

Contrasting Models of Urban Governance: A Comparative Study of Noida and Gurugram

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Abstract

Post-liberalisation India has witnessed a significant increase in urban centres across the country driven by the inflow of Multinational Companies (MNCs), easing of laws to promote private sector-led growth and the rapid influx of migrants moving to these urban centres in search for new employment avenues. This article seeks to explore the evolution of two important urban centres located in the National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi — Noida and Gurugram. Both the cities developed under different frameworks and trajectories, leading to two contrasting models of urban governance. While Noida is characterized by a centralized-technocratic model of governance, in contrast, Gurugram is characterized by an entrepreneurial-fragmented model of governance. Through a qualitative, comparative analysis based on institutional frameworks, planning instruments and democratic participation, the article attempts to understand the key differences in the urban governance models of Noida and Gurugram. It also seeks to relate the urban governance models of the two cities with the foundational literature on urban governance, given by scholars like Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey. Finally, the article attempts to understand the challenges encountered both by Noida and Gurugram with respect to their distinct urban governance models, and the recommendations proposed to mitigate these issues

Keywords

Urban governance, decentralization, centralized, fragmented, development, planning

Introduction

Urbanization in India has been one of the most profound transformations of the post-independence period, which has affected the spatial distributions, job opportunities, and systems of governance in the entire nation. The uneven and fast urbanization has posed considerable problems with planning, the

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provision of infrastructure and the successful governance of the cities, which have led to the subsequent policy interventions and the institutional reforms. The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 intended to institutionalize decentralization in the urban areas and strengthen the urban local bodies. Three decades later, the urban governance landscape across the major cities of the country remains highly heterogeneous. Within this academic discourse, the National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi has emerged as a fascinating area of study amongst academicians who focus on the various contradictions which shaped the present model of governance and development in the city of Delhi and its adjoining NCR cities.

While existing scholarship has discussed at length the rise of neoliberal urban culture and metropolitan governance in Delhi, there exists a dearth of academic research on how different models of urban planning shape urban outcomes in Delhi's NCR cities. Noida and Gurugram, both satellite cities of Delhi, remain relatively underexplored as contrasting archetypes of governance- one highly technocratic and centralized while the other marked by several fragmented layers of governance respectively. Moreover, the implications of these different governance models on infrastructural development, citizen participation and democratic accountability remain insufficiently analyzed.

This article seeks to address this gap by offering a comparative, theoretically informed analysis of the two cities- Noida and Gurugram. The article attempts to understand how the different institutional design of the two cities produces different models of urban governance which in turn, leads to differing trajectories of development and participation. In addition to that, the original contribution of this article is its attempt to link the theories of urban governance given by David Harvey, Henri Lefebvre, and Michel Foucault to empirical cases in the Indian context- Noida and Gurugram. The article employs the qualitative, comparative case study method to examine and compare the urban governance models of the two-satellite cities of Delhi.

Conceptual Framework

The article seeks to explore the theoretical modules of urban governance as put forward by scholars- Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, and David Harvey- and attempts to link these theories in the context of the urban governance models of Noida and Gurugram. Michel Foucault (1978) argues that governance is not just concerned with territory (like sovereignty), but with the "right disposition of things". "Things" refers to a complex composed of men in their relations and imbrications with resources, means of subsistence, territory, climate, customs, habits, industry, and accidents. Foucault argues that governance relies on employing tactics to achieve its ends, unlike sovereignty which operates through law. In urban contexts, this lens enables us to understand how urban local bodies,

planning agencies as well as development agencies enact disciplinary control over the urban population through zoning laws, planning instruments and infrastructural regimes.

The social crisis in the city and the possibility of urban-based transformation were the primary concerns of Henri Lefebvre (1991), whose major idea is *The Right to the City*. The right to the city, he defined, was a cry to the existential agony of the crisis of everyday life in the city, and an appeal to examine the crisis and establish an alternative urban life which is less alienated, more significant, and open to change and novelty. He thought that citizens are entitled to democratically create and occupy urban space. The concept of right to the city was subsequently transformed into the question of the manufacture of space which became universal. This lens can help us to view urban governance in the light of how space is socially constructed and politically struggles in the city.

David Harvey (2012) substantially relies on Lefebvre but combines the concepts with his study of the forces of capitalism and consumption of economic surpluses. Harvey states that the process of urbanization and capitalism are inter-related to one another — the process of capitalism constantly produces surplus product, and urbanization is needed to consume the surplus. According to Harvey, this gives rise to creative destruction under capitalism where excess capital is consumed at the expense of stripping the urban masses of their right to the city. In cities, the conceptualization of urban governance in neoliberalism by Harvey is entrepreneurial in which cities are competitive in terms of investment, branding, and real estate capital. Here, the governance is transformed towards controlling the common good to the encouragement of urban growth coalitions — collaboration between state, business, and global capital.

Besides the foundational literature on urban governance as formulated by Foucault, Lefebvre and Harvey, the article also examines the research undertaken by other scholars in order to investigate the peculiarities of the processes of governance and development that the cities of Noida and Gurugram have. As the ethnographic study to be used in the case of Noida, the book *The Politics of Community-making in New Urban India* by Ritanjan Das (2023) can be used to comprehend the process of city-making in Noida under the conditions of the post-liberalization urbanization of India, when a small-scale industrial township was converted into a real-estate based modern town. While the book also focuses on the various forms of community-making in the city, for our study, we primarily focus on the growth story of Noida as a new urban centre in the vicinity of Delhi and its unique urban governance model, with occasional references to how the process shaped the idea of space and community in the city. Despite lack of academic literature, the article builds upon several relevant news and op-ed articles from different news portals like *The Wire* and *The Times of India* to understand the urban governance model of Noida and how it has evolved over the decades, despite facing several challenges.

While navigating the urban landscape of Gurugram, the article *Neoliberal Spatialities in Gurgaon* by Anamica Singh, Tathagata Chatterjee and Hilde Heynen (2020) serves as a foundational literature to understand a more hybrid case of urban development in Gurugram, where the attitudes of native land-owning villagers have evolved to accommodate a new landscape of neoliberal accumulation under mutually beneficial and negotiable conditions. In addition to that, *Lessons from Gurgaon, India's private city* by Shruti Rajagopalan and Alexander Tabarrok (2014) serves as another important read to understand the nature of urban governance in contemporary Gurugram. Despite a dearth of academic literature, the article builds upon several relevant news and op-ed articles from different news portals like The Times of India, The Hindustan Times, and several others.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative, small-N comparative case study design to examine the urban governance models of Noida and Gurugram. A qualitative, small-N comparative case study is an in-depth research design that analyzes a few selected cases (small-N) — in the present study, the two cases analyzed are the cities of Noida and Gurugram — to understand a complex phenomenon by comparing them in their natural context. The two cities are similar in terms of socio-economic and geographic background, being planned urban centers in the area surrounding Delhi, but they also differ greatly in terms of the institutional and administrative structure. This study is based on the logic of the Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) - the selection of two general similar cases to describe the differences in the performance of the governance structure and institutional strategies.

The study will solely use secondary data sources, with a major focus on scholarly sources and media reports that will illustrate the urban governance models in Gurugram and Noida. Peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books form the analytical foundation to understand the models of urban governance and its evolution in both the cities. In addition to that, media reports are used to track contemporary developments, stakeholder perspectives as well as public opinion on urban governance and management. Supplementary sources like the Master Plan documents, official websites have also been referred to for the purposes of the study.

The analysis employs a qualitative comparative case study approach under which the urban governance models of both the cities are traced on the basis of several parameters, which include institutional design, decision-making, infrastructural governance, citizen participation, and accountability mechanisms. Considering the fact that it has used secondary data as the study has a limitation in terms of primary insight depth, it is compensated by comprehensive analysis of pertinent academic sources as well as media and official reports.

Case Study

Both Noida and Gurugram developed as satellite cities in the vicinity of Delhi, the capital of India, with the primary objective of decongesting the national capital by shifting businesses, industries and population to these nearby cities. The population of Delhi reached an all-time high during the decade of 1971-81, when the rate of growth of population in Delhi was highest at 53.00 per cent (Economic Survey of Delhi 2023-24). As a result, it became imperative on the part of the authorities to draft appropriate plans to decongest the city. It was in this respect that the places surrounding the city of Delhi, in the state of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana were selected to evolve into modern day Noida and Gurugram respectively. For the purposes of the study, we take the case studies of Noida and Gurugram, both developed around similar time frames, and attempt to compare and analyse how two different cities gave birth to contrasting models of governance and development.

The Story of Noida

Noida is a satellite city of Delhi located in the Gautam Buddha Nagar district of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. It lies in the south-eastern direction to the city of Delhi. It is bounded by the river Yamuna and Delhi in the west and the southwest, National Highway 24 and the city of Ghaziabad in the north, river Hindon and the sister city of Greater Noida in the east and the confluence of the rivers Yamuna and Hindon in the south. According to Das (2023), the development of Noida can be approached dating as far as 1972, when the state government of U.P., having noticed the growing population pressure in Delhi, declared the area of 36 villages of the Meerut-Bulandshahr region as the Yamuna Hindon-Delhi Border Regulated Area in the frames of the UP Regulation of Building Organisations Act (1958). However, no urban centre was planned in the area during that time. It was only on 17 April 1976 that the UP government constituted an industrial development authority under the provisions of the UP Industrial Area Development Act (1976) for the entire area and issued land acquisition notification to the 36 villages within it. This area was named New Okhla Industrial Development Area (N.O.I.D.A.), from which the name of the city Noida is derived. This industrial development authority was established as a statutory authority and entrusted with the responsibility to oversee all development activities.

The formation of Noida Authority was a unique exercise in post-colonial Indian experience, whereby the various functions of an industrial township which were hitherto the functions of multiple state agencies were brought under the authority of a single entity (Das 2023). The Noida Authority was not only the nodal planning agency, but it was also to function as a state industrial development corporation, an urban development authority as well as a municipal corporation, all rolled into one (Master Plan 1976–1992). It wields enormous powers over land, planning, infrastructure and even

civic services. Das notes that as of 2022, the Authority is led by 17 members including a chairman (who is an IAS Officer), CEO (who is also an IAS Officer) and six officers on special duty from the UP government. Even after more than four decades of its formation, no public representation was ever felt necessary in the Authority. As a result, Noida lacks a municipal democracy till date, with no local public representation in the governance of the city.

Over the last four and half decades, the Authority has laid out its planning priorities via five Master Plans of Noida: 1976–1992, 2001, 2011, 2021 and 2031. All these Master Plans have together led the evolution of the city of Noida into its current form. A close reading of these plans reveals that the adoption of a flexible planning approach, with periodic shifts in planning objectives and revisions in land allocation for different categories, transformed the city from an industrial to a low-cost residential hub during the 1980s and 1990s, and eventually into a premium real estate destination post-2000 (Das 2023). Observers claim that the Noida Authority has transformed Noida into a world-class city today, with a more coherent and consistent nature of development, as witnessed by well-organized spatial development, superior road and drainage infrastructure, and effective service delivery compared to its other NCR counterparts. Das argues that the present-day picture of Noida with its highly organized spatial development and infrastructure has been largely possible because of the far-sighted vision of the officials of the Noida Authority, who meticulously drafted the Master Plans. The Master Plans present a vivid picture of the present-day city, where industrial and residential zones occupy the central and northern parts of the city, while agricultural fields lay interspersed with rural settlements in the southern parts. The city is divided into 163 sectors, with each sector being developed for a particular purpose as laid out in the Master Plans. Overall, the Master Plans of Noida portray a smooth and orderly urban development process that has led to the emergence of Noida as one of the premier urban destinations of the country in just over four decades.

However, beyond the orderly world of the Master Plans and the Authority-championed harmony, Noida depicts a completely different picture. A bustling urban centre like Noida lacks a municipal corporation of its own, leading to absence of democratic decentralization, limited citizen participation, and lack of accountability. In addition to that, the existence of a powerful ‘builder-politician-bureaucrat’ nexus in Noida has been well established through various judicial pronouncements, reports of CAG and various investigative agencies (Kumar 2025). Most importantly, over time, the city has become a commodified space of built forms exemplifying the post-war ‘rupture’ in urban restructuring in advanced economies (Lefebvre 1991), whereby the city exhibits a particular form of spatial Organisation that favours the middle classes and elites at the expense of the poor and the dispossessed, producing a city space that is fundamentally unequal. Besides that, the development of Noida is in line with Foucault’s (1978) concept of governmentality where power is exerted through bureaucratic

mechanisms, planning norms and regulatory practices as seen when pronouncing Master Plans, zoning laws, and many others.

The Story of Gurugram

Gurugram is a satellite city of Delhi located in the Indian state of Haryana. It lies in the south-western direction to the city of Delhi. Popularly known as the “Millennium City” of India, the city was officially renamed “Gurugram” in 2016 by the then Chief Minister of Haryana, Manohar Lal Khattar. Singh et al. (2020) notes that the development of Gurugram can be traced back to the 1960s, when it was included in the 1962 Masterplan of the Delhi Metropolitan Area (DMA). However, for a very long time, Gurugram remained an agricultural suburb with no signs of industrial development and urbanization. It was only in 1982, after the public-sector automobile manufacturer Maruti Udyog Limited (in collaboration with Suzuki Motors of Japan) set up a manufacturing unit in Gurugram, that Gurugram started to take its first serious steps toward industrial development. It was also around this time that private developers like DLF and Ansals began to look for opportunities in Gurugram. Rigid laws in Delhi forced these private developers to look beyond Delhi for survival. Under these circumstances, Gurugram emerged as a viable alternative, with its close proximity to the capital, IGI Airport as well as the Delhi-Jaipur Highway.

Rajagopalan and Tabarrok (2014) argues that the liberal policies adopted by the Haryana government in the 1970s as well as the ease to get licenses for large-scale private sector projects greatly facilitated the urban development of Gurugram. First, in the 1970s, the Haryana state government removed the tedious non-agricultural use clearance (NAC) requirement. Second, the state was authorized by the Haryana Urban Development Authority Act of 1977 to take over the agricultural land to build townships. At the same time the Haryana Development and Regulation of Urban Areas Act (1975) allowed the development of the townships with the large parcels of adjacent land under the licence of the developers. In addition to that, the period of liberalization that followed during the decade of the 1990s transformed Gurugram from an agricultural hinterland to a corporate powerhouse. However, this development of Gurugram was largely facilitated by the private sector and in this process, local villagers were also active participants.

In most cases, the government takes over village land for urban development through mechanisms like land acquisition which involves compulsory transfer of land for public purposes in lieu of compensation. However, the story of Gurugram is quite fascinating where the private developers took the initiative to acquire land from the villagers. In the late 1970s, villagers of Nathupur (over which DLF Cyber City, parts of DLF Phase 3 and the Ambience Mall complex is built) anticipated their lands would be acquired for urban development. So, when K.P. Singh, the former Chairman and CEO of

DLF approached them in the 1980s, they were cautious about selling to a private developer, fearing the loss of their ancestral “mother land.” DLF had to build trust gradually, spending months persuading farmers of the benefits. Singh et al. (2020) notes that because DLF needed financial support to advance the process of land acquisition, K.P. Singh conceptualized a partnership model with the villagers whereby he proposed that the villagers invest in DLF and become shareholders. DLF offered a whopping 12 percent interest for the villagers who invested in the company. This became a win-win situation for both the company as well as the villagers. The villagers, thus, became a part of the process of urbanization and greatly benefitted from it. Hence, it might be plausible to argue that it was this model of partnership with the villagers that DLF developed which made it possible for them to acquire vast acres of land in Gurugram without much cases of litigation or protest against them.

The urban governance model of Gurugram comprises multiple authorities. These include the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA), the Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) and the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG). All these authorities are entrusted with specific responsibilities, but in many cases, this has led to overlapping duties, delays in service delivery, and weak coordination. Rajagopalan and Tabarrok (2014) observes that while HUDA and private developers are supposed to hand over infrastructure to the MCG for maintenance, there is no clear timeframe or agreement on this process, leading to uncertainty over the responsibility of public utilities. Residents in HUDA areas often lack any effective grievance redressal mechanism, while the MCG has one but no authority there. Often, this fragmentation results in coordination issues, leaving jurisdiction and accountability undefined. The formation of GMDA in 2017 was believed to be a solution to these problems. In the initial period, both the MCG and the GMDA were operating separately. However, they soon realised that their objectives and work largely overlapped, often creating confusion. The two agencies have common functions in the maintenance of roads, drainage, street light and water supply systems. Although the GMDA is in charge of city and arterial infrastructure (such as bulk water supply and sewage treatment), the MCG deals with local distribution, internal roads, sanitation and property taxation. Nevertheless, their jurisdictions are not clearly defined, thus causing problems with coordination and gaps in responsibility. Citizens are often confused with whom to address in terms of civic matters especially in an industry where the two agencies are involved. Consequently, this decentralized system of governance has been greatly criticized because it slows down the service delivery system and hinders the coordination of urban planning within Gurugram (Kumar 2021).

Infrastructural deficiencies, inadequate drainage, and haphazard planning are some of the issues experienced in Gurugram, denting its image of a global city. Analysts blame the fragmented model of urban governance responsible for the current state of Gurugram. At the same time, state-led planning

has often taken a backseat in the case of Gurugram, the city has primarily prospered due to the initiatives taken by the private sector. Private sector-led development has come with its own set of challenges which need to be addressed at the earliest. Besides, the fact that Noida is a commodified urban space that corresponds to Lefebvre (1991) concept of post-war urban restructuring (Das 2023) can be used to describe Gurugram even more strongly. The urban development, which is mostly fueled by the privately owned capital, has created a spatial structure that favors the elites at the expense of the urban poor, thus causing repetition of the deep socio-spatial inequalities. In addition to Lefebvre, the governance model of Gurugram closely resembles the entrepreneurial model of urban governance advocated by Harvey (2012). Gurugram's development has been facilitated largely by the private sector (DLF, Ansals) taking advantage of the liberal policies of the Haryana state government, implying the transformation of the role of the state from welfare provision to the facilitation of capital accumulation.

Discussion: Comparative Analysis of Noida and Gurugram

Today, Noida and Gurugram have emerged as key urban centres surrounding Delhi, despite different models of urban governance and development histories. Noida is ruled by one centralized organization- Noida Authority that has massive powers on land, planning, infrastructure, licensing and even civic services. The Noida Authority is not only the nodal planning agency, but it also functions as a state industrial development corporation, an urban development authority as well as a municipal corporation. In contrast, the urban governance model of Gurugram comprises multiple authorities. These include the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA), the Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) and the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG). While all these authorities are entrusted with specific responsibilities, this fragmentation has often led to overlapping duties, delays in service delivery, and weak coordination.

A focal point of comparison between the urban governance models of the two cities can be traced to the demarcation of responsibilities. In Noida, urban governance is more centralized and streamlined. Noida Authority has acted as a single window for planning, infrastructure, approvals, allowing stable planning and implementation as well as it reduced inter-jurisdictional conflict which is common to multi-agency systems. The Noida Authority can fulfill the functions of a planner, developer, and regulator at the same time, so coordination among departments is quite efficient, which allows quicker decision making. The model enables uniformity in the urban design, greater predictability in the provision of infrastructure and the reduction of bureaucratic barriers to both investors and the residents. In contrast, local governance arrived quite late in Gurugram to manage public services. While the city started attracting international companies and investors in the 1990s, the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG) was created only in 2008. Urban governance is highly fragmented in

Gurugram. Gurugram is struggling with the jurisdictional conflicts between GMDA, HUDA and MCG. The establishment of GMDA in 2017 was aimed at centralizing planning and approvals, however, in practice, its role is duplicated with MCG and other institutions. According to Kumar (2021), the GMDA deals with the city-level and arterial infrastructure, such as bulk water supply and sewage, whereas the MCG is in charge of the local distribution, internal roads, sanitation and property taxation. However, often a lack of clear demarcation of responsibilities have led to coordination issues between the two bodies. He cites an instance, if the arterial drains leading to a master drain or vice versa were in a bad condition, there was no outlet for stormwater or sewage to flow. Often, the MCG and GMDA officials would clear their respective lines only to find that the line ahead was choked, making the entire project redundant. Such instances of anomaly in coordination and accountability gaps have proved to be a major roadblock in the governance of Gurugram. Union minister and Gurugram MP Rao Inderjit Singh, as stated in *The Times of India* (2025), notes that the existence of both the GMDA and the MCG has led to the lack of clarity on the precise areas of their responsibility and administration. The Gurugram MP also noted the lackadaisical attitude on the part of GMDA officials to conduct frequent meetings which has severely hampered the vision with which GMDA was formed.

In addition, another key axis of divergence in the urban governance models of Noida and Gurugram stems from the difference over fiscal authority in both the cities. In Noida, the fiscal power resides with the Noida Authority that was created under the UP Industrial Area Development Act (1976). The Act also allows the Noida Authority to earn its own revenue mainly by way of allotment of land, rent of leases, transfer of properties, development fees and user fee. At the same time, the Authority is allowed to retain these revenues with them rather than transferring them to the state exchequer. This allows the Noida Authority to enjoy sufficient fiscal autonomy to manage their own affairs without having to depend extensively on the state government. In Gurugram, on the contrary, there are several agencies that have fiscal power — the MCG, GMDA as well as the Finance Department of the state. Although the MCG is officially authorized to collect property taxes, user charges, and advertisement fees (*The Times of India* 2025), significant fiscal resources, in particular, infrastructure and massive urban development are governed by GMDA and directly allocated by the state government and developers of individual projects. This has resulted in overlapping fiscal jurisdiction in Gurugram, which acts as a major roadblock affecting the local government's responsiveness to civic issues in the city.

The governance models of the two cities also portray large differences in the service delivery outcomes. *Realty Plus Magazine* (2025) opined that Noida was designed as a city planned in the grid layout by the government with controlled land distribution, while Gurugram emerged as a boom town

of the private sector - established by developers such as DLF on the farmland. The expansion of the free-market economy brought about by the era of liberalisation in Gurugram attracted Fortune 500 corporations and flying executives, whereas Noida grew at a slower pace due to the control of the public. Gurugram has encountered several challenges due to the lack of a state-led planning, with crumbling public infrastructure, poorly managed drainage, encroachments, and waterlogging. Kumar (2021) argues that the city remains heavily affected due to lack of proper urban planning and the absence of a municipal body for a long time. Over the last 15 years, MCG has always been playing catch-up to Gurugram's civic mess. Each time there is heavy rain, the city is inevitably waterlogged due to either absence of drainage lines or choked drains. Kumar points out that the newer areas of the city (sectors 58-115) where over half a million people are estimated to be living, continue to be hampered by civic issues such as poor road connectivity and absence of streetlights. In some of the newer sectors, condominiums and societies are yet to get direct water or sewerage connections, and remain heavily dependent on private water tankers and septic tanks. The state government of Haryana has recently launched several action plans to address Gurugram's civic issues including drainage, roads and sanitation (Brij 2025), the implications of which are yet to be witnessed. In Noida, urban services in comparison, are far more structured. The Noida Authority enforces zoning, regulates construction quality, and ensures that new sectors come equipped with roads, power, and sewage. Older sectors are being upgraded, but newer ones already enjoy world-class infrastructure.

The governance models in Noida and Gurugram also underscore significant differences in the degree of citizen participation in the two cities. Noida lacks a strong elected municipal body. The Noida Authority performs many civic functions that in other cities lie with municipalities. This has resulted in limited citizen voice and weak accountability. Kumar (2025) notes that in the case of Noida, the Uttar Pradesh government has craftily used the exception clause (1) in Article 243Q to subvert the constitutional direction regarding setting up of rural and urban local governments. Through State Act 4 of 2001 and State Act 10 of 2016, among several other amendments, sections 12A and 12B have been inserted in the Uttar Pradesh Industrial Area Development Act, 1976 to provide for immediate cessation of Gram Panchayats and urban local self-governments once their area is notified. As a result, even after so many decades, Noida lacks a municipal body of its own. The lack of an elected municipal authority has resulted in the existence of a powerful 'builder-politician-bureaucrat' nexus in Noida, which has been well established through various judicial pronouncements, reports of CAG and various investigative agencies. While the Supreme Court has suggested converting Noida into a metropolitan corporation for more democratic accountability (Mahapatra 2025), no concrete steps have been taken in this direction. Dev (2025) claims that this institutional vacuum has resulted in grave charges of collusion among the Noida Authority officials, builders and different layers of government. In the DND Flyway toll scandal, Noida Toll Bridge Company Ltd (NTBCL) had already recovered its

investment back but still kept on operating by illegally collecting tolls under agreements enabled by the Noida Authority and the state governments. Similarly, in the Twin Towers (Supertech), the Noida Authority was heavily criticized for turning a blind eye to breaking of building norms, with the court referring to the “nefarious cooperation” between the developer and the Authority. These are some of the many instances of corruption persistent in the Noida Authority, most of which can be attributed to the lack of a municipal body. Gurugram, in contrast, has greater scope for democratic participation of the people through the MCG. Elections are held to the post of Mayor of MCG. This creates more opportunity for local politics even though actual power of elected bodies is undermined by state and bureaucratic control. The presence of Resident Welfare Associations (RWA) in both the cities have fostered some form of citizen participation, but they have often been met with mixed results and surpassed under bureaucratic authority.

The growth stories of Noida and Gurugram closely resemble the theories of urban governance put forward by Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, and David Harvey. Lefebvre (1991) allows us to see urban governance through the prism of how space is socially produced and politically contested. He defined the right to the city as a response to the existential pain of the crisis of everyday life in the city and a call to look at the crisis and create an alternative urban life. Over the decades, one can observe that the city of Noida too has become a commodified space exhibiting a particular form of spatial organisation that favours the middle classes and elites at the expense of the poor and the dispossessed, producing a city space that is fundamentally unequal. Lefebvre’s idea of a commodified urban space becomes even more pronounced in the case of Gurugram. The development of Gurugram has created a spatial pattern which favours the elites at the expense of the urban poor, thus recreating the profound levels of socio-spatial disparities.

Along with Lefebvre, the Gurugram model of governance is quite similar to the entrepreneurial form of urban governance proposed by Harvey (2012), where the role of the state is redefined as the one of facilitating the growth of capital instead of providing welfare. The growth of Gurugram has been enabled to a great extent by the private sector (DLF, Ansals) exploiting the liberal policies of the Haryana state government, resembling a capitalist system that constantly produces surplus and urbanization is needed to consume this surplus. The neoliberal trace in the case of Gurugram is rather noticeable: growth is valued more than equity and profit is valued more than health. Conversely, the development of Noida falls in line with the idea of governmentality introduced by Foucault (1978) in which the power is exercised by the bureaucratic machine, planning rules, and regulation practices. The centralized nature of control of the Noida Authority coupled with the use of technocratic tools such as Master Plans, zoning laws and many more, show governance by use of administrative knowledge and tools. While Gurugram is a manifestation of market-driven logic of governance, Noida

is an embodiment of a statist, technocratic one. They all embody divergent paradigms of neoliberal urbanism in post-liberal India.

Conclusion

The comparative study of the urban governance models of Noida and Gurugram reveals the fact that urban governance in India has been a heterogeneous process. This heterogeneity can be attributed to both administrative as well as political factors, reflecting differing configurations of state power, market forces, and institutional authority across urban spaces. While Noida represents the technocratic-centralized model of governance based on Foucault's (1978) idea of governmentality, privileging order and efficiency at the expense of democratic participation; Gurugram, on the other hand, embodies the entrepreneurial-fragmented model of Harvey (2012), where governance is dispersed among several state as well as private actors, resulting in spatial and institutional chaos. In Noida, governmentality is exercised through bureaucratic expertise, master planning, and regulatory control, producing a disciplined urban order. In contrast, Gurugram's entrepreneurial governance prioritizes capital accumulation, real estate interests, and flexible regulation, often at the cost of coherent public infrastructure and social equity.

Both governance models have encountered distinct challenges, prompting the formulation of various recommendations aimed at addressing these shortcomings. In the case of Noida, the key challenge lies in its democratic deficit and the concentration of decision-making power in unelected authorities, whereas in Gurugram, the core challenge emerges from overlapping jurisdictions and weak coordination among the various local bodies. Recently, the Supreme Court has suggested converting Noida into a metropolitan corporation for more democratic accountability (Mahapatra 2025). This reflects a growing judicial recognition that technocratic efficiency alone cannot be a substitute for democratic decision-making and decentralized governance. Similarly, the state government of Haryana has recently launched action plans to address Gurugram's civic issues including drainage, roads and sanitation (Brij 2025). These initiatives, on the part of the government of Haryana, reflect an attempt by the state government to strengthen coordination among the various urban bodies in the wake of persistent civic failures arising out of fragmented institutional arrangements. In addition to that, there has been mounting pressure to demarcate and clarify the roles and responsibilities of the GMDA and the MCG and improve coordination. Overall, the comparative trajectories of the two emerging urban centres foreground the structural weakness at the heart of the 74th Amendment — formal decentralization without substantive political, fiscal, and administrative devolution. Urban decentralization in India, as the cases of Noida and Gurugram reveal, remains less a regime of self-government than a carefully managed illusion of it.

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