

Chapter 84

Politics–Administration Relations and the Effect on Local Governance and Development: The Case of Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the politico-bureaucratic dynamics within the local government of Bangladesh, focusing on the policy role while explaining the governance role of politicians and bureaucrats. Particular emphasis is placed on the politics-bureaucracy relationship and its impact on local governance and development, given that the nature of this relationship and the appropriate role of political leaders and administrators have been the subject of considerable debate. During the last two decades of democratic governance in Bangladesh, politicians have been the dominant forces in governance due to their role in aggregating interests and values; however, bureaucrats are similarly influential, given their role as initiators and implementers of policies. The bureaucracy has emerged as a dominant institution in both local and central governments. The bureaucracy is directly or indirectly involved in partisan politics, which negatively impacts local governance and development.

INTRODUCTION

Politicians and bureaucrats are an integral part of public administration at both central and local government levels in Bangladesh. They also play a vital role in pursuing good governance and attaining developmental goals. It is difficult to define the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats in local government in Bangladesh, and there is limited investigation on how this relationship affects local governance and local development. This chapter explores the politics-administration relationship and its effects on local governance and development in Bangladesh from an empirical perspective. The objectives are twofold:

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1. To investigate the theoretical models of politics-bureaucracy relations at the local government level and determine the extent to which they apply to the context of Bangladesh; and
2. To examine the implications of the model of politics-bureaucracy relationship for local governance and development in Bangladesh.

Locating the analysis within institutional and functional dimensions the main proposition is: *If local government is controlled by central government regulations, the scope for bureaucratic domination in governance is enhanced, with the potential for conflict between local elected politicians and local bureaucrats.*

METHODOLOGY

This study used two sources of data: primary and secondary. Primary data were collected from semi-structured interviews in seven *Upazila Parishads* (UZPs) of seven divisions. Respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique and they fell into three categories: elected local politicians, administrative officers, and local citizens. The sample size was 280 across all three categories of respondents. Secondary data and information were collected from different media such as books, journals, newspapers, articles, and the Internet.

MODELS OF POLITICS-ADMINISTRATION RELATIONSHIPS: CONCEPTUALIZATION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Many scholars have identified the politics-bureaucracy relations as a central theme of politics and administration in the literature of political science and public administration. Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman (1981) have suggested that we need to know about the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats if we are to understand the process of governance, how it is changing, and how strategies for influencing policy are affected. The argument is that successful democratic governance rests on a balanced and symbiotic relationship between politicians and bureaucrats; a good relationship strengthens the government's legitimacy while a bad or conflictual relationship undermines it (Farazmand, 1997). Woodrow Wilson, Frank Goodnow, and Max Weber have all advocated separation between the two spheres to achieve political neutrality. Wilson's (1887) article *The Study of Administration* represents the classical theoretical exposition of the politics-administration dichotomy, wherein "the idea of the state is the conscience of administration – this is why there should be a science of administration which shall seek to straighten the paths of government – that administration should be separated from politics and policy concerns" (Wilson, 1887, p. 201). Wilson's arguments created an avalanche of responses, resulting in the emergence of three major theoretical models that sought to explain these relations: the dichotomy or separation model, the mutual-interaction or overlapping roles model, and the symbiotic model.

The dichotomy model proposes a clear distinction between politics and administration, given that the politics-bureaucracy relationship is characterized by the principle of separation of duties, based on trust. Politicians propose policies and bureaucrats provide nonbiased information. Bureaucrats should operate on the principle of political neutrality based on their expertise, the laws, and the ordinances that govern their actions. As Wilson explained:

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