

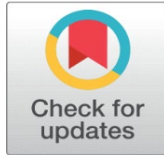
IDEOLOGY, INSTITUTIONAL FRAGILITY, AND EARLY STATE-BUILDING: GOVERNANCE ARCHITECTURE IN POST-LIBERATION BANGLADESH (1972–1975)

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of Bangladesh in December 1971 created one of the most compressed episodes of post-conflict state formation in modern South Asia. Between 1972 and 1975, the government of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman attempted to translate an ideological vision grounded in nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism into operational governance institutions under severe structural constraints. While previous studies have examined constitutional design, economic nationalization or 1975 political transformation separately, few analyses integrate these dimensions within a unified state-building framework. This study addresses this gap through a mixed-methods historical review combining PRISMA-guided literature synthesis with historical institutional analysis. Drawing on 25 key scholarly works and primary policy sources, research evaluates institutional formation across constitutional design, economic governance, administrative reconstruction and crisis management between 1972 and 1975. The findings indicate that early Bangladeshi state-building achieved rapid constitutional institutionalization but faced persistent implementation challenges due to administrative fragility, fiscal scarcity and external economic shocks. The 1974 famine exposed significant coordination failures within food governance institutions, while constitutional restructuring of 1975 represented a crisis-driven institutional recalibration rather than a purely ideological shift. Comparative analysis with Algeria, Tanzania and Vietnam demonstrates that executive centralization under post-liberation stress is a common structural pattern, though Bangladesh's early commitment to constitutional pluralism and civic secularism represented a distinctive institutional experiment. The study contributes to state-building theory by illustrating how ideological ambition interacts with structural constraints during early post-conflict governance formation.

Keywords: Bangladesh State-Building, Post-Liberation Governance, Institutional Formation, Post-Conflict Governance



1. INTRODUCTION

State formation in the immediate aftermath of armed liberation represents one of the most complex phenomena in comparative politics, which differs from the processes of state-building seen in more stable political histories. The latter are characterized by a more incremental approach, whereas the former requires the achievement of constitutional legitimacy, bureaucratic reconstruction, fiscal rebuilding, and social reintegration simultaneously, amidst the devastation of war. This simultaneity of requirements under severe resource constraints has been termed 'compressed

institutionalization' by political governance theorists, referring to the condensation of processes that normally take place over decades into a matter of a year or so (Fukuyama, 2004; Fukuyama, 2011).

Bangladesh provides a particularly instructive case of this phenomenon, as a country whose post-colonial history is marked by a striking lack of examination of its constitutional development trajectory. Indeed, as a country that gained its independence in December 1971, following a nine-month-long war that had caused a huge loss of life, displacement, and devastation of its entire economic infrastructure, its post-independence challenges were of unprecedented difficulty for a newly formed state. Conservatively, it may be assumed that the war had destroyed 30–40 percent of its infrastructure; more than ten million refugees had to be reintegrated into their homes; agriculture had been destroyed; and many of its key officials had either fled or been removed from their posts. Yet, in the midst of such unprecedented instability, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's regime succeeded in establishing a constitutional framework within a year of its independence, based on four guiding principles: nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism, which still guide its constitutional identity today.

The three years from the promulgation of its 1972 Constitution until the constitutional reforms of 1975 are particularly noteworthy as a particularly significant period in its state-building trajectory, as they saw particularly important determinations about how economic policies were to be formulated, how its bureaucracy was to be organized, how power was to be distributed between its central and regional governments, and how power was to be distributed within its executive branch. Yet, as a particularly important period in its constitutional history, it remains a particularly underexamined phenomenon in Bangladeshi history, in comparison with its liberation struggle and its post-1975 history.

The existing literature on post-liberation Bangladesh appears to be dominated by three broad schools of thought: biographical accounts of Bangabandhu's leadership qualities (Ahmed, N., 2014; Mascarenhas, 1986); political economy accounts of nationalization and reconstruction policies (Sobhan, 1980; Karim, 1995); and analyses of the 1974 famine and its lessons for governance (Sen, 1981; Jahan, R., 2005). There is little attempt, however, to synthesize these approaches into a single, coherent account of state-building in post-liberation Bangladesh that integrates constitutional development, economic governance, and administrative reconstruction into a single, overarching process of institution-building in post-liberation Bangladesh. This article attempts just that.

The article makes three specific contributions to the existing literature on post-liberation Bangladesh. Firstly, it integrates constitutional development, economic governance, and administrative reconstruction under a single rubric of post-liberation state-building in Bangladesh. Secondly, it utilizes the framework of historical institutionalism to highlight significance of period between 1972 and 1975 in Bangladesh's political development. Thirdly, by drawing parallels between Bangladesh's post-liberation state-building process and that of other post-liberation states, it locates Bangladesh's process within a broader global trend of institution-building in post-conflict situations.

The central research question guiding this study is: how was Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's ideological vision for a nation transformed into actual rules and structures of governance between 1972 and 1975, and what are the implications for how the broader political and economic constraints of the era shaped that transition? Two subsidiary queries are used as a framework for answering that core one: what were the actual forms taken by each of the pillars of the original ideology, and how did administrative weakness, financial constraint, and external events impact how well actual institutions lived up to the normative vision?

In order to answer these questions, a hybrid theory base is required that includes historical institutionalism, Weberian theory on legitimacy and authority, theories on state capacity, and comparative theory on post-liberation governance (Weber, 1978; North, 1990; Migdal, 1988; Young, 1994). The structure of the article has a clear linearity. It begins by presenting the theory in Section 2, the methods in Section 3, a systematic analysis of the development of institutions in different fields of governance in Section 4, a synthesis of the thematic analysis in Section 5, a comparison of the results in Section 6, a discussion on the implications in Section 7, and concludes in Section 8.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis is organized around four interconnected theoretical pillars: legitimacy and authority transition, state capacity and scope mismatch, historical institutionalism and path dependency and postcolonial governance fragility.

2.1. AUTHORITY TRANSITION AND CONSTITUTIONAL ROUTINIZATION

Weber's (1978) tripartite typology of authority structures, which comprised traditional, charismatic and rational-legal authority, offers a basic framework for analysis. Post-liberation states characteristically commence with charismatic authority structures vested in the leadership of the liberation movement, whose charismatic legitimacy is forged through mass mobilization and symbolic association with national sacrifice. The structural problem of governance transition involves routinizing charismatic authority into the institutional structures of constitutionalism, which can transcend the lifespan of the charismatic leadership (Weber, 1978; Skocpol, 1979).

Bangabandhu's charismatic authority in 1972 was characterized by a high concentration of charismatic legitimacy. His political personality was indistinguishable from the liberation movement, with his return from Pakistani imprisonment in January 1972 symbolically restoring national sovereignty. The speed with which the 1972 Constitution was enacted can be seen as a calculated attempt to institutionalize the charisma of the liberation movement into constitutionalism, which was more resilient than charismatic leadership (Ahmed, N., 2014; Riaz, 2016). The constitutional codification of the four principles can be seen as a normative translation of the ideology of the liberation movement into state structures, which transformed the mobilizational impetus of the revolution into constitutional mandate (Ahmed, N., 2014; Riaz, 2016).

However, the constitutional codification of the principles cannot be seen as a guarantee of institutional consolidation. The Weberian transition from charisma to rational-legality involves not only the codification of rules but the creation of bureaucratic structures that can operationalize the rules (Weber, 1978). The institutional capacity for constitutionalism was limited, with the state's social penetration capacity being weak (Fukuyama, 2004; Weber, 1978).

2.2. STATE SCOPE, STATE STRENGTH, AND THE CAPACITY-MANDATE GAP

Fukuyama (2004) makes a clear move: there is a difference between what the state attempts to do (scope of functions) and how powerful the state is to do so (capacity/institutions). The state, after the liberation, presents a paradox. The ideals, as well as the constitutional promise, prompt the state to do more, nationalization, the welfare state, redistributive planning, etc. At the same time, the state becomes weaker, bureaucratic shakeups, revenues, brain drain, etc. The result is a persistent difference between what the state is supposed to do and what the state can do, which affects the effectiveness of institutions (Fukuyama, 2004; Grindle, 2007).

In the case of Bangladesh, the 1972 constitution promised bold ideals of socialism and social justice, with a wide range of responsibilities for the state woven throughout the economic, social, and redistributive spheres. However, the state administrative machinery was in a state of severe disrepair, not capable of executing the ideals promised by the constitution. This difference between the state's wide normative commitments and its weak implementational capacity is the central governance problem from 1972 to 1975. Migdal (1988) and Evans (1995) both propose ways to understand the manifestation of the difference between the state's capabilities and its commitments.

2.3. HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONALISM AND PATH DEPENDENCY

According to historical institutionalism theory, institutions are not just solutions for contemporary issues; rather, they are a product of a previous sequence in which initial decisions created constraints and influenced subsequent choices, which are further influenced by feedback effects (Pierson, 2004; North, 1990). Critical junctures are those points in which character of institution is particularly fluid allowing for foundational choices that will subsequently guide the course forward even though initial conditions have changed profoundly.

The period between 1972 and 1975 was a particularly important period in history of Bangladesh state. Choices on the executive branch, economic philosophy, civil-military relations, and local governance created institutional patterns that continued to guide governance for decades. In this regard, the change in the constitution in 1975 was not a radical shift; rather, it was a natural institutional adaptation in response to a series of crises that accumulated over a period of time on a previously established trajectory of governance (Pierson, 2004; Collier & Collier, 1991; Chowdhury, S., 2012).

2.4. POSTCOLONIAL GOVERNANCE FRAGILITY

The existing literature on postcolonial governance has extensively examined these very structural conflicts that are also present in states of recent independence when compared to an ideal Weberian model: an existing bureaucracy that is not well suited for development, a lingering disconnect between formal institutions and informal patronage systems, a weak ability to extract revenues, and a predisposition toward elite capture (Young 1994, Ake 1996, Herbst 2000, Alavi 1972). The state-in-society framework developed by Migdal also suggests that weak states are not able to penetrate down to the administration level of society due to strong social structures that are not easily penetrated by citizens' allegiances.

These issues of postcolonial governance were perhaps never more glaringly apparent than in post-liberation Bangladesh. The civil service, which had been dominated by Pakistani preferences, was dislocated by the civil war (Zafarullah & Khan 1988). Local governance structures were disorganized, and bringing in liberation war-era politicians into these structures created a system of dual authority. All of these issues of postcolonial governance would only serve to heighten the structural challenges of post-conflict rebuilding (Alavi 1972, Leftwich 2000, Fanon 1963).

2.5. SEQUENTIAL ANALYTICAL MODEL

Integrating these theoretical strands, this study proposes a five-stage sequential analytical model that structures the empirical analysis. Fig. 1 presents this model visually, with each stage elaborated in Table 1.

Figure 1

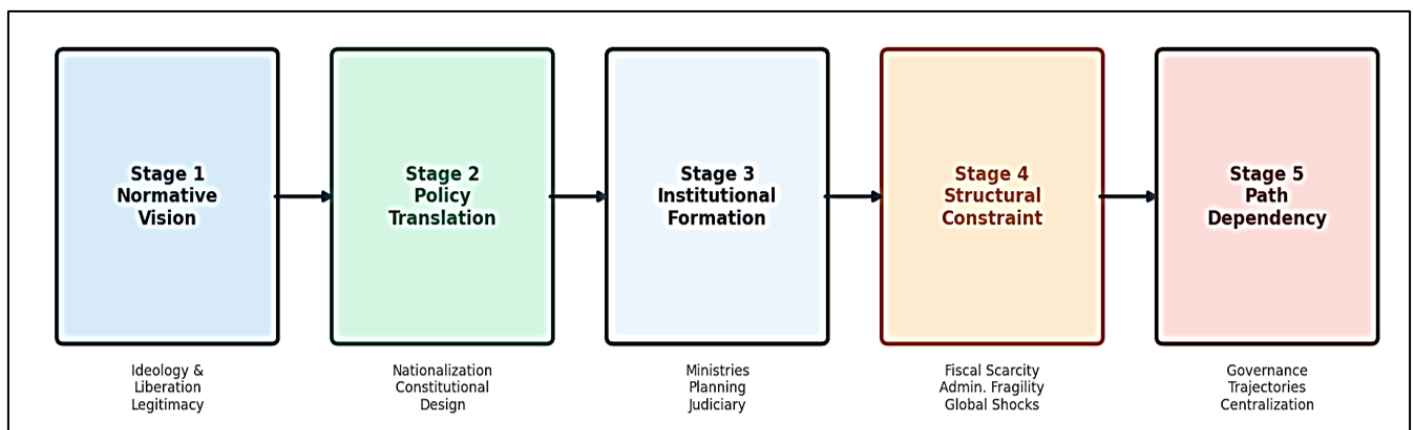


Figure 1 Sequential Analytical Model for Post-Liberation State-Building (Bangladesh 1972–1975)

Source: Authors' original framework, adapted from Pierson (2004), Fukuyama (2004), and Weber (1978)

Table 1

Table 1 Sequential Analytical Model: Stage Definitions and Theoretical Sources			
Stage	Description	Key Variables	Theoretical Source(s)
Stage 1, Normative Vision	Leadership ideology and constitutional commitments as governance blueprint	Ideology, liberation legitimacy, founding principles	Weber (1978); Collier & Collier (1991); Fanon (1963)
Stage 2, Policy Translation	Conversion of normative vision into concrete policy instruments and mandates	Nationalization, planning architecture, administrative reform	Fukuyama (2004); Evans (1995); Ahmed, S. (2005)
Stage 3, Institutional Formation	Construction of formal governance structures and bureaucratic organizations	Ministries, courts, SOEs, planning bodies, Bangladesh Bank	North (1990); Pierson (2004); GoB (1972)
Stage 4, Structural Constraint	Structural limits on institutional design and policy performance	Fiscal scarcity, admin. fragility, global shocks, famine	Migdal (1988); Fukuyama (2004); World Bank (1975)
Stage 5, Path Dependency	Durable effects of early institutional choices on long-term governance trajectories	Governance trajectories, centralization, constitutional legacies	Pierson (2004); North (1990); Chowdhury, S. (2012)

2.6. ANALYTICAL EXPECTATIONS

There are three expectations that guide the empirical analysis. These are derived from the theory. The first is the lofty goals set out in the 1972 Constitution are likely to exceed the capacity to implement them. There is a gap between capacity and mandate. Second, the success of institutions in governance areas depends on structural limitations such as tight budgets, administrative turmoil, and sudden external economic shocks. Third, crisis in governance may prompt a response to recalibrate the system, which may result in the concentration of power in the executive branch when the state is vulnerable.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

For this study, an integrated mixed-methods historical review will be employed, where three main components will be integrated: (i) a structured literature synthesis following PRISMA best practices, (ii) a historical institutional analysis of constitutional texts, policy documents, and government records from 1972–1975, and (iii) a qualitative meta-synthesis of interpretive findings based on a selection of relevant literature (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007; Booth et al., 2016).

Quantitative meta-analysis was deemed both impracticable and inappropriate for this research question. The post-liberation institutional formation process is a complex historical phenomenon with context-rich, multi-causal dynamics that cannot be easily reduced into standardized effect sizes for statistical aggregation.

3.2. SEARCH STRATEGY AND SOURCE SELECTION

A wide literature sweep was undertaken using Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and other South Asian academic archives. The literature sweep used a range of keywords that included:

"Bangladesh State Building 1972-1975," "Post-Liberation Governance in South Asia," "Bangabandhu Institutional Formation," "Bangladesh Constitutional Developments 1972," "Nationalization in Bangladesh," "BAKSAL Governance Reform Efforts," "The 1974 Famine in Bangladesh," "Fragility in Postcolonial States," "Post-Conflict Governance Building," etc. The literature sweep was undertaken from 1971 to 2024. This was a broad literature sweep that included both contemporary literature on the period and retrospective literature on the period. The literature sweep was biased towards peer-reviewed journals, books, primary sources like constitutions and policy documents, and comparative literature on governance.

3.3. PRISMA-GUIDED SCREENING AND FLOW DIAGRAM

The study was conducted following a four-stage process of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, following a systematic process. Fig. 2 is a PRISMA flow diagram, whereas Table 2 presents the result of screening in each stage quantitatively.

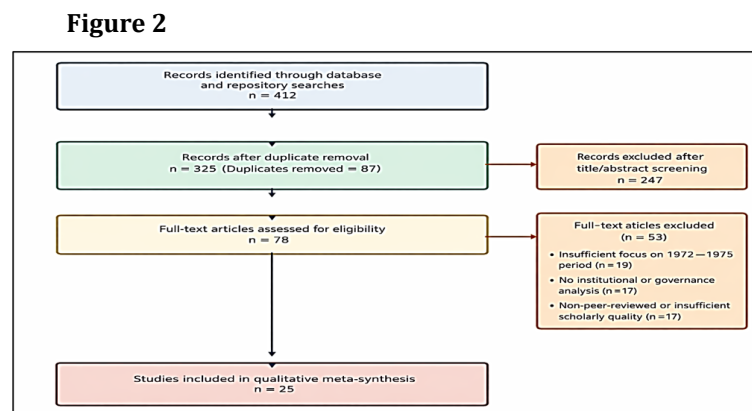


Figure 2 PRISMA-Guided Literature Screening Flow Diagram

Source: Authors' systematic review; PRISMA framework adapted from Booth et al. (2016)

Table 2

Table 2 PRISMA Literature Screening Summary		
Screening Stage	Action Taken	Records (n)
Identification	Database searches across Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and South Asian repositories	412
De-duplication	Duplicate records removed	87 removed → 325
Screening	Titles and abstracts screened for relevance	325 screened
Screening Exclusion	Records excluded after title/abstract screening	247 excluded → 78 retained
Eligibility	Full-text articles assessed for eligibility	78 assessed
Exclusion – Temporal Scope	Not focused on the 1972–1975 foundational period	19 excluded
Exclusion – Analytical Depth	Lacked institutional or governance analysis	17 excluded
Exclusion – Quality	Non-peer-reviewed or insufficient scholarly quality	17 excluded
Final Inclusion	Studies included in qualitative meta-synthesis	25 included

3.4. INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

In order to qualify for consideration, the works had to satisfy four criteria of inclusion. First, the works had to be peer-reviewed scholarly material or primary sources. Secondly, the works had to deal with Bangladesh from 1972 to 1975 or a relevant comparative post-liberation case. Thirdly, the works had to deal with the institutional, constitutional, economic governance, or the political aspects. Finally, the works had to be accessible in English or Bengali. The works were excluded on the following grounds: if the works were biographical or hagiographic without any institutional analysis; if the works were journalistic without any grounding in analysis; if the works dealt with the pre-1972 or post-1975 periods without any engagement with the foundational period; or if the works were conference abstracts or grey literature of insufficient quality (Booth et al., 2016).

3.5. ANALYTICAL DIMENSIONS AND METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

The studies have been analyzed based on five dimensions following the sequence of the model: (i) constitutional institutionalization; (ii) economic governance and nationalization; (iii) administrative capacity and bureaucratic restructuring; (iv) crisis governance - famine, oil shock, and distributional failure; and (v) institutional recalibration -the 1975 constitutional transformation and BAKSAL. I have done the thematic coding myself to ensure no bias creeps into the analysis by searching for common interpretive patterns.

There are some limitations to be kept in mind. The archival records for 1972-75 are not fully available due to the war and subsequent political changes. The accounts written by scholars after 1975 may have been subject to political interpretations. The quantitative economic data for the period immediately following liberation is not reliable. And lastly, meta-synthesis is an analytical generalization based on qualitative data, so the results are to be viewed with that understanding.

4. INSTITUTIONAL FORMATION ACROSS GOVERNANCE DOMAINS (1972–1975)

In this section, we chart the development of these five governance domains from 1972 to 1975. We focus on the inter-domain influences among these five domains and the collective pressures from building these five domains simultaneously.

4.1. CONSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE AND IDEOLOGICAL EMBEDDING

The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, promulgated in November 1972, just a year after independence, is arguably one of the fastest and most comprehensive constitutional developments in recent South Asian history. This was a result of the normative vision of the freedom leadership, coupled with the need to establish state authority quickly in light of possible territorial and political obstacles.

The four principles of nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism that formed the bedrock of the Constitution were not just ideals but intended to inform institutionalized state authority in all spheres of governance. The concept of nationalism underpinned state sovereignty and its unitary state structure. Socialism informed state authority in governance of the economy, including the nationalization of industries and establishing state planning institutions. The concept of democracy informed a Westminster-style parliamentary system of government, where a cabinet was accountable to a democratically elected legislature, provided for fundamental rights, and an independent judiciary. Secularism promoted inclusiveness by removing religion as a criterion for membership in the body politic.

From a Weberian perspective, this constitutional process is very enlightening. The charisma of Bangabandhu was translated into a rational-legal authority through constitutional law, where the Constitution was a legal duty that institutions could enforce. This, according to Collier and Collier, was a critical juncture whose consequences would far transcend its promulgation.

The comprehensiveness of this constitutional process did not automatically translate into smooth operationalization of its provisions, particularly when state capabilities were limited, where these provisions were more in the nature of guidelines than rules that could be enforced. The state-in-society perspective is also relevant in understanding why constitutional authority was undermined by informal power structures in localities.

4.2. ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE AND THE NATIONALIZATION STRATEGY

The key economic policies adopted between 1972 and 1975 included two measures: the swift nationalization of key industries and banks, and the establishment of a national plan through the Planning Commission. The measures adopted showed a move towards socialism in the constitution of Bangladesh and an attempt to revitalize the economy that had been stagnated due to the war (Sobhan, 1980; Ahmed, S., 2005; Karim, 1995).

The nationalization measures adopted in 1972 included jute processing industries, textiles, sugar mills, heavy industries, banks, and insurance. These industries were dominated by West Pakistanis before war. The war had stagnated them, making them struggle. The stagnation also provided an opportunity to fill the vacuum to revitalize growth. Analyzing nationalization based on political economy theory reveals that nationalization had many effects. It ensured that the elite did not hang on to abandoned industries, growth was restored to the economy, met the socialist provision in the constitution and created new revenues for government (Government of Bangladesh, 1972a; Evans, 1995; Sobhan, 1982).

Figure 3 presents key macroeconomic indicators for the 1972–1975 period, illustrating the severity of the structural economic context within which governance institutions were being constructed. Table 3 provides the underlying data in tabular form.

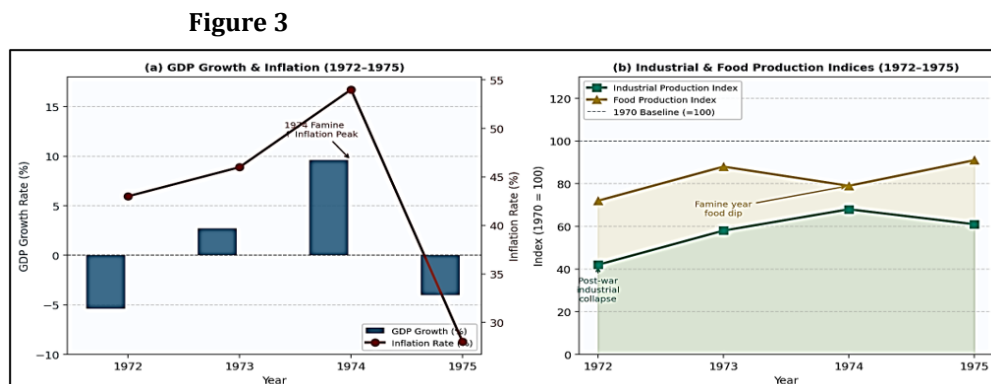


Figure 3 Macroeconomic Indicators in Bangladesh, 1972–1975

Sources: World Bank (1975, 1976), IMF (1974, 1976)

Table 3

Table 3 Key Macroeconomic Indicators for Bangladesh (1972–1975)				
Indicator	1972	1973	1974	1975
GDP Growth Rate (%)	-5.4	2.7	9.6*	-4.0
Inflation Rate, CPI (%)	~43	~46	~54	~28
Foreign Exchange Reserves (USD million)	<30	~85	~92	~104
External Aid Dependency (% of development budget)	~60	~55	~52	~48
Industrial Production Index (1970 = 100)	42	58	68	61
Food Production Index (1970 = 100)	72	88	79†	91
Poverty Headcount Ratio (estimated %)	~80	~79	~82†	~77

* Partially reflects incomplete post-war data; † denotes famine-affected year. Sources: World Bank (1975, 1976); IMF (1974, 1976); Government of Bangladesh Planning Commission (1973, 1975).

The macroeconomic indicators presented in Table 3 illustrate the severity of the economic environment during the early post-liberation period in Table 3 and Figure 3. While foreign exchange reserves decreased and need on outside assistance increased, inflation rates significantly soared. In fact, they notoriously rose above 40 percent annually (World Bank, 1975; IMF, 1974). The 1973 oil price shock exacerbated the situation by raising the price of imported fertilizer for farming and oil for powering generators. Numerous obstacles prevented state-owned businesses from leading the rehabilitation operations (Sobhan, 1980; Ahmed, S., 2005; Karim, S., 1981). Capacity and mandate were clearly at odds; in fact, Fukuyama (2004) pointed out that the constitutional requirement for socialist economic development produced a broad mandate for governance that was greater than the capabilities of the then-existing economic governance institutions.

One important case study for economic governance in development was Bangladesh's Planning Commission (Government of Bangladesh, 1973, 1975). It was designed to strike a balance between development spending and reconstruction efforts, and it was greatly influenced by planning theory from the 1970s. Data gaps, a lack of interministerial coordination, and a shortage of development economics personnel were some of the problems that hampered it (Hossain & Sobhan, 2000; Karim, 1995).

4.3. ADMINISTRATIVE RECONSTRUCTION AND BUREAUCRATIC CAPACITY

It was perhaps one of the most important and difficult problems that needed to be solved in Bangladesh after independence to restore a working civil service system. The old system showed signs of Pakistan centralized bureaucracy but war left its own mark: senior Pakistani officials had fled, records were lost or damaged, coordination between central and district offices was broken, and many Bangladeshi civil servants were killed, displaced or traumatized (Zafarullah & Khan, 1988; Sobhan, 1982; Siddiquee, 2006).

The government plan for restoring the civil service system had two parts: first, they would quickly restore ministry and departmental structures that could be used and second, they would integrate civil servants by hiring liberation war administrators and military officers into civil service jobs. They would also build up civil servants through training programs that got help from international experts (UNDP, 1973, 1975; Zafarullah & Khan, 1988).

In Bangladesh after independence, the conflict between public service meritocracy and political expediency was very strong. The incorporation of liberation war administrators into civil service roles represented a significant affirmation of the state's dedication to recognizing military service, however it contradicted the principles of civil service meritocracy and duty delineation. Hiring based on patronage was at odds with hiring based on merit, which let problems from the colonial and Pakistan eras come back in post-independence Bangladesh (Zafarullah & Siddiquee, 2001; Zafarullah & Khan, 1988). This aligns with Migdal's (1988) assertion that social networks may compete with formal authority systems in fragile regimes.

Lewis (1993) argues that NGOs were crucial in hiring government servants during this time. This is an important part of governance that is not generally talked about enough when talking about building a state. In same way, Siddiquee

(2006) and Hossain & Sobhan (2000) talk about how pressure from donors might lead to institutional needs that are different from what people in the country need.

4.4. THE 1974 FAMINE: INSTITUTIONAL STRESS AND GOVERNANCE FAILURE

The 1974 famine constituted the most severe institutional stress test for Bangladesh institutions between 1972 and 1975 revealing weaknesses of the country's emerging system of governance. Consistent with Sen's entitlement approach, experts agree that famine was not caused by a collapse of aggregate food production. Instead, it was caused by a failure of food distribution.

A few weaknesses in governance contributed to the crisis. The first was the flawed design of the Public Food Distribution System inherited from the Pakistani period. The system was designed to stabilize grain prices for cities and poor but was flawed in terms of its design, logistics and defenses against corruption (Osmani, 1990; Jahan, R., 2005). Second weakness was poor market oversight that was supposed to prevent hoarding and price increases during times of uncertainty. The anti-hoarding regulations were not well enforced, nor was price monitoring extended beyond the cities. The third weakness was the lack of an early warning system for impending food shortages. The government did not have the data or analytical capacity to detect an impending crisis before it became severe (Sen, 1981; IFPRI, 1974).

Another factor that might have been at play is the external shocks. The rise in the prices of oil in 1973 had a significant impact on the prices of agricultural inputs. The floods that occurred in the region also had an impact on the agricultural sector. The reduction in the level of food aid from the US following the trade relations with Cuba under the PL480 program exacerbated the shortage of foodstuffs. This shortage occurred at a time when the distribution of the little available food was at its peak (Jahan, R., 2005; Hossain, 2002). This shows that the Bangladeshi institutions were vulnerable to the shocks that were affecting the region. When the above factors are considered from the viewpoint of the Historical Institutionalism approach (Pierson, 2004; Collier & Collier, 1991), it is evident that the famine served as a crucible that hastened the pace of the push for institutional reform. The loss of public trust, the rise of opposition, and the sense of inefficacy all contributed to the changes to the constitution in 1975 (Chowdhury, S., 2012; Mascarenhas, 1986).

4.5. THE 1975 CONSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION: RECALIBRATION OR REVERSION?

The overhaul of the entire system of governance came into being in the country with the advent of the Fourth Amendment to the constitution in January 1975. The parliamentary system of governance was replaced by a presidential one. The multi-party system was replaced by a one-party system through the formation of the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BAKSAL). Press freedom was restricted. The relationship between the party structures and the state administration was reorganized to forge more unified channels of mobilization (Chowdhury, S., 2012; Riaz, 2016; Kabir, 2007).

The 1975 constitutional shift in Bangladesh can be interpreted differently. According to one school of thought, as reflected in the works of Riaz (2016) and Chowdhury (S., 2012), the formation of the BAKSAL marked a decline of the democratic values enshrined in the 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh. This marked the beginning of the shift from constitutional pluralism to authoritarian rule. However, the actual state of affairs suggests a shift due to the overall institutional failure of the state.

The second passage makes more sense when examined in the context of the governance landscape in 1974–1975, where the government had to contend with a fiscal crisis, the aftermath of the famine, growing oppositional politics, security threats from different armed groups, and a sense that the existing structures were incapable of coordinating governance in a manner that could effectively deal with these crises. In that sense, a more centralized executive could be seen as a measure aimed at restoring governance coherence in a system under significant strain, as seen in several post-liberation states in similar historical moments (Young, 1994; Riedl, 2014; Haggard & Kaufman, 1995).

The assassination of Bangabandhu in August 1975 removes any possibility of assessing how BAKSAL might have evolved into a different form, raising a counter-factual about whether it might have evolved into a more entrenched system of authoritarian rule or possibly a more entrenched system of institutional consolidation with democratic openings, although what is clear, analytically, is that the transformation in 1975 was a path-dependent response to structural crises, rather than a random choice in politics (North, 1990; Pierson, 2004).

4.6. INSTITUTIONAL ECOSYSTEM: ARCHITECTURE AND CONSTRAINTS

Figure 4 presents a sketch of the institutional landscape that was formed by 1975, emphasizing the constitutional core, the satellite governance bodies, and the structural limits that limit the whole system. This figure combines all the analytical results from Sections 4.1 to 4.5.

Figure 4

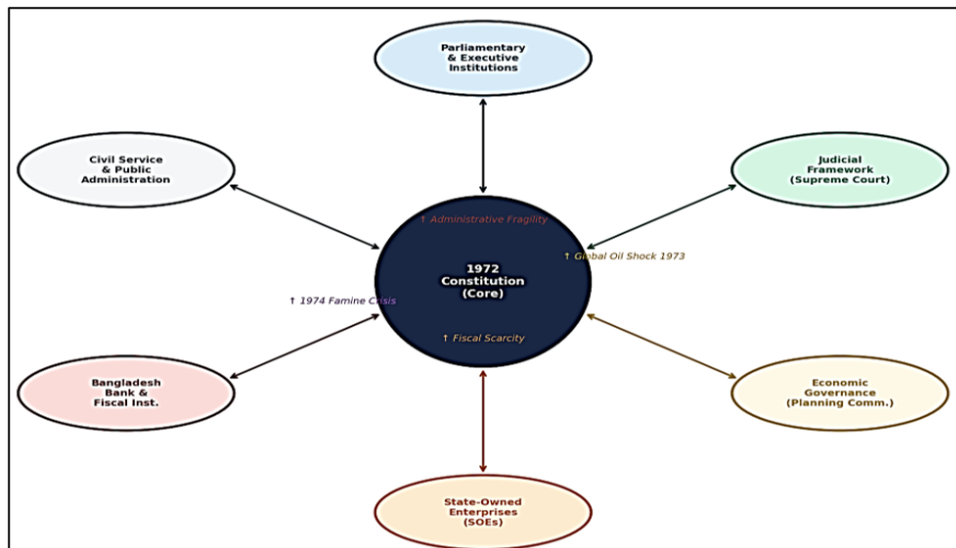


Figure 4 Institutional Ecosystem of Post-Liberation Bangladesh (1972–1975)

Source: Authors' synthesis based on Ahmed, N. (2014), Sobhan (1982), Zafarullah & Khan (1988), and Jahan, R. (2005)

5. THEMATIC SYNTHESIS OF META-SYNTHESIS FINDINGS

A qualitative meta-synthesis of 25 studies, analyzed through five dimensions, reveals that there are three main interpretive patterns that emerge from the academic literature, regardless of the discipline or methodology used. Table 4 represents the results of the meta-synthesis before the analysis of the patterns is discussed.

Table 4

Table 4 Thematic Meta-Synthesis of Scholarly Interpretations Across Five Analytical Dimensions			
Analytical Dimension	Studies Engaging	Dominant Scholarly Interpretation	Principal Synthesized Finding
Constitutional institutionalization	22 of 25	Rapid, normatively coherent embedding of founding ideology (Ahmed, N., 2014; Riaz, 2016; Chowdhury, S., 2012)	1972 Constitution successfully anchored liberation ideology in formal legal architecture at exceptional speed, constituting a genuine governance achievement
Economic governance and nationalization	19 of 25	Strategically rational under crisis conditions but administratively overextended (Sobhan, 1980, 1982; Ahmed, S., 2005; Karim, 1995)	State ownership restored production but generated efficiency deficits from management shortages, political interference, and fiscal pressure
Administrative capacity and restructuring	23 of 25	Severe disruption requiring reconstruction under political pressure (Zafarullah & Khan, 1988; Siddiquee, 2006; Hossain & Sobhan, 2000)	Capacity-mandate gap persisted throughout the period, systematically limiting policy implementation effectiveness across all governance domains
Crisis governance, 1974 famine and exogenous shocks	17 of 25	Compound governance failure across distributional, regulatory, and early-warning dimensions (Sen, 1981; Osmani, 1990; IFPRI, 1974)	Famine accelerated political pressure for institutional recalibration; exposed deep coordination failures in food governance institutions
Institutional recalibration, 1975 transformation	20 of 25	Crisis-driven institutional response rather than purely ideological reversal (North, 1990; Pierson, 2004; Collier & Collier, 1991)	BAKSAL represents structurally conditioned centralization under accumulated governance

5.1. PATTERN ONE: NORMATIVE COHERENCE WITHOUT OPERATIONAL DEPTH

The overall thread that can be drawn from the meta-analysis is that there's a strong, almost striking disparity between how coherent the design was intended to be and how deeply it actually functioned in governance. The 1972 Constitution is an exceptional instance of how rapidly constitutionalization occurred, an end product that concretized the ideals of liberty in a remarkably coherent and logical fashion. The literature consistently highlights the excellence of its parliamentary design, fundamental rights, independent judiciary, and four founding principles, which were all integrated in a relatively sophisticated manner (Ahmed, 2014; Riaz, 2016; Chowdhury, 2012).

The overall body of literature, however, continues to emphasize how there's a strong disparity between the ideal and actual design. The administrative capabilities were slow in actualizing the ideals set forth by the constitution; the economic governance bodies were hampered by a tight budget and managerial capabilities; and local governance was a weaker link. Overall design and content were coherent and ideal in nature but actualization and implementation were being held back by underlying structural issues (Zafarullah & Khan, 1988; Migdal, 1988; Siddiquee, 2006).

This phenomenon can be explained by concept of "good enough governance" that Grindle (2007) discusses.

5.2. PATTERN TWO: STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS AS THE PRIMARY MEDIATING VARIABLE

Another consistent theme addresses structural elements, including administrative deficiencies, fiscal limitations and a succession of external disruptions, as a connection between a prescriptive vision and tangible governance results. The literature indicates that initial governance challenges in Bangladesh were not primarily influenced by ideology or ineffective governance but rather by structural factors that would have constrained any administration originating from a comparable context (Sobhan, 1980; World Bank, 1975; IMF, 1974).

1973 oil crisis had an even bigger effect because economy had almost no savings and depended largely on imported gasoline and fertilizers. 1974 famine, which showed problems with distribution and regulation, happened in a world that was affected by outside forces. These determinants regularly elucidated a significant percentage of governance outcomes, irrespective of policy. The reading aligns with Bates (1981) regarding the political economy of agriculture policy and with Haggard (1990) concerning structural restrictions encountered by rapidly industrializing economies.

5.3. PATTERN THREE: CRISIS AS INSTITUTIONAL CATALYST

The third key pattern examines the role of governance crises in driving a process of recalibration of institutions. The broader literature suggests that the significant changes that took place in the 1972-1975 period, particularly the 1975 constitutional changes, did not take place in a vacuum. Rather, they were preceded by or related to governance crises that created a build-up of political pressure for change (Chowdhury, S., 2012; Riaz, 2016; Kabir, 2007). The 1974 famine, for example, the growing fiscal crisis, the security challenges posed by multiple armed groups, and the emergence of political opposition all created a situation where the existing institutions appeared to be inappropriate for managing the crisis.

This pattern is also consistent with the ideas of historical institutionalism (Pierson, 2004; Collier & Collier, 1991), which suggests that certain junctures are critical because institutions are particularly malleable at such times. At such times, existing institutions are no longer appropriate for managing the crisis. Hence, the changes introduced in 1975 are not simply an accident of politics but are structurally driven by the build-up of governance crises. This is an important point for democrats to understand. Skocpol's comparative historical approach is also useful for understanding the role of a series of crises in driving changes to institutions.

6. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: BANGLADESH IN POST-LIBERATION PERSPECTIVE

These examples were chosen for several reasons: first, they present commonalities of state-building processes following liberation: a process of ideological mobilization, state-institution building, and economic challenges in post-

conflict situations. A methodical comparative analysis of state-building processes in Algeria (1962-1965), Tanzania (1961-1965), and Vietnam (1975-1978), all post-liberation states that started at comparable points, underscores both commonalities of state-building processes following liberation and distinctiveness of Bangladesh's state-building process. Figure 5: A comparative governance profile of Bangladesh is presented side-by-side, whereas Table 5: A clear comparative framework is presented.

These cases were selected because they represent comparable post-liberation state-building contexts characterized by ideological mobilization, institutional reconstruction and post-conflict economic challenges.

Figure 5

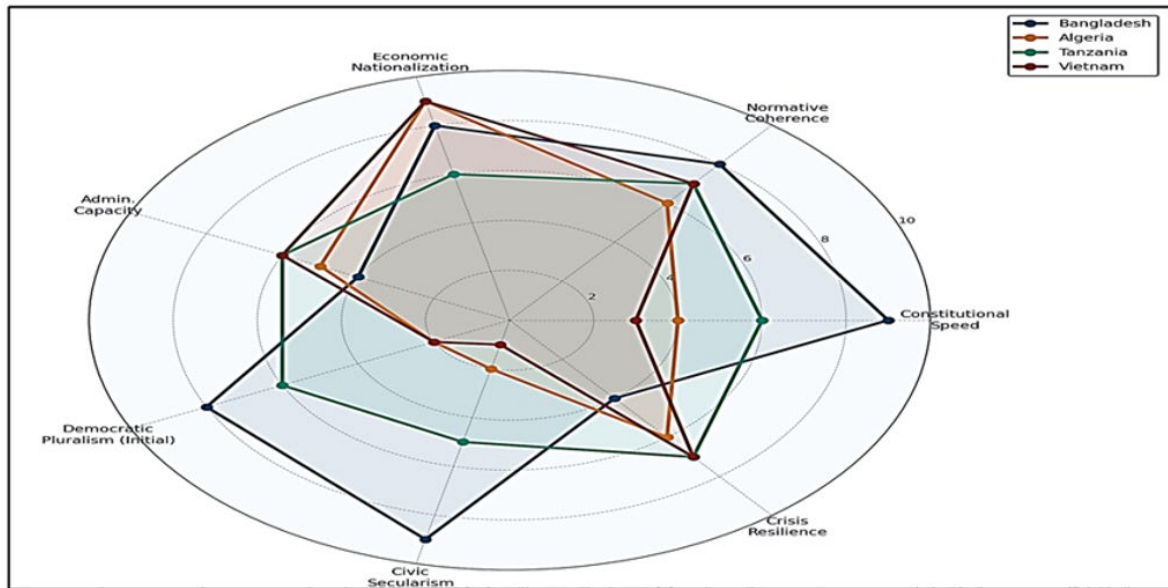


Figure 5 Comparative Governance Profile, Post-Liberation States (Bangladesh, Algeria, Tanzania, Vietnam)

Source: Authors' comparative assessment based on Young (1994), Collier & Collier (1991), and case literature. Scores (1–10) are analytical indicators, not official indices. Algeria: Young & Turner (2010); Tanzania: Young (1994); Vietnam: Evans (1995).

Table 5

Table 5 Comparative Post-Liberation State-Building Features , Bangladesh, Algeria, Tanzania, Vietnam				
Feature	Bangladesh (1972–75)	Algeria (1962–65)	Tanzania (1961–65)	Vietnam (1975–78)
Liberation War Duration	9 months	7 years	Peaceful independence	30 years (combined conflict)
Initial Constitutional Form	Parliamentary democracy adopted within 1 year	One-party republic from outset; no formal constitution initially	Multi-party, transitioning to single-party (1965)	Communist single-party from outset
Founding Ideology	Nationalism, socialism, democracy, secularism (4 explicit constitutional pillars)	Arab socialism + Islam (FLN ideology)	African socialism , Ujamaa (Arusha Declaration 1967)	Marxist-Leninism; national reunification
Nationalization Strategy	Rapid, comprehensive across industry and banking (GoB, 1972a)	Rapid, initially oil-centred; French asset seizure	Gradual (Arusha Declaration 1967); ujamaa villages	Comprehensive in the South post-reunification
Administrative Inheritance	Severely disrupted; Pakistani apparatus removed (Zafarullah & Khan, 1988)	Heavily disrupted by French departure	Moderate colonial legacy; Tanganyikan civil service	North-South administrative integration challenge
Initial Constitutional Trajectory	Pluralist → centralized 1975 (BAKSAL) (Chowdhury, S., 2012)	Centralized from outset (FLN single party)	Pluralist → single-party 1965 (TANU)	Single-party from outset
Food/Humanitarian Crisis	1974 famine (severe) , governance failure (Sen, 1981)	1963–64 food insecurity (moderate)	Periodic food insecurity; structural rural poverty	Post-reunification food shortages in South

Explicit Civic Secularism	Yes , constitutional provision (Article 12, 1972)	No , Islam as state reference	Christian-secular hybrid (informal, unstated)	State atheism (anti-religious on different grounds)
Founding Leader Longevity	Bangabandhu assassinated August 1975	Ben Bella ousted June 1965	Nyerere led to 1985 (longest tenure)	Ho Chi Minh died 1969 (pre-victory)

The above comparative analysis reveals an important commonality: all four countries took an economic developmental pathway of nationalization or central planning immediately following liberation but each also encountered administrative weakness shortly after independence. Additionally, each faced centralizing tendencies that reduced the initial period of constitutional pluralism. Such a comparative analysis suggests that centralization of executive power in each country is a result of structural considerations rather than the personalities of individual leaders. Such an analysis has important implications for how scholars understand the 1975 Bangladeshi shift (Young, 1994; Riedl, 2014; Ake, 1996).

Bangladesh is an important case for analysis within the context of the above comparative analysis. Bangladesh was unique for several reasons. First, it was unique for the speed with which it adopted constitutional institutionalization, within only one year of independence, Bangladesh had a fully realized parliamentary constitution. This was not the case for any of the other countries under analysis. Secondly, Bangladesh was unique for its bold attempt to enshrine civic secularism within a predominantly Muslim country. Such an attempt was not made by any of the other countries under analysis. Finally, the 1972 Bangladeshi constitution was unique for its attempt to merge socialism with parliamentary democracy. Such an attempt was not made by any of the other countries under analysis, Vietnam’s attempt at Marxism-Leninism and Algeria’s attempt at Islamic socialism (Young & Turner, 2010; Evans, 1995; Tilly, 1990).

The above analysis reveals that while Bangladesh’s attempt at state-building was certainly within the context of the broader structural considerations of all countries following liberation, ambitious ideals coupled with structural weakness, Bangladesh was also unique for certain reasons.

7. DISCUSSION

The findings provide a direct response to the central research question: how did the ideological vision of Bangabandhu shape the institutions of governance between 1972 and 1975? The data reveal that the ideological vision was enshrined in the constitutional framework but had only a limited impact on governance and the economy due to the structural constraints.

7.1. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This study makes a valuable contribution to the ways in which we think about the construction of states. Firstly, it provides evidence to support Fukuyama’s theory of the capacity-mandate gap. This study demonstrates a tangible gap between the ambitions of an institution and what it can deliver. This is not just an abstract gap but one which has a tangible impact on the success of policies.

Secondly, the study provides a significant contribution to the discussion around the concept of critical junctures in the theory of historical institutionalism. This study demonstrates the period between 1972 and 1975 to have a lasting impact on the construction of the state. This can be seen in the construction of the constitution, the civil service model, and the model of economic governance. This is not just a lasting legacy in the sense of the longevity of the ideas contained within the constitution. It is a legacy which can be seen in the ongoing nature of centralization and civil service models.

Thirdly, the comparative analysis contributes to the expanding debate on post-liberation governance (Young, 1994; Riedl, 2014; Ake, 1996), as it reveals a trend: under crisis, executive power concentrates in various cases of post-liberation governments. This contradicts the assumption that executive power concentration is a product of the personal failings of a particular leader or the betrayal of the ideological platform. This finding is consistent with Skocpol's (1979) assertion that crises in the state lead to changes that transcend the actions of particular individuals. This is also consistent with Haggard and Kaufman's (1995) examination of the political circumstances that foster executive power concentration in the face of economic crises.

7.2. POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR POST-CONFLICT GOVERNANCE

There are a number of lessons that can be drawn from the Bangladesh case for how we think about governance after conflict. The first is the importance of building the capacity to deliver constitutional goals, as opposed to just focusing on the constitutional goals themselves. The normatively ambitious constitutional commitments of the 1972 constitution were not matched by the necessary work of building the capacity to deliver them, which meant a structural mismatch that only worsened over time. For those designing governance after conflict, a more gradualist approach to constitutional development, one that tries to balance normative goals with the capacity to deliver them, seems a good rule of thumb (Grindle, 2007; Leftwich, 2000).

The 1974 famine highlights the importance of institutions of distribution for governance. When a post-conflict state prioritizes constitutional and economic reform, without investing adequately in food governance, it makes itself perilously vulnerable to crises that can have serious political knock-on effects (Sen, 1981; Osmani, 1990).

Finally, case highlights the fact that aid received from 1972 to 1975, though welcome, meant that the state was not really capable of governing itself, which speaks to current models of international aid to post-conflict states. There is a balance to be struck between aid and capacity for autonomous governance.

7.3. REASSESSING BANGABANDHU'S LEADERSHIP

Analytic framework of this article also requires that we take a nuanced view of Bangabandhu's leadership, avoiding both hero-worship and political blame. Data suggest that governance challenges between 1972 and 1975 were structurally serious, of a kind that would have limited any government that inherited these problems. The return to constitutional rule, restoration of basic governance functions and initial attempts at economic stabilization were substantive governance achievements under extraordinary circumstances (Ahmed, N., 2014; Collier & Collier, 1991).

At same time, weaknesses in areas such as food distribution and coordination of government functions suggest that substantive institutional gaps existed that effective crisis management could have helped offset in some measure. The constitutional overhauls of 1975, despite their underlying rationale, ultimately resulted in a narrowing of democratic pluralism that had characterized the initial period of Bangladesh's political experiment. Bangabandhu's assassination in August 1975 eliminated any opportunity to evaluate how BAKSAL's institutional trajectory would have developed (Mascarenhas, 1986; Kabir, 2007).

The evidence also fails to support an assessment of these years as an ideological failure or leadership treachery. The governance constraints of this period were unusually serious, the normative gains of this period, such as the 1972 Constitution, were very real and substantive (Chowdhury, S., 2012; Riaz, 2016), and the centralizing tendencies of 1975 represented a structurally driven adjustment of institutions, not an ideological rejection of democracy.

7.4. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Despite its contributions, this study has a few notable limitations. Firstly, owing to the scarcity of archival material from this period of early post-liberation history, this study relies mostly on secondary sources of information. Secondly, owing to measurement uncertainties resulting from administrative disruptions during the war, macroeconomic data for this period is also limited for the post-war years. Last but not least, this study's comparative analysis is limited to a few post-liberation cases, but not an exhaustive global comparison.

8. CONCLUSION

This study examined the process through which Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's ideological vision was translated into the mode of governance of institutions in Bangladesh during its early state-building period between 1972 and 1975. This study employed a mixed-methods approach that combined a PRISMA-inspired literature synthesis, a historical institutional analysis, and a little bit of comparative analysis to examine this process.

1972 Constitution is notable for the impressive achievement of rapidly establishing constitutionalism. Within an astonishingly brief time frame following independence, the country created nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism as foundational principles to govern the way it would rule itself. These were not empty rhetoric but normative

guides that would shape the constitution itself, the exercise of political power, and the way the institutions of the state would be organized. In this way, the constitution presented an unambiguous ideological platform to translate legitimacy of liberation into a rational-legal system.

This study also reveals an obvious disconnect between constitutional ideals and practical implementation of governance. The ideals extended the role of the government beyond what it was capable of executing. The country's administrative capacity, financial means and expertise were extremely meager following the war. The implementation of policies in economic management, public administration and distributional policies was therefore lagging behind expansive ideals outlined in the constitution. 1974 famine exposed the structural challenges in a devastating way.

The 1975 constitutional shift must be viewed against the broader structural context. It is not simply an ideological shift away from the democratic ideals of the 1972 Constitution. Rather, the shift towards a stronger presidency and the establishment of BAKSAL can be viewed as a crisis response to re-tune the institutions to the increasing governance challenges. If we look at other cases of liberation struggles, Algeria, Tanzania, Vietnam, we see a similar phenomenon emerging: a centralizing executive response to governance challenges is common in the early stages of institution-building in newly liberated states. At a broader level, the experience of Bangladesh illustrates an important dynamic in the governance challenges of liberation struggles. The ideals driving the rapid institution-building also drive grand governance ideals that are beyond what can be realistically achieved by the newly created state. Therefore, the real question for institution-building is not so much how to design institutions but how to gradually adapt grand ideals to what can realistically be achieved by the institutions. Managing the tension between grand ideals and what can be realistically achieved is an important way to understand the process of institution-building in newly liberated states and to frame the current debates about the appropriate design for governance in newly independent or fragile states.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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