

Original Article

THE CIVIC-DEVELOPMENT CONVERGENCE- INSTITUTIONALISING POLITICAL VOLUNTEER NETWORKS FOR GRASSROOTS PLANNING IN ASSAM

Deep Jyoti Deuri ^{1*}, Arup Barman ², Abhijit Medhi ³

¹ Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar, India

² Professor Department of Business Administration, Assam University, Silchar, India

³ Research Scholar, Department of Library and Information Science, Assam University, Silchar, India



ABSTRACT

This article examines a major challenge in decentralised governance in Assam, where public mobilisation coexists with continued difficulties in implementing the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP). The study uses qualitative secondary document analysis, reviewing government policy documents, administrative reports, and regional political literature to identify key barriers to effective grassroots planning and participation. Based on the findings, the paper proposes the Civic-Development Convergence Model. The model recommends integrating existing youth volunteer networks into trained, nonpartisan community development roles. This model approach transforms shifting these groups away from occasional protest-based activity and trains them instead as certified, neutral community facilitators. It also provides a practical framework to increase participation in village assemblies and strengthen transparency and accountability in rural governance across Northeast India.

Keywords: Decentralised Governance, Political Volunteerism, Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP), Social Capital, Autonomous Council

INTRODUCTION

In Northeast India, Assam has significance in democratic decentralisation. The state has a highly active, organised, and politically aware population Baruah (2005). From historic student movements to recent demands for ethnic autonomy, it has played an important role in shaping the state's socio-political landscape Misra (2000), Hussain (1993). However, despite this strong civic participation and high levels of 'bonding social capital' Putnam (2000), most of this civic energy remains limited to electoral campaigns, protest movements, or relief activities during the annual floods, rather than contributing to everyday local governance in the region.

Concurrently, the decentralised institutions of grassroots democracy face operational challenges in Assam. The recent reforms, such as the Gram Panchayat elections and Ward Sabhas, aim to strengthen democratic participation Goswami (2019). Institutions like the Autonomous Council and the Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) struggle with a shortage of trained personnel, low public volunteers, and inadequate technical capacity for GP-level development plans Mahanta (2021), Ministry of Panchayati Raj. (2022).

In Northeast India, political volunteerism is uniquely robust, driven by student bodies and ethnic identity. To redirect this mechanism toward long-term social development, the raw mobilizational capacity of volunteers must be integrated into decentralised governance and community welfare systems McDuie-Ra (2016).

*Corresponding Author:

Email address: Deep Jyoti Deuri (Deep.Jyoti@outlook.com)

Received: 26 May 2026; Accepted: 22 June 2026; Published 31 July 2026

DOI: [10.29121/JISSI.v2.i2.2026.81](https://doi.org/10.29121/JISSI.v2.i2.2026.81)

Page Number: 10-17

Journal Title: Journal of Integrative Science and Societal Impact

Journal Abbreviation: J. Integr. Sci. Soc. Impact

Online ISSN: 3108-2165, Print ISSN: 3108-1959

Publisher: Granthaalayah Publications and Printers, India

Conflict of Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Authors' Contributions: Each author made an equal contribution to the conception and design of the study. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

Transparency: The authors affirm that this manuscript presents an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study. All essential aspects have been included, and any deviations from the original study plan have been clearly explained. The writing process strictly adhered to established ethical standards.

Copyright: © 2026 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In Assam, the socio-political landscape features a highly politically active sphere of citizens, along with grassroots movements and public protests, historically being the primary way of expressing social and political demands [Baruah \(2005\)](#), [Hussain \(1993\)](#). In Assam, political volunteerism is less individualistic and is instead rooted and supported by influential student and ethnic youth groups [Misra \(2000\)](#), [Weiner \(1983\)](#). This has created strong bonding, marked by internal solidarity and the ability to mobilise quickly [Putnam \(2000\)](#).

CHALLENGES FOR GRASSROOTS DECENTRALISATION

Local self-governance under the Gram Panchayat Development Plan faces major implementation challenges. However, the Assam PRI Act 1994 provides a framework for local bodies that still experience low public participation [Goswami \(2019\)](#). Studies show that participation in Gaon Sabha meetings is consistently low [Mahanta \(2021\)](#). The reports from the Ministry of Panchayat Raj note that grassroots planning is lacking and that coordination among government departments is weak, leading to an inability to transform planning into people's participation and movement [Ministry of Panchayati Raj. \(2026\)](#).

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND RESOURCE MOBILISATION

To address these implementation gaps, according to [Chambers \(1994\)](#) Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) framework, local knowledge must be supported through structured and participatory facilitation to be effectively incorporated into development planning. The State Institute of Panchayat and Rural Development's welfare programs help with community mobilisation [ActionAid India. \(2021\)](#). This approach is consistent with the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) framework, which argues that sustainable development is best achieved by identifying and building on a community's existing skills, human resources, and social networks [Kretzmann and McKnight \(1993\)](#).

RESEARCH GAP

A critical synthesis of the literature reveals a sharp thematic dichotomy that leaves a vital structural intersection unexplored:

Figure 1

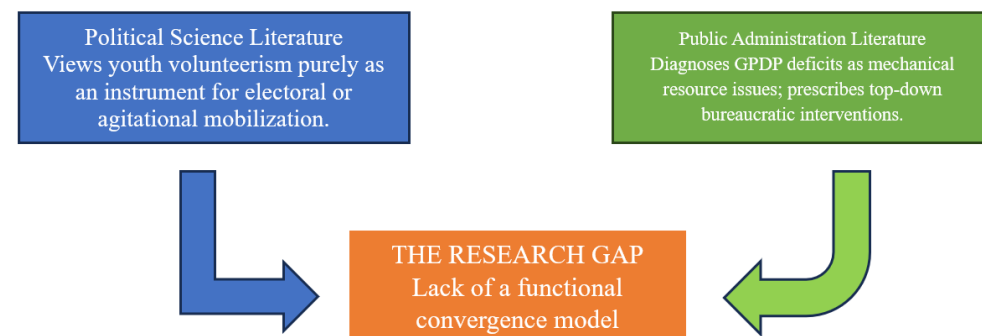


Figure 1 Conceptual Research Gap

Source: Developed by the author, 2026

[Figure 1](#) demonstrates that these two perspectives have largely evolved independently, resulting in a lack of a functional convergence model that integrates the mobilisation capacity of political volunteers with decentralised governance and community development. This study seeks to address this gap by proposing a framework that redirects youth political volunteerism toward participatory local governance and sustainable development.

Consequently, a significant research gap remains in understanding how different community socio-political institutions can work together effectively. Existing studies have not examined how Assam's identity-based volunteer networks, which possess strong bonding social capital, can be trained and integrated into formal local governance as neutral community facilitators. Such volunteers could help address key challenges, including weak local data collection and low public participation in planning processes. This article seeks to address this gap.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To study the role of youth-led political volunteer groups in rural Assam, and to identify the factors that limit their involvement.

To develop and evaluate a Civic-Development Convergence Model that integrates youth volunteer networks into the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP)

METHODOLOGY

The study uses an exploratory research design utilising qualitative document analysis [Bowen \(2009\)](#). Since the main objective of the study is to formulate a civic development convergence model, the study evaluates and synthesises policy frameworks, empirical literature, and administrative data based on secondary data.

CATEGORISATION OF SECONDARY DATA SOURCES

To ensure a balanced analysis of both the volunteer networks and the local governance deficits in Assam, secondary data were gathered across three distinct functional categories:

Table 1

Table 1 Data Categories		
Data Category	Primary Sources & Repositories	Analytical Utility
Statutory Frameworks & Policy Guidelines	Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) guidelines, Assam Panchayati Raj Act, Assam. (1994) , State-Act Autonomous Council legislative documents, and SIPRD training modules.	To map the formal, legal mandates and operational guidelines of the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP)
Administrative & Evaluation Reports	National and state-level GPDP committee reviews, Ministry of Home Affairs reports on Northeast youth engagement, and evaluation reports from civil society organisations (e.g., ActionAid, UNICEF).	To diagnose the exact structural, financial, and human resource deficits occurring during grassroots implementation.
Peer-Reviewed Empirical Literature	Academic articles, doctoral dissertations, and research monographs focusing on social capital, youth mobilisation, student politics, and decentralised planning in Northeast India.	To understand the historical behaviour, organisational networks, and socio-political trajectories of volunteer cadres in Assam.

Source: Statutory Frameworks Compiled by the Author, 2026

The integration of secondary data sources through data triangulation enables cross-validation of findings across all the data [Denzin \(1978\)](#), [Flick \(2018\)](#). This approach provides a way to understand both the institutional framework of the Gram Panchayat Development plan and the opportunities for mobilising youth volunteers for development [Creswell and Creswell \(2018\)](#). to understand both the institutional framework of the Gram Panchayat Development plan and the opportunities for policy execution.

DOCUMENT SELECTION CRITERIA (INCLUSION/EXCLUSION)

To reduce selection bias, documents were selected on three criteria. First, Policy documents, government reports, and research studies till 2026 were included. Second, the review focused on literature related to Assam, PRIs, and Autonomous Councils. Finally, documents addressing the participation or technical challenges of GPDP and community volunteers in the region were included.

ZDATA EXTRACTION AND DOCUMENT ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

The selected secondary material was analysed using a qualitative thematic content analysis framework, executed through a three-stage conceptual mapping process:

Figure 2

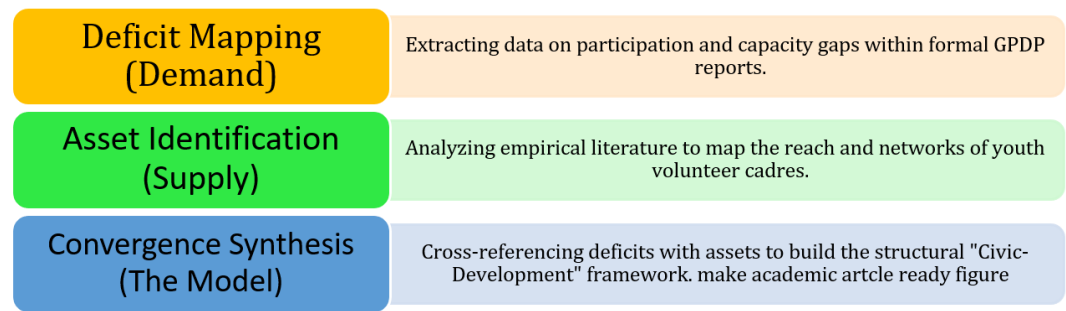


Figure 2 Data Analytical Framework

Source: Compiled by the Author, 2026

Deficit Mapping: The data from government reports and policies were systematically coded to identify and categorise the main problems in grassroots planning, including low Gaon Sabha attendance, data management, and qualitative content analysis [Mayring \(2000\)](#), [Krippendorff \(2018\)](#).

Asset Identification: Empirical literature on Assamese Student politics and youth mobilisation was coded using thematic analysis techniques [Braun and Clarke, \(2006\)](#) to extract operational strengths, such as rapid mobilisation capacity and rural outreach.

Convergence Synthesis: The identified governance deficits were subsequently cross-referenced with the operational assets of youth volunteer networks through thematic synthesis to identify areas of institutional convergence. This integrative analysis provided the conceptual foundation for constructing the proposed Civic-Development Convergence Model [Thomas and Harden \(2008\)](#).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of secondary data shows that the challenges faced by local self-governance in Assam closely align with the strengths of the region's youth networks. By comparing government reports with research studies, this section identifies how these two areas complement each other, forming the basis of the proposed Civic-Development Convergence Model.

Table 2

Table 2 The Civic-Development Convergence Framework		
Dimension	Traditional Political Volunteerism	Development-Oriented Civic Action
primary Activity	Electoral canvassing, rally organisation, and political sloganeering.	Community asset mapping, data collection, and welfare facilitation United Nations Development Programme. (2015) , Ministry of Panchayati Raj. (2022) .
Operational Cycle	Episodic (peaks during election years).	Continuous (aligned with development plan implementation).
Target Outcome	Electoral victory or policy concession Norris (2002) .	Improvement in human development indicators (HDIs) United Nations Development Programme. (2015) .
Institutional Nexus	Political parties and student unions.	PRIs, Autonomous Councils, and line departments.

STRUCTURAL PAIRING MATRIX: GAPS VS. ASSETS

The core finding of this analysis is that the operational strengths in the civic volunteer cadres can mechanically resolve the structural deficiencies in the institutional Gram Panchayat/Autonomous Council.

Table 3**Table 3 Analytical Framework for Civic–Development Convergence**

Institutional Governance Deficit (Demand Side)	Volunteer Network Asset (Supply Side)	Operational Convergence Mechanism
Participation Deficit: Low Gaon Sabha attendance; structural exclusion of marginalised households Goswami (2019) , Mahanta (2021) .	Mobilizational Capital: Deep, village-level network penetration and rapid collective mobilisation capacity Hussain (1993) .	Community Animation: Volunteers serve as neutral social animators, conducting door-to-door sensitisation to drive Gaon Sabha turnouts.
Data & Technical Deficit: Poor collection of disaggregated village statistics; weak execution of Participatory Rural Appraisals [PRA] Ministry of Panchayati Raj. (2026) .	Digital Literacy Cap: Highly tech-savvy, formally educated rural youth demographic underutilised in village affairs Ministry of Home Affairs. (2023) .	Civic Tech Intermediation: Forming campaign workers into digital scribes to execute spatial mapping, asset registry, and scheme tracking.
Accountability Deficit: Elite capture of resources; irregular or weak statutory social audits Bardhan (2002) , Ministry of Panchayati Raj. (2026) .	Vigilance Tradition: Established historical culture of anti-corruption pressure-group politics and civil resistance Baruah (2005) , Misra (2000) .	Social Auditing Cadres: Transitioning agitational vigilance into formal, institutionalised monitoring of asset creation and welfare delivery.

Source: Compiled by the Author, 2026

The [Table 3](#) presents the Civic- Development Convergence Model, with key governance challenges in GPDP implementation with capacities of youth volunteer networks in Assam. It shows that participation, technical, and accountability gaps can be reduced by leveraging volunteers' mobilisation capacity and civic vigilance through structured mechanisms. The framework illustrates that community assets can be systematically integrated into decentralised planning to strengthen participatory governance at the Gram Panchayat level.

DISCUSSION: MECHANISM OF TRANSITION

The primary theoretical barrier identified in secondary literature is the inward-looking nature of political and ethnic volunteerism in Assam. Using [Putnam \(2000\)](#) terminology, the state features an excess of bonding social capital, exclusive loyalty to student unions or ethnic autonomous groups, which often fosters inter-group fragmentation [Baruah \(2005\)](#). The model changes the energy use pattern instead of focusing on political competition; these local cadres take responsibility for development and service roles through the People's Plan Campaign framework (MoPR,2022). This helps connect marginalised citizens to formal government services, regardless of their identity or background.

Figure 3**Figure 3 Conceptual Framework of Civic–Development Convergence**

Source: Developed by the Author, 2026

The [Figure 3](#) shows the proposed conceptual framework through which bonding social capital is characterised by identity-based collective mobilisation. It can be transformed into bridging social capital through engagement within the GPDP. Training programs and structured social audits help redirect existing volunteer networks toward inclusive, development-focused community participation. As a result, involving youth volunteers in local institutions can improve cooperation between communities, build trust in public institutions, and promote more participatory local governance.

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE OF POLITICAL NEUTRALITY

The public administration report highlighted a significant concern: the risk of partisan capture if political volunteers enter local planning space [Goswami \(2019\)](#). To protect the GPDP framework from partisan bias, the secondary data highlight the need for a strong institutional safeguard through state training bodies such as the State Institute of Panchayat and Rural Development (SIPRD).

The findings suggest that volunteer networks can maintain structural neutrality if they are onboarded under a Three-Tier Certification Framework:

- 1) **De-linking:** Volunteers register as independent civic animators, signed to a code of conduct that bans overt political branding during planning exercises.
- 2) **Capacity Building:** SIPRD provides standardised training focused on technical data tools, human development indicators (HDIs), and neutral participatory methods [Chambers \(1994\)](#).
- 3) **Institutional Supervision:** Animators operate directly under the bureaucratic oversight of the block development officer (BDO) and panchayat secretary, ensuring their labour is aligned with statutory planning objectives rather than party interests.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR AUTONOMOUS COUNCILS

The Model holds value for the Autonomous Councils in the State, for example, the Deori and Mising Autonomous Councils. These councils often operate with limited administrative infrastructure and face workforce shortages at the village level [Mahanta \(2021\)](#).

Secondary evaluations show that these councils depend heavily on ethnic youth groups for political support [Misra \(2000\)](#). The proposed Convergence Model suggests integrating these youth groups into permanent development roles. This can strengthen the councils' administrative capacity, improve welfare monitoring, and provide timely, detailed field data to support better planning and stronger negotiations for state resources.

CONCLUSION

This paper examines a key challenge in decentralised governance in Assam: while public participation is high, local planning institutions continue to face serious constraints. By comparing statutory planning frameworks with regional political studies, it argues that the limited implementation of the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) is not only due to administrative or financial drawbacks. It also results from the failure to effectively use the large network of youth volunteers already active in community and political activities across the region.

To address this gap, the paper proposes the Civic-Development Convergence Model. The model recommends training and integrating local youth volunteers into neutral, development-focused community roles under the supervision of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and State Act Autonomous Councils [Putnam \(2000\)](#). These volunteers can improve transparency and accountability at the grassroots level. Overall, the model promotes an asset-based approach to rural development by making better use of existing local human resources.

SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is based on qualitative document analysis and secondary data, which is its main limitation. Although the proposed framework linking governance gaps and existing youth volunteer networks is conceptually strong, it needs to be tested in real-world field settings. Future research should conduct long-term pilot studies in selected rural blocks or Autonomous Councils in Assam to evaluate the model's impact on Gaon Sabha participation and youth volunteerism.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- ActionAid India. (2021). Bridges to the Most Vulnerable: Strengthening Local Governance in Assam. ActionAid India.
- Bardhan, P. (2002). Decentralisation of Governance and Development. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 16(4), 185–205. <https://doi.org/10.1257/089533002320951037>
- Baruah, S. (2005). Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195690828.001.0001>
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Chambers, R. (1994). The Origins and Practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal. *World Development*, 22(7), 953–969. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X\(94\)90141-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(94)90141-4)
- Chattopadhyay, R., & Duflo, E. (2004). Women as Policy Makers: Evidence from a Randomised Policy Experiment in India. *Econometrica*, 72(5), 1409–1443. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0262.2004.00539.x>
- Creswell, J. W., and Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry. *Theory Into Practice*, 39(3), 124–130. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15430421TIP3903_2
- Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods* (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Dreze, J., & Sen, A. (2013). *An Uncertain Glory: India and Its Contradictions*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400848775>
- Farmer, T., Robinson, K., Elliott, S. J., & Eyles, J. (2006). Developing and Implementing a Triangulation Protocol for Qualitative Health Research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 16(3), 377–394. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305285708>
- Flick, U. (2018). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Goswami, S. (2019). Decentralised Governance and Democratic Decentralisation in Assam: An Assessment. *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 65(2), 341–356. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019556119851097>
- Hussain, M. (1993). *The Assam Movement: Class, Ideology, and Identity*. Manak Publications.
- Isaac, T. M. T., and Heller, P. (2003). Democracy and Development: Decentralised Planning in Kerala. In A. Fung & E. O. Wright (Eds.), *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance* (pp. 77–110). Verso.
- Kretzmann, J. P., and McKnight, J. L. (1993). *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilising a Community's Assets*. ACTA Publications.
- Krippendorff, K. (2018). *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (4th ed.). Sage Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071878781>
- Lijphart, A. (1977). *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*. Yale University Press.
- Mahanta, A. (2021). *Local Self-Governance and Rural Development in Northeast India*. Concept Publishing Company.
- Manor, J. (1999). The Political Economy of Democratic Decentralisation. World Bank. <https://doi.org/10.1596/0-8213-4470-6>
- Mayring, P. (2000). Qualitative Content Analysis. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 1(2), Article 20. <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-1.2.1089>
- McDuie-Ra, D. (2016). *Borderland City in New India: Frontier to Gateway*. Amsterdam University Press. <https://doi.org/10.5117/9789089648945>
- Ministry of Home Affairs. (2023). *Youth Engagement and Social Infrastructure in the Northeastern States*. Government of India.
- Ministry of Panchayati Raj. (2022). *People's Plan Campaign: Operational Guidelines*. Government of India.
- Ministry of Panchayati Raj. (2026). *Report of the Committee on Enhancing the Quality of the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP)*. Government of India.
- Misra, U. (2000). *The Periphery Strikes Back: Challenges to the Nation-State in Assam and Nagaland*. Indian Institute of Advanced Study.
- Mitra, S. K. (1992). *Power, Protest and Participation: Local Elites and the Politics of Development in India*. Routledge.
- Narayan, D., & Woolcock, M. (2000). Social Capital: Implications for Development Theory, Research, and Policy. *The World Bank Research Observer*, 15(2), 225–249. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/15.2.225>
- Norris, P. (2002). *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139175098>
- Offe, C., & Fuchs, S. (2002). A Decline of Social Capital? The German case. In R. D. Putnam (Ed.), *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society* (pp. 189–244). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0195150899.003.0006>
- Panchayati Raj Act, Assam. (1994). *The Assam Panchayat Act, 1994*. Government of Assam, Legislative Assembly.
- Payeng, H., and Rao, P. (2026). Borders Within: The Politics of Belonging and Displacement in Assam. *Lex Localis - Journal of Local Self-Government*, 24(2), 112–131.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon & Schuster. <https://doi.org/10.1145/358916.361990>
- Putnam, R. D., Leonardi, R., & Nanetti, R. Y. (1993). *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400820740>
- Rao, V., and Walton, M. (Eds.). (2004). *Culture and Public Action*. Stanford University Press.
- Sarkar, S. (2021). Youth Volunteerism and Civic Engagement in Northeast India: Patterns and Prospects. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 24(6), 748–764. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2020.1766528>
- Scott, J. C. (1998). *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press.
- Sharma, K. (2008). *Decentralisation and Local Governance in North-East India*. Regency Publications.

- Thomas, J., & Harden, A. (2008). Methods for the Thematic Synthesis of Qualitative Research in Systematic Reviews. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 8, Article 45. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-8-45>
- United Nations Development Programme. (2015). Human Development Report 2015: Work for Human Development.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2020). Human Development Report 2020: The Next Frontier—Human Development and the Anthropocene.
- Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1995). *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1pnc1k7>
- Weiner, M. (1983). The Political Demography of Assam's Anti-Immigrant Movement. *Population and Development Review*, 9(2), 279–292. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1973053>
- Woolcock, M. (1998). Social Capital and Economic Development: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis and Policy Framework. *Theory and Society*, 27(2), 151–208. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006884930135>