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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

The Elephant in India's Data Room: Fragmented Governance, Missed Potential

 **THE HINDU**

9 May 2026

POLITY**SCIENCE & TECH****ECONOMY****GS2****GS3**

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"India's vast administrative data sits in ministerial silos. Should India create a powerful centralised data authority with real cross-ministry jurisdiction, or would that create unacceptable surveillance risks?"

EDITORIAL SUMMARY:

The Hindu examines India's fragmented data ecosystem — siloed ministries, duplicate datasets, and absent interoperability — and argues that without a centralised data governance architecture (through bodies like IDMO), evidence-based policymaking will remain aspirational despite India's digital ambitions.

THE CORE PROBLEM: DATA ABUNDANCE, GOVERNANCE DEFICIT

India generates extraordinary amounts of data — health records (Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission), land records (SVAMITVA), financial transactions (UPI), tax filings (GSTN), and education statistics (UDISE+). Yet this data sits in **ministerial silos**, incompatible formats, and inaccessible repositories.

The result: policy decisions are made on the basis of outdated surveys and incomplete administrative data — despite the data theoretically existing somewhere in government systems.

THE FRAGMENTATION PROBLEM

Each ministry maintains its own data systems with different standards, identifiers, and update frequencies:

- Ministry of Health: HMIS, NHM data, Ayushman Bharat
- Education: UDISE+, DIKSHA
- Finance: GSTN, Income Tax portal, PFMS

- Agriculture: PM-KISAN beneficiary lists

These cannot easily “talk” to each other. A farm household appears differently in PM-KISAN, GSTN, and MGNREGS databases — creating **reconciliation problems** and enabling leakage.

WHAT GOOD DATA GOVERNANCE LOOKS LIKE

- 1 **India Data Management Office (IDMO):** Proposed nodal body to set data standards and coordinate inter-ministerial data sharing. Established under MeitY — but implementation remains thin.
- 2 **Open Data Infrastructure:** Government datasets in machine-readable formats for public research, civil society audit, and private sector innovation.
- 3 **Data Quality Standards:** Mandatory metadata, update frequency requirements for all government databases.
- 4 **Aadhaar as Interoperability Spine:** Using Aadhaar-based authentication to link disparate beneficiary databases — requires robust privacy safeguards under DPDP Act 2023.

THE PRIVACY-GOVERNANCE TENSION

Good data governance requires data linkage; data linkage creates surveillance risk. Key gaps:

- No clear framework for inter-ministerial data sharing
- DPDP Act 2023 exempts government from many obligations
- Data Protection Board of India not yet operationalised

UPSC MAINS ANALYSIS

GS Paper 2 — Governance: e-Governance, IDMO, National Data Governance Framework, JAM trinity, DBT

GS Paper 3 — Economy: Digital economy, open data, DPDP Act

Keywords: IDMO, National Data Governance Framework, DPDP Act 2023, Data Protection Board, JAM trinity, open data, administrative data silos, Aadhaar

Mains Angles:

- 1 “India’s governance transformation is constrained by its data governance failure.” Critically examine.
- 2 Evaluate the role of Aadhaar as a unifying identity spine for India’s social sector data.

The Hindu's argument: India's governance transformation is hamstrung by data fragmentation. The government has invested in digital delivery but little in foundational data infrastructure. Fixing this requires IDMO to gain real authority, DPDP Act to cover government data processing, and political will to break ministerial data fiefdoms.

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