

Populism, Reforms, and Political Leadership: An Analysis of Anumula Revanth Reddy's Leadership Style in Telangana

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Abstract

Purpose: This study focused on welfare redistribution within the context of economic transformation and the hybrid leadership approach of Revanth Reddy, the second Chief Minister of Telangana, who assumed office in 2023.

Methodology: This study employs a multi-source qualitative methodology. The study analyses the Telangana Rising 2047 Vision Document, Praja Vani grievance records, and legislative proceedings (primary sources—including), as well as government surveys, CMO releases, and media reports (secondary data) from December 2023 to March 2026. The state government is focusing on introducing specialised skilling programmes in AI, analytics, and design-oriented fields targeting women and youth. Also, by 2047, it aims to create 16-20 million new jobs for the young workforce (21-30 years).

Findings: The state's success under the leadership of Revanth Reddy includes free travel for over 36 lakh women and a ₹22,000 crore loan waiver for 25 lakh farmers. Alongside fiscal constraints and revenue deficits, including state debts exceeding ₹6 lakh crore. Revanth Reddy's brainchild, the CURE-PURE-RARE, aims to help Telangana achieve a \$1 trillion economy by 2034 and a \$3 trillion economy by 2047.

Originality/Value: This study contributes to the literature on developmental governance by analysing a unique case. He simultaneously pursues welfare populism, structural economic reform, and personal capacity-building (including executive education at the Harvard Kennedy School). It argues that the sustainability of this hybrid model depends on transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and the mobilisation of revenue and MOUs, which will be key to overcoming these challenges.

Keywords: CURE-PURE-RARE model, Developmental governance, Hybrid leadership, Telangana, economic vision 2047, welfare populism.

1. Introduction

In India, politics since the 2010s has been characterised by a renewed focus on people's welfare, with developmental aspirations linked to it (Roy, 2023). Nowadays, Political Parties across India, from AAP's public-oriented welfare governance to the Trinamool Congress's direct benefits to the public, are consolidating power and leading through economic difficulties. In 2014, a young Telangana was formed on the promise of addressing regional disparities and equitable growth. Revanth Reddy's tenure since December 2023 symbolizes an impactful case of this hybrid leadership. His charismatic leadership style and political campaign narrative framed the previous BRS regime as "**Dorala Palana**" vs "**Prajala Palana**" by importing the Karnataka Congress model of six guarantees and assurances, which led the

Congress party to victory in the Telangana assembly elections in 2023, securing 64 seats in the 119-member assembly. Two years six months into governance, Reddy's leadership approach has steered financial burden from the previous government estimated ₹9,500–10,500 crore annually (The Hindu, 2025) based on the White Paper on Telangana Finances presented in December 2023, despite fiscal challenges (Telangana ranked seventh on NITI Aayog's Fiscal Health Index 2026), Revanth Reddy has launched transformative initiatives.

Reddy's unique citizen-centric model and initiatives redefined citizen engagement and public governance in the state through the Praja Vani programme (Launched on December 8, 2023). This dedicated platform acts as a bridge between citizens and the government for the redressal of public grievances relating to land records, pensions, housing, employment and healthcare. It has earned praise across the country as a "first-of-its-kind" citizen-centric model unique in India. In January 2026, Reddy completed the 'Leadership in the 21st Century' executive program at Harvard Kennedy School. In January 2026, Reddy completed the 'Leadership in the 21st Century' executive programme at the Harvard Kennedy School, becoming one of the few serving Indian chief ministers to participate in an international leadership development programme of this nature. The programme focused on strategic decision-making, leadership challenges, and effective governance. Revanth Reddy's participation reflects an effort to strengthen administrative skills and develop a global perspective, aligning with Telangana's vision of combining political Leadership with modern governance practices.



Source: (Telugu Times, 2026)

This paper analyses the leadership style of Revanth Reddy by examining his political strategies as the chief minister. On the one hand, he engaged in strategic populism (Weyland, 2001), using charismatic appeals to the public and commencing welfare schemes to build a loyal support base.

On the other hand, faced with fiscal surpluses, he pursued "good enough governance (Grindle, 2004) — focusing reforms on the most critical areas rather than attempting high-budget, and politically difficult overhauls. This combination allowed Revanth Reddy to maintain popularity and stability without overextending the state's budget. Revanth Reddy breaks from his predecessor KCR's centralised, identity-driven style with his personal up skilling, direct access to the public, and long-term economic planning (Hindustan Times, 2023). However, the opposition parties BRS and BJP are questioning unfulfilled high-cost guarantees, such as the payment of ₹2,500 to women, delayed pensions, and the vision's feasibility amid "tight finances." However, with the hybrid leadership style, Revanth Reddy is tirelessly attempting

to make Telangana a model state in the country. This study draws on sources (vision document, CMO releases, Praja Vani dashboards and Daily News newspaper clippings) up to May 2026, providing a balanced, data-rich analysis relevant to academic scrutiny.

2. Literature Review

In the Indian Context, previous researchers focused on national leaders like Indira Gandhi's authoritarian populism and regional leaders, such as M.G. Ramachandran's Dravidian welfare model. India also provided state-level people leaders like Y S Rajashekar Reddy during his tenure from 2004-2009; his model combined free electricity for agriculture, pensions, and Arogyasri with infrastructure, creating a template of "welfare populism". On the other hand, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah (2013–2018 & post-2023) introduced "five guarantees", inspired by Telangana's approach and enabling Congress's 2023 win. Banerjee and Duflo (2020) stated that such welfare schemes create visible political returns through "tangible benefits" but risk fiscal unsustainability.

According to Rodrik's (2018) framework, Revanth Reddy's leadership was more than just a clever political game. Leaders must address the challenges of modern governance and protect citizens from the very forces of change that enable growth. In India, post-2014 territorial power-sharing emphasizes competitiveness among the states, in which states like Kerala and Andhra Pradesh focused on welfare-heavy models (Tillin, 2019); on the other hand, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu pursued /development-investment-led models (BusinessLine, 2014; Jaffrelot, 2025). Under KCR's regime, the state's regional pride was blended with irrigation and IT growth (Telangana Today, 2023), but his "pro-people" policies became a pipeline for channeling public funds into private pockets. Revanth Reddy's Harvard engagement adds a novel dimension to his Hybrid leadership approach; his participatory governance theories resonate in the consultation of 40000 inputs from the people (Fung & Wright, 2003).

2.1 Theoretical Framework

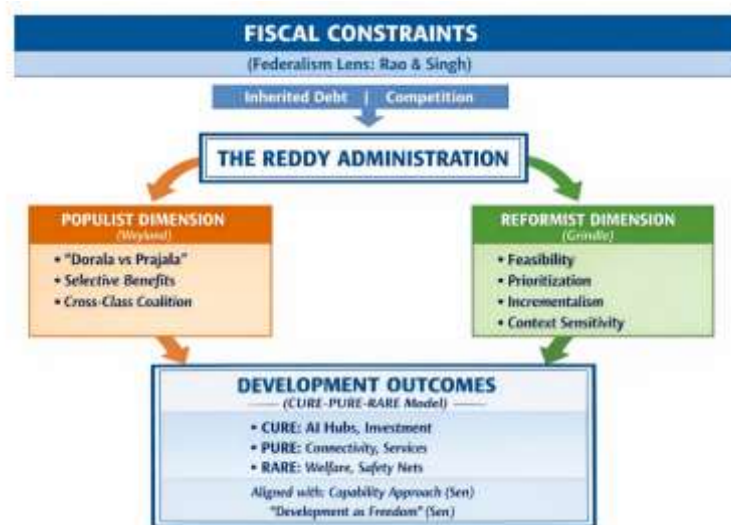
The study integrates two complementary frameworks to analyse the leadership and governance of the Revanth Reddy administration. First, Weyland's (2001) strategic populism views leaders as rational political actors who use their charisma to appeal to people's benefits and distribute resources to build and maintain cross-class coalitions to retain power. During the 2023 Telangana Assembly election campaign his "dorala vs prajala" (ruler's vs people) stance against the corrupt elite positioned him as the champion of the common people in his political rhetoric (The Hindu, 2023). This framing builds intense loyalty. Secondly, most critical governance failures are addressed by the incremental accommodation of "good enough governance" (Grindle, 2004). The transformative leadership framework is used to evaluate and explain Revanth Reddy's leadership qualities across four dimensions (Northouse, 2021).

Table-1: Application of Transformational Leadership Dimensions to Reddy

Dimension	Definition	Application to Revanth Reddy
Idealized Influence	Leader serves as a role model, demonstrating high ethical standards.	Reddy's visionary speeches and public persona; his projection as a decisive, incorruptible leader
Inspirational Motivation	Leader articulates a compelling vision that motivates followers.	The "dorala vs prajala" narrative; promises of a new, developed state

Intellectual Stimulation	Leader challenges followers to be innovative and challenges assumptions.	Reddy's Harvard training and emphasis on technology (AI initiatives); positioning as a modern, forward-thinking leader
Individualized Consideration	Leader attends to each follower's needs, acting as mentor or coach.	The Praja Vani program—a public grievance redressal system where Reddy personally hears citizen complaints

Source: (Bass, 1985; ANI News, 2023; The Hindu, 2023)



Source: created by the Author

3. Methodology

This study employs a single-case qualitative design. The present study examined Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's leadership style, populist strategies, and reform initiatives in Telangana from December 2023 to May 2026.

Data sources include:

- Telangana Rising 2047 Vision Document
- Chief Minister's Office (CMO) official releases
- Praja Vani grievance redressal dashboard
- CM's public statements, X (Twitter) posts, and Assembly speeches

Data are collected from media and social media sources, Government publications, and websites. This study has limitations. It focuses on a single state and a single leader; the results may not apply broadly to other situations.

4. Discussion- From Praja Palana to Telangana Rising 2047

4.1 Leadership Style: Assertive, Globally Oriented, and People-Centric

Revanth Reddy's decentralized governance is focused on implementing welfare schemes transparently and effectively, adding that "Praja Palana" (people-centric governance) (The Hindu, 2023). On March 06 2026, the Telangana government launched a "99 Days Action Plan" (Praja Palana – Pragati Pranalika) through Grama Sabhas to accelerate development by prioritising grassroots (The Hindu, 2026). The Praja Vani, launched at the Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Praja Bhavan, brings decision-making closer to the people

by allowing them to voice their grievances directly. On Tuesdays and Fridays, this citizen engagement in governance programme is held regularly and accepts applications directly from the public, reinforcing accessibility and transparency (The New Indian Express, 2025). Deputy CM Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka described it as "unique in India" and also credited the official commitment (The Hindu, 2026).



Source: The Times of India. Telangana Praja Darbar a hit, gets over 5k pleas in 2 days. December 11, 2023.

The global orientation of CM Revanth Reddy's participation as the first sitting CM of Independent India to attend the Harvard Kennedy School's "Leadership in the 21st Century: Chaos, Conflict and Courage" from January 25- 30, 2026. He was among 62 participants from over 20 countries across five continents, representing various sectors, including politics, governance, and civil society. During this upskilling programme, he learnt various skills, authority analysis, effective decision-making under uncertain situations, and peer simulations. This global exposure translated into tangible economic diplomacy. During the Davos Global Investment Summit in January 2026, he presented Telangana State's Vision Document to UAE officials and to Delaware Governor Matt Meyer (March 2026).



Source: "Telangana concludes Davos visit, announces investments in AI initiatives, data centres," The News Minute, January 23, 2026.

He sought their collaboration in the health and education sectors. Revanth Reddy organised a Telangana Rising Global Summit in December 2025. He secured investment proposals worth ₹5.75 lakh crore. These "Investment magnet projects" are competing with other states in India and in countries such as China, Japan, and South Korea.

3.2 Populist Elements: The Six Guarantees and Mass Welfare Rhetoric

Populism manifests in the Six Guarantees, framed as redress against “feudal” rule. Implementation has been phased due to finances.

Table-2: Reddy's Guarantee Schemes: Implementation Status & Budgetary Allocation (March 2026)

Guarantee	Core Promises	Status as of June 2026	Beneficiaries/Impact Data (Latest)
Mahalakshmi	₹2,500/month to women; LPG at ₹500; free bus travel	Free bus & LPG fully implemented; ₹2,500 cash delayed (fiscal constraints cited)	40 lakh women daily; ₹10,000 crore saved by women since Dec 2023 ; Smart cards being introduced
Gruha Jyothi	200 units free electricity	Fully implemented	₹2,080 crore allocated in 2026-27 budget
Rythu Bharosa	₹15,000/acre to farmers; ₹12,000 to labourers; ₹500 paddy bonus	Kharif 2026–27 assistance being disbursed. The govt. began releasing ₹9,000 crore from 30 June 2026, with payments credited in phases over nine days.	₹18,000 crore allocated in 2026-27 budget; ₹21,000+ cr loan waivers already provided
Indiramma Atmiya Bharosa/ Pensions	Enhanced pensions & support	Partial rollout; full enhancement delayed	₹14,861 crore allocated for Cheyutha pensions in 2026-27; 2 lakh new pensions to be added
Indiramma Housing	Houses for poor	Partial rollout	₹5,500 crore allocated in 2026-27 budget
Rajiv Yuva Vikasam	Youth & disabled support	Scheme struggling; funds not yet disbursed to selected beneficiaries	₹5,800 crore allocated in 2026-27 budget; CIBIL score requirement creating eligibility issues

Source: (Government of Telangana, 2026; IANS, 2026; L. Venkat Ram Reddy, 2026; The News Minute, 2026; The New Indian Express, 2026)

Revanth Reddy's people-oriented measures, such as the caste census survey, sub-categorisation of SCs, Indiramma houses for 4.5 lakh beneficiaries, and free fine rice for low-income families, are the best populist measures of his governance. He demonstrated a tangible impact on the public through the Indira

Mahila Shakti Scheme and other welfare initiatives. The recent Jubilee Hills bypoll, panchayat wins, and municipal-corporation election results evidenced populist measures of Revant Reddy's governance.

3.3 Reforms: Telangana Rising 2047 Vision and Structural Transformation

Revanth Reddy unveiled the 83-page 'Telangana Rising 2047' vision document, which received inputs from the Indian School of Business and NITI Aayog, outlining a plan to transform the State into a \$3 trillion economy by 2047 and a \$1 trillion GSDP by 2034 (The Hindu, 2026). The vision document aims to have Telangana contribute 10% to India's national GDP, aligning directly with the Viksit Bharat 2047 goal (Deccan Chronicle, 2025). This summit served as a launch pad for the next 25 years.



Source: (Government of Telangana, 2025)

Since December 2025, CM Revanth Reddy has been implementing all components of the Telangana Rising 2047 Vision, which documents three core pillars (economic growth, inclusive development, sustainable development) and cross-cutting enablers (technology, financing, governance), through inter-departmental coordination and regular progress reviews.

- **Economic Growth:** To transform Telangana's economy into a \$1 trillion GSDP by 2034 and a \$3 trillion economy by 2047 (The Hindu, 2026). Revanth Reddy is planning to position the state as an 'AI-Powered Telangana' by setting a goal to train 5 lakh professionals in AI-related specialization's by 2027 (Investing.com, 2026).
- **Inclusive Development:** The Revanth Reddy-led state government aims to raise Women labour-force participation from the current 30% range (India-level) to over 45–50% by 2047 (Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority, 2020).
- **Sustainable Development:** Through large-scale environmental restoration, such as Musi River rejuvenation, lake revival under HYDRAA, green urban planning in the CURE zone, and climate-resilient agriculture in the RARE zone, with a clear commitment to achieve Net-Zero emissions by 2047 (Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority, 2020).

Table-3: CURE-PURE-RARE Regional Economic Zones

Zone	Geographic Scope	Focus Areas	Key Activities & Infrastructure	Strategic Objective
CURE- Core Urban Region Economy	Area within the Outer Ring Road (ORR) (~160 km radius)	- High-value services innovation - DeepTech & AI - Quantum computing.	Establishment of Global Capability Centres, R&D investments, startup ecosystem, design studios, metro rail expansion.	To transform Hyderabad into a globally competitive, livable city.
PURE- Peri-Urban Region Economy	Between ORR and proposed Regional Ring Road (RRR), connected via greenfield expressways	Manufacturing, logistics, industrial expansion	Large-scale manufacturing clusters, logistics hubs, industrial parks, MSME ecosystems, skill development centres; development of Bharat Future City	To act as a growth buffer zone, balancing urban expansion with industrial development and employment generation
RARE- Rural Agri Region Economy	Areas beyond RRR up to state boundaries	Agriculture modernization green economy rural development	Improved market linkages, integration with urban & global supply chains, promotion of sustainable and agri-based industries	To enhance rural prosperity and integrate rural economies with broader economic systems

Source: Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (2025). Telangana Rising 2047

3.4 CURE–PURE–RARE- A Spatial Model

The Telangana government, under the leadership of CM Revanth Reddy, became the first state in India to divide its entire geography into three distinct zones. Revanth Reddy's tenure (December 2023 to March 2026) as Chief Minister witnessed people-oriented reforms such as the restoration of lakes, expansion of Aarogyasri to 10 lakhs, rejoining of crop insurance, and rejuvenation of the Musi River, which are the flagships of his leadership approach.

3.5 From Polluted Waterway to Vibrant Riverfront: The Musi Project as a Game-Changer for Hyderabad's Future

CM Revanth Reddy's vision to transform the state capital, Hyderabad, into a world-class metropolis by addressing its long-standing environmental degradation and economic stagnation, the flagship initiative, The Musi River Beautification and Rejuvenation Project, aims to address sustainable development issues in the state capital (Musi Riverfront Development Corporation Limited, n.d.). To revitalise the 55-km polluted stretch of the Musi River in Hyderabad, Revanth Reddy launched as part of the Telangana Rising 2047 vision.



Source: (HansIndia, March 27, 2026)

The purpose of this project is to develop a vibrant riverside, enhance tourism, improve flood control, establish recreational parks, and create a night economy with night bazaars, with multifaceted benefits (Musi Riverfront Development Corporation Limited, n.d.). This project also combats urban pollution and improves AQI and water quality. Reavanth's game-changer project not only restores the historical and ecological heritage of Hyderabad city but also draws inspiration from global models like London's Thames or Singapore's riverfronts (Deccan Chronicle, 2026). This project positions the Hyderabad brand image as a competitive global hub by fostering inclusive growth, women's safety, and long-term resilience against climate challenges.

3.6 Administration as Chief Minister: Achievements and Challenges

The Congress government has spent ₹76,382 crore on implementing its 'six guarantees' (Deccan Chronicle, 2025). After assuming office on December 7, 2023, as the CM of Telangana State, his administration moved swiftly on electoral promises. Revanth Reddy launched the Cheyutha scheme to provide free medical and healthcare up to Rs 10 lakh under the Rajiv Arogyasri initiative. It is estimated that 90.10 lakh families below the poverty line will benefit from this scheme, and 1,672 medical packages, along with 21 speciality services for patients with physical ailments, are also available under it (Government of Telangana, n.d.).



Source: (Social News XYZ, 2023)

Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy launched the Mahalakshmi free bus scheme within 48 hours of taking charge. The scheme enabled over 290 crore free journeys within 28 months (Deccan Chronicle, 2026). By 30 March 2026, women had collectively saved ₹10,000 crore (Deccan Chronicle, 2026). This scheme helped Women, particularly from middle- and lower-income groups.



Source: (Deccan Chronicle, 2026)

In 2024, to directly benefit farmers in Telangana state, the government announced a ₹21,000 crore farm loan waiver scheme, providing loans of up to ₹2 lakh per farmer. The disbursement exceeded ₹21,000 crore and directly benefited more than 25 lakh farmers. The state government received 1.05 crore applications in the outreach programme,



Source: (The Hindu, 2024)

Revanth Reddy's US investment tour in August 2024 was a notable achievement. The state secured commitments of ₹31,500 crore (The New Indian Express, 2024). Also assured of creating over 30,750 new jobs, with major announcements from Amgen (a biotech R&D facility) and Charles Schwab (a global capability centre) (The New Indian Express, 2024).

Revanth Reddy's brainchild, HYDRRA (Hyderabad Disaster Response and Asset Protection Agency), was reorganised from the Enforcement, Vigilance and Disaster Management Department (EV&DM). Recognising the crisis, CM Revanth Reddy tasked HYDRRA as a dedicated agency to protect public assets- government lands from encroachments, protect lake beds, nalas, and buffer zones, and strengthen disaster response capabilities. As of March 2026, HYDRRA has reclaimed 1,350 acres of government land in Hyderabad, valued at Rs 65,000 crore (NewsMeter, 2026). HYDRRA aims to restore Hyderabad's

hydrological balance as part of the broader urban rejuvenation agenda under the Telangana Rising 2047 vision. However, with the state's total outstanding liabilities (public debt plus guarantees) approaching ₹8 lakh crore as of December 2025, the Revanth Reddy administration has faced significant challenges, including inherited fiscal constraints (ETV Bharat, 2026). The 2026–27 budget projects a fiscal deficit of ₹58,458 crore and low capital expenditure (The Times of India, 2026). The state government is heavily dependent on borrowing due to these fiscal constraints.

5. Challenges and Criticisms

The Revanth Reddy administration is facing significant challenges, including a massive inherited fiscal deficit, revenue shortfalls, and a debt burden. State's expenditure on salaries, pensions, interest, and welfare schemes across different categories accounts for 65–70% of the budget 2025-26 (Rajeev, 2026). Due to this expenditure, schemes such as "Rythu Bharosa" and the ₹2,500 monthly assistance to women, as well as enhanced pensions, have been delayed.

These fiscal challenges are obstacles to Revanth Reddy's Telangana Rising 2047 vision and to the government's. He must overcome them to achieve sustainable development. HYDRAA claimed to recover over 1350 acres of encroached lake beds (2,011 acres of lake) and government lands, reflecting the government's commitment to protecting public assets, prioritising urban sustainable development, and restoring water bodies. Still, the move triggered protests from affected tenants and residents. Here, to provide clearer pathways for resettlement and alternative livelihood support, the government may adopt a consultative, phased approach.

Conclusion

During Anumula Revanth Reddy's tenure (2023–2026), he implemented welfare schemes and focused on development at the same time through his flagship programme Praja vani, addressing public grievances. This shows his mix of populism and long-term reform. To upskill himself and to strengthen his governance, he did a leadership training programme at Harvard Business School.

To modernise the state's economy and governance, he unveiled the Telangana Rising 2047 vision document. However, inheriting a massive debt burden from the previous BRS government and severe financial constraints have slowed the full implementation of the six guarantees. Despite these challenges, CM Revanth Reddy's unique leadership style and visionary approach to welfare measures and governance have attracted global investors. For researchers studying Indian states, Telangana offers insight into how leaders seek to balance immediate public demands with long-term development goals. Ultimately, Revanth Reddy's leadership is not just about politics — it is a real-world experiment in combining populism with structural reforms in a federal democracy.

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