

Reinventing Governance: The Evolution of Public Administration in Bangladesh

Muhammad Kamruzzaman¹

Abstract: This study investigates the growth of Bangladesh's public administration over the past decade, with particular emphasis on structural reforms envisioned to reinforce governance, augment service delivery, and improve accountability. Influenced by both domestic significances and external drivers—including faster digitalization and the pressures of globalization—the administrative system has experienced extensive transformation. The analysis examines national-level reform initiatives, the role of international actors, and the effects of these changes through a focused case study of the Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB). The findings indicate that while reform measures have contributed to noteworthy improvements in public service outcomes, challenges persist, particularly concerning uneven implementation, institutional capacity constraints, and the influence of international financial institutions such as the IMF. The paper concludes with recommendations aimed at reinforcing administrative capacity, ensuring equitable allocation of resources, and advancing robust digital governance frameworks to support sustainable public-sector modernization.

Keywords: Public Administration, Bangladesh, Bureaucracy, Reform, Governance, Global, IMF, BRDB

1. Introduction

Bangladesh's bureaucracy is important in shaping the country's governance and public administration. Over the past decade, organizational structures have evolved due to internal and external factors, shifts in the political landscape, economic growth, and recent external factors like digitalization and sustainable development. The paper discusses structural changes aimed at implementing democratic principles of publicity in service delivery reform, addressing corruption and inefficiency. It highlights both successful and unsuccessful reforms and recommends improving Bangladesh's bureaucratic structures. These structural changes aim to apply democratic principles of publicity to the service delivery reform agenda, as well as efficacy and effectiveness in adopting solutions to age-old problems of corruption and inefficiency. In identifying the impact of these reforms on governance, the paper highlights failed and successful elements of these reforms and notes some enduring problems. It recommends improving Bangladesh's bureaucratic structures to cater to the contemporary state's requirements.

¹ Associate Professor, Department of Government and Politics, Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka -1342, Bangladesh. Email: k.zaman@juniv.edu

2. Background and Context

The corporate governance environment in Bangladesh has gone through changes in the last decade due to internal and external factors. From being inefficient excessively centralized, and frequently intervening politically in the past by dint of its post-colonial administrative heritage, bureaucracy in Bangladesh can be defined. The challenge of the governance system is reflected in the nation's inability to deliver public service due to various factors, inclusive of the following: lack of transparency, low citizen participation in the governance system, and high level of corruption as administered (Naher *et al.*, 2020).



Figure: Map of Bangladesh based on Divisions

Source: (Ruhullah *et al.*, 2024)

Bangladesh has undertaken many reforms, like e-governance, decentralization policies, and increased accountability. The kind of development is welcome to deal with problems present in any society, ranging from issues of Socio-Economic Status (SES) and poor performance by the public sector. However, it has never been done democratically, making the actions and decisions non-transparent, and the citizens' involvement in the governance process for sustainable improvements was highly limited. Stoker (2019) examines the relationship between governance resources, knowledge, institutional adaptability, and collaboration in Bangladesh's bureaucracy, identifying best practices and strategies for improving public administration.

3. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical approach to examine the evolution of Bangladesh's public administration over the past decade. The study focuses on structural reforms and their implications for governance, service delivery, and institutional accountability. The methodology integrates secondary data analysis, case study examination, and thematic content analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of administrative changes and challenges in Bangladesh.

3.1 Literature Review

The renovation of public administration in Bangladesh has been widely analysed through multiple scholarly lenses of the eye, including bureaucratic reform, governance challenges, digital transformation, and global institutional influence. However, the literature often explores descriptive assessments rather than deep critical analysis. This review synthesizes key themes, compares scholarly viewpoints, and identifies analytical gaps relevant to the present study. Bangladesh's public administration retains deep institutional legacies from its colonial past, categorized by excessive domination, hierarchical decision-making, and politicization of administrative processes. The development of the public administration of Bangladesh has had much literature in various areas of scholarly study, such as governance studies, development administration, and the subject of public sector reform. Nevertheless, as the current literature indicates, there are serious gaps in the critical correlation of bureaucratic reforms to the outcomes of governance, particularly regarding digitalisation, global impacts, and institutional responsibility. The early literature presents the Bangladesh bureaucracy as one that is extremely centralised, hierarchical, and affected by colonial legacies (Mamun *et al.*, 2021). Although the work has a historical background, it is not critical of new reforms like e-governance and decentralisation. Mamun *et al.* (2021) believe that Bangladesh has transformed into a hybrid model of administration that incorporates both the principles of New Public Management (NPM) and the traditional control of bureaucracies. Nonetheless, they fail to thoroughly investigate why reforms based on NPM have reaped mixed results in various ministries and local government entities. The literature continues to talk about corruption and bad governance structures. Naher *et al.* (2020) note that corruption in frontline health services is systemic and political in nature. They term informal payments, patronage networks, and bureaucratic bottlenecks as the primary sources of inefficiency, as identified in their scoping review. They are valuable, but their research is more in-depth in the health sector and offers few insights into the broader bureaucratic construct. In this way, the current paper builds on this discussion to

more comprehensive administrative reforms, such as digital governance, decentralisation, and foreign forces.

Naim and Hasan (2018) explore how power is concentrated and rent-seeking behaviour in the public institutions and state that a centralised power structure undermines accountability. Nevertheless, they fail to attribute such behaviours to reform findings, including e-file systems, innovating in the field of public services, or performance-based evaluation. Thus, the current research tends to fill these gaps in the literature by examining the interaction of centralisation and reform initiatives. The other valuable scholarly input is provided by Stoker (2019), who states that the reforms of governance are based on the flexibility and adaptability of the existing institutions, cooperation, and the availability of governance resources. His focus on complexity and interdependence applies to Bangladesh, but Stoker's fails to give a country-specific analysis. This paper will expand on his conceptual framework to see how the impact of the global factors like IMF conditionalities, World Bank-funded reforms, and international trends in digital governance have influenced the Bangladesh transformation in bureaucracy. Lastly, the studies on the effects of international institutions show inconclusive results. According to Apeti and Gomado (2024), IMF conditionalities tend to finance macroeconomic stability to the detriment of social welfare expenditure. This criticism applies particularly in Bangladesh, where IMF-led reforms have created controversy in terms of subsidy reduction and fiscal limitations. The existing research has failed to provide a critical connection between IMF interventions and administrative restructuring. Therefore, a gap has been identified in this study, which is addressed through cross-sectional analysis.

Critical Gap Identification

Across the literature, several gaps emerge:

Gap in Literature	Why It Matters	How This Study Responds
Limited critical analysis of administrative reforms beyond the health/education sectors	Narrow sector focus weakens holistic understanding	This study examines national reforms, global influences, and a BRDB case study
Inadequate assessment of digital governance outcomes	Digitalisation is a major reform trend	This research paper evaluates e-governance adoption and challenges
Lack of integration between global financial pressures and administrative change	IMF/World Bank influence is increasing	This study analyses the reform outcomes and controversies
Weak methodological guidance in past research	Researchers often fail to justify qualitative analysis	This research paper uses thematic analysis and case study methods

Table 1: Critical Gaps in Literature and Study Response

Source: Self-made

Justification for Methodology

- The identified gaps support the choice of a qualitative, descriptive, analytical approach because:
- Existing literature is fragmented; qualitative synthesis enables an integrated understanding.
- Few studies connect national reforms, global influences, and institutional case studies.
- A qualitative method allows deeper analysis of governance challenges and reform outcomes.
- Secondary data is widely available but under-analysed; thematic analysis fills this gap.

Table for Comparative and Critical Analysis

Author and Year	Main Contribution	Strengths	Limitations / Critical Observations
Mamun et al. (2021)	Shift from traditional to New Public Management (NPM)	Historical overview, administrative evolution	Lacks depth on digital governance and uneven implementation
Naher et al. (2020)	Corruption in frontline services	Strong empirical evidence	Sector-specific, not generalisable to the entire public administration
Naim and Hasan (2018)	Rent-seeking & centralisation	Highlights governance failures	Does not analyse reform mechanisms responding to centralisation
Stoker (2019)	Governance complexity framework	Strong theoretical basis	No country-specific application; requires contextual adaptation
Apeti and Gomado (2024)	IMF conditionality & reforms	Insightful global comparison	Limited focus on administrative effects in Bangladesh

Table 2: Comparative Analysis of Key Literature on Public Administration Reform in Bangladesh

Source: Self-made

4. Analysis of Changes in Public Administration

4.1 National-Level Changes

Bangladesh's public administration has undergone significant reforms in response to the evolving political, economic, and social environment. One of the reforms implemented includes restructuring various government departments to improve effectiveness and efficiency in service provision.

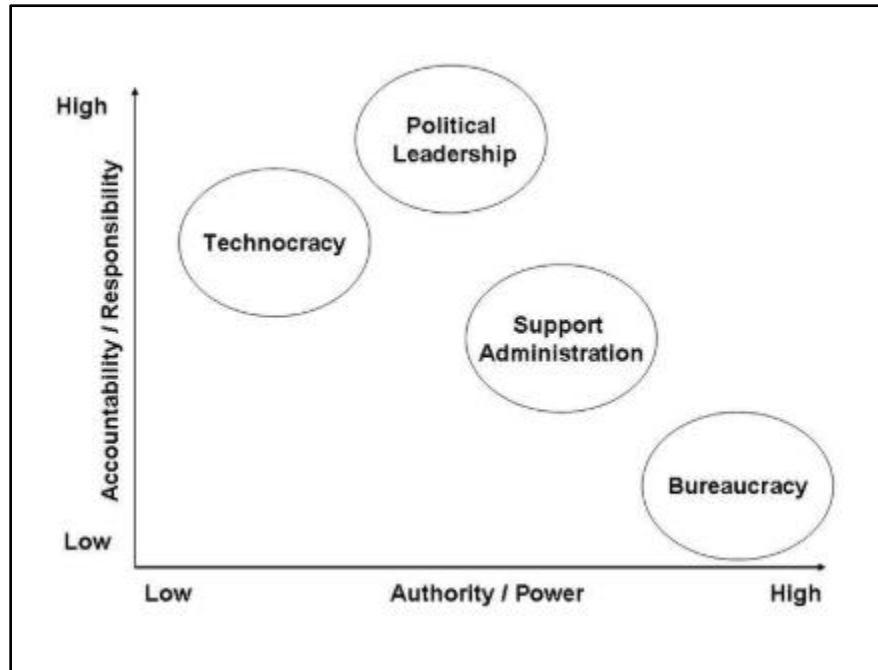


Figure: Power and accountability of different components in public governance of Bangladesh

Source: (Naim *et al.*, 2018)

The Public Administration Reform Commission (PARC) was established in 2000 to enhance governance quality by decentralizing operations and increasing public information. However, political factors and economic pressures have led to the adoption of centralized governance and new governance technologies.

4.2 International Themes

Global trends have significantly influenced the evolution of Bangladesh's public administration. One important advancement has been the implementation of e-governance, which has advanced methods of government delivery of its services and eradicated the vice of corruption. Financial assistance from international agencies, such as the World Bank, has also supported administrative reforms in the health and education sectors. Stoker (2006) states that the process of globalization and the growing emphasis on sustainability and environmental governance have prompted policy changes in Bangladesh. These

changes have led to adjustments in public administration to address environmental issues and promote sustainable development. Bangladesh is compared with other developing countries, and similar challenges and reforms are observable though the speed of implementation has varied based on local political contexts and the availability of resources.

5. Case Study: Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB)

The case study of the changes in public administration within a government department is illustrated through the case of the Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB). The BRDB, established as the planner and implementer of rural development, has also undertaken many reforms in areas of project and resource management.

The use of technology to support the innovation of processes through the use of mobile-based monitoring of rural projects has promoted accountability. However, the increased community involvement in decision-making made by the BRDB has led to the enhancement of the rural development programs. These initiatives, under similar strategic endeavours, observed globally and nationally, point to the increasing importance of using technology, the emerging focus on sustainability, and incorporating people from communities in the development of public administration in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) exemplifies changes in public administration over the past decade through reforms in project and resource management. Mobile-based monitoring enhances accountability and community participation in rural development programs, aligning with global trends in smart technology, sustainability, and participatory governance, transforming public administration in Bangladesh.

6. Impacts on Governance and Public Services

6.1 National Impacts on Governance

The reforms in Bangladesh's public administration have significantly impacted the quality of governance. The government's implementation of digital applications and e-governance has improved the delivery, and availability and minimized bureaucracy in the administration of public services. Many of these changes have eased the difficult process of implementation and leadership, as well as increasing the ability to minimize corruption while increasing public confidence in governing bodies. Also, decentralization reforms have focused on enhancing the delivery of services at the local level, bolstering the units of local governance, and enhancing quick reactions to local conditions. However, the dynamics of such changes also have their drawbacks, such as differences in capacity and the rate of implementation of reforms throughout the country, which in turn may reduce the impact of the measures taken. Bangladesh's shift from traditional to modern public administration reflects global influences, including Western models emphasizing accountability, regulation, and modernization.

6.2 New Public Management and Recent Trends of Bangladesh Public Administration

New public management is a broad and complex term used to describe the wave of public sector reforms worldwide since the 1980s. Over the last ten years, the Public Administration has integrated New Public Management strategies promoting ethical changes, more especially in public spending, issues with money, and general accountability. Multi-level governance involves bureaucracy and diverse actors, influenced by power dependency theory. Public-private partnerships, technological advances, e-governance, and civil society engagement have redefined governance, emphasizing transparency, market-oriented policies, and accountability (Stoker, G.2019).

Table 3. Some important administrative reforms in Bangladesh have the overtones of New Public Management (NPM).

Committees/ Commissions/Study Groups	Focus	Recommendations
Martial Committee on Examining Organizational setup of Ministries, Divisions, Directorates, and other Organizations, 1982	Reorganization and Rationalization of manpower In public organizations	Reduction of the size of the government; reduction of layers for decision making; delegation of administrative and financial powers down the hierarchy.
UNDP-sponsored Public Administration Sector Study, 1993	Civil Service	Performance management system; rationalization of civil service structure; elimination of redundant government functions; merit-based selection and promotion; strengthening the Public Service Commission
World Bank Study: Bangladesh Government That Works Reforming the Public Sector, 1996	Civil service, public enterprise, NGOs	Redefining frontiers of the public sector; enhancing the level and nature of accountability and responsiveness of public organizations to different stakeholders; streamlining regulations, laws, and processes; maintaining an efficient, committed, and professional public service
Public Administration Reform Commission, 2000	Administrative structure for improving the quality and standard of service, transparency, and efficiency	Determination of missions of public offices; improving the delivery of services; reforming the civil service; formation of the professional policy making group (senior management pool); reorganizing institutions and rationalizing manpower; restructuring field administration and decentralization;

		establishment of an independent commission against corruption; establishment of criminal justice commission; establishment of the Office of Ombudsman; reducing wastage and promoting value for money; strengthening parliamentary oversight; facilitating private investment
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Source: UNDP Report (Dhaka), 1993 & ADB Report, 2007

Public services in Bangladesh have seen advancements due to reforms in governance, particularly in sectors such as health, education, and infrastructure. E-governance solutions have made it easy for people to access government services and have also helped in cutting down the time taken to process various applications. In the health care industry, digital health records and telemedicine services have received increased adoption, benefiting the health care sector by reaching out to distant communities that would otherwise be harder to access.

6.3 Public Service Delivery Improvements

Sectors such as health, education, and infrastructure have benefited from reform. For example, digital health records and telemedicine have improved service access in remote areas. E-governance platforms have reduced processing times and increased convenience for citizens, contributing to more equitable and efficient public services.

7. The IMF's Role in Governance and Reform

The IMF has the sovereign responsibility of guiding governance as well as economic development policies of many developing countries African, Asian, and Middle Eastern nations. IMF is usually involved in offering funds and lending advice frequently during emergent situations. As much as its programmes intend to balance economies, they normally accompany harsh measures such as structural adjustment policies that may also have mixed outcomes.

In many developing nations, including Bangladesh, the International Monetary Fund played an important role in shaping an array of economic stability and reform initiatives. Nonetheless, critics have a systematic critique that IMF programmes are somehow linked to reduced spending on public services, regardless of improvements in governance and welfare. In Bangladesh, the IMF-supported structural reforms have brought stability to the economy but have also created controversies about IMF measures, where monetary support comes with the conditionality of certain policies, social welfare, and subsidy programs for the poor people.

Bangladesh's public administration faces challenges such as uneven performance of reforms, limited capacity at local levels, and help constraints in rural areas. There is a need

to enhance the capacity of public service delivery in line with providing training and equipment to rural areas. Critics argue that IMF conditionalities can undermine social protection systems, even as they promote governance reform. In Bangladesh, these tensions are visible in debates over subsidy cuts, fiscal constraints, and public sector investment (Al-Mohamady, 2024).

8. Recommendations

Bangladesh should invest in capacity-building at the local government level and ensure equitable distribution of resources across regions to address these challenges. Even though digital instruments and decentralization can enhance governance, the rate of advancement challenges the traditional bureaucracy, resulting in ineffectiveness. Similarly, measures supported by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) may lead to rationalization and reduced budgetary allocations to extremely important services. But this is an opportunity to further strengthen electronic governance, and decentralization processes to make public services more accessible and non-biased (Naughton, 2024). However, modern public administration has undergone enormous changes in its capacity building, governance systems, as well as implementing rules and regulations for better service delivery in the 21st century. The policies of e-governance, decentralisation, and innovation of services to the population have enhanced transparency, lessened the processing time, and widened accessibility to services. In addition, in Bangladesh, public administration took on new public management late 80s. Ensuring justice, equitable distribution of public resources across the country, is the pathway to progress, the sustainable development of the Bangladesh administration.

9. Conclusion and Way Forward

The public administration in Bangladesh has undergone remarkable change during the last decade due to internal reforms, the development of technologies, and foreign influence. The policies of e-governance, decentralisation, and innovation of services to the population have enhanced transparency, lessened the processing time, and widened accessibility to services. Nevertheless, the continued problem of governance enhancement is constrained by such obstacles as bureaucratic centralisation, asymmetries in reform execution, and capacity weaknesses on the local level, as well as the consequences of IMF-led financial reforms.

This research concludes that administrative reforms have brought in new modern tools and practices, but their success highly depends on the institutional capacity, political commitment, and capacity to incorporate global governing models in the local socio-political setting. The discussion also shows that reforms were never consistently equally positive; some of them have made it more efficient, and others have raised the controversy of equity, government spending, and institutional independence.

To continue, Bangladesh needs to build the local government, improve accountability mechanisms, and increase inclusive digital governance models. Moreover, the policy

formulation ought to involve greater involvement of people and evidence-based analysis of the policies so that reforms can overcome structural flaws instead of coming up with short-term, top-down answers. Through a combination of national interests and international excellence, it can be seen that Bangladesh can still work on making the country progress towards a more transparent, responsive, and citizen-oriented system of public administration.

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