

Bureaucratic Norms and State Capacity in India

Implementing Primary Education in the Himalayan Region

ABSTRACT

Himachal Pradesh outperforms other Indian states in implementing universal primary education. Through comparative field research, this article finds that bureaucratic norms—unwritten rules that guide public officials—influence how well state agencies deliver services for the poor. The findings call attention to the informal, everyday practices that generate state capacity.

KEYWORDS: India, state capacity, norms, policy implementation, education

INTRODUCTION

Governments across the world view the provision of basic education as a fundamental obligation to citizens. After a legacy of neglect, the Indian state enacted a number of policies guaranteeing free and compulsory primary education. Public expenditure on education grew from a paltry 2% of GDP in the 1970s to approximately 4% by the 1990s. That expansion was driven largely by the central government, which became more active in education over recent decades. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for All Movement, SSA), India's flagship scheme; the Midday Meal Program; and more recently the Right to Education Act are national policies that have been instituted across the country. With the expansion of school infrastructure, the abolition

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of fees, and the provision of incentives such as free uniforms, textbooks, and school lunches, student enrollment rates have grown rapidly. Today, more than 95% of children ages 6–14 in India are enrolled in primary school, with growing participation among girls, Scheduled Castes, and other disadvantaged groups.

Notwithstanding these gains, significant gaps persist in the extent and quality of policy implementation. High rates of teacher absence, poor management of the Midday Meal Program, and abysmal learning outcomes have led to dissatisfaction with the government's primary school system. For a young population trying to compete in the global economy, poor education carries significant costs. The mushrooming of private schools across India reflects the unanswered demand for quality. Mass exit from the government school system has placed state capacity under further strain. To grasp the contours of policy implementation, broad assessments at the national level are insufficient. Sub-national variation in policy implementation across India's federal democracy is substantial. State agencies in some parts of India implement primary education surprisingly well, while others perform much worse than their socioeconomic conditions would predict. What accounts for these differences? Subject to a common policy framework and similar democratic and administrative structures, why do some public agencies implement universal primary education more effectively than others? More broadly, what explains the varying capacity of the Indian state to deliver public services to the poor?

This article addresses these questions in the context of India's Himalayan region. It draws on the comparative lessons of the contiguous hill states of Himachal Pradesh (HP) and Uttarakhand. Though it is not the first place one would expect primary education to be implemented well, HP stands out among Indian states. The harsh physical conditions in the Himalayas make public service delivery very difficult. Conventional wisdom suggests that the spread of mass education follows modernization and economic development. Yet HP is one of India's most rural states. It has enjoyed comparatively little industrial development; economic livelihoods are still based on subsistence agriculture. Nevertheless, HP outperforms other states in implementing universal primary education, including its far wealthier neighbors in the plains.¹

1. Planning Department, Government of Himachal Pradesh, *Himachal Pradesh Human Development Report* (Shimla: Planning Department, Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2002); World Bank, *Himachal Pradesh: Accelerating Development and Sustaining Success in a Hill State* (New Delhi: World Bank Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Unit, 2007).

At the same time, facing similar economic and sociocultural conditions, the state of Uttarakhand performs significantly worse. What explains this variation in state performance?

To understand how policy implementation takes place in India, I argue, one must examine how public agencies function in practice and relate to citizens on the ground. I advance a theory centered on bureaucratic norms—unwritten rules that guide the behavior of public officials and structure their relationships with civic actors outside of the state. Bureaucratic norms influence how officials enact their roles and responsibilities as they carry out the tasks of policy implementation, from infrastructure development to community outreach. These norms also shape the ways officials engage with citizens and civic agencies in educational planning, service delivery, and local monitoring. Whereas the state capacity literature emphasizes the formal design of institutions, social theorists stress the importance of norms, informal practices that guide both expectations and behavior.² As a number of studies have found, bureaucratic norms can profoundly influence the ability of state agencies to work effectively, enforce policies, and advance social welfare.³ Building on these insights, this article seeks to unpack the black box of the Indian bureaucracy and show how norms governing the internal processes within the state produce varying outcomes for policy implementation.

I develop the argument by analyzing HP's exceptional performance in comparison to Uttarakhand's less-than-stellar implementation of universal primary education, with an eye toward identifying broader lessons for state capacity in India. The findings for this study are drawn from more than two years of field research (2008–10) conducted in rural North India. The study forms part of a larger subnational comparative analysis of policy implementation in three states of North India (Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh).⁴ Using a combination of field research methods, including

2. Jon Elster, *The Cement of Society: A Study of Social Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); James Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1990).

3. James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1989); Daniel M. Brinks, "Informal Institutions and the Rule of Law: The Judicial Response to State Killings in Buenos Aires and São Paulo in the 1990s," *Comparative Politics* 36:1 (2003) p. 1–19; Judith Tendler, *Good Government in the Tropics* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Elinor Ostrom, "Crossing the Great Divide: Coproduction, Synergy, and Development," *World Development* 24:6 (1996), p. 1037–1087.

4. Akshay Mangla, *Rights for the Voiceless: The State, Civil Society and Primary Education in Rural India* (Ph.D thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2013).

in-depth interviews, participant observation within the state, and village ethnography, I trace the implementation process from the capital city down to the village level. I conducted more than 500 interviews and focus group discussions with policymakers, bureaucrats, civil society groups, schoolteachers, and parents. In addition, I draw on select village case studies investigating the impact of community participation on service delivery. Field research was supplemented with government reports, NGO documents, and newspaper coverage of the primary school systems within each of the three states. The names of interviewees, case-study villages, and primary schools have been withheld or changed to protect the identity of respondents.

In what follows, I first describe the educational scenario in the Himalayan region through a comparative assessment of HP and Uttarakhand. I then present a theory of bureaucratic norms and highlight the mechanisms through which norms produce varying results for policy implementation. I turn next to the central empirical findings. Field-based evidence reveals that bureaucratic norms in HP operate according to a *deliberative* model. That is, they encourage public officials to work collectively and adapt policies according to local contexts, while promoting the participation of citizens and civic agencies—women's groups in particular—in the implementation process. Consequently, policy implementation in HP has been highly responsive to local needs. Bureaucratic norms in Uttarakhand, meanwhile, operate according to a *legalistic* model. They tend to promote strict adherence to official rules, procedures, and hierarchies within the state. The state bureaucracy in Uttarakhand tends to marginalize citizens in the implementation process and stifle local collective action, which yields worse outcomes. I illustrate these mechanisms through local case studies of service delivery and local monitoring within each state. The article concludes by examining the broader implications of these findings for our understanding of state capacity in India.

PRIMARY EDUCATION IN THE HIMALAYAN REGION: A COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT

A comparative analysis of education in HP and Uttarakhand reveals significant variation in performance. To establish the validity of the comparison, however, we should first take note of their common features. HP and Uttarakhand have similar geography, climate, and subsistence-based agricultural economies. As Table 1 shows, their socioeconomic indicators are also broadly aligned.

TABLE I. Socioeconomic Indicators: Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand

	<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	<i>Uttarakhand</i>
Population (millions)	6.9	10.1
Number of administrative districts	12	13
Sex ratio (females per 1000 males)	974	963
Annual per capita income (Rs.)	50,365	55,877
Percentage urban	9.8	30.6
Percentage Scheduled Caste	24.7	17.9
Percentage Scheduled Tribe	4.0	3.0

SOURCES: Census of India (2001, 2011); Reserve Bank of India, *Handbook of Statistics on Indian Economy, 2010–11*, September 14, 2012, New Delhi, Government of India.

The two states have similar education policies. India's national policies for universal primary schooling, including SSA and the Midday Meal Program, have been administered for more than a decade within each state. SSA gives underserved villages new schools and infrastructure within an officially prescribed distance of 1–3 km from the village center. In addition, the program abolishes school fees, provides teaching and learning materials, and gives children from disadvantaged backgrounds incentives to enroll in school, including scholarships, free textbooks, and uniforms. The Midday Meal Program is also a centrally sponsored scheme; it provides a hot lunch daily in every government primary and middle school, with the twin objectives of targeting malnutrition and raising student attendance. For both SSA and the Midday Meal Program, India's central government provides the majority of funding. State governments, meanwhile, have primary responsibility for implementing the policies. Last but not least, the administration of primary education is organized in similar ways across HP and Uttarakhand. Both states have a Department of Education as well as a state project office for SSA, which together oversee policy implementation. Both the principal secretary of education and the state project director of SSA are positions occupied by officials belonging to the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), the country's elite civil service. Local implementation is carried out in a decentralized system involving district administration and village education committees (VECs). VECs are the nodal agency at the village level, consisting of parents, the school headmaster, and the elected head (*pradhan*) of the village council (*panchayat*).

TABLE 2. Comparative Educational Performance in the Himalayan Region

	<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	<i>Uttarakhand</i>
<i>School inputs</i>		
Schools that have teaching-learning materials (%)	91.5	82.4
Schools serving the midday meal (%)	98.0	95.1
Student-teacher ratio	14	18
Single-teacher schools (%)	7.9	19.5
<i>Access and participation</i>		
Student enrollment (%)	99	97
Student attendance (%)	96.2	90.4
Student dropouts in Grade 5 (%)	2.6	6.9
Teacher absence (%)	21.2	32.8
<i>Learning outcomes</i>		
Fifth-graders who can read a basic paragraph (%)	89.4	75.8
Fifth-graders who can do basic arithmetic (%)	76.6	63.3

SOURCES: Input indicators, learning outcomes, and student enrollment and attendance rates from *Annual Status of Education Report 2011 (Rural)* (Mumbai: Pratham Resource Centre, 2012). Teacher absence rate from Michael Kremer et al., “Teacher Absence in India: A Snapshot,” *Journal of the European Economic Association* 3:2-3 (2005), pp. 658-67. Student dropout rate from Arun C. Mehta, *Elementary Education in India: Analytical Report 2008-09* (New Delhi: National University of Educational Planning and Administration, 2011).

Turning to the implementation outcomes in Table 2, both Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand have achieved near-universal access to primary schooling, as indicated by their enrollment rates. Nevertheless, HP performs better with regard to student attendance, a more meaningful indicator of access. One reason is that educational planning in HP has closely tracked the needs of local communities, with better targeting of underserved habitations.⁵ In the delivery of teaching and learning materials, HP once again outperforms Uttarakhand. Both states perform relatively well in implementing the Midday Meal Program.

5. In a reassessment of primary schooling by the original PROBE research team, 90% of surveyed parents said that their local primary school was less than thirty minutes away, and the average reported time to reach school was twenty minutes, a major achievement given the dispersed settlement patterns in the Himalayan region. Anuradha De, Reetika Khera, Meera Samson, and A. K. Shiva Kumar, *PROBE Revisited: A Report on Elementary Education in India* (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2011), 97.

The variation across the two states in educational quality is much starker. Teacher absence is a major problem in India. The causes behind this phenomenon include the politicization of school teachers, weak accountability structures for frontline education (and health) workers, and a decline of professional norms.⁶ Yet the rate of absence in Uttarakhand is far worse than in HP. Teacher absence in Uttarakhand is further exacerbated by the high proportion of schools having only a single schoolteacher in charge of all five grades, covering ages 6–10. The problem is not due to teacher scarcity in Uttarakhand—the state has one of the lowest student–teacher ratios in India. Rather, the majority of single-teacher schools are located in the interior hills, which are sparsely populated and logistically hard to reach. HP also has scattered habitations and low population density, but state agencies there have done a better job in reducing regional imbalances in the placement of teachers.

Along with its participation indicators, HP has a clear advantage in learning outcomes. According to the *Annual Status of Education Report* carried out by the NGO Pratham, a much higher percentage of fifth-graders surveyed in HP can read and do basic arithmetic.⁷ To be sure, learning outcomes still have much room for improvement. In comparative terms, however, HP is a top-performing state in India, as evidenced further by its literacy rate of 84%.⁸ It trails only Kerala, India's much-vaunted model of social development. HP's educational achievements are in several respects even more extraordinary than Kerala's. At the time of India's 1947 independence, the hill area comprising HP suffered near-universal illiteracy and was classified as an "educationally backward" region.⁹ Nor did HP have progressive social

6. Geeta Gandhi Kingdon, and Mohammed Muzamil, *The Political Economy of Education in India: Teacher Politics in Uttar Pradesh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Michael Kremer, Karthik Muralidharan, Nazmul Chaudhury, Jeffrey Hammer, and F. Halsey Rogers. "Teacher Absence in India: A Snapshot." *Journal of the European Economic Association* 3:2–3 (2005), pp. 658–67; Vimala Ramachandran, "Why School Teachers Are Demotivated and Disheartened," *Economic and Political Weekly* 40:21 (2005), p. 2141–44.

7. ASER. *Annual Status of Education Report 2011 (Rural)*. Mumbai: Pratham Resource Centre, 2012.

8. According to the latest Census of India (2011), literacy in HP is a full 10 percentage points above the Indian average of 74%. To be sure, the Indian Census has a rudimentary bar for assessing literacy. Census enumerators ask household respondents if a person is literate, and typically, any amount of schooling is taken as sufficient evidence, regardless of the quality of education received.

9. At the time of independence, HP was a loose confederation of princely states administered, at times, by the neighboring state of Punjab as well as India's central government. HP was finally granted statehood on January 25, 1971, becoming India's 18th state.

movements or left-leaning political parties, two significant factors behind Kerala's social development.¹⁰ As the widely-heralded 1999 *Public Report on Basic Education* (PROBE) points out, the "schooling revolution of Himachal Pradesh" took place over a relatively short period of time and under difficult circumstances.¹¹

A final point to note is that the educational gains in HP can be attributed almost entirely to *public* efforts. Although privatization has grown in recent years, the prevalence of rural private schooling in HP is well below the Indian average, and much lower than in neighboring states. The penetration of private schooling in rural Uttarakhand, meanwhile, is more than twice that of HP, which suggests that educational gains there are less a function of state capacity and may have more to do with high societal demand for schooling.¹²

Before going further, we should consider alternative explanations for the superior performance of HP. Theories of modernization associate the expansion of mass education with economic development, industrialization, and urbanization. These are not the ingredients behind HP's achievements. The Himalayan region's climate and geography present major impediments to industrial growth. Infrastructure projects are difficult to execute, and prohibitively high transportation costs discourage manufacturing.¹³ Over 90% of hill residents in HP and Uttarakhand secure their living from small-scale agriculture and animal husbandry. Nor has HP enjoyed relative wealth. State per capita income today is slightly above the average for India, though it has stood below the national average throughout most of the state's history.¹⁴

10. On the role of left-leaning parties and social movements in improving state capacity around poverty alleviation and social development, see Atul Kohli, *The State and Poverty in India: The Politics of Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Patrick Heller, *The Labor of Development: Workers and the Transformation of Capitalism in Kerala, India* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

11. PROBE Team. *Public Report on Basic Education in India*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999). Along with the PROBE study, see Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *India: Development and Participation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

12. As Muralidharan and Kremer find in their survey of private schooling, 15% of villages in HP have private schools, compared to 30% in Uttarakhand. Karthik Muralidharan and Michael Kremer, *Public and Private Schools in Rural India* (unpublished manuscript, 2007).

13. Both states enjoy subsidies from India's central government for infrastructure development, as well as tax incentives to attract business.

14. World Bank, *Himachal Pradesh*.

Uttarakhand has been more effective in attracting new industry through tax breaks and other incentives.

Scholars writing on HP's achievements in early child education and health call attention to the peculiar social fabric of the Himalayan region.¹⁵ Compared to the deeply entrenched inequalities of caste and gender that pervade the plains regions of North India, social norms in the Himalayas are more inclusive. In addition, the hill region was spared from the exploitative system of landlordism (*zamindari*) which was imposed by the British across the Gangetic Plains and which led to severe social inequalities and caste polarization. Lower castes in the Himalayas were less dependent on upper castes for their economic livelihood. Gender norms in the Himalayas tend also to be more inclusive than in the plains. Women participate more in the economy and enjoy greater freedom of movement and decision-making authority within the household.

Given the well-established link between social norms and education, one must consider further the role of caste and gender norms in the Himalayan region.¹⁶ Greater social equality may have been conducive to the expansion of primary schooling in the hills, as compared to the Gangetic Plains, where inequalities and caste divisions undermined local collective action. Social norms alone, however, cannot explain the variation in educational performance *within* the Himalayan region. Caste and gender norms are broadly similar in Uttarakhand and HP. Even more than HP, Uttarakhand has a robust history of collective village institutions and women's social movements.¹⁷ As a distinguished scholar on the subject and a member of the original PROBE team pointed out, "The catalytic role of state initiatives helps to understand why some other areas, where gender relations and social

15. Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *India: Development and Participation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

16. On the relationship between social norms and education, see James Coleman, *The Adolescent Society: The Social Life of the Teenager and Its Impact on Education* (New York, The Free Press, 1961); James Coleman, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital," *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, Supplement (1988), p. S95-S120. For a review of the literature see George Akerlof and Rachel E. Kranton, "Economics and Identity," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 115:3, 2000, p. 715-53.

17. One must also be careful not to oversimplify the social structure within the Himalayan region. *Dalits*, the former untouchables of the caste system, were traditionally excluded from upper-caste schools and temples in the hill region. Gerald D. Berreman, *Hindus of the Himalayas: Ethnography and Change* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1972).

conditions have much the same features as in Himachal Pradesh, have failed to experience a similar transformation of schooling patterns.”¹⁸

Taking political factors into account, HP and Uttarakhand are both governed by two-party systems consisting of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Congress Party, India’s two national parties. That stands in contrast to the fragmented, multi-party system that obtains in Uttar Pradesh and other neighboring states. Two-party systems in India have been found to be better at providing public goods, the reason being that political parties seek support from many social groups and thus provide public goods to win elections.¹⁹ Partly for this reason, public spending on education is comparatively high in both HP and Uttarakhand. Over the past decade (2001–11), HP spent on average Rs. 15,000 (\$244) annually per child on primary education. Meanwhile, Uttarakhand spent Rs. 16,000 (\$260) per child, among the highest in the country. It is worth mentioning here that social service provision is far more costly in hilly terrain, which contributes to relatively high education spending in the two states.²⁰

A final set of considerations deals with the human resources devoted to primary education, which again are broadly similar. As shown earlier in Table 2, both states have relatively low student–teacher ratios. Schoolteachers are paid comparable salaries, according to guidelines set by India’s central government.²¹ One may posit that the quantity of bureaucratic resources helps explain the variation in outcomes across these two states. Consistent with the manpower shortage in public agencies throughout India, bureaucratic density in both states is very low: for every thousand people, HP has 0.4 bureaucrats, while Uttarakhand has 0.32, working on primary education.²² Though the level is similar, it may be the case that HP possesses higher-quality

18. Jean Drèze, “A Surprising Exception: Himachal’s Success in Promoting Female Education,” *Manushi*, no. 112 (1999), p. 16.

19. Pradeep Chhibber and Irfan Nooruddin, “Do Party Systems Count?” *Comparative Political Studies* 37:2 (2004), p. 152–187.

20. Calculated from Annual Work Plan and Budget, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, multiple years (2001–2011).

21. At the time of fieldwork, both Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand had adopted the recommendations of India’s Sixth Central Pay Commission, which set guidelines for the remuneration of school teachers and other public employees.

22. Calculated by the author using official manpower records from the Departments of Education in HP and Uttarakhand, which were further verified during interviews with public officials in each state. According to the 2011 Census of India, Himachal Pradesh has a population of 6.9 million, while Uttarakhand’s is 10.1 million.

bureaucrats. Without additional data on the individuals working in education, one cannot reject the hypothesis that state agencies in HP tend to attract higher-quality personnel.

BUREAUCRATIC NORMS AND THE INDIAN STATE

With HP's superior performance in primary education established, this section presents a theory of state performance centered on bureaucratic norms. Studies of Indian bureaucracy draw heavily on Weber's classic formulation.²³ Bureaucracies with the appropriate systems and procedures in place are thought to be more capable of governing society. In contrast, states that operate via personalistic ties are considered "weak" or "predatory," lacking the capacity to govern effectively.²⁴ Some argue that the Indian state possesses certain Weberian characteristics—these include civil service protections, high salaries, and meritocratic procedures for recruitment and promotion—while at the same time being susceptible to political interference and particularistic demands.²⁵

Their insights notwithstanding, these approaches to understanding the Indian state face three primary difficulties. First, because they take the Weberian rational-legal state as the ideal model for bureaucracy, departures from the ideal get categorized as instances of state weakness or failure, foreclosing important qualitative differences among seemingly weak bureaucracies.²⁶ Second, and related to the previous point, because they focus overwhelmingly on the formal structures of the state, the informal features of organization that influence bureaucratic behavior are given scant attention. Third, existing

23. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946).

24. Migdal, J. S. *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988.

25. Ronald Herring, "Embedded Particularism: India's Failed Developmental State," in *The Developmental State*, ed. M. Woo-Cumings, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 306–327; Peter Evans, *Embedded Autonomy: States and Industrial Transformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Atul Kohli, *State and Poverty in India*. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

26. A growing body of scholarship is concerned with how states govern effectively when traditional forms of state capacity are missing. See e.g. Lily Tsai, *Accountability without Democracy: Solidary Groups and Public Goods Provision in Rural China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Matthew Amengual, "Pollution in the Garden of the Argentine Republic: Building State Capacity to Escape from Chaotic Regulation," *Politics & Society* 41:4 (2013), p. 527–560.

approaches have difficulty accounting for subnational variation in the quality of governance across the country. Indian states have virtually identical structures of bureaucratic recruitment, pay, and promotion, and are led by an elite cadre of nationally recruited civil servants. And yet, state capacity to implement public policy varies substantially.

The theoretical framework advanced here calls explicit attention to the *informal* features of the state that determine the quality of governance. I take norms to be unwritten rules of conduct that instruct agents on how to act under a given set of conditions.²⁷ As scholars of organization have long observed, norms structure the expectations and behavior of social actors.²⁸ Within bureaucracies, norms shape the commitment of public officials, their propensity to engage in collective behavior, and the actions they deem appropriate in carrying out their duties. Bureaucratic norms provide standards and guidelines to determine which actions are permissible, mandatory, or prohibited. My approach also draws on research examining the organizational culture of public agencies.²⁹ According to one recent study, the culture of corruption among local officials in India often leads to systematic discrimination against the poor in the policy implementation process.³⁰ Other studies find that poor citizens experience the state in remarkably different ways during their routine encounters with local agencies.³¹ These otherwise fascinating accounts of the Indian state fall short of providing a theoretical framework to account for the uneven quality of public agencies across the country.

The framework of bureaucratic norms helps pry open the black box of the Indian state to help analyze the varying effectiveness of agencies implementing public policy. In the policy domain of education, bureaucratic norms influence how officials carry out critical tasks such as school infrastructure development, service delivery, and monitoring. Norms shape how officials

27. This definition draws on the work of Elster (*Cement of Society*).

28. Alvin W. Gouldner, *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy* (New York: Free Press, 1954); Herbert Kaufman, *The Forest Ranger: A Study in Administrative Behavior* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967); Alan Fox, *Beyond Contract: Work, Power and Trust Relations* (London: Faber & Faber, 1974).

29. See in particular James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

30. Akhil Gupta, *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012). This argument draws on rich, ethnographic research on public agencies implementing poverty alleviation programs in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

31. Stuart Corbridge, Glyn Williams, Manoj Srivastava, and René Véron, *Seeing the State: Governance and Governmentality in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

TABLE 3. Alternative Models: Deliberative and Legalistic

	<i>Deliberative norms</i>	<i>Legalistic norms</i>
Bureaucratic behaviors	Participatory behavior	Protective behavior
State–civil society relations	Civic inclusion	Civic exclusion
Implementation process	Responsive implementation	Rational implementation
Exemplary case	Himachal Pradesh	Uttarakhand

SOURCE: By author

interpret and apply rules and procedures in practice. They regulate the nature of communication and coordination across organizational boundaries, and crucially, the participation of lower-level officials. Bureaucratic norms operate indirectly through their influence over civic participation. Norms guide how public officials relate to citizens, civic agencies, and other non-state actors. Non-state actors, meanwhile, learn to adjust their expectations and behaviors based on their prior experiences with public officials. It is through the mechanisms of bureaucratic behavior and civic action that norms influence policy implementation.

Having established the logic behind bureaucratic norms, I develop two alternative models, which correspond closely to how public agencies operate in HP and Uttarakhand (see Table 3). Bureaucratic norms in HP approximate what I call a *deliberative* model of governance. This theoretical formulation builds on long-standing scholarship on public deliberation and participatory governance. In contrast to standard bureaucratic hierarchy, deliberative forms of organization promote discussion and collective problem-solving across organizational divisions as well as between officials and citizens.³² In a deliberative model, officials work together to solve problems collectively. They also incorporate civic agencies and citizens in the implementation process, who can provide local knowledge and other inputs. Communities, meanwhile, experience tangible gains from working with state agencies, which spurs further collective action. These behaviors taken together generate a responsive implementation process. Policies are

32. See e.g. Joshua Cohen and Charles Sabel, "Directly-Deliberative Polyarchy," *European Law Journal* 3:4 (1997), p. 313–342. Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright, "Deepening Democracy: Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance," *Politics and Society* 29:1 (2001), pp. 5–41. C. Sabel, "Learning by Monitoring," in *Handbook of Economic Sociology*, ed. Neil J. Smelser and Richard Swedberg, p. 137–165. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

adapted to local needs, producing superior outcomes for the delivery of primary education.

In contrast, public agencies in Uttarakhand exemplify what I call a *legalistic* model of governance. Drawing on the philosophy of law, legalism refers to a general attitude, ethos, or ideology that holds moral conduct to be a matter of following the rules.³³ Legalism promotes, above all else, rule-following and deference to formal hierarchy. In contrast to the deliberative model, bureaucrats in a legalistic model strictly adhere to official rules and procedures, interpreting their mandate in narrow terms and applying policies rigidly across cases. They tend to refrain from engaging with civic agencies and citizens, whose involvement is taken to interfere with the internal workings of the state. Consequently, legalistic practices tend to weaken civic engagement and local collective action around primary schooling. Taken together, these behaviors generate a rational implementation process, one in which policies are applied in uniform fashion across local contexts. The absence of local flexibility and civic input produces inferior outcomes for primary education.

THE DELIBERATIVE MODEL OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

Viewed from the outside, public agencies in Himachal Pradesh appear no different from those in other Indian states. The bureaucracy is organized hierarchically and divided functionally by policy domain. Public officials are hired through a meritocratic recruitment process involving civil service examinations, and promotion is achieved mostly through seniority along with performance assessments. The education bureaucracy is structured according to a standard organizational blueprint and endowed with similar material and human resources as in other states. The formal training of public officials is also comparable to that in other states.³⁴ Beneath this common exterior, norms in HP's state bureaucracy operate very differently, exemplifying the deliberative model.

Located in the Himalayan foothills, Shimla once served as the summer capital for the British colonial government. Today, it stands as the political

33. Judith N. Shklar, *Legalism: Law, Morals, and Political Trials* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).

34. When Himachal Pradesh was first granted statehood in 1971, officials from the Uttar Pradesh cadre of the IAS trained the HP bureaucracy on how to administer the new state (multiple interviews with IAS officers carried out in Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and New Delhi, 2008–10).

and administrative center of Himachal Pradesh. The headquarters of the Department of Elementary Education is located just below Shimla's main bus stand. During a meeting with local officials stationed there, I learned of a school program for children belonging to the Muslim Gujjar community. A small nomadic tribe, the Gujjars spend the summer months herding cattle in the hills and in the winters return to their agricultural base in the plains. This nomadic, labor-intensive lifestyle can take a toll on their children's education. Local officials in Shimla responded by creating a mobile primary school. Wherever the Gujjars would travel, the "school" would join them as a small caravan of teachers with learning materials. Within a few years, the first batch of Gujjar children completed primary school.

Straightforward as the example appears, enthusiasm among officials for the mobile school program was puzzling. Why spend scarce time and administrative resources on a program targeting a politically irrelevant group in Shimla? Nowhere in the SSA policy framework is it written that a mobile school should be provided to children belonging to nomadic tribes. Further fieldwork revealed numerous examples like this one. In another far-flung corner of the district, local officials had created a program to educate migrant children who had come from the poorer states of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. These children often worked alongside their parents on construction sites. By coordinating efforts across multiple agencies, including a local NGO that worked with children who were out of school, local officials helped create an alternative schooling program near the construction sites. Official policy, formal incentives within the bureaucracy, and the logic of electoral politics could not explain these behaviors. Instead, as discussed below, they reflect how a deliberative model of governance works to promote primary education.

The examples given above help inform our understanding of state capacity in HP, particularly in comparison to Uttarakhand. With few specialized resources at their disposal, officials in HP have learned to engage in collective action to solve problems. Taking the case of the Gujjar tribe, local officials discussed the problem with senior colleagues in the education bureaucracy. They were encouraged to take time away from their normal routines and to carry out an "exposure visit" to learn more about the nomadic community and find a practical solution. As one official explained: "With support from the department, I visited the Mohammedan Gujjar community in Saharanpur. The children were lagging far behind, and their parents had doubts

about the school system. We explained to them that SSA provides all the inputs, like books, uniforms, bags, free of cost. So that helped.”³⁵

Officials gave the Gujjar community information about state programs, while at the same time obtaining contextual knowledge about its distinct needs. In particular, the Gujjar community required a flexible approach to schooling that could accommodate a nomadic lifestyle and their children’s contributions to the household economy. Senior officials took a keen interest in working with local officials to develop a solution. A plan was drawn up to hire young volunteer teachers outside of official recruitment channels. These teachers were first appointed on a contractual basis. Over time, they were promoted to become *vidya upasaks* (knowledge workers), a para-teacher scheme adopted across the state in 2001.³⁶

Far from being an isolated case, fieldwork revealed numerous examples in HP of collective problem-solving, across a variety of tasks and local circumstances. Central to the deliberative model is the value that senior officials place on the input and participation of their subordinates. India’s administrative setup divides authority between the state, district, and block. Local officials stationed at the administrative block (a sub-district office) occupy the lowest rung of the bureaucratic hierarchy. Often they are seen as petty clerks, the corrupt front lines of India’s bureaucratic red-tape.³⁷ In HP, however, they are more commonly viewed as assets by senior officials. A former director of education explained: “When something is needed at the primary school, the local [citizen] will first go to the block. Even if I [the director of education] were contacted directly, I would still rely on the block administration for support. The real knowledge of what is happening rests with the block education officer. He knows his school catchment area better than anyone else.”³⁸

The value placed on local knowledge is further evident in state planning documents. A report produced in 2005 by the Planning Department of Himachal Pradesh to inform the government’s Five Year Plan devoted an

35. Interview with senior official, District Project Office, SSA, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, March 2010.

36. Unlike regular government school teachers who are hired by the state government through an official recruitment process implemented via a Public Service Commission, para-teachers are selected by village *panchayats* and appointed on a contractual basis without public service protections.

37. Akhil Gupta, *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

38. Interview with former director of education, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, July 2008.

entire chapter to “People’s Participation.” The report emphasized the need to use administrative resources to conduct training programs, exposure visits, *panchayat* and NGO capacity-building activities, and even local *melas* (festivals) in collaboration with civic agencies, all done “to spread the concept of people’s participation in development planning.”³⁹ Further evidence comes from bureaucratic efforts to promote civic engagement directly. Consider the case of Himachal Gyan Vigyan Samiti (HGVS), a leading civil society organization that evolved out of state literacy programs. HGVS is the HP branch of Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti (the Indian Organization for Learning and Science, BGVS). Formally registered in 1991, HGVS has an organizational presence in 45 administrative blocks spread across all 12 districts of HP, as well as a network of approximately 50,000 members that include service professionals (schoolteachers, doctors, and scientists), social activists, and rural youth, as well as public officials.⁴⁰

With state support, HGVS helped spearhead literacy campaigns across HP. The organization was given the mandate to run the State Resource Centre, a nodal agency in charge of adult literacy programs and vocational skill development. According to HGVS fieldworkers, the literacy programs allowed them to establish a network of contacts in villages and spread the message about state efforts to expand education. The notion that “I may be illiterate, but my child does not have to be” was often expressed by parents to HGVS fieldworkers.⁴¹

Through their grass-roots networks and linkages to the state, HGVS officers conveyed these popular sentiments to education officials. According to a senior official who had spent many years in the education bureaucracy, “Bureaucrats in departments like Forestry and Education became involved with Himachal Gyan Vigan Samiti and they saw the benefits of working with local people and institutions.”⁴² By engaging with organizations like HGVS to identify public needs, the Himachali state had effectively granted authority

39. Planning Commission, “Himachal Pradesh Development Report,” in *State Development Report Series* (New Delhi: Planning Commission, Government of India, 2005), p. 259.

40. HGVS is a branch of a larger umbrella organization known as Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti (BGVS), a nationwide movement to empower marginalized citizens through literacy and scientific knowledge. BGVS was sponsored by the National Literacy Mission of 1987, a central-government program to expand literacy among adults.

41. Multiple interviews and focus group discussions with fieldworkers at HGVS, Shimla, February 2010.

42. Interview with retired IAS officer, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, July 2008.

to citizens. Although states are often reticent to share authority, the benefits become more apparent when considering the challenges of implementation across a large, diverse territory. Even with expanded resources under SSA, it is impossible for local officials to visit every school, let alone solve problems as and when they arise.⁴³ Civic agencies have helped the state carry out critical tasks such as identifying children who are out of school and motivating parents to attend VEC meetings.

THE LEGALISTIC MODEL OF UTTARAKHAND

Uttarakhand's legalistic model of governance offers a sharp contrast to the norms fostering deliberation in HP. Uttarakhand was carved out of the hill region of Uttar Pradesh (UP) in 2000 to form a separate state. After achieving autonomy from UP, citizens and public officials held high expectations for their new state.⁴⁴ More than a decade later, these aspirations remain largely unmet. Unlike the deliberative approach of HP's education bureaucracy, senior officials occupying similar positions in Uttarakhand upheld hierarchical boundaries and procedures. They viewed lower-level officials as incompetent underlings rather than local assets. Without delving too far into the details, field research points to the persistence of legalism in Uttarakhand. After the state was established, the most palpable change that public officials experienced was a more decentralized administration. The different organs and levels of the state were more accessible, making it easier for officials to communicate and carry out routine work. As a bureaucrat from the SSA State Project Office noted, the degree of communication had improved: "Things are different now that we have a small state. Information from here can go straight to the officials at the top."⁴⁵ Local bureaucrats, who previously had no interaction with senior officials like the secretary of education, found that organizational barriers had been lowered. A direct link had been established between their offices and senior administrators based in the state capital, Dehradun.

Yet the creation of Uttarakhand also exposed an underlying tension between decentralization and bureaucratic norms compelling officials to uphold official procedures and hierarchies. Lower-level bureaucrats now had greater contact

43. Multiple interviews with local officials, Himachal Pradesh, March 2010.

44. "With Hopes and Fears," *Frontline* 17:17 (August 19–September 1, 2000), <<http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1717/17170350.htm>>.

45. Interview with education official, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, June 2009.

with senior officials. Steeped in the bureaucratic hierarchy of UP, senior officials now had to engage with their subordinates. Many officials expressed the concern that access to the state could be misused. Rules and procedures had to be tightened, or else the bureaucracy might fall prey to political interference, or worse even, be captured by local elites. The new, decentralized political system gave citizens “too much access” to the state, raising the potential for corruption.⁴⁶ According to a senior official from the education bureaucracy, “Before, when we had our Education Directorate in UP, no teacher would think to approach us. All their concerns would flow through official channels. But with greater access to the state, things can happen underhandedly.”⁴⁷ In contrast to bureaucrats in HP, who saw civic participation as critical for policy implementation, bureaucrats in Uttarakhand expressed suspicion toward nonstate actors. In return, citizens and civic agencies altered their strategies and learned to circumvent state institutions.

Consider the experience of Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi Paryavaran Shiksha Sansthan (USN), also known as the Uttarakhand Environmental Education Center. USN is a well-regarded NGO that has worked for more than 25 years in the areas of early-childhood education, community empowerment, and environmental sustainability.⁴⁸ Based in the hilly district of Almora, USN was appointed a nodal agency for environmental education back when Uttarakhand was still part of Uttar Pradesh. The organization worked with the Department of Education to develop textbooks, teaching manuals, and activities around environmental education in government schools. Similarly to HGVS in Himachal Pradesh, USN had worked at the grass-roots level with women’s groups in villages across Uttarakhand. In the early 1990s, the women’s groups expressed an interest in early-childhood education, and USN helped them create preschool centers (*balwadis*) within their villages. Communities took ownership over the centers, providing land, labor, and voluntary assistance to manage and maintain them. Meanwhile, USN provided technical inputs, trained instructors, and conducted routine monitoring visits and capacity-building sessions. Although the *balwadis* did not have formal state recognition, these institutions served as *de facto* schools and

46. Multiple interviews and focus group discussions with state officials, Uttarakhand, June–August 2009.

47. Senior official, Department of Education, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, July 2009.

48. More information on Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi is available from the Uttarakhand Environmental Education Centre, <<http://www.ueec.org.in>>.

community centers. They also provided a public space for village residents to come together and discuss their collective needs.⁴⁹

USN's *balwadi* program was supported financially by the central government's Ministry of Human Resource Development. The organization thus enjoyed some autonomy from the state bureaucracy of erstwhile UP. After the creation of Uttarakhand, the state bureaucracy began scrutinizing the work of civic agencies, particularly to ensure that they conformed to rules and procedures. At times the *balwadi* program would deviate from official rules specifying the location and daily schedule of preschool centers. Whereas state policy required preschools to be physically located within the primary-school campus, the placement and timings of the *balwadi* centers were decided by the women's groups themselves. Typically, the centers were located in a part of the village that all households could access. Families came to rely on the *balwadi* as a safe place for childcare and learning. As I observed in several villages, mothers would leave their young ones at the center each morning before heading to the fields to perform agricultural work.

The flexibility built into the *balwadi* program conflicted with bureaucratic norms, which required strict adherence to official procedure. Due to the bureaucracy's overwhelming concern with rule enforcement, the *balwadi* centers could no longer operate under the state's preschool program. Program officers at USN treated community participation as paramount, and yet they also understood that the rules had to be applied evenly by the state. As one of *balwadi* program managers put it: "The bureaucracy cannot say that 'your organization is good or different.' They have to follow a standard rule. . . . And once you get kicked out of the system, that's it."⁵⁰ From the perspective of local communities, the process of rule enforcement was insensitive to their needs, effectively undoing 20 years of local collective action around early-childhood education.⁵¹ What state officials saw as evenhandedness, local residents experienced as the heavy-handedness of a legalistic state that did not value their participation. The shared sacrifices that community members

49. To learn more about the *balwadi* program and how it has helped forge community spaces, see *The Balwadi: Binding the Himalayan Village* (Almora, Uttarakhand: Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi, 2001).

50. Interview with program manager, Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi, Almora, Uttarakhand, October 2009.

51. Multiple interviews and focus group discussion with women's groups, Almora, Uttarakhand, 2009.

had made to develop the centers were left unreciprocated by state agencies. The *balwadi* centers were subsequently dismantled.

Before moving on to analyze how norms influence the delivery of primary education, the question of where bureaucratic norms come from in the first place merits consideration. Given the two hill states' similar geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic characteristics, what explains the variation in their bureaucratic norms? Though beyond the scope of this article, additional research conducted on the political history of each state identifies the formative impact early political leaders had on the bureaucracy.⁵² Since HP's founding in 1971, political leaders have established a vision of inclusive development, working with bureaucrats to identify the needs of hill communities.⁵³ The political leaders of Uttarakhand, meanwhile, failed to advance a developmental vision for the hill region when it was part of Uttar Pradesh. Instead, they sought access to power and resources in the plains of UP, showing little interest in how well those resources were being utilized by their hill-based constituents.⁵⁴ This pattern continued even after Uttarakhand separated from UP. The differing political visions that operated in these two states may have inculcated distinct bureaucratic norms. Although a fuller account is needed, these preliminary observations are consistent with a large body of scholarship highlighting the impact leaders have in setting norms, especially in the early stages of organizational development.⁵⁵

SERVICE DELIVERY AND LOCAL MONITORING

Having shown above the distinct bureaucratic norms governing state agencies in HP and Uttarakhand, I now examine how they produce divergent results

52. These findings, which are the subject of a larger research project, draw on extensive interviews with retired public officials and historical sources documenting the impact of political leaders and party systems across these states.

53. See in particular the writings of Dr. Y. S. Parmar, the first Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh. Yashwant Singh Parmar, *Himachal Pradesh: Case for Statehood* (Shimla: Directorate of Public Relations, Government of Himachal Pradesh, 1965).

54. T. S. Papola, "Contradictions in Development of Uttarakhand: Need for a Region-Specific and Autonomous Planning Framework," in *Uttarakhand Statehood: Dimensions of Development*, ed. M. C. Sati and S. P. Sati (New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 2000).

55. John Kane, *The Politics of Moral Capital* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Edgar H. Schein, "Culture: The Missing Concept in Organization Studies," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 41:2 (1996), p. 229–240. John D. Dilulio, "Principled Agents: The Cultural Bases of Behavior in a Federal Government Bureaucracy," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 4:3 (1994), pp. 277–318.

for service delivery and monitoring. Delivery and monitoring of educational services are paramount tasks facing the state. They are also extremely difficult to execute well. To ensure that schools are truly functional requires intense, periodic interactions and feedback among state agencies, schoolteachers, and local communities. As mentioned earlier, the SSA program established a decentralized mode of governance involving local district administration and community oversight through VECs and *panchayats*.

Alongside these formal institutions, India's Himalayan region has a long history of informal village associations, particularly women's groups, which have had a vital hand in advancing early-childhood education.⁵⁶ Much has been written about women's associations in the Himalayas. These groups evolved organically and have a long history of village-based collective action. Known in HP as *mahila mandals* (women's groups), these associations have mobilized around a range of issues, such as forest management, land rights, water and sanitation, early childcare, and even local justice.⁵⁷ The strength of these associations reflects in part the economic contribution of women, who perform the majority of agricultural labor in the hill region. Women also influence household decision-making, especially in the areas of child health, nutrition, and schooling. Some women's associations have organized into larger activist networks that cut across caste and class differences to advance gender equality and other social issues.⁵⁸ The effectiveness of these associations, however, varies across states, even within the Himalayan region. Women's groups in HP, for example, have been empowered to work alongside state agencies to monitor and improve the delivery of primary schooling.⁵⁹ In contrast, Uttarakhand's legalistic state has thwarted the participation of women's groups, leading

56. Women's participation in service delivery is particularly critical in the Himalayan region given its history of male out-migration. See e.g., A. Jain, *Labour Migration and Remittances in Uttarakhand: Case Study Report* (Kathmandu: International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, 2010).

57. These groups are distinct from the narrower "self-help groups" among women which have been promoted by the Indian state. For an extensive discussion of women's village associations in Himachal Pradesh, see Kim Berry, *When Women Get Together: The Politics of Collective Action and Differences in Village Women's Organizations of Kangra, India* (Ph.D. thesis, Cornell University, 1997); "Disowning Dependence: Single Women's Collective Struggle for Independence and Land Rights in Northwestern India," *Feminist Review* 98:1 (2011), p. 136–152.

58. Kim Berry, "Disowning Dependence: Single Women's Collective Struggle for Independence and Land Rights in Northwestern India." *Feminist Review* 98:1 (2011), pp. 136–52.

59. Drèze, Jean. "A Surprising Exception: Himachal's Success in Promoting Female Education." *Manushi*, no. 112 (1999), pp. 12–17.

them to disengage from state institutions, even though women's groups in Uttarakhand have a rich history of collective action.⁶⁰

In HP, state initiatives to engage local communities have led to greater participation of women's associations across a wide range of policy domains. As a senior official in the Department of Rural Development explained, "We have found the *mahila mandals* quite helpful in our Total Sanitation Campaign. Also we have seen them work against alcoholism and other social issues in the village. They are active within the community and we try to rope them in more and more."⁶¹ The involvement of women's groups is no less evident in the domain of primary education. According to the PROBE report, women's groups in HP have been more effective in monitoring local primary schools than formal institutions like the *panchayats* and the VECs. Studies have also demonstrated the groups' positive impact on outcomes such as student attendance and delivery of the Midday Meal program.⁶²

To further augment their role in education, women's groups in HP were officially recognized by the state through the creation of Mother Teacher Associations (MTAs). The state's decision to establish MTAs needs to be understood in comparative terms. Most Indian states adhere to the standard administrative format stipulated by SSA, which makes the village education committee the nodal agency in charge of school-related matters. Though VECs are active in HP, their engagement has been largely limited to school infrastructure projects and less focused on the delivery of educational services. As an official in the Education Department explained, "The VEC was created because of the school grants that must be spent under SSA. So their main focus from the beginning was driven by spending [*kharcha*]. . . . But the MTA is more involved as an actual school committee. They [the women] make sure that the school functions, that children attend, and that the food they eat is nutritious. They are more active compared to VECs."⁶³

Public officials in HP recognized the impact that women's groups could have and helped create the political space for them to participate in the

60. Ramachandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

61. Interview with senior official, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, August 2008.

62. Based on their analysis of the data from the PROBE survey, Drèze and Kingdon find that the presence of women's groups in HP helps explain higher student enrollment and attendance, particularly for girls, as well as better implementation of the state's Midday Meal Program: "School Participation in Rural India," *Review of Development Economics* 5:1 (2001), p. 1–24.

63. Interview with senior official, State Project Office, SSA, Himachal Pradesh, July 2008.

educational system. During internal discussions, officials expressed concern that VECs and *panchayats* often lack the motivation and capacity to monitor primary schools.⁶⁴ In contrast, the MTA is made up of concerned mothers with a real stake in making sure that their local school functions well. The decision to adopt the MTA structure grew out of informal discussions within the bureaucracy, with input from civic agencies like HGVS, who shared their grass-roots experiences of working with women's associations. The education bureaucracy invested in the concept further by having HGVS develop "model" MTAs as a pilot program for the state. As the initiative began to show results, it was expanded further, and local officials were asked to hold public meetings with the groups. In Shimla District, I observed local agencies conduct monthly meetings and capacity-building exercises with MTAs at the administrative block. The local administration made it a priority to have female officials, including a district gender coordinator appointed under SSA, participate in these meetings since women were more comfortable approaching other women.⁶⁵ These meetings also facilitated the exchange of ideas and information. Public officials learned about many implementation problems on the ground, while local communities gained knowledge of their rights and responsibilities.⁶⁶

Take for example the MTA meetings held in Banyog, the local office of a *panchayat* whose administrative boundaries covered five scattered villages located outside Shimla proper. Focus group discussions conducted with five separate MTAs revealed that local primary schools in the area faced a common problem. Schoolteachers had been arriving late to school each day by an hour or more. In some of the villages, they would arrive more than two hours late, by which time the schoolchildren would already be having their midday meal. MTA members expressed their frustrations over teacher lateness during meetings held with local officials and school headmasters. Over the course of these discussions, it emerged that most of the teachers working in the area took the same bus together each day from the town center. The bus from

64. Participant observation in the state bureaucracy, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, April 2010.

65. Interview with local official, SSA, Shimla, March 2010.

66. Similar mechanisms have been identified in the research on co-production arrangements, where local agencies and citizens collectively manage public goods and services. See e.g., Ostrom, "Crossing the Great Divide"; Anuradha Joshi and Mick Moore, "Institutionalised Co-Production: Unorthodox Public Service Delivery in Challenging Environments," *Journal of Development Studies* 40:4 (2004), p. 31–49.

Shimla often departed late, causing the teachers to miss their connection to another bus for villages in Banyog. Seeing that the bus delay was affecting a number of primary schools in Banyog, education officials approached the local transportation agency and negotiated an agreement to have the morning bus depart from Shimla half an hour earlier. Ever since then, the MTA members reported, teachers had been arriving at school on time.

Collaboration between local agencies and women's associations in HP stands in contrast to the policy implementation process in Uttarakhand. There, I found that local agencies would regularly discourage women's groups from participating. Indeed, public officials in Uttarakhand expressed deep skepticism regarding the ability of local communities to improve the delivery of primary schooling. Take the case of the primary school in Pujari, an upper-caste village located along the roadside in Almora District. Problems of teacher absence and poor teaching often came up in meetings held by the village women's group. A few members of the group, who were also part of the school's VEC, tried raising the issue at quarterly meetings held at the school. The school's head teacher complained of having to cover all five grades on her own, in addition to other administrative duties. The VEC requested that the Department of Education send an additional teacher to the school, but official policy prohibited the posting of new teachers at the school in Pujari. Because it was a roadside school with a relatively small number of students, the local bureaucracy denied the request for an additional teacher.

The women's group took matters into its own hands, organizing funds from parents in Pujari to appoint a local teacher informally at the school. Nevertheless, parents continued to be unhappy with the poor quality of teaching, a problem exacerbated by the head teacher's irregular attendance. Concerned parents lodged a complaint about the head teacher with the local education bureaucracy. Meanwhile, the head teacher, who came from a lower caste group, filed her own complaint against the women's group under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Act, a law that protects lower castes and tribal communities from harassment by upper castes.⁶⁷ Local officials extended little support to the women's group, stating that it had no official

67. The Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act was enacted in 1989 by India's central government to protect lower castes and tribal communities from physical atrocities, threats, and harassment.

standing and that members must not set foot on school premises unless they were parents and had been called there for an official meeting. For fear of having to face the legal system, the mothers decided to withdraw their complaint against the head teacher. Their faith in the local primary school reached an all-time low, and some families in Pujari began sending their children to private school.

CONCLUSION

This article has shown that bureaucratic norms governing public agencies in Himachal Pradesh contributed to the state's exceptional performance in implementing universal primary education. The education bureaucracy in HP operates according to a deliberative model of governance, one that promotes collective action by officials within the state, and encourages the participation of citizens and civic groups like HGVS. In contrast, the legalistic model that prevails in Uttarakhand encourages strict rule-following and the uniform application of policies, while discouraging civic input. Working under the same national policy framework, formal administrative structures, and democratic institutions as other states do, public agencies nevertheless operate according to different norms, which has real implications for the well-being of citizens. These findings suggest that bureaucratic norms are an important feature of state capacity, one that ought to receive more scholarly attention. A closer examination of the normative environment in which public agencies operate can also help identify novel strategies for enhancing state capacity, especially when public resources are scarce.

These findings also provoke more careful thinking about the interaction between the Indian state and civil society. Some argue that a robust civil society is what allows the state to govern effectively.⁶⁸ The findings from India's Himalayan region suggest that the state itself can inculcate norms of civic participation. Public agencies in Himachal Pradesh actively promoted women's groups and encouraged their involvement in the governance of primary schooling. Public agencies in Uttarakhand, on the other hand, thwarted local collective action, leading citizens to seek alternatives, including the option to exit the government school system altogether. How far

68. Robert D. Putnam, Robert Leonardi, and Raffaella Y. Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

this pattern will endure is difficult to say. As a relatively new state, Uttarakhand still has some distance to cover in establishing bureaucratic norms. Given that norms can evolve over repeated interactions, over time the state bureaucracy may well learn to adapt and find ways to elicit civic participation around primary schooling.⁶⁹ Then again, given the high demand for skills and the rapid pace of privatization taking place in India's education sector, the state may not enjoy the luxury of time.

69. On the evolution of norms over time, see Elinor Ostrom, "Collective Action and the Evolution of Social Norms," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 14:3 (2000), p. 137–158.