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A Theoretical Analysis of Justice and Democracy in a Plural Society: Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls on Justification and Pluralism

Seda Gözde Tokatlı¹

¹ International Relations Department/İzmir Democracy Üniversitesi
Email: sedagozde.tokatli@idu.edu.tr, orchid id: 0000-0002-1880-1338

Abstract

This article examines John Rawls's understanding of liberty and justice concepts and considers its significance for democratic life in pluralistic societies, placing it in critical dialogue with Jürgen Habermas's theory of justification and discourse ethics. In *A Theory of Justice* and later in *Political Liberalism*, Rawls develops the idea of "justice as fairness," presenting society as a fair system of cooperation among free and equal citizens. Through the device of the original position, he articulates principles designed to secure basic liberties while ensuring social equality under conditions of reasonable pluralism. Habermas, however, challenges aspects of Rawls's framework while simultaneously extending it. In *Between Facts and Norms*, he shifts the focus from hypothetical agreement to the procedural foundations of democratic legitimacy, arguing that valid norms emerge through processes of rational deliberation and communicative action. For Habermas, legitimacy depends less on a prior consensus and more on ongoing public justification within inclusive deliberative institutions. Both theorists seek to explain how democratic norms can be justified in societies shaped by deep moral and cultural diversity. Whereas Rawls emphasizes political consensus grounded in public reason, Habermas locates legitimacy in intersubjective communication and discursive will-formation. Their comparison highlights complementary yet distinct pathways for sustaining justice, stability, and democratic legitimacy without resorting to a comprehensive moral doctrine, demonstrating their continued importance for contemporary political theory.

Keywords: John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas, Pluralism, Justice, Democracy

1. Introduction

John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas stand among the most influential political philosophers of the twentieth century, both seeking to provide a normative foundation for justice and democracy in pluralistic societies. Despite their shared commitment to reason, freedom, and equality, they diverge in their conceptions of justification and the role of public discourse in achieving a legitimate democratic order.

John Rawls was a central figure in twentieth-century moral and political philosophy and a major representative of the liberal tradition. His most influential contribution, developed in *A Theory of Justice*, is the account of a just liberal society known as "justice as fairness." Drawing on the social contract tradition, Rawls argues that justice—

particularly distributive justice—should be understood as fairness, meaning that social goods are distributed according to principles that free and equal persons would choose under impartial conditions.

Rawls's project seeks to reconcile the competing claims of liberty and equality by identifying principles capable of structuring a well-ordered society. To do so, he introduces the thought experiment of the original position, in which individuals deliberate behind a "veil of ignorance" that prevents them from knowing their social status, talents, or personal advantages. Under these fair conditions, Rawls contends, rational agents would endorse two principles of justice: first, the principle of equal basic liberties for all citizens; and second, the difference principle, which permits social and economic inequalities only if they benefit the least advantaged members of society. In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls further develops his theory in response to the fact of reasonable pluralism in modern democratic societies. Recognizing enduring moral and cultural diversity, he introduces the idea of public reason, arguing that political principles must be justified in terms accessible and acceptable to citizens who hold diverse comprehensive doctrines. Through this shift, Rawls aims to secure the stability and legitimacy of liberal democracy without appealing to any single moral or religious worldview.

Jürgen Habermas is widely regarded as one of the most influential contemporary philosophers and social theorists. For Habermas, moral principles are fundamentally principles of justice, but unlike John Rawls, he grounds justice and political legitimacy in communicative rationality and discourse ethics. Rather than deriving principles from a hypothetical contract, Habermas argues that democratic legitimacy arises from intersubjective processes of public deliberation in which norms acquire validity through the rational agreement of free and equal participants.

At the core of Habermas's theory is the idea that law and political authority are legitimate only when they can be justified within inclusive and undistorted communicative practices. The central question, therefore, is how a free and autonomous political order can be realized under conditions of coercive law, and how reason can be employed to justify the exercise of political power.

The dialogue between Rawls and Habermas reveals a key philosophical tension within pluralistic democracies: the tension between consensus and communication as sources of legitimacy. While Rawls emphasizes overlapping consensus and public reason as the basis of stability, Habermas locates legitimacy in ongoing deliberative processes. Despite their differences, both thinkers seek to reconcile freedom, equality, and democratic legitimacy without appealing to a single comprehensive moral doctrine. Their complementary perspectives offer enduring insights into how modern democratic societies can sustain justice, stability, and mutual respect amid deep moral and cultural diversity. In pluralistic modern democracies, citizens cannot be expected to agree about social norms based on common allegiance to religious doctrines concerning persons or society, and both philosophers thus engage fundamental questions about how a binding framework for the public use of reason might be possible and justifiable. (Hedrick,2010,1).

This paper examines John Rawls's conception of liberty and explains how it is justified within his broader framework of justice as fairness. It analyzes the structure and normative grounding of his two principles of justice, clarifying how they aim to secure equal basic liberties while regulating social and economic inequalities. Particular attention is given to the relationship between justice and democracy in pluralistic liberal societies, assessing the conditions under which political liberalism can achieve stability in a Rawlsian framework. A central concern of the paper is how consensus is possible in a multicultural society marked by diverse and often conflicting comprehensive doctrines. By examining Rawls's ideas of public reason and overlapping consensus, the study explores how citizens can endorse shared political principles without abandoning their moral or cultural commitments. Finally, the paper turns to Jürgen Habermas to provide a comparative perspective. Through this comparison, it seeks to deepen the analysis of the public sphere, multiculturalism, and the role of public reason and communicative justification in democratic legitimacy. This dialogue highlights both convergences and tensions between Rawls's political liberalism and Habermas's discourse-theoretical approach.

2. Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative, analytical, and comparative methodology to examine the political philosophies of John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas. Its primary method consists of close textual analysis of their major works, including *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism*, as well as Habermas's writings on discourse ethics and communicative rationality, particularly *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. In addition, relevant secondary sources—such as peer-reviewed journal articles, encyclopedia entries, and critical commentaries—are examined to situate the analysis within broader scholarly debates.

The research is structured around a comparative framework organized along four principal dimensions: (1) conceptions of justice and liberty; (2) the role of reason in democratic justification; (3) approaches to legitimacy under conditions of pluralism; and (4) the substantive versus procedural foundations of political morality. Through systematic comparison, the study identifies both convergences and divergences between Rawls and Habermas, clarifying their distinct yet overlapping contributions to contemporary democratic theory. This study employs conceptual analysis to elucidate key notions such as the original position, justice as fairness, public reason, and discourse ethics. This methodological approach enables a careful evaluation of the normative implications of each framework and assesses their practical relevance for sustaining justice, legitimacy, and stability in pluralistic democratic societies.

3. John Rawls: A Theory of Justice

3.1. John Rawls: *Basic Structure of Society*

In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls (1971) introduces the idea of justice as fairness, grounded in the hypothetical “original position” and the “veil of ignorance.” This construct allows rational individuals to choose principles of justice without knowledge of their social status, ensuring impartiality and fairness. Rawls sought to provide a moral foundation for a liberal democratic system where individual freedom and social equality coexist. He proposed that a just society is one whose principles would be chosen by rational individuals under fair conditions, rather than determined by social status, wealth, or power. The two principles derived from this position—the equal basic liberties principle and the different principles seek to reconcile liberty with equality. Justice as fairness is Rawls's theory of justice for a liberal society. He holds that justice as fairness is the most egalitarian and the most plausible interpretation of liberalism's fundamental concepts. Rawls continued to rework justice as fairness throughout his life, restating the theory in *Political Liberalism* (1993), *The Law of Peoples* (1999), and *Justice as Fairness* (2001). In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls (1993) responds to the problem of moral pluralism, arguing that the legitimacy of political institutions in a democratic society depends on citizens' adherence to public reason, which provides a shared framework for justifying political decisions without relying on any comprehensive moral doctrine. Rawls sees justice as fair as answering to the demands of both freedom and equality. (Rawls,1993)

John Rawls was deeply influenced by Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy, which played a central role in both his teaching and theoretical work. Drawing on Kantian ideas of autonomy and moral equality, Rawls sought to provide citizens with a framework through which they could understand themselves as free and equal participants in a fair democratic order. His project envisions a stable and just constitutional democracy that not only secures domestic justice but also contributes responsibly to a peaceful international community. Justice as fairness is intended to articulate the proper organization of the major political and social institutions of a liberal society—its political constitution, legal system, economic arrangements, and family structure. Together, these institutions constitute what Rawls calls the “basic structure” of society, since they fundamentally shape individuals' life prospects and opportunities. For the sake of theoretical clarity, Rawls assumes a self-sufficient and closed society, in which individuals enter only by birth and exit only at death. Within such a society, citizens inevitably hold diverse moral, religious, and philosophical commitments, leading to differing views about how institutions should be designed and reformed. To secure their support, Rawls must therefore provide a justification that they can reasonably accept despite their differences. As Thomas Pogge (2007, p. 43) notes, Rawls's task is to offer a public and political justification capable of persuading citizens who affirm competing conceptions of the good, thereby grounding social cooperation on principles they can endorse as fair.

3.2. John Rawls: *The original position*

The original position aims to move from these abstract conceptions to determinate principles of social justice. The original position is a hypothetical situation in which free, rational, and equal individuals come together to decide on the fundamental principles of social cooperation. It serves as a modern reinterpretation of the social contract tradition, drawing inspiration from thinkers such as John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant, but formulated within the framework of moral and political constructivism rather than natural law.

In the original position, Rawls employs the famous “veil of ignorance” to ensure impartiality and fairness in the decision-making process. Behind this veil, individuals are deprived of all knowledge of their personal characteristics and social positions—such as class, race, gender, talents, or conception of the good (Rawls, 1971). Rawls develops what he claims are principles of justice through the use of an artificial device he calls the original position, in which everyone decides principles of justice from behind a veil of ignorance. The original position is an imaginary situation in which each real citizen has a representative, and all these representatives come to an agreement on which principles of justice should order the political institutions of the real citizens. No one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does anyone know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength, and the like. Besides that, the parties do not know their conceptions of the good or their special psychological propensities.

The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance. If an individual does not know how he will end up in his own conceived society, he is likely not going to privilege any one class of people. No one is advantaged or disadvantaged over the other. In conditions of scarcity, people with similar interests and needs have competing interests regarding the distribution of goods that many want. It regards people as both free and equal and as capable of acting both reasonably and rationally (Paul, 1985, p.379). The original position thus serves not as a historical event, but as a theoretical model of justification. It provides a framework through which citizens can reason about justice in a pluralistic democracy, offering an objective standpoint for evaluating the fairness of social institutions.

In justice as fairness, Rawls calls this reasonableness the capacity for a *sense of justice*. The conditions assuring such fairness include the equal right of the participants to determine the principles of justice as well as their freedom both to design the institutions that will govern them and to select a determined conception of the good for themselves. In the original position, parties are deprived of any bargaining advantage due to natural contingency (Paul, 1985, p.381). As a result, under equal conditions, decisions of the people will serve the interests of everyone, and justice will be explained as fairness.

Rawls aims to propose a public criterion of justice that citizens can understand and apply together in a transparent way to all questions concerning the basic structure of society. The primary goods are certain basic rights and liberties such as freedom of thought, speech, assembly, movement, conscience, free choice of occupations, powers and prerogatives of offices, income and wealth, and self-respect. Access to as many of these primary goods as possible is supposed to be advantageous to all citizens, important for the development and exercise of their two moral powers as well as for the realization of whatever lower-order interests each may have (Pogge, 2007, p.73). Primary goods are related to the concept of justice. Rawls derives his account of *primary goods* from the conception of the citizen as free and equal, reasonable, and rational. Primary goods are essential for developing and exercising the two moral powers (Leif, 2012, p.1). People will choose a principle that regulates that all primary social goods be distributed equally unless distribution would be to everyone's advantage (Paul, 1985, p.382). People in an original position would decide justice as fairness so that all primary goods will be distributed equally and basic liberties will be secured. Rawls only attempts to show that his two principles of justice would be favored over utilitarian principles, since he sees utilitarianism as the main competing tradition of reasoning about justice.

Classical utilitarianism, the nineteenth-century theory of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, holds the philosophy of “the greatest good of the greatest number.” Rawls focuses on the benefits of the individuals, while the utilitarian view focuses on the benefits of society. Rawls's view of “justice as fairness” remains central to contemporary political philosophy. Justice as fairness applies only to the basic structure of society and is not dependent upon any sectarian assumption (Olsaretti, 2004, p.12). ‘Justice as fairness’ also implies that the principles

of justice apply equally to all individuals (Rawls, 1971, p. 11). These principles must be decided upon in such a way as to benefit all individuals and not be merely designed to favor the interests of a particular group of individuals over another group of individuals.

3.3. The Two Principles of Justice as Fairness

3.3.1 The First Principle of Justice

In John Rawls's theory of justice as fairness, the first principle regulates basic rights and liberties, the principle of fair equality of opportunity governs access to social positions, and the difference principle addresses the distribution of income and wealth. In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls formulates the first principle as follows: *"Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all"* (1971, p. 53). The basic liberties include political liberty (such as the right to vote and run for office), freedom of speech and assembly, liberty of conscience and freedom of thought, the right to hold personal property, and freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention. These liberties define the status of citizens as free and equal participants in democratic life. Although basic liberties may sometimes appear to conflict, Rawls maintains that any adjustment among them must aim at securing the most extensive and coherent system of equal liberties for everyone. Importantly, while private property is protected as a basic liberty, ownership of the means of production is not guaranteed in the same way.

Rawls also emphasizes that these rights must be effectively secured in practice. A society that fails to protect the equal liberties of disadvantaged groups—whether defined by gender, minority status, or socioeconomic marginalization—does not satisfy the first principle of justice. Furthermore, Rawls introduces a "priority rule," according to which the principles of justice are lexically ordered. This means that the first principle has priority over the second: basic liberties cannot be compromised for the sake of economic advantages or greater aggregate welfare. Liberty may be limited only for the sake of protecting liberty itself, thereby ensuring that fundamental rights are not subordinated to considerations of efficiency or social gain.

3.3.2. The Second Principle of Justice

In *A Theory of Justice* (1971), John Rawls sets out two fundamental principles intended to regulate the basic structure of a just society. While the first principle secures equal basic liberties, the Second Principle of Justice governs the distribution of social and economic inequalities and specifies the conditions under which such inequalities can be morally justified. Rawls formulates the second principle as follows: *"Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle, and attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity"* (1971, p. 83).

This principle contains two distinct but complementary components. The first is the difference principle, which permits inequalities in income and wealth only if they improve the situation of the least advantaged members of society. Inequalities are not rejected outright; rather, they are justified only when they work to the benefit of those worst off. The second component requires fair equality of opportunity, meaning that social positions and offices must be genuinely accessible to all, not merely formally open. Individuals with similar talents and motivation should have equal prospects of success, regardless of their social background. Together, these conditions aim to ensure that economic structures do not merely preserve formal equality but actively promote substantive fairness within a constitutional democratic framework.

The Second Principle implies that a just society must structure its institutions—economic, educational, and political—in ways that promote genuine equality of opportunity and protect the least advantaged. Therefore, while Rawls accepts that inequalities are inevitable, he insists that they must be organized to contribute positively to the well-being of all, particularly those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Social and economic inequalities are to be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society. Each may be equally free to speak his mind, but the materially advantaged may pursue greater influence on their ideas than the disadvantaged. Rawls argued

that whatever economic inequalities prevail in a society are minimized by the difference principles, which maximize the value of liberty to the least advantaged. (Paul, 1985,p.386)

On the other hand, according to Robert Nozick, who is an American philosopher, stress on that it is an unfair principle for people who make rational decisions and work hard to deserve welfare and property legitimately. Robert Nozick, one of the most prominent critics of Rawls, challenges the moral legitimacy of the difference principle from a libertarian standpoint. In his influential work *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974), Nozick argues that Rawls's redistributive approach to justice is unfair to individuals who acquire their holdings legitimately through rational decisions, effort, and voluntary exchange. For Nozick, people who have natural talents coming from birth can aim to improve their abilities to take advantage of them, and they cannot be compared with others (Nozick,1974).

Will Kymlicka (2002) is a Canadian political philosopher best known for his work on multiculturalism. He states that the difference principle causes inequality in a society. While Rawls rules out inequalities determined by both social circumstance and talents and abilities, he appears to allow inequalities based on choices and efforts.(Kymlicka, 2002). According to Kymlicka, while Rawls intends to create a fair distribution of social and economic goods, the difference principle may, in practice, reinforce inequality within a society. Rawls appears to permit inequalities that arise from individual choices and efforts (Kymlicka, 2002). This introduces a potential inconsistency within Rawls's framework: although he rejects inequalities based on factors beyond one's control, he accepts those derived from personal decision-making, which may still be shaped by social context and opportunity structures.

According to the Cosmopolitan view, people in different underdeveloped nations should get some assistance from the developed nations to sustain justice on a global level. Cosmopolitan theorists argue that individuals, regardless of their nationality or place of birth, deserve equal moral consideration and should have access to basic opportunities for a decent life. Therefore, people in underdeveloped nations should receive assistance from developed countries to promote fairness and sustain justice globally (Beitz, 1999; Pogge, 2002). This view challenges the Rawlsian framework, which primarily limits principles of justice to the basic structure of a single society. For example, there are big differences between the people in Mexico and America in their opportunities and expectations for life. People do not have a chance to choose their own country from birth. For Rawls, one of the biggest differences between societies in terms of distribution of resources, not their natural resources, is their own culture, religion, traditions, and working skills.

4. Jurgen Habermas: Theory of Communicative Action and Deliberative Democracy

Jürgen Habermas is a German philosopher and sociologist and one of the most prominent representatives of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. A central concept in his work is communicative rationality, the idea that individuals coordinate their actions and resolve conflicts through dialogue aimed at mutual understanding rather than through strategic calculation or coercion. In *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981), Habermas distinguishes between communicative action and strategic (or instrumental) action. Strategic action is oriented toward success and the achievement of individual goals, often treating others as means. Communicative action, by contrast, is oriented toward reaching understanding (*Verständigung*), where participants offer reasons and seek agreement based on the force of the better argument. For Habermas, social cooperation becomes legitimate when it emerges from such reasoned consensus rather than from power or manipulation. Connected to this framework is Habermas's theory of discourse ethics, which holds that moral norms are valid only if they could receive the acceptance of all affected participants in a rational and inclusive dialogue. Normative validity, therefore, depends on the possibility of justification under conditions of free and equal participation. This approach embeds ethical reasoning within democratic deliberation and contrasts with models that attempt to separate moral considerations from political decision-making.

In *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (1990), Habermas elaborates the concept of communicative action, arguing that legitimacy and social coordination emerge through intersubjective processes where individuals engage as equals in rational discourse. Similarly, in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*

(1962/1991), he analyzes the conditions under which a public sphere can function as a site for critical-rational debate, thereby sustaining democratic accountability and political legitimacy. By integrating ethical discourse into the deliberative process, Habermas offers a framework for pluralistic societies in which consensus is achieved not through coercion or imposition, but through reasoned and inclusive dialogue (Habermas, 1991).

Habermas's focus on democratization was linked with emphasis on political participation as the core of a democratic society and as an essential element in individual self-development. Habermas' concept of the public sphere thus described a space of institutions and practices between the private interests of everyday life in civil society and the realm of state power. (Kellner, 2000) He moves Kant's categorical imperative beyond its 'monological' reflection by demanding that we emphatically take into consideration the viewpoints of all who would be affected by the adoption of a certain moral action or normative claim. Douglas Kellner challenges and extends Jürgen Habermas's conception of the public sphere. While acknowledging the profound influence of Habermas's Structural Transformation, Kellner argues that Habermas unduly idealizes the bourgeois public sphere and overly dichotomizes the communicative "lifeworld" from the systemic realms of economy and state. Kellner contends that Habermas fails to theorize adequately the dramatic influence of mass media, digital communication, and globalization on public discourse and citizen participation (Kellner, 2000).

In contrast to John Rawls's device of the veil of ignorance, Jürgen Habermas proposes a model of justification in which participants do not abstract from their identities and perspectives. Rather than bracketing differences, Habermas "lifts" the veil and requires that citizens engage in open discourse where they are fully aware of one another's social positions, experiences, and interpretations. Legitimacy, for Habermas, arises not from hypothetical agreement under conditions of ignorance, but from actual processes of communication among concrete individuals. Habermas's sensitivity to the dangers of authoritarianism is shaped by his historical experience; as a young man in Germany, he witnessed the brutality of the Nazi regime. The catastrophic collapse of democratic institutions under fascism deeply influenced his philosophical project. In response, Habermas seeks to defend human autonomy and modern democracy by reconstructing the Enlightenment commitment to reason and universalism on intersubjective foundations. Rather than abandoning reason after its historical misuse, he reformulates it as communicative rationality grounded in dialogue and mutual recognition.

According to Habermas, genuine consensus can emerge only under conditions of free and equal participation. Norms are valid only if all those affected can accept their consequences without coercion. As he states in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, agreement cannot be expected "unless all affected can freely accept the consequences and the side effects that the general observance of a controversial norm can be expected to have for the satisfaction of the interests of each individual" (Habermas, 1990, p. 93). Thus, democratic legitimacy depends on inclusive deliberation in which participants assess the validity of norms through reasoned argument and reciprocal justification.

According to Habermas, everyone should express their own desires and needs. Everyone should also take the perspective of others. For Habermas, the general conditions of the ideal speech situation and the rules of reason, especially as coupled with this sense of solidarity, describe the necessary conditions of democratic policy. In Habermas' conception, the media and public sphere function outside of the actual political-institutional system, mainly as a site of discussion and not as a locus of political organization, struggle, and transformation. Today, first broadcast media like radio and television, and now computers, have produced new public spheres and spaces for information, debate, and participation that contain both the potential to invigorate democracy and to increase the dissemination of critical and progressive ideas, as well as new possibilities for manipulation, social control, and the promotion of conservative positions.

For Habermas, "public reason" includes the "unofficial arenas of the political public sphere." Indeed, these unofficial arenas, independent public forums, distinct from both the economic system and the state administration, having their locus rather in voluntary associations, social movements, and other networks and processes of communication in civil society, including the mass media, are the basis of popular sovereignty (McCarthy, 1994, 49) Public autonomy and popular sovereignty can survive only if the right relation obtains between the decision-making bodies and the forms of association in which they are embedded between 'strong

publics and what Habermas calls 'weak publics' or 'civil society'. In the public spheres, communication and discourse can circulate freely, untouched by governments and administration, and regulated only by the rules of the practice.

5. Comparative Analysis of Rawls and Habermas: Justice, Legitimacy, and Democracy

John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas represent two of the most influential contemporary theorists of justice and democratic legitimacy, yet their approaches are grounded in fundamentally different methods of moral and political reasoning. Rawls and Habermas converge in several respects. Both theorists stress the protection of basic rights and liberties and the importance of ensuring that political institutions respect the equality and dignity of all citizens. Both also prioritize structures—whether principles or communicative procedures—that aim to prevent domination and arbitrary disadvantages, ensuring that social cooperation is fair and legitimate.

Rawls develops his notion of public reason in the light of what he calls the "fact of reasonable pluralism" about the good, which he claims is the characteristic feature of modern political and social life. He argues that "Since there is no reasonable religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine affirmed by all citizens, the conception of justice will be the backbone of a well-ordered democratic society and will be the domain of the political compromises that can form part of an overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines (Rawls 2005,p.38).

Rawls's concept of "public reason" is more narrowly defined, to exclude such unofficial forums -the unofficial arenas of public discourse which, for Habermas, are the source of democratic self-rule and political autonomy. Rawls seems committed to a more restricted notion of public reason - one which, for the sake of achieving agreement in a pluralistic society, apparently restricts the critical function of reason in public venues. Habermas's conception of public reason not only includes the unofficial venues excluded by Rawls - for Habermas, these unofficial domains of rational discourse in fact ground democratic self-government and political autonomy (McCarthy,1994,p.51)

Comparative analysis reveals that while Rawls focuses on institutional design and procedural fairness, Habermas emphasizes deliberation and communicative legitimacy. Both frameworks address the problem of autonomy under coercive law and the justification of political power in pluralistic contexts (Pogge, 2007; Wenar, 2008). Together, they provide a robust theoretical foundation for understanding how modern democracies can uphold justice, stability, and inclusivity without imposing a single moral doctrine. Rawls ensures that democratic institutions remain fair and impartial, whereas Habermas emphasizes the importance of ongoing dialogue and citizen participation in sustaining legitimacy. This dual perspective underscores the relevance of both thinkers for contemporary political theory, particularly in navigating the challenges of diversity, pluralism, and public justification.

Nevertheless, the distinction remains crucial: Rawls offers a principle-based, idealized conception of justice, while Habermas advances a procedural, discourse-oriented model of democratic legitimacy, emphasizing the ways in which justice is realized through collective communication and participation rather than through abstract reasoning alone. Habermas's approach differs from that of John Rawls, who emphasizes hypothetical fairness through the original position and the veil of ignorance. Unlike Rawls, who filters ethical and religious considerations from public decision-making, Habermas incorporates these considerations into deliberation, emphasizing the intersubjective nature of legitimacy and the ongoing participatory processes required to sustain democracy. While Rawls derives principles of justice from idealized rational choice, Habermas stresses the procedural and communicative conditions under which legitimate norms can be created and sustained in actual societies.

For Rawls, justice is a basis of universalism. Habermas's argument for international justice focuses on a global constitution. The primacy of the participant's perspective in Habermas, over against the observer's perspective in Rawls, thus coheres with Habermas's more robust notion of public reason, one which apparently makes more room for critique than does Rawls, and which is grounded in the unofficial venues of rational discourse (McCarthy, 1994, p. 60). Rawls ensures that democratic institutions remain fair and impartial, whereas Habermas emphasizes the importance of ongoing dialogue and citizen participation in sustaining legitimacy. This dual perspective

underscores the relevance of both thinkers for contemporary political theory, particularly in navigating the challenges of diversity, pluralism, and public justification.

6. Conclusion

John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas are two of the most influential contemporary Western political philosophers. In Political Liberalism, Rawls moves away from presenting justice as fairness as a comprehensive doctrine and instead frames it as a political conception of justice—understood as a modular framework that can fit within any reasonable comprehensive doctrine. Against value skepticism and utilitarianism, Rawls follows Kant’s maxim that we ought to act in ways that are good for all people, extending this principle to formulate his vision of a just society. According to Rawls, a just society is one in which every citizen is treated equally and freely. Kant’s principle of autonomy is interpreted intersubjectively: “we act autonomously when we obey those laws which could be accepted by all concerned based on a public use of reason.

In contrast, Habermas’s discourse ethics is a broader moral theory, concerned with right conduct in general. While Rawls explicitly denies that his theory of justice is a moral theory in this comprehensive sense, Habermas presents discourse ethics as a general theory of morality. For Rawls, under conditions of pluralism, justifying the basic structure and constitutional essentials of society based on any single comprehensive doctrine would inevitably provoke controversy and conflict, undermining stability. Rawls interprets “comprehensive doctrine” broadly, encompassing religions, worldviews, and moral systems. In his framework, good democratic citizens achieve public justification by filtering ethical reasons out of political deliberation, focusing instead on reasons that all reasonable citizens can accept.

By contrast, Habermas views democratic institutions as aiming to secure political justification by incorporating as many ethical reasons as possible into the deliberative process. Despite these methodological differences, both philosophers are concerned with similar foundational questions: how citizens can remain free and autonomous under coercive law, and how collective reason can justify the exercise of political power.

In pluralistic modern democracies, where citizens cannot be expected to agree on social norms based on shared metaphysical or religious doctrines, both Rawls and Habermas grapple with the problem of how a normatively binding framework for the public use of reason can be both possible and justifiable.

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Public Discourse and Online Hate Speech: Anti-Indigenous Racism

Lorenzo Cherubini¹ 

¹ Faculty of Education, Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada

Correspondence: Lorenzo Cherubini, Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada.

E-mail: lcherubini@brocku.ca

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-7589-8108>

Abstract

Hate speech has proliferated across social media platforms, allowing users to target specific groups and spread racist and discriminatory messages to prospective audiences all over the world. The context of online hate speech is consequential for marginalized groups, including the Indigenous Peoples of Canada. This research study therefore addresses the need to investigate more comprehensively the public discourse, as it is posted on the YouTube social media site, corresponding to Indigenous-settler relations. Using a discourse analysis approach, the study discusses anti-Indigenous frames of reference from selected posts that capture discriminatory tones of incredulity and cynicism. When considered from a social constructionist framework as both independent statements and a collection of comments, the posts reflect a sense of moral fatigue on the part of commentators that draw upon exaggerated and misconstrued truths that appeal to already disillusioned viewers.

Keywords: Cyberhate, Social Media, Discourse Analysis, Hate Speech

1. Introduction

1.1 Extremist Views and Social Media

Hate speech continues to be an emerging reality across social media platforms that allows users to target specific groups and spread racist and discriminatory messages (Brant & Hulin, 2023; Mathew et al., 2021). Hate speech encompasses discriminatory comments and criticisms directed at specific groups (Wong et al., 2015). The online environment allows anyone with access to social media channels to communicate their opinions and perspectives. Users can post their views on various social, political, and economic current events and thereby contribute to the cyberculture discourse (Sacristán, 2013). In fact, cyberhate is experiencing a heightened prominence across Southeast Asia, India, Africa, Europe, and North America (Jakubowicz, 2017). Social media platforms, as they exist across various virtual channels, facilitate the communication and interaction of hateful and discriminatory content that may also include extremist views that encourage radical ideologies in their messaging (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Rone, 2022). There has been a rise in intolerant and extremist views expressed across the internet cyberculture, including on social media sites that have an extensive reach for prospective audiences and users. The

racist and discriminatory viewpoints have significant adverse consequences for targeted groups in society (Author; Daniels, 2009) and can enable radicalized communities of individuals that define themselves as defending so-called traditional values and nationalistic beliefs to direct their hate against those groups and/or members in society who do not share these potentially deleterious ideologies (Freilich et al., 2009).

YouTube, an online sharing electronic platform, allows viewers to watch, create, and comment on videos. An estimated six billion hours of video are watched on a monthly basis (Algonquin College, n.d.). Generally speaking, users can post comments on each respective video site to communicate their thoughts with others. This open communication platform can be a venue for the dissemination of hate-filled comments. Cyberhate is defined as discourse involving the use of electronic communications technology to share racist content and extremist ideologies that advocate for discriminatory views and practices by attacking the identity of the targeted group (Anti-Defamation League, 2010; Isasi & Juanatey, 2016).

1.2 Contextual Framework

The context of online hate speech is consequential for marginalized groups worldwide. As examples, consider the hateful speech across social media platforms that was an outcome of the 2019 Christchurch terrorist attacks in New Zealand (Tan, 2022), or in Indonesia where hate speech is often associated with socio-political issues that adversely implicate people's religious beliefs (Magfirah & Saputra, 2021; Sazali et al., 2022). Like Australia, Indonesia has also experienced a rise in Islamophobia among virtual communities and social media channels (Kastolani, 2020; Pohjonen & Udupa, 2017). Consider, too, the prominence of hate speech in Japan, where, similar to Indonesia, hate narratives in social media contexts propagate discrimination and ideological aggression (Akuzawa, 2016; Ash-Shidiq & Pratama, 2021; Septiana et al., 2025). Highly diverse populations in Sri Lanka are also subject to the emergence of cyberhate in social media that targets religious communities and ethnic groups (Perera et al., 2023).

Hence, the Indigenous Peoples of Canada are no exception to being targets of cyberhate. Racist and discriminatory comments directed towards Indigenous persons are often the source of social division and give rise to pre-existing false assumptions (e.g., see Abraha, 2017; Yimam et al., 2019). Online posts are often typical of misinformation that only polarizes the impending social and political circumstances of the targeted population by bringing to light the apparent injustices of government and social initiatives that invest in matters of social justice at the expense of the interests of Canadian nationalists (e.g., see Public Safety Canada, 2025). This research study, therefore, addresses the need to investigate more comprehensively the public discourse, as it is posted on the YouTube social media site, in relation to Indigenous-settler relations. The research focuses on this online space where socio-political and socio-economic perspectives are readily shared and exchanged among users and in the process contribute to a divisive and dangerous social reality (Kopytowska, 2017).

YouTube is one of various online video channels that have become social media platforms to access and participate in hate speech and distribute far-right ideologies (Caiani & Parenti, 2016; Marwick & Lewis, 2017). Of note to the study under discussion are the social posts related to specific videos shared on YouTube platforms that focus on Indigenous Peoples' rights and socio-political circumstances. The posts reflect settler colonial sentiments that in themselves are often normative constructs based on Eurocentric hegemonic traditions at the peril of Indigenous Peoples' conditions (e.g., see Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Moreton-Robinson et al., 2008). The comments are typically highly subjective and, as some scholars suggest, characteristic of shifting levels of harm protected by the principles of free speech (Ayele et al., 2024; Madukwe et al., 2020). The social posts can range from moderate levels of stereotyping to direct appeals for violence against the targeted population (Ayele et al., 2024; Beyhan et al., 2022).

This paper is a component of a larger research study that recognizes that the various and recent Canadian government public commissions and apologies to Indigenous Peoples for the consequences of the residential school system (see Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015) and the brutal tribulations experienced by Indigenous women (see National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019) "coexist with a denial of Canadian settler colonialism"

(Mudde, 2020, p. 48). As stated in previous studies (Author), the social posts across various social media platforms situate Indigenous Peoples' realities in the context of a colonial historical interpretation (Smith, 2021), despite the awareness of the injustices they experience having been brought to public attention. The discriminatory sentiments of Canadian nationalists can be positioned as a justification to racialize Indigenous Peoples by their difference and racial inferiority (Burton et al., 2010).

2. Method

Discourse analysis, as a qualitative method, was used in this and the related studies on the topic. The discourse of the social media posts shared on two YouTube sites is the object of analysis (da Silva & de Castro e Silva, 2020; Orlandi, 2012). The method facilitates an examination of language as it is used in the specific field of social posts to better understand the nature of communication amongst users (Vine, 2023).

For this study, two YouTube videos downloaded from a major Canadian newscast (CityNews and Global News) were selected. The videos, entitled *Human Rights Report Highlights Canada's Violation of Indigenous Rights* and *Canada Still Failing to Address Indigenous Rights*, describe a Human Rights Watch (2023) report that outlines Canada's violations of these rights. Twenty-two comments and 3,071 views were recorded for the CityNews video, and 81 comments and 6,300 views were recorded for the Global News video since their respective postings in January 2023. The analysis sorted the top comments as identified by the YouTube platform. In total, 13 and 31 comments that connotated and/or denotated anti-Indigenous sentiments from the respective videos were selected for analysis.

The methodology used in this study considers knowledge as an extension of the social realm and reflective of reality (Dunn & Neumann, 2016). It understands meaning to be an outcome of the construction of a particular discourse—in this case, the conversation in response to the two YouTube videos of national news broadcasts that focus on the same topic. Language, in this way, is very much social because subjects and material realities are attributed specific meaning and assume certain identities (Hansen, 2006). The written texts and posts are considered data and represent a phenomenon that is relevant beyond an individual person, as the language itself captures the emergence of certain conventions in the broader relationships of the conversation (Taylor, 2013). It is important to note, then, that the language is not understood as explaining the world but, rather, facilitating the production of it (Dunn & Neumann, 2016).

The aim of the study, thus, is to examine the discourse to better perceive the construction of reality and the subsequent versions of truth. According to Bartelson (1995), the discourses under examination are statements that organize specific practices, allowing the researcher to “focus on continuity, change, or rupture within specific discourses, either within a specific historical moment or comparatively” (Mutlu & Salter, 2013, pp. 113–114). The investigation is focused on the interaction of communication to describe the social practice of the collective, and then the respective beliefs, values, and social identities of the membership (e.g., see Gee, 2011, 2014). The analysis lends itself to a social constructionist framework because the commentators' identities are subject to analysis given the language they employ to represent the social world to which they directly contribute (Vine, 2023).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 News Source 1

The first of two YouTube videos is from a national news source in Canada (CityNews) and provides a journalistic summary of Canada's failure to address fundamental Indigenous rights (as chronicled in the Human Rights Watch report). Users posted their comments in response to the news story on the social media platform for others to read and/or respond.

The discursive frames of reference convey a profound cynicism on the part of most commentators. The rights of Indigenous Peoples are described in a language of incomprehension. One comment, relatively typical of others, presents a misinformed contemporary perspective of the Canadian government's role in addressing the serious

challenges across Indigenous communities as they relate to the accessibility of safe and clean drinking water, sustainable living conditions, and health-related disparities: “I don't understand. [Indigenous Peoples] want nothing to do with us, but yet at the same time, they want our stuff and us to look after them?” The language of the statement suggests that Indigenous Peoples seek no relationship with settler Canadians, yet the hallmark Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) and TRC (2015) reports were both widely publicized as strategic initiatives to strengthen and promote reconciliatory and equitable relations. The same comment falsely positions Indigenous communities in a rhetoric of dependency, implying that their welfare and sustainability hinge on the stewardship of mainstream Canadians, thereby neglecting the rich history of Indigenous Peoples that existed across Turtle Island far before first contact.

A different post uses an incredulous tone already established across a number of posts to belittle the serious and detrimental living conditions of some Indigenous communities discussed in the YouTube news broadcast. The Human Rights Watch report brings to light the various consequences for some Indigenous communities that are forced to tolerate dilapidated living conditions. Yet, the commentator readily dismisses such claims: “If a house has windows, then why would it have a problem with poor ventilation?” The post ignores the destitute housing predicaments and instead offers a resolution couched in simplistic terms to further underscore what is described as Indigenous Peoples’ lack of self-sufficiency.

The rhetoric across the posts frames a social reality that positions Indigenous communities as undeserving of further support and consideration from what is implied to be a historically generous Canadian public. Commentators refuse to discuss the violations of Indigenous Peoples’ rights and instead focus on particular issues that they believe have obvious and basic solutions. The implication of this rhetoric is the connotation that Indigenous communities cannot recognize these fundamental resources. As a result, commentators readily reject the apparent false claims as they relate, in this instance, to the accessibility of clean drinking water: “Don’t be mad ... the rest of the country gets lead pipes running to their homes.” The tone is clearly condescending. The user sets aside the glaring statistics and first-hand video of the newscast that describe Indigenous communities’ difficulty accessing clean drinking water. The cynicism embedded in the rhetoric that appeals directly to the same Indigenous communities experiencing these challenges is inappropriate and harmful. The commentator’s attempt to console Indigenous Peoples is insincere. The suggestion is made that non-Indigenous communities also experience challenges with accessing clean water. The rhetoric frames a social reality whereby Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons share a common adverse circumstance and, in the process, implies that Indigenous communities should have little to no priority in mainstream society’s attention to these matters.

A similar tone is represented in posts that offer a comparative viewpoint, persuading viewers to recognize the unfairness of catering to Indigenous rights. A commentator writes, “And everyone else [has] rights ... ahem ... vaccine mandates, the emergency act, travel mandates etc. etc.” The language evokes frustration. The post implies that despite the circumstances that trouble Indigenous communities as documented in the video, the rights of Canadians should be at the very least of equal priority. There is no mention of the historical wrongdoings of colonial practices that continue to jeopardize a sustainable and healthy way of life for Indigenous Peoples and communities. Instead, the post underpins colloquial frames of reference to redirect viewers’ attention from the video to the equally pressing concerns of all Canadians’ rights. The commentator cites the social and health restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic as examples of rights violations. The discourse shifts attention immediately from the disconcerting images of the video to what many Canadians believe to have been an unfair imposition of their civil liberties during the pandemic. By citing the example of the social and health restrictions, the commentator incorporates what may be a tangible and understandable perspective for most viewers, unlike, one might surmise, the less-relatable issues that plague Indigenous communities that are discussed in the news broadcast.

A different post confuses the concept of rights, stating that Indigenous Peoples “want separate ‘rights’ [but] human rights are just fine.” Note that Indigenous Peoples’ claims are situated in a language of privilege. Comments like this one imply that the rights to which Indigenous Peoples are entitled and embedded in treaty agreements are superior to the rights afforded to all Canadians. The discourse is very much a negation of difference. For this user,

and others like them, the historical and contemporary plight of Indigenous communities (despite the telling conditions and statistics described in the Human Rights Watch report) is not worthy of distinction.

For some users, the apparent historical record of financial investments on the part of the Canadian government simply contributes to what is clearly a sense of moral fatigue. Commentators readily note the extensive funding on the part of the federal government to improve the living conditions of Indigenous Peoples living on reserve lands that has, according to these viewers, resulted in few positive outcomes. Consider the following post as one example: “They have been given billions [of dollars], yet the bands steal the money instead of spending it on infrastructure like every other community!” The tone is dramatic. The discourse evokes connotations of a sizable amount of public financial support and uses the rhetoric of blame to make the case that Indigenous community leaders exploit the funding for self-serving interests at the peril of the tax-paying public at large. The issue of limited access to clean water on some Indigenous reserves, as one example featured in the news report, is summarily dismissed by laying blame on the Indigenous communities themselves. The user transitions the dramatic and accusatory rhetoric into a direct comparison with Canadian mainstream communities that seemingly are far more prudent in distributing sources of funding to cater to most citizens. One senses the moral fatigue in the rhetoric of this post, and others like it, that imply a lack of patience with the continued funding to improve Indigenous communities’ living conditions.

Note also how the dramatic and blameful rhetoric formulated in a sense of moral fatigue appeals to like-minded readers who may share these misinformed opinions. The posts present a subjective and misguided interpretation of social truth. For those Canadians already disgruntled by federal and provincial political agendas that support Indigenous Peoples’ welfare, these posts invite them to consider how such programs undermine their own welfare as Canadians. The posts appeal to those already bothered as they do to individuals who may have been harboring the same sentiments but have not located a place and space where these views are readily shared. The hateful rhetoric, in these instances, affirms the sense of moral fatigue that may be attributed to having spent financial resources on Indigenous communities that remain encumbered by the same issues the funding was meant to resolve. It is interesting how Indigenous communities are framed in a discourse of difference set apart from “every other community.” The identities between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians in this construction of social reality are quite striking. The latter assumes an identity of superiority whose generosity and goodwill have been exhausted.

The rhetoric of blame is sustained by subsequent posts and is an example of how one sentiment fuels other hateful comments. The frames of reference falsely situate Indigenous Peoples as bearing the fault of their own misfortune. In the process, the language seems to absolve Canadians of their treaty obligations and other responsibilities to Indigenous Peoples. As this post states, “This is the fault of native leaders, who refuse to dig the earth to lay proper pipes and instead choose to have reservoirs full of still water. Modernize or die.” Here, too, Indigenous community leaders are criticized, and in this instance for their refusal to agree to what is positioned as the more prudent decision to engage in pipeline construction. The comment, and others like it, bring no attention to the spiritual and cultural significance of the land and Mother Earth that are honored by Indigenous Peoples and traditions. Instead, Indigenous community leaders are critiqued for not succumbing to the apparent priority to abide by the terms of progress established by some non-Indigenous interests. The post aims to appeal to a degree of common sense to persuade viewers that the alternative to pipeline construction is to maintain an unsustainable, dangerous, and unhealthy option—“reservoirs of still water.” The implication in these discursive frames of reference is that Indigenous Peoples are deliberately choosing to disregard more viable options to better their living conditions.

Such positions are situated in frames of reference that discount Indigenous worldviews. One wonders: is the latter commentator confusing the construction of industrial pipelines to transport oil across Indigenous territory to various ports in Canada with the building of plumbing infrastructures for communal water distribution? Regardless of its intentionality, the object of the discourse (pipeline construction) takes center stage in the post and may contribute to the negative public sentiment against those Indigenous groups that rallied against the oil pipeline construction across Canada (e.g., see CBC News, 2021; Gaglione, 2023). In a brutal and blunt concluding statement, the commentator offers Indigenous Peoples a ludicrous ultimatum: they can either abide by settler

priorities captured in the language of modernization or simply cease to exist. The concept of modernization is understood in settler-colonial terms and readily negates Indigenous worldviews and beliefs.

The rhetoric, perhaps a consequence of the moral fatigue across this and other posts, is emotionally based and entices conclusive outcomes meant to foster the impatience and intolerance of Canadian nationalists. It is an example of hate-filled discourse in one cyberspace platform. The language is extremist and appalling. It seems, moreover, intentionally situated to dismiss the violation of Indigenous Peoples' human rights and, in the process, raise the temperature of viewers to create an equally strong and passionate tone. Canadians, it would imply, should not feel shameful for Indigenous Peoples' circumstances despite the realities depicted in the video and noted in the Human Rights Watch report.

3.2 News Source 2

The second video under analysis and posted on YouTube relates to Canada's response to the various issues that challenge Indigenous Peoples, including violence, poverty, and social and health inequities. There were 31 comments selected for analysis.

There is a strong sense of resentment across most of the selected posts. Commentators readily dismiss the profound challenges experienced by Indigenous Peoples that are presented in the Human Rights Watch report and instead express their frustration with the perceived privileged treatment of Indigenous Peoples by the Canadian federal government. The frustration is often framed by a rhetoric of cynicism. One comment suggests that "taxpayers will continue to pay for everything they can, buy housing for everyone, and let everyone out of jail" on condition that Indigenous Peoples care for their property and abide by the law. The commentator uses a sweeping and false statement of citizens paying for Indigenous Peoples' needs in an attempt to influence readers' preexisting grievances. The comment relies on a misdirected sense of the lack of accountability in the Canadian justice system that supposedly favors Indigenous Peoples' interests. The rhetoric implies that Canadians, and not Indigenous Peoples, are treated inequitably. Equally apparent is the damaging tone throughout the discourse that suggests a lack of appreciation on the part of Indigenous Peoples for the taxpaying public's generosity. The discourse is hyperbolic and creates a social phenomenon that is unsustainable for mainstream Canadians.

In other comments, individuals criticize federal government policy that is "failing to address all human rights issues for everyone [and] not just Indigenous people." The commentator couches the blame in a rhetoric of victimization, including the mainstream public. The suggestion is that all Canadians experience the same challenges as Indigenous community members. Note how the language essentially erases the unique ordeals of Indigenous Peoples that are rooted in colonial oppression. Interpretations based on settler colonial perspectives remain the controlling narrative to describe the social phenomenon. Interestingly, though, the discourse does not implicate the violation of Indigenous Peoples chronicled by the YouTube video but instead serves to establish a counter social practice whereby injustice is not exclusive to Indigenous Peoples.

In the same way, and equally significant, the rhetoric inherent in some comments points to what is best described as moral fatigue. In several posts, commentators assume the stance of speaking on other people's behalf. One post stated that "this story is making less sense to more people the more we hear about it." Here, too, the discursive frames of reference reflect a tone of utter frustration by suggesting that the masses, the larger collective of Canadian society that are separate and distinct from First Nations people, are becoming increasingly dismayed by the seemingly constant reports of the injustices against Indigenous Peoples. The commentator constructs a distinct identity characteristic of Canadian nationalist ideologies. In fact, the rhetorical tone suggests that the heightened exposure to Indigenous Peoples' challenging conditions and rights violations essentially serves to confuse Canadian consciousness only further—as if the contemporary realities of Indigenous Peoples could not be comprehended to begin with. Relatedly, the oversimplification expressed in a rhetoric of ignorance draws public attention to the financial commitments invested in Indigenous affairs, as one post stated, "Money, money, money. More handouts based on lies." The commentator uses repetition to accentuate the prolonged commitment that the Canadian public has already made to address Indigenous community concerns, identifying in the same sentiment the economic investments as mere unmerited donations in response to false truths. The rhetoric represents a denial

of the very realities that confront Indigenous Peoples and communities and implies that colonial history is the accepted truth in the construction of the social world characteristic of anti-Indigenous sentiments. The discursive frames of reference suggest that the claims, statistics, and realities that confront Indigenous communities are mere dishonest representations to further solicit support and draw from an already burdened taxpaying public.

The rhetoric across the commentaries is unmistakably one of moral fatigue. Commentators readily speak on behalf of all those who subscribe to Canadian nationalist ideals to convey their weariness of experiencing less privilege than Indigenous Peoples. The discursive frame of reference is one of intolerance. The appeal is very emotionally based:

Same rights as any Canadian, plus no property taxes to pay, plus income from activities that are illegal for other Canadians such as selling cigarettes or big game hunting out of season ... plus a cheque for \$20K per commune member every time someone mentions “residential schools” or “murdered and missing.”

Commentators invite readers to consider the apparent injustices related to the processes and procedures that concede certain privileges to only Indigenous community members. The frames of reference position Indigenous Peoples as exploiting the interests of Canadian nationals since they are exempt from taxes and can reap the benefits of otherwise illegal activities. The language creates a seemingly intolerable social phenomenon. The rhetoric is meant to give viewers pause for concern. For nationalists who feel already underserved by political agendas, the rhetoric of this post (and those like it) invites a comparison of social and economic welfare. Note, too, how the federal commissions that garnered widespread national media interest and attested to the cultural genocide of residential school practices and the disparate casualties of Indigenous women (e.g., see National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019; TRC, 2015) are readily dismissed by false claims of compensation. The profound realities and social practices captured in both reports are formulated in a vocabulary that gives no credence to the first-hand testimonies of Indigenous Peoples who are directly connected to the cruelties.

Especially telling is the post that identifies in most candid terms the hate speech captured across the communication of this social media platform: “Every single person commenting has hate towards indigenous people in this commenting section.” It is important to distinguish, however, that none of the posts are necessarily in violation of the Canadian Digital Charter. The Government of Canada instated Canada’s Digital Charter that includes the expectation that digital platforms will not shelter hateful and extremist ideologies (Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2019). But in all instances, however, the posts harbor connotations of extremist hate rhetoric. Moreover, these same discourses are readily available to anyone who accesses YouTube, regardless of age. The digital platform is very mainstream. The posts include rhetoric that embraces hate and extremist views and celebrates nationalist principles reflective of settler colonial historical narratives. For this reason, it is not uncommon to read posts in which commentators take it upon themselves to embody the identity of all Canadian nationalists: “Natives care, the citizens don’t. Give it a rest already; this is getting really old. Just give them another billion dollars. That will make them go away for a while again.” The frames of reference are extremely damaging. The hateful rhetoric is embedded in a narrative of moral fatigue while affirming for other like-minded individuals that their intolerance towards the supposed injustices of Indigenous Peoples is legitimate. Again, those with preconceived grievances towards Indigenous communities may experience a sense of affirmation in knowing that others, too, perceive the government’s unfair treatment of Canadian nationals.

In the same light, the rhetoric of other posts seeks to console any feelings of guilt that Canadians may be experiencing watching the video of Indigenous rights violations. One post uses discursive frames of reference to justify a social construction of reality that absolves Canadians of further obligation:

Natives right[s]? They already get money from us for drugs. Clean water? Without us, they wouldn’t have water to drink at all. What do they want? In reality, always the most useless people are the most dependent people

Note the oppositional language of us versus them to distinguish the noble commitments of Canadians that stand in direct juxtaposition to the overwhelming dependency of Indigenous communities. Canadians, in this and similar

posts, are positioned as benevolent in their commitment to the apparently despondent Indigenous communities. Using rhetorical questions, the commentator invites readers into the critical conversation intended to persuade them of the fact that Canadians have essentially exceeded expectations in caring for these marginalized populations. Here, too, the sense of moral fatigue is interwoven in the discourse. The discourse attempts to position a seemingly conclusive and convincing statement in response to the questions. Readers are left to wonder what Indigenous Peoples could possibly want more in response to Canadians' generosity. The final statement is reminiscent of a far more forceful tone and is positioned in the diction of "reality." The commentator can apparently speak from a position of expertise given that they have established an irrefutable argument. In deprecating frames of reference, Indigenous Peoples are described as supremely inadequate given their reliance on Canadians to support their well-being.

The respective posts seem to fuel a collective momentum characteristic of hate-filled discourse. Consider the following:

Never mind the Indigenous communities: non-indigenous peoples are stuck with a federal government that doesn't give two cents about the rights of Canadians. Period. There's no need to perpetuate the "victim mentality" and "racist treatment" always referred to by one part of the population: every elderly person, disabled individual, or run-of-the-mill Caucasian continues to pay for what other people—those who were completely unrelated to them from every angle—did to indigenous persons of yesteryear. ... God forbid if you're white in Canada today. You have to apologize for being white, even when you have done nothing to apologize for. Young white men are at the bottom of the totem pole. Period.

The appeal to those Canadians who are already disgruntled by government initiatives to remedy the challenges experienced by Indigenous Peoples is striking. Distinct to the rhetoric are feelings of moral fatigue experienced by Canadians who are unwilling to tolerate conversations that espouse the interests of Indigenous peoples. Note, too, how the commentator absolves all nationalists of feeling remorseful for past harms to Indigenous communities. There is neither acknowledgment nor tolerance for the contemporary violations to Indigenous Peoples documented in the video that are rooted in colonial practices. Moreover, the specific reference to "young white men" is also quite telling. The literature suggests that young people can be especially susceptible to extremist ideologies, particularly when they perceive little hope for their future and feel separated from the traditions, beliefs, and cultural identities of their nation, and as a result succumb to a sense of moral panic (see Donaldson, 2017; Author). The post states in unequivocal terms that white males in Canada have been relegated to a significantly inferior status and appropriates the totem pole—an Indigenous symbol to commemorate individuals and events—to underscore the comparison.

4. Conclusion

Social media platforms have become a venue for hate speech around the world. It is a cyberculture discourse that entertains comments from users about social, political, and economic current events and can be a virtual location to spread discriminatory and racist views. YouTube, an online sharing platform, permits users to post comments regarding each of their videos. This investigation analyzes the public discourse corresponding to Indigenous-settler relations in Canada in the broader context of key federal government initiatives and responses to the historical realities that have negative implications on Indigenous Peoples' contemporary living conditions and social welfare. Using a discourse analysis approach, the analysis discusses the frames of reference from selected posts that capture a tone of incredulity and cynicism from anti-Indigenous perspectives. The posts, then, when considered from a social constructionist framework, reflect a sense of moral fatigue on the part of commentators who rely on exaggerated and misconstrued truths that appeal to already disillusioned viewers. The rhetoric is hateful and extremist. It dismisses the violation of human rights experienced by Indigenous Peoples and communities that are documented in the videos and in the Human Rights Watch report.

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Ahom Agency and the State in Contemporary Assam: Negotiation, Responses and Politics for Scheduled Tribe Status among Ahoms

Tulika Senapati¹, Chuchengfa Gogoi²

¹Department of Political Science, North Lakhimpur University, tulikasenapati2015@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0001-6882-6544

²Department of Political Science, North Lakhimpur University, chuchengfa@nlu.ac.in, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-3098-0148

Correspondence: ChuchengfaGogoi, Department of Political Science, North Lakhimpur University, Lakhimpur, Assam, India. Mobile: 70886073557. E-mail: chuchengfa@nlu.ac.in

Abstract

The concept of 'identity politics' has become a widely used yet often ambiguously defined term within the social sciences. While numerous scholars have attempted to theorize it, its discursive nature is captured by Kwame Anthony Appiah, who observes that identity politics is frequently invoked not as a neutral analytical category. As Appiah notes, one's own political commitments are understood as just politics, whereas the claims of others are dismissed as 'identity politics'. This insight reveals how groups universalize their own interests while delegitimizing others. Within this purview, the paper examines the complex dynamics of identity politics among the Tai-Ahom community and the responses of existing Scheduled Tribe groups in Assam. Historically, the Tai-Ahom were a dominant ruling group with rich historical archive. But the identity of the Tai-Ahom was reconstructed by colonial governmentality. The paper examines the trajectory of Tai-Ahom identity and the contemporary revival movement led by various Tai-Ahom associations. It also focuses on the demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status by the Ahom community and the response of other existing Scheduled Tribes. By analyzing the Ahom agency, this study demonstrates how affirmative action creates a contested political landscape for state patronage and resource allocation. The paper seeks to understand the interplay between the ethnic roles played by Tai-Ahom in their demand for Scheduled Tribe recognition and, similarly, the role of existing STs in responding to the development of that demand.

Keywords: Tai-Ahoms, Identity Politics, Just Politics, Demand for Scheduled Tribe Status, Governmentality

1.Introduction

The multi-ethnic and multicultural character of society has made it particularly prone to identity-based politics in India. In the post-colonial period, various states in India have experienced ethnic movements seeking political autonomy and economic and cultural recognition. Assam has often been perceived as a contested socio-political space and a recurrent hotspot of 'identity politics'. Sanjib Baruah argues that the ethno-territorial character of Assam

and the constitution's preferential treatment provisions led ethnic communities to bargain with the state for Schedule Tribe (ST) status, the Sixth Schedule for existing STs, and for those with a Sixth Schedule demand, a full-fledged state (Baruah, 2008). The preferential treatment policy of the Indian Constitution facilitates the mobilization of groups to demand preferences and benefits, leading to political tensions over how the state distributes resources, resentment among groups that avail of such benefits, and issues for policy debates (Weiner, 1983). This is currently evident in Assam's politics. The six communities, namely the Tai Ahom, Chutia, Moran, Matak, Adivasi, and Koch Rajbangshis, have been demanding Scheduled Tribe status, which is opposed by the existing ST of Assam. Their demand for recognition of ST status was approved at the winter session of the Assam Assembly on 29th Nov, 2025, which led to large protests by existing ST groups in Kokrajhar, resulting in the destruction of the Bodoland Territorial Council secretariat. The protest erupted after the *Group of Ministers* (GoM) report recommended ST recognition for the six communities. The protesters argued that extending ST status to these communities would dilute the constitutional safeguards affecting their political, educational and employment rights.

Assam, with a total population of approximately 3.12 crore, STs constitute about 12.45 percent of the Assam population. The question of 'tribality' of these communities is a recurrent theme of discourse (Misra, 2012), as the general and anthropological perception of tribes contradicts the constitutional understanding of the ST. This discussion broadens to include the communities demanding ST status in the contemporary period. The Constitution of India nowhere defines what constitutes an ST, nor does it mention specific criteria for recognizing ST in India (Middleton and Shneiderman, 2008). The Constitution, under Article 342, empowers the state to include and exclude any communities from the ST list. The scheduling process is lengthy: first, the concerned state sends recommendations and justification to the center; second, the center forwards it to the Registrar General of India; and then the proposal is referred to the National Commission for Schedule Tribe for their recommendations. Only those cases agreed upon by all these agencies are considered ST by the President's notification. However, ambiguity arises from the criteria used for identifying ST communities. The Lokur Committee outlined certain indicators such as primitive traits, distinct culture, geographical isolation, shyness, and backwardness which remains vague and open to interpretation. Moreover, the absence of religion as a defining criterion from the official indicator complicated the issue of identifying ST in India. The major issue in dropping religion has created serious ambiguity in the dichotomous relation of the caste and tribe binary, as the colonial construction of caste/tribe relied very much on religious distinction. This lack of clarity has produced conceptual and practical inconsistencies in identifying STs in India. Within this ambiguous framework, communities demanding ST are trying to revive their ancestral tribal religion to demarcate themselves as non-Hindu. This is seen in the case of the Tai-Ahom in their demand for Scheduled Tribe recognition.

The Tai-Ahom community has increasingly rearticulated their ethnic character in line with their demand for Scheduled Tribe status. The performativity of Tai-Ahomness serves as a strategic means through which the community demonstrate themselves as a 'potential other', capable to bargain with the state and the existing ST communities. The present paper attempts to understand the case of the Tai-Ahom and the process of tripartite bargaining among the Tai-Ahom community, communities already enjoying ST benefits, and the state as the ultimate arbiter.

2. Tai Ahom: historical antecedent and Revivalism

The emergence of the "*anthropological cast of mind*" transformed the social mobility of communities into a caste/tribe binary. Colonial knowledge production infused identity consciousness into different fractions of people by enumerating them and identifying their traits and features within fixed categories such as caste and tribe. This community consciousness is used or challenged by groups to augment their position in the social hierarchy or to bargain with state power. The case of Tai-Ahom is one such example that challenges the colonial positioning of their community.

Assam, as a borderland, has always experienced the circulation of new ideas, people, and material goods mingled with the existing institutions and discourses (Sharma, 2011). The migration of Indo-Aryan and non-Aryan people and their assimilation created a unique social structure in Assam. Tai-Ahom is one such historically dynamic community whose identity was shaped by migration, assimilation, and state formation in this region. The Tai-Ahom,

or Ahom, were a small group of the Shan branch of peoples, with 9,000 men, women, and children, 2 elephants, and 300 horses migrated from Upper Burma and established their kingdom in Assam and ruled 600 years in the region (Gait, 1926). They assimilated and accommodated the indigenous populations of the region within their administrative sphere. The tribal chiefs of indigenous communities were admitted to Ahom clans, and common people were transferred into *paiks*.¹ It is worth mentioning that the Ahom migrated to Assam long before the Tai Shans of Burma converted to Buddhism (Neog, 1996). Thus, it is evident that they had migrated with their tribal belief system. Over time, they expanded their political boundaries by annexing the neighboring polity. The expansion not only changed the political boundaries and tribal feudal political structures but also gave rise to a new, sophisticated state polity with Brahmanical influence (Guha, 1983). In this new sophisticated polity, the Ahom had become a minority in terms of population, and new branches of Aryanised people became the subjects of the Ahom kingdom (Terwiel, 1996). They adopted Assamese as their court language, began practicing Hindu rituals, and appointed Brahmins to various offices in the Ahom kingdom. Royal patronage of Hindu rituals and the spread of neo-Vaishnavism gradually reshaped the cultural milieu of the Ahom court and its subjects. This process produced a flexible caste-based social order within which mobility of rank and status remained contingent upon royal authority.

The trajectory of the Ahoms shifted with their incorporation into the colonial administrative framework. The emergence of colonial administration in Assam, with its enumerative modalities such as ethnography, gazetteers, and census, “created the sense of a controllable indigenous reality” (Appadurai, 1993). It reconfigured the region’s previously fluid social structure, recasting Ahom identity within fixed classificatory categories. A closer reading of ethnographic accounts and census reports suggests that Ahom remains a persistent site of colonial confusion and misinterpretation. The colonial ethnographers relied on Brahmanical texts and the interpretations of local elites to classify people into categories based on ‘religion’ and ‘custom’, ignoring marginalized local practices (Driks, 2001). Elite perceptions are evident in Haliram Dhekial Phukan’s *Assam Buranji*, in which he described the Ahom as a degraded and impure community. In a similar vein, the first census of 1872 referred to the Ahom as a “corrupt and degenerated race” that intermixed with the indigenous population. They clubbed them as semi-Hinduised aboriginals despite the fact that some of them still retained the habit of eating beef and the practice of burying dead remains (Hunter, 1975). They consider religion a factor in determining whether a community can be posited. The problem with religion was that the Hinduised aboriginals of Assam had not developed a caste structure as a fixed religious institution, but rather a social position where the wealthy class sought upward social mobility. This can be seen in the demand by 15 Tai-Ahom clans, under the leadership of Padmeswar Naoboicha Phukan, to be recognized as Kshatriyas, on the grounds that they wrote ‘Simha’ after their names and fought battles like Kshatriyas (cited in Barpujari, 1990). Their claim was refuted by the 1901 Census, which simultaneously categorized them as lower-caste. They used the ‘jalchal’ factor as the Brahmins did not take water from them (Sharma, 2022). The then Governor, Beatson Bell, regretted the blunder and assured the Ahom groups of the necessary correction in the preceding census. Although the Ahom were never recognized as Kshatriya, Padmanath Gohain Barua, in his 1937 book *Asamar Buranji*, noted in the chapter *Axomiyar Jat Bibhag* that the upper Ahom clans were Kshatriya (Gohain Barua, 2004).

The colonial discourse on tribes did not classify the Tai-Ahoms as a tribe. Their Hinduisation and abandonment of the Tai language portrayed them as more integrated into the Hindu caste society rather than fitting within the category of “tribe”. The Census Commissioner of 1931, C.S. Mullan, compared Tai-Ahoms with Kacharis; both were completely Hinduised, with the exception that Kacharis retained their tribal language and maintained a distant relationship with mainstream Assamese, unlike the Ahom (Mullan, 1932). Thus, they put the Kacharis as a ‘backward tribe’ and the Ahoms in the caste category.

The question of ‘tribal’ or ‘Scheduled Tribe’ status concerning the Ahom community is predominantly a post-colonial thing. The control over indigenous knowledge systems has transformed pre-colonial ‘fuzzy’ communities into more defined collective identities such as nation, tribe, and caste, by delineating community boundaries (Kaviraj, 1993). This process facilitates the cultivation of a unified identity, which in turn enables the articulation of collective interests. The post-colonial assertion of Tai-Ahom ethnicity and their demand for ST recognition stem from this collective sense of “we-ness”. Historical injustices coupled with hegemonic dominance by the upper castes within Assamese society over the Ahom community have accelerated this process. This is evident in the increasing number of civil society groups and various socio-religious organizations; the Ahom Sabha, Mohan

DeodhaiBailungSanmilan, Poi Phuralung Sangha, All Tai Ahom Student Union, Ban Ok Pup Lik Mung Tai, among others. These organizations work for ethnic mobilization of Tai-Ahom, along with creating a 'relational idea' of ethnic similarities and differences. They facilitate the ethnic renewal process by reviving cultural markers such as language, religion and traditional practices. Tai-Ahom, being assimilated and intermixed in terms of language and religion, use 'Buranji' or chronicles as their autoethnography and look back to their ancestral 'homeland', Southeast Asia, to reconstruct their cultural markers. Yasmin Saikia argues that the ethnic renewal process of Tai-Ahom operates bi-directionally. She argues that Tai-Ahom elites embrace Thai inputs by aligning their history with Thai culture, myths, and language, while Thai scholars simultaneously promote their connection to the Pan-Thai nationalist project (Saikia, 2006). Saikia and Hiren Gohain both express their skepticism over the Tai-Ahom ethnic renewal process. The founding president of Ban Ok Pup Lik Muang Tai, PuspaGogoi, stated that

"We have experienced how the upper-caste Assamese society treated us because of our food habits. They suppress us culturally, in terms of religion and language. It is a movement not only against Brahminical dominance but also to revive our age-old language and religion."ⁱⁱ

Adding to this, he also argues that:

"Tai-Ahom and the Thai people are similar in terms of tonal use, in terms of dress and cultural practices, which most of Tai-Ahom have forgotten to practice. That is why we are trying to revive those practices and language. We are not creating new but trying to revive what Swargadeo brought with him".ⁱⁱⁱ

The creation of the Phura Lung religion serves to support their demand for ST recognition, as it contrasts with the binary classification of Hinduism and tribal affiliations. Although the criterion of 'religion' was not included as a scheduling criterion by the Lokur Commission, a significant number of individuals within the Tai-Ahom community are converting to the Phura Lung religion through the 'tetete'^{iv} ceremony. At the grassroots level, the common people perceive religion as a criterion for inclusion in the ST list. They are projecting themselves as 'non-Hindu' by practicing certain rituals. Additionally, the Assam government facilitates their recognition of religious identity by providing funding for the establishment of 'Roucheng' or 'places of worship' for the Tai-Ahom community.

The revival of the Tai-Ahom ethnicity seeks to establish a unique Tai-Ahom identity while advocating for ST recognition. Over time, this movement has transformed Upper Assam into a significant platform for cultural expression, where symbols such as traditional attire and culinary customs are prominently showcased. The struggle for ST recognition is based on the community's capacity to translate culture into performance, rather than on historical indigeneity (Shneiderman and Turin, 2006). In public gatherings, whether cultural programs or protest rallies, the Tai-Ahom community is clad in traditional attire as a deliberate expression of their cultural identity. In contemporary times, this performative assertion of distinctiveness has become increasingly visible.

3.Claims, Justifications and Schedule Tribe: Interrogating Inside

The constitutional category ST is a colonial legacy with a politico-administrative benefit. The growing demand for ST recognition is seen as a "very attractive package deal" to acquire such benefits.^v Here, the paper seeks to analyze the justification for Tai-Ahom's demand for ST status. The identity consciousness of Tai-Ahom and the sense of historical injustice are not new feelings, but are now instrumentalized within the community itself. In the initial period of the ST recognition movement, the problem with Tai-Ahom identity articulation lay within the community; the people were divided along lines of religion, ritual practices, and ways of life. Thus, in the initial period, socio-political and cultural rights were demanded for different sections of Tai-Ahom. The cultural organizations, such as the All Assam Phuralung Buddhist Sangha in 1979, submitted a memorandum to the Joint Parliamentary Select Committee on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Order Bill, 1978, demanding ST recognition for the Tai-Ahom, especially for followers of the Phuralung religion.^{vi} Their demand was limited to the Tai-Ahom, who have retained Tai practices, similar to other Tai groups in the Northeast that received ST status under the Constitution (Scheduled Tribe) Order 1950. Citing their exclusion, several Tai-Ahom associations have sought ST recognition, drawing parallels with groups such as Tai-Aiton, Tai Phake, and Tai Khamyang as their cousin brothers. In memoranda, they claimed their distinct culture, language, and religion as justification for inclusion on the ST list. The present president of *Phuralung Sangha* argues that:

“We Tai-Ahoms are a historically marginalized primitive tribe. We follow the Phuralung, we have our own dress, our own marriage ceremony, our own rituals and our own language. A total of 1,26,331 people have accepted Phuralung religion, and the number continues to increase”.^{vii}

He also reiterates that.

“Followers of these religions resemble the practices of other Tai groups. We practice elements of animism and use Tai-Ahom language in religious and chaklong (marriage) ceremonies. Thus, we should confer ST recognition to preserve and protect our distinctness”.^{viii}

Since the 1980s, the movement has progressed primarily through the submission of memoranda and ethnic demonstrations. In 1982, the All Tai-Ahom Society submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister for ST recognition (Phukan, 2010, p. 188). Again, in the year 1982, the All Tai-Ahom Society welcomed the Government of India’s proposal to amend the Constitution to provide linguistic, cultural, and economic safeguards for the ‘Indigenous Assamese’ and proposed adding provisions to protect, conserve, and develop the language, culture, and economy of the Tai-Ahom. The memorandum stated that the Tai-Ahoms were discontent with the political-administrative arrangement in Assam and thus needed political safeguards for their community (Phukan, 2010). Over the years, various Tai-Ahom organizations, whether separately or jointly, have demanded ST recognition through memoranda. The memoranda highlighted the justifications and rationale for granting recognition to the Scheduled Tribe. It reiterates the historical injustices produced by colonial governance and the continued dominance of caste Hindu groups in the post-colonial period. They also repeatedly emphasize the community’s cultural and linguistic distinctiveness and economic backwardness to demonstrate that they fulfill the required criteria for Scheduled status.

The All Tai Ahom Student Union and Tai-Ahom YuvaPrishad staged a road protest in various districts of Assam and in Delhi with the slogan ‘No ST, No Rest’. The present All Tai Ahom Student Union President, BasantaGogoi, stated that:

“Tai Ahom qualifies all the criteria of the Lukor Commission mentioned. Our people are economically deprived, our women are shy, we have our own religion and dress, and we live in remote villages. We qualify for all the criteria, yet we are deprived of this constitutional right”.^{ix}

Arguing the present movements, Manoj Gogoi, Chief Advisor of ATASU, says that,

“Our demand is not merely to avail ST benefits in employment and educational institutions, but to safeguard our land and our people. Granting ST recognition to these six communities would increase the proportion of the Scheduled Tribe population, which would, in turn, automatically qualify Assam as a *janajatiyarajya*”.^x

The Tai Ahom are currently enjoying OBC status and all its benefits. The OBC status is viewed as inadequate to deal with their issue despite having 27% reservation in Assam. One of the respondents argues that,

“OBC recognition does not provide us with a political and cultural safeguard. Without political rights, we cannot preserve our own land and our culture”.^{xi}

Their main argument was that in a multicultural society, where Tai-Ahom, being a small population, feared being wiped out by larger communities. They were not only afraid of cultural assimilation but also feared being deprived of political recognition. Three constituencies of Upper Assam, Dhemaji, Jonai, and Dhakuakhana, where a larger number of Tai-Ahom live, are reserved for ST, where they cannot contest elections. Another reason is that the existing ST(Plains), such as Deories, Missings, and Sonowal-Kachari, are concentrated in the seven districts of Upper Assam. But their population is not concentrated in one area; it is interspersed with other demanding communities such as Ahom, Moran, and Chutia(Phukan 2010). The rising demand for Sixth Schedule status among these communities created a sense of threat among the Tai-Ahoms, prompting them to assert their demand for ST recognition more strongly.

4.State’s response: a review of developments

The Constitution of India has empowered the state and central governments to decide whether a community can be recognized as an ST. In recent times, some communities across Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh have received ST recognition. This has, in turn, encouraged the Tai-Ahom to press more strongly for ST recognition.

A new wave was ignited by Hiteswar Saikia, who recommended that the Central Government include Tai-Ahom under the 6th Schedule of the Constitution. The Central Government had appointed a Joint Select Committee of Parliament, headed by Shri Amar Rai Pradhan, to study the causes affecting six communities in Assam. In 1997, they recommended Tai-Ahom and five other communities to be recognized as ST. But due to the dissolution of the Lok Sabha, the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) and (Scheduled Castes) Order Bill, 1996, did not proceed to the voting phase.

The Assam State Assembly debates often center on ST recognition. The Chief Minister Saikia responded that the demand would take time due to ambiguities in the criteria for Scheduled Tribe recognition, particularly in area restrictions and population (Assam Legislative Assembly, 1996). Bharat Chandra Narah, Minister of Welfare of Plain Tribes and Backward Classes, stated that the Assam government will submit a memorandum to the center seeking ST recognition for six communities, with an assurance that there will be no conflict with existing ST communities (Assam Legislative Assembly, 2004). On 5th August 2004, the State Government unanimously resolved to urge the Government of India to include the Tai-Ahom and the other five communities in the ST(Plain) within the state of Assam. But the Registrar General raised certain observations and requested additional clarification, and asked the Assam government to provide further justification on 7th Dec, 2005 (Standing Committee, 2006).

Therefore, the Government of Assam had appointed an Expert Committee under the Assam Institute of Research for Tribes and Scheduled Castes (TRI) to prepare their claims and justifications for enlisting the Tai Ahom as an ST. The committee responded to the RGI's queries through their bibliographic evidence submitted in 2012 to the Government of Assam (Report of the Expert Committee). Then the Government of Assam sent its proposal to the Central Government led by the United Progressive Alliance. The proposal did not get a positive response from the Manmohan Singh-led UPA government.

The demands of the Tai-Ahom and the other five communities have become part of the Bharatiya Janata Party's election manifesto. Their vision document stated that the BJP government is closely cooperating with the Central Government to secure recognition for the Tai-Ahom as a Schedule Tribe (Assam Vision Document, 2016-2025). They promise to form a khilonjiya government to protect the *jati, mati, bheti*^{xii}, which incorporates the six communities' demand for Schedule Tribe recognition. Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised to grant Schedule Tribe status to the Tai-Ahom communities in his election rallies in Assam. As a result, a new committee was set up in 2016 under Mahesh Kumar Singla to recommend modalities and consult with all three parties (state, Communities seeking Schedule Tribe and Existing Schedule Tribe) (The Hindu, 1st March, 2016). It was welcomed by various Tai-Ahom organizations and the coordination organization of the other five communities, JanagosthiyaOikya Mancha. The primary thrust of the committee was to examine the shift of the six communities from Other Backwards Class to ST, safeguard the interests of the existing ST, and formulate a mechanism to ensure fairness in reservations for these six communities. But the Committee repeatedly failed to submit its report, which prompted various Tai-Ahom organizations to stage statewide protests. The JanagosthiyaOikya Mancha took to the streets, staging a half-naked protest at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi. In October, the organizations called for a 36-hour Assam Bandh, which significantly disrupted everyday life by affecting routine work, transportation, and normal economic activities across the state (Saikia, 2017).

The Tai-Ahom and their demand for ST recognition made significant progress when the National Commission for ST recognized that these communities possess the characteristics to qualify for inclusion in the ST list (The Assam Tribune, 15th Dec, 2024). In line with this, the Minister of Tribal Affairs, JualOram, introduced the Constitution (STs) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2019. The bill was intended to amend the Constitution (STs) Order, 1950, to include certain communities in the list of STs for the state (Press Information Bureau, 2019). But the political context and timing of the Bill's introduction are called into question due to the delay in its approval. The Tai Ahom organizations within the Choi JanagusthiyoOikya Mancha express their dissatisfaction with the delay in the matter and reiterate the need for immediate inclusion in the Schedule list (Memorandum, 2024).

The most recent development in this matter of granting Tai-Ahom and the other six communities is that the Group of Ministers (GoM), a Cabinet-level committee of the Assam Government, was formed following the Central Government's 2019 recommendation. The Group of Ministers, a three-member body, consulted with all stakeholders and has prepared modalities for granting ST status to the communities. The committee is vested with the responsibility of determining the quantum of reservation for OBCs after the creation of a new Scheduled Tribe category and of preparing measures to ensure safeguards for the existing Scheduled Tribes (Lok Sabha, 2024). The report was presented on the last day of the Winter Session in 2025. The committee, headed by Dr. Ranuj Pegu (Minister of Education, Government of Assam), put forward a multi-layered recommendation that was likely to prolong the issue. The three recommended categories of STs in Assam are ST(Plains), ST(Hills), and ST(Valley), with the latter being newly added. The report provides its rationale for creating the ST(V) category to safeguard the existing ST, which includes Tai-Ahom, Chutia, Tea Tribes or Adivasi communities, and Koch Rajbongshi (excluding the undivided Goalpara district), whereas Moran, Matak, and Koch Rajbongshi of the undivided Goalpara district are included in the ST(P) (Group of Ministers Report, Nov, 2025). This structure will allow reservations in Parliament, the Legislative Assembly, and local bodies, with certain exceptions - Lok Sabha constituencies covering the Sixth Schedule areas will be permanently reserved for the existing STs through a constitutional amendment. Secondly, it suggests separate reservation quotas with distinct rosters and vacancy registers for all state Government recruitments (Group of Ministers Report, Nov, 2025). The category ST(V) will be the same at the central government level, as it has a 'single national ST list' (Group of Ministers Report, Nov, 2025). If the central government is satisfied with this report, the pending Bill of 2019 will be passed to give status to Tai-Ahom and the other five communities.

A myriad of events take place after the cabinet approves the recommendation. Some leaders of Tai Ahom Organisations, such as Tai Ahom YuvaChatra Parishad and All Tai Ahom Student Union, celebrated and called it a 'historic step'. Rana Ranjan Gogoi, General Secretary of the Tai Ahom YuvaChatra Parishad, said, "We are thankful to the state government and the chief minister for keeping their word. This is a moment of joy; we are finally getting what we deserve (Hindustan Times, 29th Nov, 2025). The government decision is also welcomed by Basanta Gogoi, President of the All Tai Ahom Student Union, who urges that the Tai-Ahom community should not be rushed into accepting or rejecting the proposal without fully understanding it (Northeast Now, 2025). ATASU held a 'Chintan Baithak' to review the Group of Ministers' report and created a high-level committee to systematically examine the consequences of implementing the current recommendations, with particular attention to their impact on the community's identity, rights, and existing social safeguards (Northeast Now, 2025).

The report is criticized by the opposition political parties. Immediately after the report was approved in the State Assembly, a huge protest led by Gen-Z students of Bodoland University took place, which vandalized the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Secretariat. The protesters argue that extending the status of a Scheduled Tribe to these advanced communities will dilute their constitutional safeguards (Assam Tribune, 2025). The Opposition leaders—including Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi, Rajgor Dal president Akhil Gogoi, and Assam Jatiya Parishad president Lurinjoyti Gogoi—criticized Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and the BJP government, and dismissed the report as another 'political gimmick' ahead of the 2026 Assembly election. The existing ST organizations staged a protest in various districts of Assam. The Coordination Committee of Tribal Organizations of Assam (CCTOA) also opposed the Government of Ministers' reports and demonstrated state-wide protest by 26 member organizations representing 14 ST communities of Assam.

The recent cabinet approval of the Group of Ministers' report has once again brought the issue into public focus; however, Tai-Ahom leaders remain skeptical. The proposed new categorization, ST(V), has raised serious apprehensions regarding its implications, intent, and long-term consequences. Rather than offering closure, this development has reinforced prevailing uncertainties and raises questions about whether the state's approach genuinely addresses their historical claims or merely uses them for political gain.

5. Responses of existing Scheduled Tribes of Assam

The existing ST communities of Assam have articulated their opposition to the demand for Scheduled Tribe recognition for the Tai-Ahom community through the banner of CCTOA, the All Assam Tribal Sangha, and the All Assam Tribal Student Union (AATSU). As an umbrella body representing various tribal groups, CCTOA has expressed its concerns to both the Union and the state governments regarding the proposed inclusion of the Tai-Ahom within the Scheduled Tribe category. They have staged protests in response to every development in the ST demand of the Tai-Ahom. A massive protest was held by CCTOA at Jantar Mantar in Delhi in response to the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order Bill, 2019. They submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister and the Home Minister, arguing that granting Scheduled Tribe status to the Tai-Ahom would eliminate the political rights of genuine tribal communities. They demand a tripartite meeting with the Union Home Minister, the Chief Minister of Assam, and the CCTOA regarding the matter (The Sentinel, 2024). They are asking for support from the existing ST communities across India, arguing that if ST recognition is granted to Tai-Ahom and the other five communities, which are populous in nature, it will open floodgates for enlisting non-tribal communities across all states in the country, thereby annihilating the very concept of tribe (The Sentinel, 2020).

The Chief Co-coordinator of CCTOA, Aditya Khaklary, argues that the Tai-Ahom and the other five communities are relatively more advanced than the existing Scheduled Tribes of Assam. If these communities get ST status, it will hamper existing Scheduled Tribes in terms of reservations in education, employment, and other sectors (The Times of India, 2016). Clarifying their stance, Khaklary stated that they are not opposed to the development of Tai-Ahom and the other five communities, but oppose granting Scheduled Tribe status at the expense of genuine tribal groups (The Sentinel, 2019).

The opposition is coming not only from existing Scheduled Tribes but also from various civil society organizations. In 2020, the Indigenous Lawyers Association of India (ILAI) appealed to the Government of Assam to reconsider its approval of ST recognition for the six communities. The President of ILAI, DilipKanti Chakma, argues that these communities are identified as OBC, based on caste, and there is no provision in law to include them from the OBC to the ST list, because the STs are totally different from caste. ILAI expressed their fear of further marginalization of the existing Scheduled Tribes of Assam (Press Release, 7th Oct 2020).

The GOM report of 2025 led to massive protests across Assam by various organizations and civil society groups representing existing Scheduled Tribes. The ST students of Cotton University, various Rabha organizations in Goalpara, various Bodo bodies in Kokrajhar, and the All Dimasa Student Union held a protest in Dima Hasao district against the government's decision to grant ST status. PramitChegyung, Dimasa Students' Union General Secretary, stated that the government's decision is politically motivated and targets the populations of six communities for the 2026 Assembly election (India Today NE, 2025). In Kokrajhar, students of Bodoland University help organize a massive protest rally at the Bodoland Territorial Council Secretariat and vandalize the secretariat hall. They submitted a memorandum to HimantaBiswaSarma, BTC Chief, HagramaMohilary, and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, demanding that the report be withdrawn through the District Commissioner (Hindustan Times, 2025). CCTOA rejects the recommendations in the GOM report and has formed a new Consultative Group comprising experts from various fields, including administration, law, and human rights, to review the GOM report and submit recommendations (Pratidin Time, 2025). They are also skeptical about the shift in the quota from OBC to ST, as Tai-Ahom and the other five communities are currently enjoying OBC benefits. It is problematic from a strategic standpoint that the caste data for Tai-Ahom and Other communities are not public, as the Socio-Economic and Caste Census of 2011 has not been officially released. In such a situation, the shift of the Tai-Ahom quota from OBC to ST becomes highly ambiguous.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the demand for ST recognition has remained a persistent feature of Assam's political landscape, significantly influencing state policies and regularly appearing in the electoral agendas of political parties. This demand is rooted in a historical experience of exclusion from the dominant social order and continued socio-economic marginalization within a caste-Hindu-dominated framework. Tai-Ahom elites and leaders of various organizations have consistently articulated their claims through memoranda submitted to government bodies and state institutions justifying ST recognition on the grounds of cultural preservation, social justice, and indigeneity.

Indigeneity, in particular, has emerged as a crucial framework through which the Tai-Ahoms assert their cultural and political rights. In the contemporary context, where Assam's politics is increasingly shaped by concerns over illegal immigration and its perceived impact on the region's demographic composition, the demand for ST status gains added urgency. Within this milieu, the Tai-Ahom community, along with the other five communities, reminds the government of its promise of protecting *jati, mati, bheti* through the constitutional recognition of ST status. Thus, ST recognition is envisioned not merely as a policy benefit but as a vital mechanism for securing cultural survival, political legitimacy, and socio-economic protection.

A counter-discourse emerging from existing Scheduled Tribe communities raises concerns about the seriousness and clarity of the government's approach to this issue. The Group of Ministers (GoM) report lacks precision regarding potential shifts in reservation quotas, particularly in the absence of a comprehensive caste census of the concerned communities. The proposed inclusion of the Tai-Ahom and the other five communities into the ST category would significantly alter the demographic composition of the group, increasing its population share from 12.4 percent to nearly 45 percent. Such a substantial expansion would inevitably have implications for the existing reservation framework. However, the GoM report remains ambiguous on these critical aspects, thereby generating resentment from existing ST communities.

The demand for Scheduled Tribe recognition, alongside the process of ethnic renewal among the Tai-Ahoms, has significantly reshaped the socio-cultural fabric of Assamese society. The assertion of Tai-Ahom identity, coupled with the reconstruction of what are presented as distinct tribal practices, has contributed to the emergence of a sharper sense of distinction between "us" and "them" within the broader social landscape. In this process, the Tai-Ahoms continue to actively negotiate their position within Assamese society. There is an urgent need to critically examine ST recognition by taking into account the perspectives of all three stakeholders. The issue extends beyond concerns of cultural representation, reservation, or social justice; it also has profound implications for maintaining social cohesion and harmony among the diverse communities of Assam.

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Notes:

ⁱ *Paik* is a system that consists of all adult males and had to render their service to the state as peasants and in time of war, they had to render their service as soldiers, for details see Gait, p 237.

ⁱⁱ Interview with Puspagogoi founding President of Ban Ok or purbanchal Tai Sahitya Sabha.

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid*

^{iv} TeTeTe ceremony is the religious conversion ceremony to Phura Lung religion. The literal meaning of the word is swearing.

^v For details see the Report of The Advisory Committee on the Revision of List of Schedule Caste and ST, Government of India, Department of Social Security, p. 8.

^{vi} Phuralung Religion is a religion of Tai- Ahom which has the elements of Hindu Tantric tradition and Bhudhisim.

^{vii} In the interview with the President of Phura-lung Sangha Jayanta Dihingia told the authors.

^{viii} In the interview with the President of Phura-lung Sangha Jayanta Dihingia told the authors.

^{ix} In the interview with the President of All Tai Ahom Student Union, BasantaGogoi told the authors.

^x Interview with the Chief Advisor of All Tai Ahom Student Union, Manoj Gogoi told the authors.

^{xi} Interview with Milan Buragohain, former President of All Tai Ahom Student Union

^{xii} The words *jati*, *mati*, *bhetit* translates as community, land and base..

Mapping the Future of AI in Academia: Identifying Critical Uncertainties and Strategic Divergences

Farras Tamir¹, Yos Sunitiyoso² 

^{1,2} School of Business Management, Institut Teknologi Bandung, Bandung, Indonesia

Correspondence: Farras Tamir, School of Business Management, Institut Teknologi Bandung, Bandung, West Java, 40132, Indonesia. E-mail: farras_tamir@sbm-itb.ac.id

Abstract

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education has created a fragmented governance landscape fraught with strategic risks. To remedy this uncertainty, this article proposes an evidence-based scenario planning framework that converts foresight from intuitive speculation to empirical analysis. In this study, we operationalize ‘impact’ and ‘societal uncertainty’ as computational metrics (e.g., discourse volume, sentiment polarization, network centrality) to identify the most critical driving forces shaping academic AI policy. These drivers create the axes of a 2×2 scenario matrix, from which four plausible future worlds emerge that are grounded in observed institutional tensions. The populated scenarios demonstrate significant strategic divergences, ranging from passive acquiescence to external corporate directives to strong, local algorithmic governance within Triple-Helix dynamics. Moreover, the stories highlight the need to redirect institutional resources from physical infrastructure to pedagogical agility, particularly through continuous faculty upskilling and the reconfiguration of process-oriented assessments. By anchoring future narratives in empirical data, this study offers university leaders and policy makers a transparent, contextually adaptive road map. Ultimately, these evidence-based scenarios enable higher education institutions to be the primary regulators of ethical AI use, evolving from technology consumers to proactive institutions.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Scenario Planning, Higher Education, Algorithmic Governance, Societal Uncertainty, Pedagogical Agility

1. Introduction

1.1 The Context and Challenges of Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education

Strategic decision-making by higher education institutions (HEIs) is increasingly influenced by artificial intelligence (AI) (Abulibdeh et al., 2025). Consequently, higher education leaders are faced with a major strategic dilemma. They are under tremendous pressure to innovate and swiftly deploy AI infrastructure to stay competitive in a digital economy (Tarisayi, 2024) but also bear the heavy burden of safeguarding core academic integrity amidst radical uncertainty. The highly fragmented nature of the public discourse adds to this uncertainty. There are stories everywhere on the internet, news portals, and media about what the future holds for AI in higher

education. Not only policymakers and industry experts but also giant technology corporations are driving the digital infrastructure and students with their own perceptions (Chan & Hu, 2023). This fragmentation of external inputs creates a "strategic fog" that obscures clear institutional pathways.

1.2 The Significance and Risks of Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education

HEIs are inherently complex adaptive systems (CAS), multi-layered, interdependent networks, where technological interventions are seldom predictable, linear cause-and-effect outcomes (Priyadarshini & Abhilash, 2022; Ueland et al., 2021). Hence, the "strategic fog" must be addressed. In these fast-moving contexts, the rapid and often unregulated adoption of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) can trigger cascading, unintended consequences. If unmitigated, institutional leaders could become trapped in reactive policy-making cycles, trying to respond to receding disruptions rather than proactively engaging in anticipatory ecosystem management (Ahern, 2025; George & Wooden, 2023)

This uncertainty presents especially high stakes for emerging economies where rapid socio-economic transitions and aggressive technological push can outpace institutional capacity and existing regulatory frameworks (Elbadiansyah et al., 2024). In such data-rich but resource-constrained environments, universities must develop robust implementation frameworks that can interpret fragmented external signals, align diverging stakeholder perceptions, and respond to shifts in policy dynamics (Ahern, 2025; Tanna & Chugh, 2026). Lacking such strategic foresight, HEIs risk misallocating massive financial resources to expensive corporate technological upgrades that fundamentally do not align with internal pedagogical needs, equitable access, or graduate employability (Elbadiansyah et al., 2024; Hughes et al., 2025; Tanna & Chugh, 2026).

Moreover, while GenAI has clear benefits in terms of bespoke learning and operational efficiency, it also poses significant systemic risks concerning algorithmic bias, data privacy, and the erosion of educational quality if not managed responsibly (George & Wooden, 2023; Hughes et al., 2025). The most significant and dangerous risk is systemic epistemological decay, which is evident in the widespread acceptance of GenAI-facilitated academic dishonesty, including sophisticated cheating, fabrication, and ghostwritten work that goes undetected (Bittle & El-Gayar, 2025; Song, 2024; Yusuf et al., 2024). The problem is exacerbated by the absence of formal, institution-wide policies, which leaves students and faculty in perpetual uncertainty regarding the rules (Hughes et al., 2025; Song, 2024). Translating this noisy public discourse into actionable foresight is therefore an urgent strategic imperative enabling HEIs to protect their epistemic integrity, remain socio-economically relevant, and navigate the edge of chaos responsibly (Ahern, 2025; Ueland et al., 2021).

1.3 Strategic Foresight and Methodological Gaps in Higher Education AI Research

Current literature points to the transformative potential of AI for personalized learning and operational efficiency, but also to the continuing divide between aspirational claims and evidence of realized impact (Bates et al., 2020). While existing research has mapped the areas and challenges of AI adoption in HEIs, most of these studies are still descriptive or prescriptive (Sposato, 2025). Most importantly, they don't have a rigorous methodology for strategic foresight, the ability to systematically anticipate and prepare for multiple plausible futures.

Traditional scenario planning, although useful for strategic navigation of uncertainty, is prone to organizational bias using subjective intuition of internal expert panels and does not capture the macro-level dynamics of changing public sentiment. On the other hand, computational techniques for generating future scenarios based on empirical risk drivers derived from large-scale news and social media data have been successfully utilized in other complex domains such as enterprise risk management and smart city planning (Hodorog et al., 2022; Sohrabi et al., 2018). This data-driven foresight approach has been shown to be effective but has not been applied to the context of higher education strategic planning, which constitutes a major methodological gap in the current scholarship.

1.4 Critical Uncertainties and Data-Driven Scenario Development

Hypothesis that a computational analysis of macro-environmental public discourse may empirically identify valid “critical uncertainties” that can be used to construct a robust and objective scenario planning matrix for HEIs. This hypothesis is reflected in the research design, which employs a sequential mixed-method approach. We first computationally extract and synthesize large-scale online news media discourse to map the dominant driving forces of AI in education. Second, we identify two critical uncertainties by evaluating these forces in terms of their strategic impact and societal uncertainty. Finally, these variables are combined to build a 2x2 scenario matrix, which results in four different future worlds. This study aims to shift the educational strategy from subjective intuition to data-driven foresight through this design, offering executable strategic implications for HEI leaders in the next five years.

2. Method

This section proposes the analytical framework for translating macro-environmental uncertainties into actionable strategic foresight. It describes the evolution from computational data mining of public discourse to systematic construction of a data-driven scenario matrix.

2.1 Research Design: A Methodological Bridge

The study employs a pragmatic research paradigm and a multi-stage sequential mixed-methods design. This research proposes a “Methodological Bridge” to lead the research from descriptive analysis to strategic foresight. The research is based on computational macro-environmental analysis as the main input, instead of traditional scenario planning methods mainly based on subjective internal expert panels or focus group discussions. The empirical basis for the construction of a 2x2 scenario matrix is the large-scale data extraction (driving forces and actor networks).

2.2 Data Source and Computational Extraction

The empirical data used to support this study were obtained through an industry collaboration with NoLimit Indonesia that employs a robust online media monitoring pipeline. The first data crawl collected public discourse from Indonesian online news media from 1 January to 30 September 2025. A validated corpus of high-relevance online media articles was established after following a rigorous contextual filtering process specific to Artificial Intelligence and Higher Education.

This dataset was analyzed computationally using three complementary techniques. First, a broad crawl was performed using broad keywords related to Artificial Intelligence and Generative AI, which led to an initial dataset of 304,245 conversations in total. Second, a purposive contextual filtering was performed using keywords highly relevant to the Indonesian higher education context (e.g., Perguruan Tinggi, Kampus, Universitas) to filter out conversations outside the scope, which successfully reduced the pool to 34,127 contextualized conversations. Finally, semantic validation was performed through a rigorous manual validation process to remove algorithmic “noise” where keywords co-occurred without meaningful relationships (e.g., a technology event just happening at a university). This resulted in a final, highly curated dataset of 6,844 valid articles from 1,517 unique media sources.

Recent research highlights social media analysis as a crucial tool for examining public discourse on emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), as these platforms capture real-time public opinions and expectations on a massive scale (Egger & Yu, 2022; Wankhade et al., 2022). To navigate this data, transformer-based methods like BERTopic are increasingly used to uncover hidden themes within short, noisy social media texts (Egger & Yu, 2022; Ocal, 2024; Rao et al., 2024). However, analyzing these texts remains methodologically challenging due to their unstructured nature, linguistic diversity, and the inherent risk of misinterpreting topic models (Egger & Yu, 2022; Laureate et al., 2023).

Across AI-focused studies, public perception is rarely uniformly positive; instead, it reflects a complex mix of attitudes. Users frequently balance optimism about AI's practical benefits with deep concerns regarding ethics, regulation, bias, privacy, and societal impact (Mohanna & Basiouni, 2024; Ocal, 2024; Wei et al., n.d.). For instance, while discussions around ChatGPT in education are generally favorable, they still heavily emphasize academic integrity, capability limitations, and workforce implications (Li et al., 2023). Similarly, conversations about technologies like DeepSeek, deepfakes, and brain-computer interfaces often blend excitement with fears of censorship, legal risks, and transparency issues (Almanna et al., 2025; Patel et al., 2026).

The spread and prominence of these technological narratives are heavily influenced by social network structures. Influential users, key opinion leaders, and active communities play a major role in shaping discourse, either by amplifying specific expectations or spreading misinformation (Landowska et al., 2024; Li et al., 2023; Unlu et al., 2025). Furthermore, online discourse is highly dynamic. Temporal and network analyses reveal that public sentiment and focal topics shift rapidly in response to major tech announcements, public controversies, or broader sociopolitical events (Almanna et al., 2025; Unlu et al., 2025).

Methodologically, combining topic modeling, sentiment analysis, and network analysis yields a much more comprehensive understanding of public discourse than relying on a single approach (Li et al., 2023; Patel et al., 2026). Recent literature also stresses the need for temporal tracking, multimodal sentiment analysis, and context-aware modeling to accurately interpret social media data (Lu et al., 2024). Ultimately, while computational analysis offers profound insights into how society perceives AI integration, it requires careful, ethically informed interpretation to navigate its persistent methodological limitations (Laureate et al., 2023).

2.3 The Data-Driven Scenario Construction Framework

The main innovation of this approach is the conversion of the results of computation into a powerful tool of strategic foresight. The scenario building was supported by a systematic three-step data-driven workflow. Identifying driving forces constituted the first stage, in which the validated topics from the BERT model were used as the initial long list of potential driving forces, including infrastructural acceleration, academic integrity crises, and pedagogical readiness.

Impact and uncertainty were assessed using an empirical approach. In scenario planning, the driving forces are explicitly ranked in terms of impact and uncertainty, usually with the help of qualitative scales or expert judgment (Benford et al., 2018; Bisinella et al., 2016; Derbyshire & Wright, 2017). In digital environments, empirical proxies such as conversation volume, sentiment analysis, and networks are used to assess public attention and polarization (Ilyas & Sharifi, 2025; Raford, 2015). However, due to biases in the data on these platforms, these social media indicators are strictly considered as proxies of societal uncertainty, and not as absolute direct measures (Ilyas & Sharifi, 2025).

Finally, the two driving forces with the largest combination of impact and uncertainty are chosen to create the axes of the 2x2 scenario matrix (Derbyshire & Wright, 2017). The crossing of the two axes produces four different but realistic future scenarios (Adikharisma & Putro, 2025; Derbyshire & Wright, 2017). Descriptions and causal arguments are then added to each quadrant, and a structured narrative develops (Derbyshire & Wright, 2017; Nunes Silva et al., 2017). This can be improved by employing online participatory tools that broaden the inputs and render the resulting scenarios more transparent and evidence-based (Nunes Silva et al., 2017; Raford, 2015).

3. Results: The Scenario Matrix

The computational synthesis of the macro-environmental discourse (PESTEL, SNA and DNA combined) generated two critical uncertainties that serve as the fundamental axes for strategic foresight. This study develops a 2x2 scenario matrix by crossing the high-impact and high-uncertainty variables that describes four possible future environments for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) over the next five years.

3.1 Defining the Strategic Axes

The scenario matrix is structured upon two continuums derived directly from the empirical frictions identified in the public discourse.

3.1.1. Vertical Axis (Y-axis): Algorithmic Governance.

This axis measures the institutional capacity and political will to enforce the ethical guardrails and maintain academic autonomy in the face of aggressive technological integration.

- 1.) *Robust Governance (Upper Spectrum)*. Here HEIs have strong academic integrity policies, demand transparency from corporate providers on data sovereignty, and have proactive ethical committees overseeing AI usage.
- 2.) *Epistemological Decay (Lower Spectrum)*. An environment steeped in algorithmic abuse. In this state, HEIs succumb to corporate capture, becoming passive consumers of technology while systemic academic fraud (e.g., generative AI-assisted plagiarism, admission manipulation, and deepfakes) becomes normalized and unregulated.

3.1.2. Horizontal Axis (X-axis): Pedagogical Agility

This axis evaluates the preparedness of the internal human capital and the flexibility of the institution to respond to the technological mandate from the outside.

- 1.) *High Agility (Right Spectrum)*. A high level of internal capacity where faculty members are constantly upskilled and curricula dynamically aligned with the requirements of the automated economy. This mode involves embedding AI into higher-order thinking assessments and active learning.
- 2.) *Capability Mismatch (Left Spectrum)*. A state of serious internal deficit. Aging/resistant faculty demographic; critical shortage of specialized technology instructors; outdated curriculum. This leads to the graduation of batches of skills that are not at all in tune with real industrial needs.

3.2. The Four Plausible Futures

The intersection of the two major uncertainties produces four different scenarios. Each scenario represents a different, but empirically plausible, operating environment for Indonesian HEIs in terms of structure over the next five years, as shown in Figure 1.

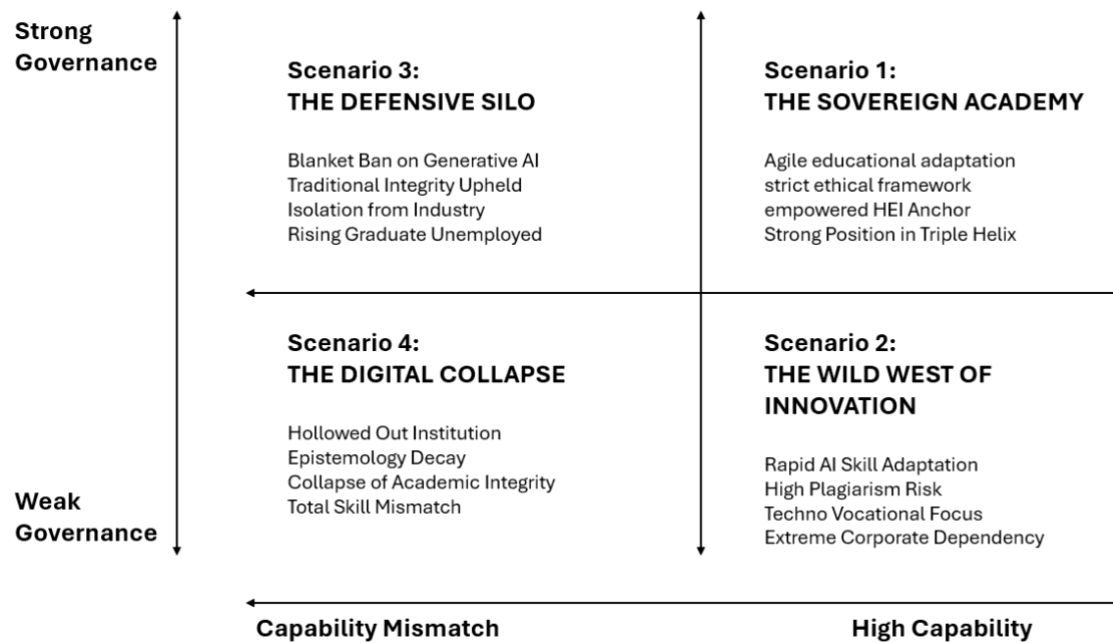


Figure 1 : A 2x2 Scenario Planning Matrix Illustrating the Driving Forces and Plausible Futures of AI in Indonesian Higher Education:

3.2.1. Scenario 1: The Sovereign Academy (Robust Governance + High Agility)

In this ideal future, HEIs are successful in balancing the external “*Acceleration Mandate*” with rigorous internal ethical oversight. University leaders assert their collective bargaining power rather than being passive consumers in the Triple-Helix network. They deploy large corporate investments and localized AI models (e.g., *Sahabat-AI*) on their own terms, insisting on strict data sovereignty and bespoke institutional guardrails from multinational tech providers.

Internally the capability mismatch is now gone. Major resources have been diverted from hardware acquisition to holistic faculty upskilling programs (e.g. *ElevAlte initiative*). Faculty are very nimble. They don’t rely on rote memorization assessments that generative AI can easily work around. Instead, curricula are actively reconstructed to include AI as a cognitive partner in higher-order critical thinking and complex problem-solving exercises.

And so, the academic integrity. Embedding ethical policies into the curriculum and culture of the institution can effectively prevent the normalization of academic fraud and universities produce highly competitive, digitally literate graduates able to meet the demands of the global automated economy and preserve the moral authority and epistemological credibility that mark higher education.

3.2.2. Scenario 2: The Wild West of Innovation (Epistemological Decay + High Agility)

This is what happens when the “*Acceleration Mandate*” completely overrides institutions. Aggressive government developmental goals and massive corporate funding lead HEIs to rapidly update their curricula and technology infrastructure. Faculty and students demonstrate great pedagogical agility, acquiring considerable expertise in the use of advanced generative AI tools for research, coding, and content creation. Universities become successful and highly efficient pipelines into the digital economy.

But rapid agility is at the grave cost of institutional governance and academic integrity. Epistemological decay is systemic when strict localized ethical frameworks and algorithmic oversight are absent. The early warning signs in public conversation, such as the normalization of generative AI for contract cheating, automated assignment generation, and sophisticated fraud via deepfakes, metastasize into daily operational realities.

In this scenario, the corporate capture of universities is occurring because the institutional leaders failed to stand up to their position in the triple-helix network. They are mostly vocational training centers, strongly determined by the agendas of multinational tech companies, completely bypassing the ethical cultivation of their students. The intrinsic value, moral authority and epistemological credibility of the university degree are fundamentally devalued, despite the high-demand technical skills of graduating cohorts. It's a Wild West environment where technological capability thrives at the expense of academic truth and integrity for the sake of speed and market alignment.

3.2.3. Scenario 3: The Defensive Silo (Rigid Governance + Capability Mismatch)

This is the result of the heavily polarized fears about “Algorithmic Misuse,” such as the creation of political deepfakes and large-scale admissions fraud, that elicit a very conservative, reactive position from the HEI administration. Universities embrace draconian algorithmic governance regimes that prioritize risk aversion and institutional reputation above all else. These range from outright bans on generative AI tools, to widespread use of AI-detection surveillance software, to onerous bureaucratic requirements for technology integration.

But this rigid governance comes with the dire “Capability Mismatch” in the human capital of the institution. The internal pedagogical agility does not change. The faculty lacks the skills or institutional support to effectively incorporate AI into curriculum design, suffering from the “Shortage of Specialized Technology Lecturers.” Instead of changing assessments to evaluate higher-order critical thinking skills in an AI age, educators resort to old-school, surveillance-heavy assessment practices to maintain control.

Consequently, the university turns into a “Defensive Silo.” It guards traditional academic integrity and sidesteps the political and legal risks of algorithmic manipulation. Yet, it becomes disconnected from the Triple-Helix ecosystem. Industry partners, frustrated by the universities’ resistance to the overarching “Acceleration Mandate,” begin to bypass the formal HEIs altogether, recruiting talent instead from independent, highly agile tech boot camps. The PESTEL economic data empirically demonstrates the ultimate tragedy of this scenario: it directly worsens the “Rising Unemployment Among Computer Science Graduates” as students exit the university with ethical but technologically obsolete skill sets that are completely mismatched with the rapid requirements of the digital economy.

3.2.4. Scenario 4: The Digital Collapse (Epistemological Decay + Capability Mismatch)

This is the absolute worst-case operating environment, where the cumulative impact of external systemic pressures completely overwhelms internal institutional capacity. In response to the “Acceleration Mandate” of government and corporate stakeholders, HEIs rush to purchase expensive AI infrastructure (e.g., cloud services, commercial language models) to appear technologically modernized. However, the institution is severely hamstrung by an acute “Capability Mismatch” where it lacks the pedagogical human capital to operationalize these tools. Faculty members are not trained or supported to change how they teach. The result is that the core curriculum is completely out of touch with the realities of the digital economy.

This stasis is compounded by the complete absence of algorithmic governance. Students rely too much on unregulated generative AI tools to subvert obsolete, rote-memorization assignments without proactive ethical guardrails or updated assessment designs. This unregulated environment is a breeding ground for systemic epistemological decay, where academic fraud is a common everyday reality.

In the future, universities will be hollow administrative shells. They are financially depleted by constant subscriptions to corporate technologies, marginalized in the Triple-Helix network and graduating cohorts that are ethically ungrounded and practically incompetent. In the end, these institutions lose all epistemological credibility and socioeconomic relevance and face the real threat of institutional collapse.

3.3. Ancillary Analyses

Beyond our primary methods (BERT Topic Modeling, SNA, and DNA), we conducted several exploratory and subgroup analyses to gain a deeper understanding of the data and verify the robustness of our findings.

First, we explored the timeline of the Online News Media (ONM) dataset to see if shifts in public sentiment are aligned with major external events, such as new national policy announcements or major AI product releases from tech companies. We also ran a subgroup analysis to compare the narratives of different actor clusters. This helped us understand, for example, how the sentiments of university leaders might differ from those of government bodies or corporate infrastructure providers.

To ensure these additional analyses did not introduce computational or statistical errors, we performed sensitivity checks on our algorithms. For the BERT sentiment analysis, we tested various confidence thresholds to make sure our classifications (positive, negative, and neutral) remained stable, which helped us minimize false-positive tagging. Similarly, for the SNA and DNA, we adjusted the clustering parameters and minimum connection thresholds. We wanted to be certain that the Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) and communities we identified were truly significant, rather than just random outputs of a specific algorithmic setting.

Because these steps were designed purely as robustness checks rather than new inferential hypothesis tests, they did not inflate our statistical error rates. To keep the main text focused, we have archived all detailed parameters, temporal matrices, and extra visualizations from these exploratory analyses in the supplemental online appendix.

3.4. Participant Flow

As this study employs a computational analysis of digital discourse, traditional participant flow metrics—such as recruitment, cross-over, and attrition rates typically found in experimental designs—are not applicable. All data utilized in this research were retrieved exclusively from publicly accessible Online News Media (ONM). No social media data, private records, personally identifiable information (PII), or sensitive human subject data were extracted, stored, or analyzed. Consequently, this research does not involve human participants in an experimental or clinical capacity. The dataset comprises purely public news discourse, ensuring strict adherence to standard ethical guidelines for internet-based research and text mining. Because the study relies entirely on open-source, public ONM data and involves no direct intervention or interaction with individuals, it does not violate any privacy protocols and is exempt from Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.

4. Discussion

4.1. Evaluation of Findings and Theoretical Contextualization

The main working hypothesis of this study was that it is possible to identify valid “critical uncertainties” through computational analysis of macro-environmental public discourse, using massive online news media data, to build a robust scenario planning matrix for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The findings of this study strongly support this proposition. This research empirically substantiates big data analytics as a highly viable, objective proxy for strategic foresight by successfully extracting, synthesizing and intersecting the continuums of Algorithmic Governance and Pedagogical Agility from a rigorously validated corpus of 6844 articles. As a result, the study succeeds in changing the methodology paradigm of scenario planning in educational governance from

subjective internal expert intuition (which is often subject to institutional blind spots) to an evidence-based, data-driven prognostic approach.

The results provide an important recontextualization of current literature on AI in higher education. Prior studies have predominantly framed AI adoption as either small-scale interventions focused on specific tools with minimal internal administrative changes or as technology adoption models (Bates et al., 2020; Ojha, 2024). However, our macro-environmental findings contradict this insular view and show that the integration of AI is in essence a systemic disruption of the whole ecosystem. This research's structural network analysis (SNA) indicates that HEIs are no longer the isolated "ivory towers" they once were but are increasingly embedded and often marginalized within a highly centralized "Triple-Helix" ecology dominated by aggressive governmental acceleration mandates and multinational corporate infrastructure providers.

Furthermore, the development of scenarios like "The Wild West of Innovation" theoretically corroborates and greatly extends the socio-pedagogical issues posed by Chan & Hu (2023) and Sposato (2025). While these scholars cautioned against the normalization of generative AI in student practices, our 2x2 matrix empirically illustrates the very systemic condition through which these localized warnings metastasize into institutional crises. The matrix shows that technological capability, when not bound by strict algorithmic governance, does not promote educational progress, but rather, it inevitably promotes epistemological decay. By synthesizing these disparate streams of literature into a single prognostic matrix, this study confirms that the real value of AI in higher education is not in the technology itself but entirely dependent on institutional governance and human capital readiness.

4.2. Strategic Implications for Ecosystem Management

The theoretical derivation of the four scenarios takes on practical importance when it is used as a diagnostic and navigational tool for institutional leadership. The empirical evidence suggests that the current trajectory of many Indonesian HEIs characterized by an over-reliance on corporate technological investments and an acute lag in pedagogical upskilling, brings them perilously close to the "Digital Collapse" or "The Wild West of Innovation." To intentionally veer away from these dystopian outcomes and towards the most desirable "Sovereign Academy" scenario, institutional leaders need to change their strategic stance from reactive technology acquisition to proactive ecosystem management. According to the foresight matrix, three main strategic interventions are appropriate.

First, HEIs must re-negotiate their position in the Triple-Helix dynamics. Structural network analysis finds universities marginalized as passive 'incubation anchors' responding to external corporate and government mandates. This marginalization is often accompanied by coercive, normative and mimetic pressures that drive institutions towards fragmented policymaking instead of aligning technology with their core academic missions (Humble, 2025). University leaders must use their collective bargaining power to realize strong algorithmic governance (up the Y-axis), and to dodge the strategic risks of absent evaluation frameworks (Sposato, 2025). HEIs should eschew off-the-shelf, unregulated commercial solutions from multinational infrastructure providers and instead demand transparent data sovereignty, bespoke ethical guardrails and the development of local AI models (e.g., by leveraging national initiatives such as Sahabat-AI). Effective AI governance is not a one-size-fits-all but a contextually adaptive approach (Humble, 2025; Parker et al., 2025). As such, universities need to be not only consumers of technology but also the key regulators of the ethical application of this technology in the academic space, with strict oversight, transparency, and protection of academic integrity and faculty autonomy (An et al., 2025; Azevedo et al., 2025; Güneş & Kaban, 2025).

Second, institutions need to rethink academic integrity beyond the prohibition paradigm. The "Rigid Fortress" scenario is empirical evidence that blanket prohibitions on AI to counter epistemological decay are a fundamentally flawed strategy that will inevitably result in capability mismatch and graduated obsolescence. So, governance should change from detection and surveillance to smooth integration. HEIs must adopt proactive algorithmic governance policies. In practice, this means establishing institutional AI Ethics Committees to oversee curriculum design and research protocols and requiring transparent "AI-disclosure rubrics" for student

assignments. By formalizing the use of generative AI as a cognitive partner and when it can be used, universities can limit the black-market use of AI for academic fraud.

Third, universities must prioritize continuous, tailored investment in faculty capabilities over rapid, hardware-led AI adoption. The educational value of emerging AI tools relies heavily on instructors possessing the digital literacy, pedagogical knowledge, and ethical competence to implement them effectively (An et al., 2025; Burneo-Arteaga et al., 2025; El-Banna et al., 2025; Kohnke et al., 2023; Mah & Groß, 2024). Consequently, professional development must explicitly target assessment redesign. Generative AI has exposed the severe vulnerabilities of traditional, memorization-heavy, and output-based exams, making them exceptionally easy to circumvent (Kofinas et al., 2025; Lu et al., 2024; Ncube et al., 2026). However, evidence suggests that simply shifting to "authentic" assessments is not enough to prevent AI misuse (Kofinas et al., 2025). Instead, a more robust pedagogical approach requires transitioning to process-oriented, staged, and evaluative assessments that make student reasoning transparent (Kofinas et al., 2025; Ncube et al., 2026). By requiring students to critique, verify, and justify AI-generated material—often supported by reflective logs and oral defenses—educators can effectively evaluate higher-order critical thinking, judgment, and ethical reasoning rather than rote recall (Al-Ali, 2025; Francis et al., 2025; Kickbusch et al., 2025; Lubbe et al., 2025; Ncube et al., 2026).

4.3. Limitations, Generalizability, and Unresolved Problems

The study, while contributing methodologically to educational strategic foresight, has several limitations that should be openly acknowledged to accurately contextualize the findings.

A significant limitation regarding internal validity is the inherent bias when using online news media as a proxy of institutional reality. The accessed sample is inherently reflective of public perception, political developmental mandates, and media sensationalism (e.g., magnifying discrete events such as admission fraud or political deepfakes). Thus, this macro-discourse may not fully capture the nuanced, day-to-day realities of practice taking place in specific university classrooms.

Moreover, although the BERT-based topic modeling and sentiment analysis yield a solid quantitative clustering, the intrinsic limitations of computational natural language processing (NLP) algorithms in recognizing human sarcasm, irony, or deep academic critique may add a slight bias to the semantic categorization.

Secondly, regarding the external validity and generalizability, the results of this study are solidly rooted in the Indonesian socio-political context. The scenarios generated are heavily influenced by the unique characteristics of Indonesia: a large, highly digitally active youth population (demographic dividend) and aggressive state-driven technological acceleration mandates. Thus, although the methodological framework (media data for scenario planning) is very flexible and universally applicable, specific scenarios and power dynamics (e.g., the Triple-Helix structure) may be less generalizable to higher education systems in countries with different demographic compositions or significantly more stringent pre-existing AI regulations, such as the European Union with the EU AI Act.

Finally, these limitations give rise to open problems that deserve critical future research. The study was able to map macro-level plausible futures from an external viewpoint. But the internal micro-level operationalization of these scenarios has not been tested. Future studies should use qualitative, internal institutional data (e.g., in-depth faculty interviews, student focus groups, localized campus policy document analysis) to test the fidelity of these macro-scenarios against actual campus-level interventions. Further, future research should examine the movement of a university in the proposed 2x2 matrix, depending on institutional characteristics (e.g., public versus private funding, research-intensive versus vocational focus).

5. Conclusion

The rapid uptake of Artificial Intelligence in higher education has created a pervasive “strategic fog,” compelling institutional leaders to make vital, long-term decisions in the face of radical uncertainty and shifting macro-environmental pressures. This study has addressed this challenge by developing a data-driven strategic foresight framework, effectively shifting the methodological paradigm of scenario planning from subjective expert intuition to empirical, large-scale public discourse analysis. This research computationally synthesized 6,844 validated online media articles in the Indonesian context and identified two main critical uncertainties: Algorithmic Governance and Pedagogical Agility.

These uncertainties were combined to form a 2x2 matrix, which outlined four possible futures: The Sovereign Academy, The Wild West of Innovation, The Defensive Silo and The Digital Collapse. The findings empirically reinforce that the ultimate value of AI in higher education is not embedded in the technology infrastructure itself, but is totally contingent on proactive institutional governance and human capital readiness. In conclusion, this foresight framework provides HEI decision-makers with a strong and evidence-based navigational tool to evolve from reactive technology consumers to proactive ecosystem managers, allowing them to formulate adaptive policies, mitigate systemic ethical risks and protect academic integrity in the digital age.

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Informed Consent Statement / Ethics Approval: Not applicable. This study exclusively utilized publicly available online media data and did not involve direct interventions with human subjects.

Data Availability Statement: The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies: During the preparation of this work, the authors utilized Gemini 3.1 Pro and Consensus AI. Specifically, Gemini 3.1 Pro was used to assist in structuring the manuscript, improving clarity and grammar, and ensuring formatting compliance, as well as to aid in the development of computational analysis tools and the preliminary interpretation of the subsequent results. An example of the input prompts utilized for Gemini is: “Check this paper grammar, flow, and formating is following Asian Institute of Research Guideline, here are the guideline” Furthermore, Consensus AI was employed to assist in literature discovery and in identifying relevant academic papers aligned with the analytical requirements of this study. After using these tools and services, the authors thoroughly reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the final content of the publication.

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Media and Public Opinion in Foreign Policy Making in Bangladesh

Anjali Yogi¹

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Delhi, India

Abstract

The influence of the media in determining public opinion and informing foreign policy-making processes in Bangladesh is considerable. The media impacts decision-making indirectly, while also acting as a forum for information and public discussion, which affects foreign policy formulation and implementation. This study analyzes the nature of the relationship between media, public opinion, and foreign policy in Bangladesh through analyses of historical developments, theoretical concepts, and current practices. The study draws attention to the media's role in Bangladesh's Liberation War, national and international media's contributions, the development of the country's media landscape, and the rise of digital journalism and social media. Informed by insights from the CNN Effect, Al Jazeera Effect, and soft power, the study identifies the media's construction of narratives that influence public perceptions of Bangladesh's bilateral relations with India, China, Pakistan, and other regional actors. The paper further explores the media's contributions to track-two diplomacy, public diplomacy, and the development of Bangladesh's international image. It contends that media acts as a crucial middleman between policymakers and citizens, as it raises foreign policy awareness, fosters debates, and sways the degree of public backing of such diplomatic efforts. Despite issues with press freedom, regulation, and digital misinformation, media remains an essential constituent of Bangladesh's foreign policy context and a key tool in advancing national interests amid an ever-connected world.

Keywords: Media, Public Opinion, Foreign Policy, Bangladesh, CNN Effect, Al Jazeera Effect, Soft Power, Public Diplomacy, Digital Media, Foreign Policy Decision-Making, Bilateral Relations, Track-Two Diplomacy, International Image, Media Activism, Bangladesh Foreign Relations.

1. Introduction

The media has an indirect impact on foreign policymaking. The trends of communication and reporting on foreign affairs influence Bangladesh's foreign policymaking in twofold ways, by providing an environment and an input source for decision-making. Governments need to interact with public media houses to shape what people know and believe about foreign policies. It is important for policymakers to have agreement about the strategies and core objectives of external engagement to ensure policy credibility for any country. Terms such as "Al Jazeera Effect," introduced by Philip Seib, have discussed new media, which is about widespread internet and satellite television and its impact on policymaking. Seib's idea of a virtual state is also relevant, through which diverse communities achieve cohesion on the internet on the international political map. These institutions have also led to the fostering of virtual sovereignty. Such extensions of the borders have led to the development of common identity among diverse religious and ethnic communities (Arnold, 2011). The phenomenon of the 24-hour media CNN effect is

also about ensuring a regular, instant flow of information and news that influences government decision-making.

The role of Media had started since the time of Independence only, the international mass media had played an necessary role in Bangladesh's War of Independence, the Guardian, Daily Mirror, *The London Times*, *The Sunday Times*, and the *Daily Telegraph*, the Sunday Observer, had tried to expedite cooperation among the international community for the cause of freedom and to support Bangladesh in the war of Independence. One of the concerns for Bangladesh, which had raised awareness about the war effort, was organized in New York in August 1971 by Pandit Ravi Shankar and George Harrison was one such instance. Pandit Ravi Shankar opined In one day, the whole world knew the name of Bangladesh. Bangladesh media has been an important player for the promotion of liberty and democracy. The sacrifices of the brave people of Bangladesh were told to the world about the tribulations which people were facing under the armed forces of Pakistan under the military administration. It was the relevance of the Journalists in the Independence War that on March 25, 1971, on the night the military had launched its genocide campaign. The Pakistani military was in Hotel Intercontinental, known as Rupashi Bangla, presently in Dhaka. The media has helped leaders get re-elected and bring down governments. In the new age of Mediaism, being a true transnational actor, the media has promoted and hindered the aims and policies of national leaders. The importance of garnering domestic support for foreign policy is recognized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. One of the important tasks is handling domestic media and building foreign policy consensus in the news circles of the country. The Foreign Affairs Ministry depends to a greater degree on the media to report and explain foreign policy developments. At one level, the government exercises some pressure on the media professionals to provide or deny access, while the reporters and correspondents, through their reportage and commentary, are able to nudge policy in certain directions. This process has its roots in the colonial practices when the foreign reporters, also known as war correspondents, were key elements in manufacturing consent for the policies of the colonial power.

2. Media Profile in Bangladesh

The media covers newspapers, television, YouTube channels, and other journals for the purpose of this thesis. In the subcontinent of South Asia, Kanganlal Harinath Majumdar could be called the first investigative reporter with the publication of *Gram —Barta Prokashita*, which was a Bangla weekly journal. This weekly aimed to reveal the veiled tyranny of those in power and generate public awareness about it. The birth of Bangla language newspapers was led by English newspapers but had different goals. In Calcutta, the English newspapers were considered a means of entertainment and profit. The Bangla newspapers, at the same time, were for the privileged class and for cultural enhancement. The *Gram Barta Prokashika* was dealing with philosophy, poetry, and hard news, along with defense and security issues. The Bangla-speaking population of Pakistan was affected due to East Pakistan's Language Movement in 1952, which had helped enhance the consciousness of the people.

Other Bangla newspapers, such as *Dainik Sangbad* and *The Azad*, were covering the news about the killing of youth activists at Dhaka University. These articles were written with evocative language describing the risks and threats posed by the Pakistani occupation forces. One of the newspapers, *Itfaq*, was first published in 1953 under Manik Miah's leadership, which popularized the nationalist movement. Apart from it, the fourth estate does play a role in mediating conflict between the legislative and executive branches of Bangladesh. Younger members of the subcommittee chairmen also seek out opinions for proposals about conflicting viewpoints. The chairmen of the standing committee on Foreign Affairs have access to information and intelligence from the government of Bangladesh. All the sides of a conflict in the international arena are being visited by the countries involved, who personally investigate all sides of a conflict in the international arena. Reporters have extensive linkages with the members of the committee. Nahim Razzak, the youngest Member of Parliament in Bangladesh, keeps frequent media interactions, such as being part of *Young Bangla Live*, *Meet the Leader*, and other interaction platforms. The incidents of violence have affected not only the local public opinion about the status of minorities but also the international reputation of the country. One such incident is when in 2012 there was a violent attack on Buddhist monasteries, shrines, and houses of the Buddhist minority in Ramu Upazila in Cox Bazar District by the local population. These incidents led to straining of Bangladesh's relations with major Buddhist countries, i.e., China, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar. Bengali dailies such as *Samakal*, *Prothom Alo* and English ones like *The Daily Star*, *Dainik Karatoa*, *Dainik Puranchal*, and *Dainik Purbokone* try to compete with broadcasters and social media

portals for web presence. Besides, the ABC Radio, Mediaworld Limited: —The Daily Star, Beximco Media Limited: The Independent (English daily) and Independent Television, Jamuna Group Limited: Jugantor (Bengali daily) and Jamuna TV, Times Media Limited: Daily Samokal (Bengali daily) and Chhanel24 (24-hour television news station), Ittefaq Group of Publications Limited: Daily Ittefaq (the oldest Bengali) are other major groups. There are more than 500 news sites and web portals functioning in Bangladesh. The Dhaka Tribune, Ekushey Television, and ETV have brought news events to the homes of people. As per the Media Landscapes report, the National Media Survey (NMS)-2018, conducted by Kantar MRB Bangladesh, says that 66 lakh people read a paper daily. With the presence of online technology and as per the movement against communal riots of 1964, the mass movement of 1969, the Freedom House report, Freedom on the Net 2020, and the presence of 4G technology have made YouTube content in the Bengali language more popular. The largest body of reporters of Dhaka-based newspapers is Dhaka Reporters Unity (DRU). It is the largest body of Dhaka-based newspapers, television and radio, online portals, and news agencies, with 300 members. Apart from it, the *Bangladesh Parliament Journalists' Association*, *Dhaka Sub-Editors Council*, *Bangladesh Photo Journalists Association*, and *Television* also work to protect the interests of their members. Apart from it, *Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS)*, *News of Bangladesh (UNB)*, *Bdnews24.com*, and *Bangladeshnews20.com* are other major websites. International organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, USAID, UNDP, Fojo, Internews, Bangladesh Telecom Regulatory Commission (BTRC) have also led the internet penetration rate to reach 87.79 million. E-commerce is also associated with online websites and is regulated by institutes such as —*e-commerce association of Bangladesh (eCAP)*. In one of the projects, WPFDF cooperation is part of the South Asia Cross-Border Journalism project to bring together journalists from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Nepal. In another area of Media activism, the *International Press Institute (IPI)*, which is for cross-border cooperation and is a global network of editors, leading journalists, media executives, and advocates for press freedom, has launched projects to highlight attacks on journalists in South Asia. The four dailies, Dainik Azad, The Pakistan Observer, Dainik Sangbad, and Dainik Ittefaq, were the pioneers of the national press system.

3. The Theoretical Framework: Role of Media in Foreign Policy Decision Making

The concept of soft power, understood as the cultural and social capital which a country possesses globally, entails the role of media and public opinion. The media is one agency capable of co-opting the interests of other nations. Nations in developing transitional countries, including Bangladesh, establish soft power by establishing media outlets, brands, and news houses, having foreign policy experts, and encouraging research on foreign policy issues, more importantly in transitional countries³⁰². The media helps in collecting data required to make informed decisions, which is also used by parliamentarians and bureaucrats. The ‘CNN Effect debate’ popularized after Operation Restore Hope in Somalia to feed starving people after the media reports of mass starvation there, had led editorials to circulate that American foreign policy was driven by Media news stories. Robert Kurtz argues that media access to technology, which was earlier with governments, has changed the nature of information and associated policy debate, and is also analyzed by Bernard Cohen's *The Press and Foreign Policy*. Bangladesh is known to have two media audiences in Dhaka and urban centers, which refer to television as their preferred source of news. Newspaper readability is first in Bangladesh, yet online media play a secondary role for both, with social media sites. The newspapers in Bangladesh are financed by Beximco, Globe, Karnaphuli, Transcom, Jamuna, Ha-meen, Bashundara, and Gemcon Group³⁰⁶. The development of think tanks confirms Dhaka centrism of foreign policy, mostly located such as Bangladesh Institute of BRAC institute, Department of International Relations, Dhaka University, Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, American Institute of Bangladesh Studies, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Institute of Bangladesh Studies, International Centre for Climate Change and Development, Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies, Institute of Bangladesh Studies.

4. An Analysis of Media's Role and Bilateral Relations of Bangladesh

Dev Nath Pathak, Chayanika Priyam and Ratan Kumar Roy have explored internet activism and its impact on politics with regard to India and Bangladesh relations. Bangladesh stands at 144th place in the Press Freedom Index given by —Reporters without Borders. The relationship between journalists and the Bangladesh Government has also not been easy-going, since independence in 1971. Bangladesh's new broadcasting policy

was implemented in 2014 for regulating the media. Yet, the low rate of Internet access, which is 9.6 percent compared to South Asian countries (ITU, 2015), also affects the media's role. Within the nation, due to the increase in cyber communities, print media is shifting toward online internet-based journalism. It helps in making the reach available to all. It is the mushrooming of web-based news and the role of corporate print and television media outlets because of which their own web versions are created, which include various web portals and news sites in Bangladesh. Haq (2014a) has outlined four categories of online news practices: small-scale news media that are independent, print media that have corporate investment, and citizen journalism using blog sites and social media.

The growth of telecommunications and ICT in Bangladesh has led to convergence of cyberspace and media, which includes Congress and other official elites. The media has played a crucial role in diffusing the tension between the two countries on different issues. One of them is the Nassau accord reached between the Ershad regime and Indira Gandhi for a resolution of the Farakka dispute. It got an effusive media response in Bangladesh. The media has also been influential in putting light on the issues of amplifying movement of people with entry/exit at checkpoints at Ghojadanga (West Bengal) and Akhaura (Tripura). The media has been emphasizing cooperation against radical and extremist groups, organized crime, terrorists, fake currency, and smuggling through the mechanism of bilateral *Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements*. The issues about Integrated Check Posts for more cooperation in the area for withdrawing port restrictions through Akhaura-Agartala port, and increasing the number of Border Haats, have been influenced by media activism. Other than that, dialogue events such as those by Conflict, Law and Development have influenced the role of media. Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Riva Ganguly Das has also, on various occasions, talked about enhancing linkages between the media of India and Bangladesh. If we scrutinize Bangladesh-China Relations and the role of media, one of the major issues at the heart of Media activism is that of the Rohingya. Bangladeshi Media has given its endorsement to the regional arrangement of Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar (BCIM). The media houses have noted the relevance of the arrangement. It is through the help of media outlets that it has been made clear by the Government of Bangladesh that the deep seaport in Chittagong is not considered a part of the String of Pearls. It is not part of the larger concern of China to encircle Bangladesh. Prime Minister assured the public through the media that China can benefit from using the deep seaport, while all neighboring countries can also use it (Chowdhury, 2010). In the context of BRI, Bangladesh, being the neighboring country of China, has received cash from China for infrastructure projects since 2016. The media have widely covered all the agreements for loans and investments, and Bangladesh is the second-largest recipient (after Pakistan) of Chinese loans under BRI in South Asia. Thus, the media has been influential in shaping public opinion about the 2,800-km Bangladesh- China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC), which is to link Kunming in China with Kolkata in India via Mandalay and Dhaka. Media houses in Bangladesh have been apprehensive about the extent of China's ability to fulfill Bangladesh's expectations on the Rohingya issue (Bhattacharjee, 2018). Efforts such as bringing together Journalists of both countries through the China-Bangladesh Media Dialogue and Chinese news agencies' efforts to bring together editors are a few of the positive futuristic initiatives. Media and civil societies in Bangladesh are resentful against China for not pressurizing Myanmar for the repatriation of Rohingya refugees. The media in Bangladesh are vocal in expressing disappointment about India for not doing enough to resolve the Rohingya crisis. It is also to be noted that any small gesture of connection by China is highlighted widely in Bangladesh media. The perception of China created by the media as non-interfering in the country's domestic affairs has favored shaping public support for the relationship. The newspapers are run with themes of China and India and their strategic concerns and have major columns on foreign policy issues. Press coverage speeds up the decision-making process, and negative coverage pushes decision-making up the bureaucracy to a higher level of officials.

To analyze the Bangladesh-Pakistan Relations, the print media from East Pakistan was vocal in favor of emancipation of the Bangalis since the Awami League in March 1971, which had launched a non-cooperation movement. The newspapers from East Pakistan, supported by Pakistan Press Trust, favored the line of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. These newspapers were *Dainik Ittefaq*, *the people*, and *Sangbad*. The offices of '*Dainik Pakistan*', '*Pakistan Observer*', '*Dainik Purbodesh*', and '*Morning News*' were involved in the movement's activities.

Periodicals and weeklies such as *Swaraj*, *Banglar Bani*, which were the voice of the resistance movement, along with these other newspapers, were closed down. *Daily Ittefaq* was associated with the democratic struggles of the Bangalis, and the daily *Sangbad* was also one of the burnt ones. It is said that the first visible signs of tension

between Dhaka and Islamabad were in the media discourse.

5. Track Two Diplomacy in Bangladesh, Media & Foreign Policy Making

For India-Bangladesh relations, 35% of foreign patients are covered by Bangladesh, and more than 50% of the total revenue is covered from medical tourism. It is the largest contributor to medical and health tourism of India. Opening up of Bangladeshi-owned IGlobal University in the United States, International Health Tourism and Services Expo, organization of 11th Meditex Bangladesh, and 4th Bangladesh Clinical Lab Expo, such as organized by CEMS Global at Bashundhara International Center, are examples of track two diplomacy. Bangladesh's healthcare system does face challenges from global medical tourism and from neighboring countries such as India, Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia. Enhancing bilateral cooperation in emerging sectors can also be a major challenge for foreign policy.

Such that the Government can allow for cross-border educational institutes in Bangladesh and joint ventures such as with the USA, Australia, Canada, the UK, and Japan on the lines of an institute such as The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), which works with various activities in the socio-cultural field, Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration (ADFM) to deal with people's movement and displacement in the region; other such incidents, such as the dialogue by the Center for Policy Development in 2015, have helped address trafficking, smuggling, and related exploitation, which are present in Cox's Bazar. The India- Bangladesh dialogues, which were to facilitate the Farakka Barrage dispute resolution between Bangladesh and India, led to the signing of the Ganges Water Treaty. One of the negotiators for the Ganges treaty, Salman Haider, acknowledged the role of track two groups in getting the problem solved. It was in June 1996 when Indian and Pakistani members of the non-governmental observer team in Bangladesh issued the 'Dhaka Statement', which supported an unconditional dialogue between New Delhi and Bangladesh. It has been suggested to boost people-to-people exchanges by harmonizing education standards at various SAARC Summit meetings³²⁶. There are also mechanisms to have multi-country dialogue, including Bhutan and China. One such mechanism is about the Basin of the Brahmaputra River from riparian countries, to consolidate political willingness among people to have a joint mechanism for sound basin management. It is also known as Track 1.5. The successful role of these mechanisms is visible in joint research proposals developed by research organizations in India, China, and Bangladesh, which have conducted assessments for the river stretch and were an important input to policy development.

At the time, there were examples of not taking Media voices into account; one of the examples was signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) agreement in 2000, which was a decision taken completely by government officials. Bangladeshi newspapers' columns had run debates in Dhaka Tribune about India rejecting the CTBT, through which it was being proposed. The Bangladeshi stand was popularized in the newspapers that Bangladesh can only be a nuclear weapon power and not as a non- weapon state.

6. Representation of Bangladesh in International Media

There is a dissimilar opinion among the people about Bangladesh; one section of the media considers it to be excluded and less focused because of being a moderate Muslim, while the media tend to cover conflict-ridden Muslim countries. International media has appreciated Bangladesh for having women as prime ministers for 29 years, while also being criticized for violence against women. Bangladesh has also received journalistic attention from global media due to it being most vulnerable due to global warming. The wide coverage and reports on mass migration, garment collapse, and climate change have been brought to the frontline of Western media³²⁷. One section of the media points out the limited coverage given to the issues of disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, maritime intelligence, and port reconstruction. Bangladesh is represented in the media as a country in need of constant support of financial aid. Prominent issues such as poverty and overpopulation are highlighted in the developed nation's media. The other major issue covered is Bangladesh's human rights concerns, due to which Bangladesh is portrayed in a negative light by the international media. The media has also given coverage to issues such as election observation by the Forum of Election Management Bodies of South Asia (FEMBoSA) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and countries such as Japan, Germany, Spain, the US, and the EU were invited to observe elections. Bangladesh's dominant values found in the literature of Tagore, Nazrul, and

Jashimuddin are significant sources of soft power, as shown by the Bangladesh Diaspora. A few instances of such practice are the establishment of the Bangabandhu Chair at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Bangkok, Bangladesh Bhavan at Visva-Bharati University, and it is also considered that allowing Rohingya refugees into its territory promoted Bangladesh as a peace-loving country, even despite having its own weak economic condition (Islam, Daily Star). Words such as dark spots to explain poor human rights records are being used in international media. Bangladeshi human rights activists were arrested in cases which represent attacks on the identity of Bangladesh (NYT, 2013).

The international media reports are focused on journalists and activists. Bangladesh's dominant values found in the literature of Tagore, Nazrul, and Jashimuddin are significant sources of soft power, as shown by the Bangladesh Diaspora. A few instances of such practice are the establishment of Bangabandhu Chair at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Bangkok, Bangladesh Bhavan at Visva-Bharati University, and it is also considered that allowing Rohingya refugees into its territory promoted Bangladesh as a peace-loving country, even despite having its own weak economic condition (Islam, Daily Star). Words such as dark spots to explain poor human rights records are being used in international media. Bangladeshi human rights activists were arrested in cases that represent attacks on the identity of Bangladesh (NYT, 2013). The international media reports are focused on journalists and activists, who talk about the challenges democracy faces in Bangladesh. One of the senior journalists, Nadeem Qadir, writes about issues from Bangladesh being covered by the magazine *The Economist*. *The Economist* chooses to publish write-ups that negatively portray Bangladesh and ignore ones that are positive he says (Qadir, 2016). He also mentions that the U.S. media does not talk about the positive developments that have happened in the last few years in Bangladesh on the issues of women's empowerment.

On the issue of radicalization being represented in international Media, the telecommunication minister of Bangladesh, Tatana Halima, acknowledged in public fora that social media is being misused by militants in Bangladesh for terrorist attacks and other activities (Asia Times, 2015). He substantiates incidents about attacks on foreign bloggers, Avijit Roy, and the death of an on-duty policeman killed by a terrorist from ISIS in Bangladesh are given comparatively wide coverage. Such incidents have been acknowledged in the parliament in many of her speeches about social media being misused for criminal activities. The government has several times taken measures to block WhatsApp and Viber and allowed for the monitoring of social media. The media also helps in understanding the future strategies and plans of militants. The IS online magazine *Dabiq*, for example, has also explained about the future attack plans and activities in Bangladesh through an article titled "The Revival of Jihad in Bengal". Seeing the role of Media in Bangladesh, and to deal with cyber-related crimes, the government has also introduced the Digital Security Act 2016³³⁰. Reports on international media also indicate interference in media affairs by telling them about the content of publication. Ownership is also given to the ruling party loyalists by the political elites to control the media. Later, the free market economic policies in 2000 led to an increase in television channels.

The role of private players in the media industry was seen from 2000 itself, when the first private television channel, ETV, started broadcasting in April 2000. And with it, the practice of issuing TV licenses to party loyalists had also started supposedly during the BNP regime (2001—2006). Media is considered not only as a tool to leverage the power of media to shape public discourse on foreign policy but to decide on foreign and national security affairs; it was also considered a tool to mobilize pressure on the politicians and bureaucrats. Among foreign representations, it also works in the way that foreign nations use media for communication with countries with whom they don't have effective or viable dialogue channels. The Internet is significantly an important medium for political communication. As represented in the Threat Model, individuals receive information about foreign policy primarily through the mass media. And that media disproportionately focuses on threat and covers terrorism in sensationalistic ways³³¹. Freedom of the press is a key element in democratization indices such as Democracy Watchdog, Freedom House, and others, and any nation-state is measured on the parameters set by these indices, thus domestic politics having international repercussions. Voltmer also argues that the media has taken an important role in democratic transitions in Bangladesh, leading to mediaization of political change. The forces of radicalization being impacted by the Media have also affected Bangladesh's representation at the international level. India's mass media, including Bengali papers, had reacted against the anti-India propaganda launched by the counter-revolutionaries. In this process, the *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, *Hindustan Standard*, and *Jugantar* (Bengali

Paper) had published cartoons and derogatory remarks about India. In another incident, online propaganda by AQIS has enchanted youths within Bangladesh. In one of the surveys conducted in 2017 by the Bangladeshi Police, it was revealed that many of the extremists are influenced by social media and have been using Thrima, WeChat, Messenger, and other social media apps to communicate. Many operations were using the networks of Islamist militants, and 29 AQIS were using online propaganda efforts that have negative effects for peace and security in Bangladesh. The International Crisis Group (ICG) reported on the emergence of a Muslim insurgent group called ARSA, also known as Harakah al-Yaqin (HaY). The ICG report also warned that a response from Burma "could create conditions for further radicalizing sections of the Rohingya population". Media representation is also affected due to the presence of the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) or due to the presence of the coalition government of two Islamist parties, the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Islamiya Okiyya Jote (IOJ), which have expanded Islamist influence in Bangladesh. These parties have also created space within extremist and terrorist groups since Islami Okiyya Jote has ties with one of the radical organizations, such as Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI).

7. Conclusion

The research suggests few of the points necessary for the future foreign policy formulation.

Increasing press freedom- A few legislations, such as the Right to Information Act in 2009, do show the commitment of the Awami League government to media freedom. But instances such as Ekushey TV, a popular TV channel in Bangladesh formed by former BBC journalist Simon Dring, have faced impediments in their coverage. The owner's permit was canceled, and he was forced to sell his share in ETV after the BNP government came to power in 2000. In another incident, in 2013, the government shut down Diganta TV on charges of reporting on the government's crackdown. Islamic TV and Channel One were also shut down due to charges by opposition parties (Adnan, 2018). Editors have been charged with defamation and sedition. The staff of Prothom Alo has been charged with more than 100 criminal cases about the issues. Among some of the victims have been atheist bloggers and publishers. It is also to be noted that there are new news sites coming up due to the prosaic economic effect termed by Abadi, which means due to fewer subscriptions, and advertising revenue is less in Print Media. The government is trying its best to curb social media with the goal of curbing violent extremism. National Telecommunication Monitoring Center and the launch of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police app called "Hello CT" in 2016 are a few examples. Yet Bangladesh needs to increase the freedom given to editors. On the other hand, the continuous coverage of foreign affairs by Bangladesh news media remains relatively small, with foreign news coverage constituting only 21 percent in morning and early evening network news programs.

The readership has dropped 1.4 percent since 2014, but print readership hasn't actually gone down despite the rise of TV and Internet. Media's role in the foreign policy of Bangladesh becomes crucial since the foreign policy of Bangladesh has to promote trade, investment, international co-operation, and international projection apart from being able to maintain the religious status quo. Bangladesh also has to look at foreign policy and security architecture, which should also include maritime routes in the Indo-Pacific to secure against piracy and meet the demands of the middle class entering the economy. The grand strategy of Bangladesh must include a development goal, which should include projects in various regions such as Khagrachari, Rangamati, and Bandarban. The government of Bangladesh also has to look at the concerns of minorities; it is seen in the creation of the Hindu Religious Welfare Trust and the Buddhist Religious Welfare Trust. Bangladesh is also enhancing its role in the Asian Cooperation Dialogue and in organizations such as the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation (ISACPA) for the promotion of all human rights. The media industry of Bangladesh is covered by various agencies, such as Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB); the report mentions media owned by big business and corporate houses and influenced by media politics over the years. Corporate interests and competition in the industry are at the root of it. It is also noted that the ideological orientation of the editor, reporter, and owner of the paper is reflected while presenting data and information. Bangladeshi media also reflects upon the internal politics of the country since Bangladeshi Dailies have a critical viewpoint about the rise of religious extremism.

Having a religious background, such as Jamaat-e-Islami, is also not appreciated by media houses. In covering foreign relations, The Daily Star, being pro-Indian, shows the media having a stand on foreign relations. In a general trend, activities of the United States, the European Union, and other major powers are covered widely.

Few of the media houses also suffer with the issues such as lack of professionalism, resource limitations; poor human resources, lack of skills and staff shortage are other major issue. The shortage of staff is one of the major reasons for inadequate follow-up on stories and the coverage to be primarily Dhaka-centric. At the same time, it has been noted that Bangladeshi public opinion believes that better trade leads to higher wages and more job creation and encourages stronger inter-state economic relations, thus being followed by policymakers.

Emphasizing foreign policy research- The Media houses in the country are also trying to create a database of people who are working on Bangladesh and India in the ministries of both countries. The seminars and conferences are not multi-faceted, thus must be conducted regularly, sometimes just based on foreign policy exchanges. In the process of keeping its brand as an activist and developmental role, the media has mobilized support for democratization and putting socio-economic issues at the front. The role of media also becomes important due to its independent perspectives apart from party politics on different policy issues.

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Climate Finance Governance in Bangladesh: Mechanisms, Institutional Challenges, and Policy Pathways

Md Jahirul Islam¹, Ireen Pervin²

¹ Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Public Administration, Bangladesh; KOICA Fellow, “Capacity Building for Response to Climate Change,” Department of International Climate Cooperation, Incheon National University, Republic of Korea. E-mail: jahir24bcs@yahoo.com ORCID ID: 0009-0008-1473-3586

² Deputy Secretary, Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh. E-mail: ireenbcs@yahoo.com

Abstract

Climate change poses a severe threat to developing economies, particularly those that combine limited adaptive capacity with high exposure to environmental hazards. Bangladesh ranks among the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world owing to its low-lying deltaic terrain, high population density, and recurrent exposure to catastrophic weather events. In this setting, climate finance plays a crucial role in adaptation and mitigation, in strengthening resilience, and in advancing sustainable development. This paper examines the governance architecture of climate finance in Bangladesh by analysing its principal funding sources, institutional frameworks, and governance challenges. Adopting a qualitative research methodology, the study draws on secondary data from the Economic Relations Division, the Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh Bank, national policy documents, reports from international organisations, and the academic literature in order to assess both domestic and external climate-funding channels. International mechanisms such as the World Bank and the Green Climate Fund, together with domestic instruments such as the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund, constitute important sources of finance. The findings indicate that although Bangladesh has established several significant climate-finance mechanisms, persistent governance weaknesses, institutional fragmentation, limited technical capacity, complex funding procedures, and low private-sector participation impede the effective utilization of these resources. The paper concludes with policy recommendations to strengthen governance frameworks, improve institutional coordination, and expand green financing initiatives to enhance climate investment and resilience in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Climate Finance, Governance Framework, Institutional Capacity, Adaptation and Mitigation, Public Financial Management

1. Introduction

Climate change affects human wellbeing, economic growth, and environmental sustainability, and it has become one of the defining global challenges of the twenty-first century. Developing nations are especially exposed, because they depend on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture and fisheries while facing acute institutional and financial constraints. On account of its geographic location, its level of economic development, and its high exposure to extreme weather events, Bangladesh has been recognised as one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change (Huq & Khan, 2014; Raihan & Khan, 2019). The country lies within the delta of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna river systems, and most of its surface area sits only a few metres above sea level. This

topography makes the nation highly susceptible to storm surges, floods, cyclones, and sea-level rise. According to the World Bank (2022), nearly two-thirds of the country's land area is less than five metres above sea level, leaving millions of people exposed to coastal flooding and climate-related displacement. Climate-related disasters routinely disrupt infrastructure, livelihoods, and agricultural output, particularly in rural and coastal areas.

In recent decades, climate-related hazards have grown more frequent and more severe in Bangladesh. Intensifying floods, cyclones, droughts, and saline intrusion undermine economic output, water resources, and food security, placing critical sectors such as agriculture, energy, and urban infrastructure at serious risk. The country faces disproportionately high climate risks even though it generates less than 0.5 per cent of global greenhouse-gas emissions (Islam, 2021). This asymmetry underscores the crucial role of international cooperation and financial support in enabling vulnerable nations to manage climate impacts and build resilience.

In response to these intensifying impacts, climate finance has become a central pillar of international climate policy. The term refers to funds mobilised from public and private sources to support mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) defines climate finance as international, national, and local financial flows that aim to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions and enhance resilience to climate impacts (UNFCCC, 2021). Such funds are essential for developing countries, which must invest substantially in climate-resilient infrastructure, renewable-energy systems, disaster-risk-reduction programmes, and sustainable land-management strategies.

International climate-governance frameworks have explicitly recognised the need to provide financial support to developing countries. The adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015 marked one of the most significant turning points in global climate governance. In its spirit, developed nations committed to mobilise at least USD 100 billion per year to assist developing countries with mitigation and adaptation (Roberts & Weikmans, 2017). Several international mechanisms, notably the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Green Climate Fund (GCF), have been established to deliver on these commitments. These bodies play a vital role in financing climate-related projects in developing countries, including renewable-energy development, climate-resilient infrastructure, and ecosystem conservation (Schalatek & Watson, 2020).

Alongside these dedicated mechanisms, multilateral development agencies such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) provide major financial support for climate adaptation and mitigation in developing countries, funding renewable-energy projects, flood-control systems, and coastal-protection infrastructure. The World Bank (2022) projects that Bangladesh will need to make substantial climate investments in the coming decades to improve resilience while pursuing its sustainable-development goals.

Recognising the importance of climate finance, Bangladesh has created several domestic channels to support adaptation and mitigation. The most widely recognised of these is the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCTF), established in 2009 to finance climate-related projects from domestic government resources (Bird, 2015). The fund supports disaster-risk reduction, climate-resilient agriculture, and coastal protection, making Bangladesh one of the first developing countries to establish a national climate fund from its own resources.

Despite the presence of both domestic and international mechanisms, institutional and governance problems complicate the effective use of climate funding. Institutional fragmentation, inadequate coordination among government agencies, and protracted bureaucratic procedures frequently delay project approval and implementation (Raihan & Khan, 2019). Weak governance and limited technical expertise can further compromise the allocation and management of climate finance, while the complexity of application procedures for international programmes makes access difficult for countries with weaker administrative systems (Islam, 2021).

A further concern is the limited participation of the private sector in climate-finance efforts. Public resources alone cannot meet the large investment needs associated with climate action. For this reason, governments and financial institutions have emphasised the importance of green finance and private investment. Bangladesh Bank, the country's central bank, has introduced a range of policies to promote sustainable finance, including green-banking guidelines, sustainable-finance frameworks, and refinancing schemes for energy-efficient and renewable-energy

products (Rahman, 2020). Even so, private-sector funding for climate-related projects remains very low, signalling the need for stronger financial governance and legal support.

Given these difficulties, strengthening climate-finance governance has become essential for the efficient management and utilisation of financial resources. Effective governance structures can improve coordination, accountability, and transparency among the institutions that manage climate funds, and can help ensure that finance is used efficiently and directed toward projects that address the needs of vulnerable populations.

Against this background, the present paper investigates the governance of climate finance in Bangladesh by examining its institutional frameworks, funding sources, and governance concerns. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the current climate-finance mechanisms in Bangladesh?
2. Which governance and institutional barriers limit the effective use and management of climate finance?
3. What legislative changes are required to enhance Bangladesh's climate-finance governance?

By addressing these questions, the study contributes to the body of knowledge on climate-finance governance and offers policy recommendations to help Bangladesh manage its climate finances more effectively. Strengthening this governance is necessary to enhance the country's climate resilience and to promote sustainable development in one of the world's most climate-vulnerable regions.

2. Literature Review

Climate finance occupies an increasingly important place in global climate governance, particularly in supporting developing countries that face major climate risks but lack the resources to manage them. In general terms, climate finance refers to public and private financial resources allocated to adaptation and mitigation initiatives that lessen the effects of climate change. The UNFCCC defines it as local, national, and international funding from public, private, and alternative sources that supports programmes to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions and increase resilience to climate impacts (UNFCCC, 2021). Such finance is essential to help developing countries transition toward sustainable and climate-resilient development pathways.

2.1 Global Climate Finance Governance

The global governance of climate finance has been decisively shaped by international climate agreements and institutional frameworks designed to encourage adaptation and mitigation in developing countries. The adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015 was a pivotal moment in this process. To support climate action in developing nations, developed countries agreed to mobilise USD 100 billion per year (Roberts & Weikmans, 2017). This commitment reflects the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, which acknowledges that wealthy countries have contributed disproportionately to historical greenhouse-gas emissions and therefore bear greater responsibility for financing climate action.

A number of international financial organisations have been established to facilitate the flow of climate funding. The Green Climate Fund (GCF) is the principal climate-finance instrument within the UNFCCC framework; it supports projects centred on sustainable agriculture, climate-resilient infrastructure, renewable energy, and disaster-risk reduction in developing countries (Schalatek & Watson, 2020). Similarly, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) has been a major multilateral institution supporting environmental and climate-related initiatives since the early 1990s. As Nakhoda (2013) observes, these institutions play a critical role in shifting financial resources from wealthy countries to vulnerable developing nations.

Despite the creation of these structures, scholars have identified several governance shortcomings in global climate-finance systems. The governance of climate finance involves a complex network of actors, national governments, international organizations, financial institutions, and civil-society organizations whose interactions

often generate administrative and institutional frictions that delay project approval and implementation (Hall, 2017). Weikmans and Roberts (2019) further emphasise that robust accountability, transparency, and monitoring systems are essential to ensure that climate finance is used effectively and reaches the most vulnerable areas.

2.2 Climate Finance Challenges in Developing Countries

Developing countries frequently encounter major difficulties in accessing international climate finance. A primary obstacle is limited institutional capacity, which constrains the ability of governments to design, implement, and manage climate programmes. According to Bird (2015), many developing countries struggle to meet the technical and administrative requirements of international climate-finance arrangements—preparing comprehensive project proposals, maintaining fiduciary standards, and complying with the monitoring and review protocols demanded by funding agencies.

A second challenge stems from the fragmented nature of climate-finance flows. Funds are channelled through a range of mechanisms—domestic financing structures, international climate funds, bilateral donors, and multilateral development banks—and this fragmentation can produce coordination problems and governance inefficiencies (Falconer & Stadelmann, 2014). Protracted bureaucratic procedures and intricate approval processes may further delay the implementation of adaptation and mitigation strategies.

The growing demand for climate investment has also highlighted the need for greater private-sector involvement. Because public spending cannot meet global investment requirements, international development organisations such as the World Bank and the ADB stress the importance of private capital. Instruments such as green bonds, blended finance, and climate investment funds are increasingly employed to attract private investment into climate-related industries, encourage private engagement in sustainable development, and reduce investment risk (Bhattacharya et al., 2016).

2.3 Climate Finance Governance in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's proactive efforts to mitigate climate change and strengthen resilience have been widely acknowledged. Owing to its position in the Ganges–Brahmaputra–Meghna delta and its high population density, the country is especially exposed to hazards such as cyclones, floods, and sea-level rise. In response, the government has put in place several institutional mechanisms and policy frameworks to support adaptation and mitigation.

One of the most important national initiatives is the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCTF), established in 2009. Funded primarily from domestic government resources, the BCCTF supports a wide range of adaptation projects, including coastal protection, climate-resilient infrastructure, and community-based adaptation programmes (Bird, 2015). Its creation demonstrates Bangladesh's commitment to addressing climate change using its own financial resources.

In addition to domestic sources, Bangladesh receives significant climate finance from international organisations and development partners. Multilateral development banks such as the World Bank and the ADB have funded numerous climate-related infrastructure projects, including flood-control systems, cyclone shelters, coastal-embankment improvements, and renewable-energy initiatives. The World Bank (2022) projects that the country will require substantial climate investment in the coming years to achieve resilient development and reduce its vulnerability to climate hazards.

Despite these efforts, Bangladesh's climate-finance management continues to be hampered by governance shortcomings. Raihan and Khan (2019) note that institutional fragmentation and weak coordination among government agencies create inefficiencies in fund allocation and project implementation, with overlapping institutional responsibilities slowing decision-making and approval. In the absence of strong governance

frameworks, climate-finance programmes may experience implementation delays or fail to deliver the expected benefits to vulnerable communities (Islam, 2021).

Bangladesh's institutional governance challenges extend beyond the climate-finance sector and reflect broader structural weaknesses documented elsewhere in the country's public administration. Mia and Tao (2024) find that robust rule-of-law institutions are consistently associated with more efficient, transparent, and accountable public service delivery, while weak legal enforcement and bureaucratic obstacles undermine service outcomes in developing-country contexts—a pattern that closely parallels the institutional fragmentation and limited technical capacity identified in Bangladesh's climate-finance governance system. Relatedly, Mia et al. (2022) show that persistent bureaucratic corruption and inefficiency continue to erode government effectiveness in Bangladesh even amid strong macroeconomic growth, suggesting that reforming climate-finance governance cannot be separated from wider public-sector reform. At the community level, Mia et al. (2025) demonstrate that digital financial products such as mobile banking and micro-insurance hold considerable, though largely unrealized, potential to strengthen climate resilience among flood-affected populations in Bogura and Kurigram, provided that barriers of digital literacy, trust, and infrastructure are addressed constraints that mirror the access and capacity limitations restricting the flow of formal climate finance discussed in this paper.

These indicate that strengthening climate-finance governance in Bangladesh should be pursued alongside the reinforcement of the rule of law, the curbing of bureaucratic inefficiency, and the expansion of inclusive digital financial infrastructure at the grassroots level.

2.4 The Emerging Role of Green Finance in Bangladesh

In recent years, Bangladesh has increasingly promoted green-finance concepts to support environmentally beneficial projects and durable investment decisions. Bangladesh Bank has issued several regulations to encourage financial institutions to operate in environmentally responsible sectors, including green banking guidelines, sustainable finance frameworks, and refinancing schemes for renewable energy and energy-efficient technologies (Rahman, 2020).

Green bonds and climate investment funds are two instruments that are becoming increasingly important for channelling private capital into climate-related industries. Uddin (2021) argues that Bangladesh could attract considerably more climate investment if it expanded the range of sustainable investment instruments and strengthened its green finance regulations. Because relatively few institutions currently use such instruments, further institutional reform is needed to draw more private enterprises into climate financing. Table 1 summarises the major climate-finance sources available to Bangladesh.

Table 1: Major climate-finance sources in Bangladesh.

Finance Source	Type	Key Institution
Domestic climate fund	National funding	Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund
Multilateral finance	International funding	World Bank
Development finance	Regional funding	Asian Development Bank
Global climate funds	International funding	Green Climate Fund
Environmental funding	Multilateral funding	Global Environment Facility

2.5 Research Gap

Although earlier studies have examined climate finance and adaptation policy in Bangladesh, comparatively little attention has been paid to the governance dimensions of climate finance. Most existing research focuses on funding

sources and adaptation strategies, while institutional coordination, governance frameworks, and the regulatory structures that shape the effectiveness of climate finance receive far less attention. There is also limited evidence on private-sector participation in climate-finance governance and on the role of green finance in Bangladesh. To address these gaps, the present study examines Bangladesh's climate-finance governance framework, assesses both domestic and international funding sources, and identifies the institutional barriers that hinder effective management. In doing so, it aims to contribute a detailed analysis of climate-finance governance and to propose policy recommendations for strengthening the country's climate-finance institutions.

3. Materials and Methods

This study examines climate-finance governance in Bangladesh using a qualitative research methodology. It relies on secondary data, comprising government reports, publications from international organizations, policy documents, and peer-reviewed academic literature. A qualitative policy-analysis approach is well suited to investigating the institutional frameworks, governance structures, and policy arrangements relevant to climate finance (Hall, 2017).

3.1 Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine existing climate-finance systems and to identify the institutional barriers that constrain their effectiveness. It considers both domestic and international sources of climate financing, as well as the governance structures responsible for allocating and managing climate-related funds. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the rules and policies governing climate finance in Bangladesh.

3.2 Data Sources

To ensure accuracy and comprehensiveness, the study draws on a range of secondary sources. These include reports and publications from international organizations, government agencies, and development institutions engaged in climate financing. Key institutional sources, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Ministry of Finance, the Economic Relations Division, and the UNFCCC, provide extensive information on climate-finance flows, project funding, and policy frameworks.

National policy documents and reports from government agencies, including the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change and the Bangladesh Bank, are used to examine how domestic climate-finance policies and governance processes operate. Reports from the Global Environment Facility and the Green Climate Fund are also reviewed to understand how external finance flows into Bangladesh and how projects are implemented.

3.3 Analytical Framework

The analysis focuses on three central dimensions of climate-finance governance:

- (1) Climate-finance mechanisms, including multilateral development funding, international climate funds, and domestic climate funds;
- (2) Institutional governance frameworks, encompassing the functions of foreign partners, financial institutions, and government agencies; and
- (3) Governance obstacles and challenges, such as institutional-capacity constraints, bureaucratic processes, and limited private-sector involvement.

Through these dimensions, the study assesses the mobilisation, management, and implementation of climate funding in Bangladesh.

3.4 Limitations of the Study

The study has certain limitations, though it nonetheless yields useful insights into the functioning of climate finance in Bangladesh. It relies on secondary data rather than primary collection methods such as surveys or interviews, and the analysis may therefore not fully capture the perspectives of local stakeholders, project implementers, or policymakers. The use of multiple reliable sources, however, enhances the validity and reliability of the findings.

4. Climate Finance Mechanisms in Bangladesh

Climate funding is an essential component of Bangladesh's efforts to adapt to and mitigate climate change. Because the country is highly vulnerable, it requires substantial resources to make its infrastructure more resilient, reduce environmental risk, and promote sustainability. Bangladesh obtains climate funds from both external and domestic sources.

4.1 Domestic Climate Finance

The Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCTF) is one of the principal channels through which the government finances climate action. Established in 2009 and funded from government resources, the BCCTF supports a broad portfolio of programmes, including climate-resilient infrastructure, coastal protection, and disaster-risk reduction (Bird, 2015). Since its inception, the fund has supported hundreds of projects aimed at strengthening the resilience of at-risk communities. Table 2 presents the fund's allocations over the past decade.

Table 2: BCCTF ten-year allocation (Data source: BCCTF Annual Report).

Fiscal Year	Allocation (Million BDT)
2024–2025	1,000
2023–2024	830
2022–2023	500
2021–2022	990.38
2020–2021	670.34
2019–2020	1,520
2018–2019	3,000
2017–2018	1,000
2016–2017	1,000
2015–2016	1,000

The Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP) provides the overarching framework guiding the use of climate finance in the country. It prioritizes agriculture, water resources, infrastructure, and disaster management sectors that are vital to national wellbeing and supports projects that help communities adapt and build resilience for the future.

Alongside government funding, domestic financial institutions are increasingly mobilising resources for sustainable projects. Bangladesh Bank has introduced policies that encourage banks to invest in environmentally beneficial initiatives, including green banking guidelines and sustainable finance frameworks that direct a portion of their investments toward projects with positive environmental impacts (Rahman, 2020). Figure 1 shows the sector-wise allocation of project assistance under the Annual Development Programme for FY 2024–2025.

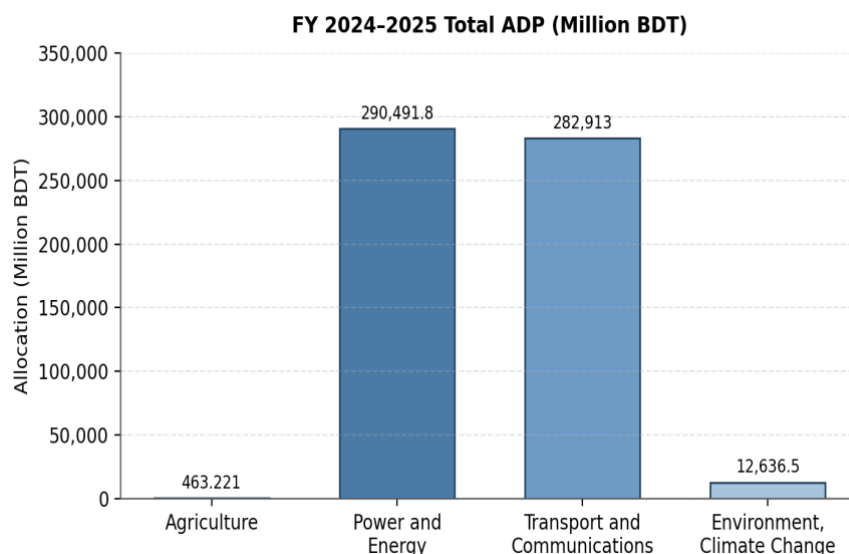


Figure 1: Sector-wise project assistance under the Annual Development Programme (Data source: ERD Annual Report).

Despite these initiatives, domestic climate-finance resources remain insufficient relative to the country's overall climate-investment needs. As climate impacts intensify, the government will need to expand domestic financing mechanisms and strengthen financial governance to ensure the efficient allocation of climate funds.

4.2 International Climate Finance

In addition to domestic resources, Bangladesh has access to large-scale international climate funds and support from development institutions. Among the key global actors is the Green Climate Fund (GCF), which finances large-scale adaptation and mitigation projects, including renewable-energy development, climate-resilient agriculture, and infrastructure-resilience programmes (Schalatek & Watson, 2020).

Another important actor is the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which has supported numerous climate and environmental projects in Bangladesh, including biodiversity conservation, sustainable land use, and climate change mitigation.

Multilateral development banks are central to climate-project finance in Bangladesh. The World Bank and the ADB have advanced large-scale resilience projects, including flood-control infrastructure, cyclone shelters, and coastal-embankment improvements. The World Bank (2022) further indicates that Bangladesh will require considerable climate investment in the coming years to improve resilience and achieve its sustainable-development goals. Figure 2 presents development-partner commitments and disbursements over the past five fiscal years.

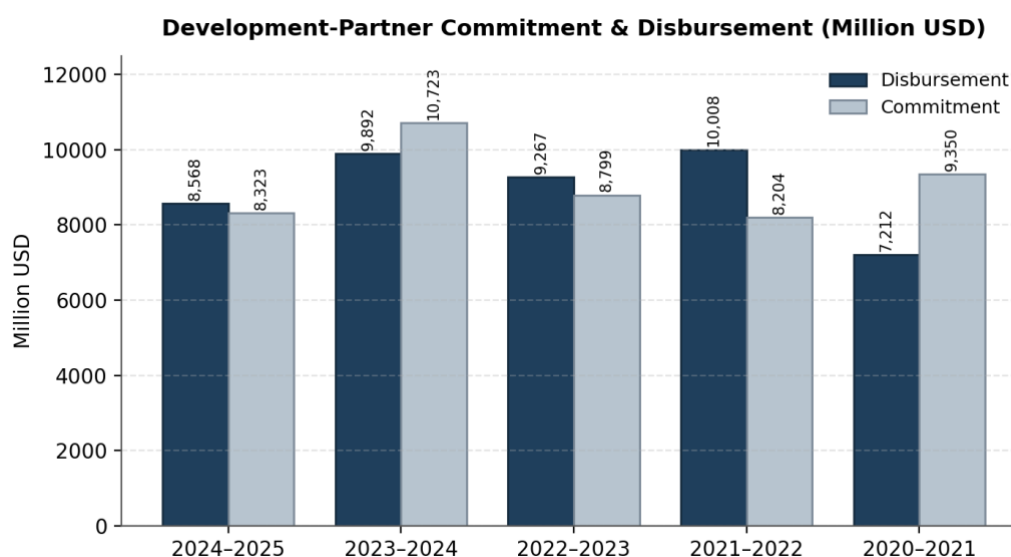


Figure 2: Development-partner commitment and disbursement (million USD) (Data source: ERD Annual Report).

Bilateral donors also support climate initiatives in Bangladesh, financing projects in clean energy, disaster preparedness, and adaptation. These flows help strengthen national strategies against environmental risk while advancing sustainability goals. Nonetheless, obstacles remain in mobilising available external resources even when funds have been earmarked: complex application procedures, stringent eligibility rules, and slow approval processes can impede support for poorer nations (Nakhlooda, 2013). Because weak institutions limit progress, stronger oversight systems would help Bangladesh access global climate finance more effectively.

5. Governance Structure of Climate Finance in Bangladesh

Channeling climate finance to where it is most needed, especially to communities facing the greatest threats from changing weather patterns, requires clear and effective oversight. In Bangladesh, multiple institutions at both the national and international levels participate in managing these funds: some mobilise resources, while others handle disbursement and implementation, working together within shared frameworks. Figure 3 illustrates this governance structure.

The Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change serves as the principal government body responsible for steering climate policy. It shapes national strategies, oversees adaptation initiatives, and builds links with global climate institutions to align domestic action with wider international commitments. The Economic Relations Division (ERD), housed within the Ministry of Finance, provides structure to the governance of climate funding by directing external financial flows. Under the ERD's coordination, climate-related foreign assistance, including funding from multilateral banks, is managed in close collaboration with international partners and channeled toward local initiatives, and the division also hosts policy dialogues aimed at aligning priorities across countries.

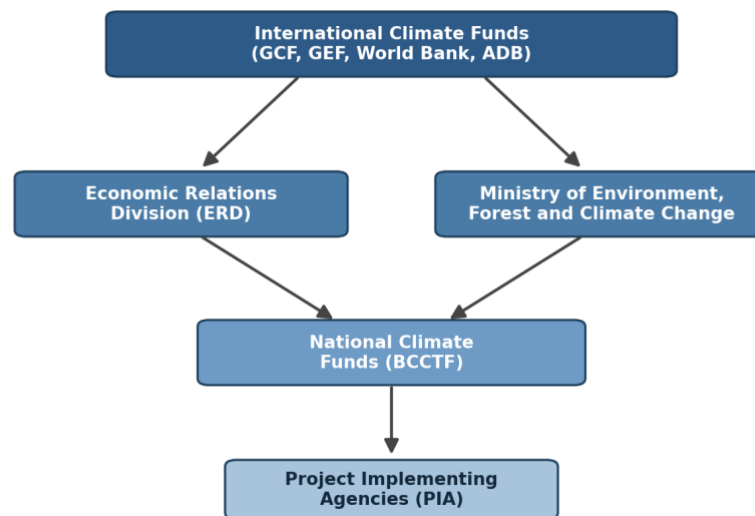


Figure 3: Climate-finance governance structure in Bangladesh.

Banks play an important role in managing climate-related funding. As the central authority, Bangladesh Bank has introduced financial regulations that steer lending toward environmentally responsible ventures; as a result, institutions increasingly follow green-banking directives, adopt sustainability roadmaps, and access dedicated refinancing programmes that support clean-power systems and energy-efficiency measures (Rahman, 2020).

Although they are distinct entities, the World Bank, the ADB, and the Green Climate Fund collaborate in shaping how climate finance flows into Bangladesh, working alongside government offices that combine oversight with on-the-ground coordination. Funding frequently arrives paired with technical assistance, so that expertise accompanies financial resources and helps refine responses to rising temperatures and flood risk. Adaptation and mitigation projects rely heavily on this combination of external support and domestic implementation. Even so, securing effective collaboration among the various actors remains difficult: clearly defined responsibilities, transparent financial processes, and strong working relationships among participants are essential if the system is to function well.

6. Barriers and Challenges in Climate Finance Governance

Despite the institutions and mechanisms established, efforts to govern climate finance in Bangladesh face several barriers. These challenges arise across financial, institutional, and decision-making domains, each of which affects overall effectiveness in distinct ways. Table 3 summarises the key barriers.

Table 3: Key barriers to climate-finance governance.

Type	Description
Institutional	Weak coordination among agencies
Financial	Limited domestic climate investment
Governance	Transparency and monitoring challenges
Administrative	Complex international funding procedures
Private sector	Low participation in climate investment

6.1 Institutional Barriers

A major structural problem lies in the limited coordination among government bodies responsible for climate financing. When multiple agencies share responsibility for climate policy, mandates often blur and processes slow; overlapping responsibilities among ministries create confusion and make it harder to move projects forward without delay. Research by Raihan and Khan (2019) shows that fragmented systems can weaken fund distribution and stall execution, so that progress falters even when resources are available. A related challenge is the shortage of strong administrative and technical capacity within institutions. Not every public agency possesses sufficient expertise to manage the complex funding programmes associated with climate change, and projects backed by international bodies that demand detailed oversight and frequent reporting can stretch existing capacity thin.

6.2 Financial Barriers

Despite support from international climate funds and aid agencies, Bangladesh struggles to manage climate financing under tight budgetary conditions. Although inflows exist, they fall short of the resources required for adaptation and infrastructure. Estimates suggest that billions of dollars will be needed over the coming decades to build genuine resilience, and the scale of required investment far exceeds current commitments, leaving substantial financing gaps (World Bank, 2022). Accessing global climate finance, moreover, typically entails complex documentation and stringent eligibility requirements. Because agencies such as the Green Climate Fund require thorough project plans and extensive supporting materials, countries with weaker administrative systems may struggle to qualify, thereby creating barriers precisely where support is most needed (Nakhooda, 2013).

6.3 Governance Challenges

Weak oversight can undermine funding objectives when monitoring tools lack precision. Where rules exist without effective follow-up, resources may miss their intended targets; unmonitored flows risk slowing progress or dissipating altogether, and even well-directed funds may underperform in the absence of consistent verification. Private participation in climate financing also remains limited. Although Bangladesh Bank launched green-lending initiatives several years ago, business investment has remained low. Deeper reform of the rules and incentives governing such support will be needed to mobilise greater private engagement.

7. Policy Recommendations

Strengthening climate-finance governance in Bangladesh requires more than incremental adjustment within current frameworks; it calls for targeted reform of how institutions operate. Greater clarity in policy improves the management of climate funds, whereas imprecise rules breed confusion among those who implement them. Modest improvements in accountability structures, revised coordination mechanisms, and broader stakeholder access can, over time, align previously disjointed efforts and gradually build trust. The following recommendations address the principal governance weaknesses identified in this study.

7.1 Strengthening Institutional Coordination

A single, dedicated oversight body could help align efforts across departments. When ministries operate in silos, implementation slows; linking them through shared systems, and assigning one entity to track funding flows and set common goals, tends to improve outcomes and reduce duplication. Clearer connections between banks and public offices generally yield more consistent results, whereas fragmented structures delay implementation. A unified approach can streamline decision-making and, over time, improve the extent to which funds reach their intended targets.

7.2 Enhancing Transparency and Accountability

Clear tracking of funds produces better outcomes, and consistent reporting strengthens oversight. Where systems lack clarity, resources often miss their mark; transparent review processes help keep priorities aligned, and openly shared results make progress visible. Strengthening monitoring, reporting, and verification systems is therefore central to ensuring that climate finance is used efficiently and reaches vulnerable communities.

7.3 Expanding Green Finance and Private Investment

Encouraging businesses to invest in environmental projects is one of the most promising avenues for increasing climate funding. Green bonds already play a role, and expanding their reach could attract stronger investor interest; climate-focused funds exist but could be scaled further, and sustainable banking practices, though still uncommon, offer an additional path when supported consistently. Each of these instruments adds momentum when strengthened, without requiring entirely new systems. Although Bangladesh Bank provides clear direction, updating the relevant laws could sharpen its impact: stronger regulation tends to encourage private capital to move toward clean energy, since investors typically wait for clear policy signals before committing. Without such legislative support, potential gains risk stalling.

7.4 Improving Access to International Climate Finance

Simplifying bureaucratic procedures across agencies would help Bangladesh respond more quickly to international funding windows. Strengthened institutions and better-trained officials, particularly in proposal design, tend to raise application quality and improve approval rates with bodies such as the Green Climate Fund. Investing in the skills of local experts and smoothing internal workflows within ministries can therefore make a tangible difference in securing external support. Figure 4 summarises the overall flow of climate finance from international sources through to community-level outcomes.

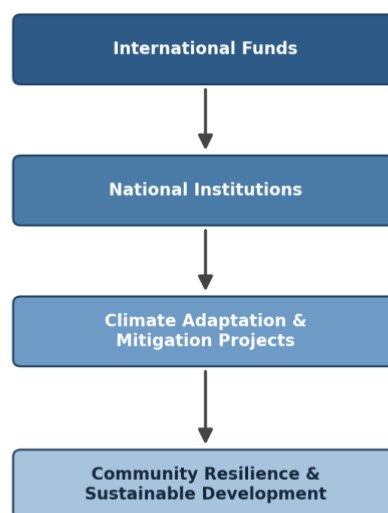


Figure 4: Climate-finance flow framework.

8. Conclusion

As climate threats intensify, Bangladesh faces severe risks due to its high vulnerability, and large-scale funding has become critical for adaptation and reducing harm. Because resilience depends on sustained investment, finance directed toward climate action is essential to securing long-term progress; access to financial support shapes how effectively the country can respond and develop amid changing conditions.

Examining existing funding sources, institutional arrangements, and decision-making challenges reveals how climate finance is governed in Bangladesh. The country already operates several key financing channels, including the national Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund, as well as external support from global climate initiatives and major development lenders. Yet effectiveness remains constrained by persistent structural problems, institutions are fragmented and poorly aligned; capacity gaps weaken implementation; access to international finance involves cumbersome procedures; and private-sector participation remains minimal. Progress depends on clearer oversight systems, improved interagency cooperation, and greater transparency in the handling of climate-related spending.

A central message of this study is that stronger private investment and an expanded green-finance ecosystem can reinforce climate-focused spending. Funding gains traction when rules improve, because clearer policies tend to encourage capital flows; financial incentives matter as well, particularly when aligned with long-term environmental goals. The shift toward sustainable models is likely to be gradual, but each reform step helps channel resources into priority areas.

Efficient fund distribution ultimately depends on stronger oversight mechanisms within climate-financing systems. Future research could examine how specific programmes affect adaptation outcomes and explore alternative financing models capable of supporting investment growth in climate-vulnerable countries. Studying real-world results alongside innovative funding structures offers a promising path for advancing both scholarship and policy on climate-finance governance.

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The Boundary Between Transparent Eco-communication and Greenwashing in Advertising: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis Perspective

Hua Ngoc Linh¹, Tran Thanh Du²

^{1,2} Thu Dau Mot University, Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam

Correspondence: Tran Thanh Du, Thu Dau Mot University, Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam, Tel: 0983947532.

E-mail: dutt@tdmu.edu.vn

Abstract

This study addresses the pressing challenge of distinguishing between genuine ecological sustainability and deceptive greenwashing within contemporary corporate communication. Prompted by increasingly stringent international regulatory frameworks, including the European Union's ECGT (2024) Directive and the US FTC Green Guides (2012), this research explores how brands navigate compliance in both textual and visual dimensions. To achieve this, the study employs a Corpus-assisted Multimodal Discourse Analysis (CAMDA) approach to scrutinize a curated corpus of 50 compliant environmental advertisements. This methodology integrates M.A.K. Halliday's (2014) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar, and the Speech Act Theory articulated by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). The empirical findings reveal that effective eco-communication depends on material processes, empirical data, and verifiable behavioral frameworks that meet stringent Felicity Conditions. In contrast, greenwashing often exploits semantic ambiguity, emotional appeals, and unsubstantiated commissive statements. Building upon these insights, the research introduces the Language Strategy Matrix for Transparent Eco-Discourse, a dual-purpose framework designed both as a practical diagnostic toolkit for strategic communicators to ensure regulatory compliance and as a pedagogical model for Business English and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curricula aimed at promoting critical media literacy and ethical copywriting.

Keywords: Greenwashing, Multimodal Discourse Analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Visual Grammar, Speech Act Theory

1. Introduction

In today's global marketplace, the rise of environmental awareness has dramatically altered consumer behavior, marking a clear pivot toward sustainable development. As ecological preservation becomes a core value in society, businesses are rushing to adopt "green" narratives to resonate with these evolving expectations. However, a troubling trend has emerged: many brands are exploiting eco-consciousness by launching advertising campaigns for products that, in truth, inflict significant damage on the environment. This deceptive marketing practice is known as greenwashing.

Extensive research has laid a robust groundwork for identifying and evaluating the impacts of this phenomenon. Particularly, quantitative studies have demonstrated that greenwashing breeds eco-skepticism and severely erodes consumer trust, satisfaction, and overall brand equity (Ho et al., 2024; Santhanakrishnan et al., 2026). Analyzing message structure, content, and discourse through Carlson et al.'s (1993) typology in diverse contexts, such as China and Pakistan, reveals that greenwashing rarely takes the form of outright falsehoods (Dai et al., 2014; Shagufta & Javed, 2026). Instead, brands commonly resort to semantic ambiguity, omissions, the "sin of no proof", and symbolic visual cues to sway consumer perception (Dai et al., 2014; Shagufta & Javed, 2026). Furthermore, structural analytical tools like Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar have proven valuable for interpreting digital imagery; yet, scholars warn that these interpretations can be subjective without a clearly defined empirical framework (Nguyen, 2023).

In response to these subtle deceptions, regulatory bodies have begun to take decisive action. Current legal frameworks, such as the European Union's ECGT Directive (2024) and the United States FTC Green Guides (2012), enforce stringent "Blacklist" principles. These regulations compel businesses to rigorously oversee their written and visual content. Regarding advertising, the laws strictly prohibit ambiguous claims like "100% natural", "zero carbon footprint", misleading scientific jargon, and unqualified assertions. Likewise, they strictly forbid "visual traps", which include: (1) misuse of imagery, like forced depictions of vibrant nature to obscure harmful chemicals; (2) misleading graphics, including icons that mimic well-established eco-labels; (3) deceptive proportions.

From this scholarly and regulatory landscape, a critical research gap surfaces. Most existing literature predominantly focuses on "diagnosing" past greenwashing instances or evaluating their commercial consequences (Dai et al., 2014; Ho et al., 2024; Santhanakrishnan et al., 2026; Shagufta & Javed, 2026). Given the increasingly stringent global legal frameworks that explicitly ban vague language and visual deception, the lack of research on how brands can effectively "adapt and comply" is a significant oversight. Additionally, the absence of a comprehensive multimodal approach, integrating SFL for lexicogrammatical analysis, Visual Grammar for decoding visual semiotics (Nguyen, 2023), and Speech Act Theory for evaluating pragmatic intent, hampers our ability to differentiate between genuine eco-communication and subtle greenwashing.

This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring a set of 50 environmental advertisements (see Appendix 1) that successfully comply with current anti-greenwashing regulations. By employing Felicity Conditions as an objective metric for this compliant corpus, the study meticulously analyzes legitimate discursive and visual strategies. Utilizing this integrated framework, the research aspires to answer the following three pivotal questions:

- (i) Which lexicogrammatical techniques are utilized in the chosen advertisements to formulate environmental assertions, as examined through Systemic Functional Linguistics?
- (ii) How are visual assets employed and organized to support or reinterpret these environmental assertions, according to the principles of Visual Grammar?
- (iii) How does the multimodal interplay between linguistic and visual elements, evaluated through Felicity Conditions in Speech Act Theory, demarcate the boundary between deceptive greenwashing and transparent eco-communication?

Ultimately, the insights gained from this comprehensive theoretical and empirical analysis are synthesized to create a practical matrix. This proposed framework aims to serve as a strategic guide for advertisers, empowering them to craft engaging, eco-friendly campaigns that leverage the green trend while ensuring complete compliance with anti-greenwashing standards in both copy and visual design.

2. Method

This study employs a Corpus-assisted Multimodal Discourse Analysis (CAMDA) approach. By compiling a specialized corpus of 50 eco-advertising campaigns, the research establishes a solid empirical foundation, which is then examined through the qualitative framework of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) to explore the intricate interplay between lexicogrammatical choices and visual representations.

The rationale for selecting CAMDA is rooted in the evolution of modern communication, where advertisements manifest as intricate, multisemiotic constructs that blend text, imagery, and layout. Relying exclusively on textual analysis risks overlooking essential layers of visual meaning. Methodologically, MDA serves as a comprehensive framework that provides a robust theoretical foundation for the seamless integration of two analytical tools: (1) Halliday's (2014) SFL for verbal text, (2) Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar for imagery. This integration facilitates a thorough evaluation of communicative surfaces. Practically, this approach acts as a powerful tool for revealing subtle greenwashing techniques, which often do not present as explicit verbal falsehoods but instead emerge from the dissonance between ostensibly safe textual claims and emotionally manipulative visuals. Moreover, it establishes a direct foundation for applications in marketing English pedagogy, equipping learners with critical thinking skills that enhance their understanding of multimodal communication.

To ensure a rigorous selection process and reduce researcher bias, two independent coders assessed the advertisements based on specific criteria, achieving a significant inter-coder reliability score of Cohen's $k = 0.798$ (rounded to 0.8), which indicates "substantial to excellent agreement". The selection of these 50 advertisements is grounded in their recognition as highly impactful marketing campaigns that promote environmental sustainability, all while strictly adhering to the standards that prevent greenwashing. To guarantee thorough representation across various industries, the data collection follows a set of well-defined criteria:

- (1) The advertisements must convey direct or indirect messages concerning environmental protection, emission reduction, recycled materials, or ecological conservation.
- (2) Priority is given to campaigns from globally influential brands shaping the marketing communications landscape (particularly within Western and US markets), as these entities act as primary trendsetters for green advertising.
- (3) The sampled advertisements must integrate both linguistic components (text/copy) and visual components (video/image) to facilitate simultaneous analysis through SFL and Visual Grammar.
- (4) The year 2011 marks a critical turning point initiated by Patagonia's landmark "Don't Buy This Jacket" campaign, which inaugurated an era of radical transparency. The timeline extends through 2025 to capture contemporary developments, including electric vehicle (EV) marketing and ambitious carbon-neutrality commitments from tech giants like Microsoft and Apple, thereby reflecting modern climate-action advertising trends.

The collection of the corpus is carried out using Purposive Sampling via reliable digital archival platforms, including Ads of the World, official corporate YouTube channels, and digital sustainability reports. After the data gathering phase is finished, the analysis process is performed in an organized manner through three consecutive stages:

- (i) Classification of Discursive Orientation (According to Carlson et al., 1993)

Before initiating the micro-structural analysis, a thorough categorization and coding process is conducted on the 50 advertisements. This process is guided by the environmental claim orientations delineated by Carlson et al. (1993). Each advertisement is carefully evaluated and classified according to these established orientations, providing a structured framework for subsequent analysis.

(1) In the realm of Product and Process Discourse, particularly regarding Recycling and the Circular Economy, several initiatives have emerged that warrant closer examination. Notably, collaborations such as Adidas x Parley's "Run for the Oceans" and The North Face's "Clothes the Loop" serve as rich case studies. These programs seek to investigate the extent to which these brands may fall into the "Hidden Trade-off" trap, in which the transformation of waste into commercially viable products could obscure broader environmental implications. By analyzing these initiatives, researchers can gain valuable insights into how effectively brands balance innovative sustainability efforts with the potential compromises in their overall ecological impact.

(2) The discussion surrounding Image and Macro-Commitment in corporate campaigns underscores how companies such as Apple, Google, and Ford are positioning themselves within the sustainability landscape. For instance, Apple's campaign "A Climate Change Promise", Google's initiative "Greenest Cloud", and Ford's slogan "Go Further" exemplify an image-oriented approach. This classification facilitates a more nuanced analysis of how these companies differentiate between establishing a clearly defined roadmap for achieving their sustainability goals and making vague commitments that lack specificity. By examining these initiatives through this lens, we can assess the effectiveness and transparency of their messaging concerning environmental responsibility.

(3) The Anti-Consumerism Discourse, particularly focused on environmental truths, is exemplified by Patagonia's bold campaign titled "Don't Buy This Jacket". This initiative encourages consumers to reflect on their purchasing habits and consider the environmental impact of their decisions. Similarly, IKEA Canada has launched its "Green Friday" initiative, which promotes sustainable practices and encourages mindful consumption. Together, these efforts represent a significant shift away from traditional linear capitalist models. They advocate for a framework that emphasizes complete transparency in communication, urging both individuals and companies to prioritize environmental stewardship over profit-driven motives.

(ii) Multimodal Deconstruction (SFL & Visual Grammar)

At this stage, the techniques used to either elucidate or shape the message are interpreted simultaneously through both visual and textual elements. This dual approach integrates imagery and written content, allowing for a richer understanding and a more nuanced influence on the audience.

(1) The Linguistic Dimension (Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics) examines how campaigns such as Tesla's "Electric Future" use Material Processes to portray a sustainable lifestyle. It also analyzes how TOMS' "One for One" campaign employs the Mood system to convey power dynamics and promote a shared social responsibility agreement between the brand and the consumer.

(2) The Visual Dimension, a concept derived from Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar, delves into the intricate analysis of visual elements that can evoke powerful emotional responses, often referred to as pathos. This framework can be utilized effectively for persuasive communication and potential manipulation in advertising. A striking illustration of this is found in Nissan's campaign titled "The Electric Vehicle Polar Bear". In this campaign, the choice of a polar bear as a central figure is particularly compelling; the bear's intense gaze directed towards an urban landscape significantly enhances the emotional impact of the message. This deliberate visual strategy carries a deeper presupposition, suggesting a sense of urgency regarding environmental issues. By framing the electric vehicle as the sole path to ecological salvation, the campaign effectively compels viewers to consider the implications of their choices, positioning the electric vehicle as not just an option but a necessary solution in the face of environmental crisis.

(iii) Pragmatic Evaluation and the Construction of a "Transparent Green" Matrix

The integration of SFL and Speech Act Theory within this analytical framework is highly complementary, as the lexicogrammatical choices identified through SFL serve as the foundation for assessing the pragmatic validity of environmental claims. Specifically, the realization of a particular Speech Act is fundamentally governed by the lexicogrammatical structures that encode it. For instance, when evaluating a Commissive act, such as a brand's

pledge to achieve carbon neutrality, Speech Act Theory mandates that the utterance fulfill the Preparatory and Sincerity Felicity Conditions. This means the speaker must demonstrate genuine intent and a concrete capacity to perform the promised action. SFL provides the precise metrics to verify this. A felicitous environmental Commitment is predominantly realized through Material Processes like build, eliminate, invest, combined with measurable Circumstances like by 2030, a \$2 billion fund. In contrast, when an environmental claim relies heavily on abstract Relational Processes like “We are green” without material substantiation, SFL analysis reveals the lexicogrammatical void that renders the Commissive act infelicitous, thereby indicating a significant risk of greenwashing.

In this study, the authors conduct an in-depth textual and visual analysis of a selection of 50 advertisements, applying the frameworks established by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) within Speech Act Theory to critically evaluate the ethical implications of the discourse presented. Each statement within these advertisements is carefully examined against the Felicity Conditions, which serve as criteria for assessing the appropriateness and effectiveness of communicative acts.

The present research will highlight how Patagonia’s approach is characterized by negative messaging. Specifically, its Negative Directives skillfully meets the Sincerity Condition, effectively conveying a genuine commitment to ethical practices. In contrast, we will also explore how the pledges made by various automotive and tech companies, categorized as Commissives, often fail to uphold these standards. These commitments frequently descend into what we term Infelicitous utterances, revealing instances of greenwashing that mislead consumers about their environmental impact. Through this analysis, we aim to provide a nuanced understanding of the ethical landscape in advertising and its implications for consumer trust and corporate responsibility.

3. Results

The initial phase of our analysis reveals the importance of categorizing the corpus, as it offers significant insights into the ways brands strategically construct their environmental messaging. By examining this distribution, we can better understand how different approaches correspond to varying levels of greenwashing risk. Table 1 below provides a detailed breakdown of these classifications within the selected advertisements, illustrating the relationship between each discourse orientation and its associated risk profile for misleading environmental claims.

Table 1: Distribution of Eco-Discourse Orientations and Associated Risks

Orientation (Carlson, 1993)	Representative Campaigns in the Corpus	Characteristics & Greenwashing Risks (Hidden Trade-offs)
Product	Allbirds: Printing carbon footprints directly on shoes.	<i>Focus:</i> Emphasizes particular sustainable materials or design choices.
	Lush: Selling “Naked” products without plastic packaging.	<i>Risk:</i> The distortion known as “Part-for-Whole.”
	Everlane: Jackets made entirely from ocean-bound plastic.	
Process	Apple: Committing to a 100% carbon-neutral supply chain.	<i>Focus:</i> Highlights supply chains, energy consumption, and waste handling.
	Budweiser: Brewing 100% of its US beer using wind power	<i>Risk:</i> Overstating adherence to established legal requirements as a virtue, or promising future actions that are not yet defined.

The North Face: Encouraging customers to bring old clothes for recycling.		
Image	Tesla: Framing electric vehicles as a symbol of modern, luxurious living.	<i>Focus:</i> Links the corporate brand to broader ecological values or moral ways of living.
	Rivian: Positioning the brand as a friend of nature by celebrating wild reserves.	<i>Risk:</i> Creating an ambiguous “Green Halo” without meaningful environmental measures.
	TOMS: Donating shoes or supporting eco-projects using profits	
Environmental Fact	Patagonia: Advising against buying their jackets to reduce consumerism.	<i>Focus:</i> Employing educational content or social commentary.
	Ben & Jerry’s: Broadcasting climate justice protests.	<i>Risk:</i> Utilizing environmental information to provoke incorrect conclusions (Emotional Greenwashing).
	WWF: Depicting forests as human lungs to warn against deforestation.	

Following a thorough classification process, the 50 advertisements were categorized into distinct groups based on Carlson’s (1993) typology, as detailed in Table 1. This foundational step sets the stage for the subsequent phases of the study, which involve data extraction and a comprehensive multimodal-pragmatic analysis.

The categorized advertisements yield valuable data, which is systematically organized into three primary strategic clusters. This organization is crucial for evaluating the intricate interaction between lexicogrammatical elements and visual structures within the advertisements. To inform this analysis, we draw upon Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Visual Grammar frameworks, which facilitate an in-depth understanding of how language and visual design work together to convey messages. Additionally, the analysis delves into the pragmatic validity of the utterances present in the advertisements, guided by the principles of Speech Acts. This theoretical lens allows us to examine how the advertisements not only communicate information but also perform actions in a communicative context.

By arranging the extracted data into these three strategic clusters, we can systematically decode the environmental messaging constructed by the advertisements. This detailed classification underscores the complex interplay between linguistic and visual elements, providing insights into how these structures collaboratively influence the intended meaning and effectiveness of the advertisements in conveying their environmental messages.

(i) Cluster 1: The “Anti-Consumerism” and “Absolute Transparency” Strategy

(1) Comprising 12% of the analyzed corpus (6 out of 50 campaigns), this niche yet highly impactful strategy is exemplified by brands such as Patagonia, REI, IKEA Canada, and Allbirds. These companies are at the forefront, demonstrating how businesses can create a positive influence within their communities and the environment.

(2) In SFL and visual grammar analysis, these brands utilize Material Processes to challenge conventional patterns of consumer behavior effectively. The textual Theme places significant emphasis on renunciation and radical transparency. For example, REI’s landmark “Opt Outside” campaign disrupted traditional norms by closing all retail locations on Black Friday, overtly rejecting the culture of mass overconsumption. Similarly, IKEA Canada encourages consumers to focus on reselling furniture instead of purchasing new items.

(3) In pragmatic evaluation, these campaigns exemplify inverted Directives. While traditional advertising typically commands consumers to make purchases, these brands instead encourage consumers to refrain from consumption or call upon competitors to adopt radical transparency, as demonstrated by Allbirds' candid disclosures regarding their carbon footprint. Such messaging fulfills the highest Sincerity Condition, as these brands willingly incur short-term financial losses, such as store closures and anti-purchase messaging, in order to prioritize genuine ecological advocacy.

(ii) Cluster 2: The "Emotional Manipulation" and "Romanticization" Strategy

(1) Accounting for 28% of the dataset (14 out of 50 campaigns), this approach leans significantly on visual storytelling. It is exemplified by iconic brands like Nissan, celebrated for its innovative vehicles; Jeep, renowned for its rugged off-road capabilities; and Corona, known for its refreshing beer and laid-back atmosphere.

(2) In SFL and visual grammar analysis, these campaigns effectively employ compelling Narrative Visual Structures combined with evocative audio-visual elements intended to evoke strong emotional resonance (pathos). Nissan depicts a polar bear departing its melting Arctic habitat to explore an urban cityscape, while Jeep utilizes the iconic voice of astronomer Carl Sagan to advocate for planetary stewardship.

(3) In pragmatic evaluation, this group employs Expressives and Assertives to underscore a pressing ecological reality. However, from a multimodal perspective, the contrast between the displaced polar bear (presented as known information) and the electric vehicle (introduced as new information) creates an ambiguous implicature. This semantic disparity runs the risk of promoting Emotional Greenwashing, as it leverages pathos to divert consumers' attention from the significant industrial impacts associated with automotive manufacturing.

(iii) Cluster 3: The "Lifecycle Extension" and "Behavioral Restructuring" Strategy

(1) Emerging as the prevailing trend, this strategy represents 60% of the total corpus, encompassing 30 out of 50 campaigns. This substantial majority signals a clear market shift towards actionable sustainability, as demonstrated by prominent brands such as Dell, renowned for its innovative technology solutions; Samsung, celebrated for its cutting-edge electronics; Tide, a leader in laundry detergents; and Hellmann's, famous for its iconic mayonnaise.

(2) In SFL and visual grammar analysis, this cluster recontextualizes well-known objects by providing tangible and actionable solutions through practical demonstrations. Dell introduces an innovative laptop design that can be entirely disassembled in seconds without the need for screws, while Samsung offers visual guides for transforming legacy smartphones into smart home IoT sensors.

(3) In pragmatic evaluation, these campaigns represent a well-considered blend of Assertives, which highlight technological benefits, and Directives, aimed at altering consumer habits. Tide encourages consumers to adopt cold-water laundering to reduce household energy usage, while Hellmann's offers innovative culinary suggestions for making use of food waste. These communications steer clear of abstract conjectures, providing consumers with concrete, actionable tools, such as modular designs, recipes, and utility applications, to facilitate the adoption of sustainable lifestyles.

4. Discussion

The examination reveals that contemporary environmental advertising is undergoing a profound transformation, necessitated by increasing regulatory scrutiny and evolving consumer expectations. To successfully navigate this complex landscape, brands must abandon superficial and grandiose claims in favor of communication grounded in verifiable data and meaningful initiatives.

The findings underscore three critical mechanisms that serve to differentiate genuine transparency from greenwashing behaviors:

(i) **Transparency Through Empirical Data and Bold Initiatives:** Effective campaigns are characterized by their restraint in using inflated adjectives and exaggerations. For example, brands like Everlane focus on delivering raw data regarding environmental impacts, while Allbirds goes a step further by directly printing lifecycle carbon footprints onto product tags. Additionally, innovative market strategies such as REI's decision to close its retail operations on significant shopping holidays reflect a commitment to sustainability that diverges from mere marketed claims.

(ii) **Transition from “Neutralization” to “Elimination”:** A key focus of scrutiny has shifted towards the nature of corporate commitments, particularly in regard to carbon neutrality. These commitments are often viewed as insufficiently specific and vague. In contrast, initiatives that aim for comprehensive remediation, such as Microsoft's frameworks designed to historically reverse emissions accumulated since 1975, demonstrate a commitment to substantive environmental accountability. These broader targets not only meet rigorous preparatory and sincerity standards but also help mitigate the risks associated with making ineffective or misleading claims.

(iii) **Multimodal Corporate Collaboration:** The landscape of successful eco-advertising has shifted away from the singular, self-serving narratives often associated with traditional advertising. Instead, the emphasis is on collaborative partnerships across sectors. For instance, consumer goods manufacturers are increasingly forming alliances with specialized recycling networks, as exemplified by P&G's partnership with TerraCycle. Simultaneously, financial institutions are engaging with environmental organizations, as illustrated by American Express collaborating with Parley for the Oceans on marine conservation efforts. This collaborative approach reflects a more equitable distribution of ecological responsibility and is further reinforced through interpersonal lexicogrammatical structures that foster strong institutional trust with the public.

Ultimately, the research suggests that the future of environmental advertising lies in genuine commitment to transparency, collaborative action, and a focus on tangible outcomes rather than hollow promises. By embracing these principles, brands can build authentic connections with consumers, ultimately driving lasting change in the marketplace.

Building on the insights gained from the corpus analysis through integrated theoretical frameworks, this section explores the academic implications, practical contributions, and pedagogical applications of the research within the realm of specialized language education. Primarily, this study makes a noteworthy contribution to the methodology for analyzing advertising discourse. By transcending single-modal approaches, the integration of SFL, Visual Grammar, and Speech Act Theory offers a comprehensive analytical lens that effectively reveals the underlying mechanisms of greenwashing. This enables both researchers and practitioners to discern the subtle dissonance between lexicogrammatical choices and visual representations.

Anchored in these analytical insights, the study compiles its key findings into the Language Strategy Matrix for Transparent Eco-Discourse (see Appendix 2). This matrix serves as an actionable diagnostic toolkit for advertisers to evaluate their corporate communication, ensuring that eco-claims meet pragmatic felicity conditions. Lastly, translating these research findings and the proposed matrix into pedagogical practices presents considerable benefits for Business English and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curricula. This approach allows educators to nurture learners' critical discourse analysis skills through real-world case studies while simultaneously enhancing professional writing competencies, such as green copywriting, focusing on the mastery of transparent lexicogrammatical and visual structures.

This study delves into the urgent necessity of distinguishing authentic ecological sustainability from the deceptive practices of greenwashing prevalent in today's corporate communication. By employing a comprehensive methodology that combines Halliday's (2014) SFL, Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar, and the Speech Act Theory developed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), the research establishes a cohesive framework for MDA. This innovative approach transcends traditional analyses that often focus on a single mode of communication, revealing how textual and visual elements work in concert to either uphold or undermine the conditions necessary for effective and truthful communication.

Through a detailed empirical examination of a diverse corpus of 50 advertisements, the study uncovers that effective and transparent environmental communication is characterized by three core principles: (1) radical transparency, (2) empirical substantiation, (3) actionable frameworks that encourage positive behavior. In stark contrast, greenwashing tends to exploit semantic ambiguity, deploy emotional appeals, and make insubstantial commitments that lack genuine intent. The findings specifically indicate that brands committed to authenticity tend to utilize material processes and present measurable data, opting for straightforward representation over embellishments. For instance, brands like Everlane and Allbirds have transitioned from ambiguous claims of carbon neutrality to specific goals focused on historical remediation, akin to the definitive targets set by Microsoft. Moreover, such compliant brands emphasize collaborative accountability over self-aggrandizing narratives of corporate heroism.

In synthesizing these insights, the research proposes the Language Strategy Matrix for Transparent Eco-Discourse, a tool that enriches the field by providing strategic communicators with a diagnostic compliance toolkit, as well as offering educators a practical framework for Business English and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curricula. Looking ahead, future studies should expand this multimodal corpus to include burgeoning digital platforms, such as short-form video algorithms and interactive social media avenues, while also investigating cross-cultural differences in regulatory practices and consumer perceptions concerning green claims.

5. Conclusion

This study delves into the urgent necessity of distinguishing authentic ecological sustainability from the deceptive practices of greenwashing prevalent in today's corporate communication. By employing a comprehensive methodology that combines Halliday's (2014) SFL, Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar, and the Speech Act Theory developed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), the research establishes a cohesive framework for MDA. This innovative approach transcends traditional analyses that often focus on a single mode of communication, revealing how textual and visual elements work in concert to either uphold or undermine the conditions necessary for effective and truthful communication.

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Appendix A

Summary of the 50 Selected Eco-Advertising Campaigns

No.	Brand	Campaign Name	Corpus Description & Summary
1	Patagonia	"Don't Buy This Jacket"	Advising customers against buying jackets unless truly necessary to reduce waste.
2	IKEA Canada	"Green Friday"	Encouraging customers to resell old furniture for discount codes, promoting a circular economy.
3	adidas x Parley	"Run for the Oceans"	Combining sports and environmental protection by turning marine plastic waste into bestselling sneakers.
4	The North Face	"Clothes the Loop"	Encouraging users to bring old clothes and shoes of any brand to stores for recycling.
5	TOMS	"One for One"	Committing to donate a pair of shoes to children in need or support environmental projects from profits.
6	Tesla	"Electric Future"	Promoting the transition to electric vehicles, establishing renewable energy, and EVs as symbols of modern, luxurious living.
7	Nissan	"The Electric Vehicle Polar Bear"	Depicting a polar bear leaving its melting habitat to enter a city, conveying the urgency of emission reduction.
8	Ford	"Go Further"	Focusing on the research and production of hybrid and electric vehicles to lower global emissions.
9	Apple	"A Climate Change Promise"	Committing to making the entire supply chain and all devices carbon neutral.
10	Google	"Greenest Cloud"	Highlighting data centers operating on 100% renewable energy.
11	Lush	"Naked"	Selling solid items like soaps and shampoos without plastic packaging, accompanied by visual eco-messages.
12	Burt's Bees	"Greater Good"	Celebrating natural ingredients, sustainable farming practices, and bee protection.
13	The Body Shop	"Enrich, Not Exploit"	Committing to 100% recycled packaging and cruelty-free testing.
14	Starbucks	"Strawless Lids Initiative"	Eliminating plastic straws and introducing strawless lids with a focus on ocean health and micro-waste reduction.
15	Starbucks	"Grounds for Your Garden"	Encouraging customers to take used coffee grounds home as free plant fertilizer.
16	Ben & Jerry's	"Climate Justice Campaigns"	Utilizing protests, social campaigns, and videos to advocate for climate justice.
17	Oatly	"Post-Milk Generation"	Using satirical, playful out-of-home advertising to promote oat milk as an eco-friendlier alternative to dairy.
18	Panera Bread	"Panera for Earth"	Introducing visual initiatives for vegan food, lower agricultural carbon footprints, and water management.
19	Seventh Generation	"Come Clean"	Providing 100% transparency on ingredients for eco-friendly cleaning agents and warning against harsh chemicals.
20	Method Products	"Fear No Dirt"	Promoting hand soaps and laundry detergents packaged in aesthetic bottles made from ocean plastic.
21	P&G	"It Takes a Village"	Partnering core brands with TerraCycle to establish complex packaging collection and recycling systems.
22	Burt's Bees	"Bring Back the Bees"	Raising awareness of declining bee populations and guiding consumers on planting wildflowers to save ecosystems.
23	Ford	"F-150 Lightning: Powering Your Home"	Showcasing the electric pickup truck's capability to supply backup power to an entire home during outages using clean energy.

24	Rivian	"Keep the World Wild"	Positioning the brand as a friend of nature via silent ad films celebrating the wild beauty of US national preserves.
25	Jeep	"Pale Blue Dot"	Using Carl Sagan's narration to promote the 4xe plug-in hybrid (PHEV), calling to protect our only planet.
26	Hertz	"Let's Go Everywhere in an EV"	Advertising large-scale EV rental services to help consumers experience green mobility without ownership.
27	Allbirds	"Meet the Carbon Footprint Label"	Pioneering the direct printing of carbon footprints on shoes, calling competitors to do the same for transparency.
28	Nike	"Move to Zero"	Featuring items made with at least 20% recycled materials toward a zero-waste, zero-carbon future.
29	Target	"Target Forward"	Launching outdoor and TV campaigns featuring private label items with circular, easily recyclable packaging.
30	REI	"Opt Outside"	Closing all stores on Black Friday and paying employees to step outdoors, rejecting hyper-consumerism.
31	Everlane	"ReNew Collection"	Launching jackets made entirely from ocean-retrieved plastic bottles with transparent production costs and impacts.
32	Microsoft	"Carbon Negative by 2030"	Committing via short documentary ads to remove all carbon emitted since its 1975 founding.
33	HP	"Windows of Hope"	Introducing laptops built with ocean-bound plastics, focusing on protecting coastal livelihoods.
34	Samsung America	"Galaxy Upcycling at Home"	Guiding users to upcycle old phones into smart home gadgets (e.g., baby monitors, light sensors) to extend hardware lifecycles.
35	Dell	"Concept Luna"	Advertising a futuristic computer concept fully disassemblable within seconds, without screws, to simplify repair and recycling.
36	Corona	"Plastic Fishing Tournament"	Organizing plastic-fishing events in marine areas, turning fishermen into ocean cleaners, and buying back plastic at above market fish prices.
37	Budweiser	"Wind Brewed"	Airing Super Bowl ads claiming 100% of US Budweiser is brewed with wind energy, featuring iconic horses and Dalmatian dogs.
38	Chipotle	"Real Foodprint"	Integrating an app feature showing the exact water saved and land protected when choosing sustainable organic menus.
39	Hellmann's	"Make Taste, Not Waste"	Super Bowl ads urging Americans to cook with fridge leftovers to curb food waste and lower greenhouse emissions.
40	Heinz	"The Marz Edition"	Testing tomato growth under simulated Mars harsh conditions to research sustainable agricultural solutions against climate change.
41	Dove	"No Digital Distortion" & Recycled Packaging	Committing to cut 20,500 tons of virgin plastic annually by adopting 100% PCR recycled bottles across all body washes.
42	Colgate	"Save Water"	Capturing continuous tap water waste during teeth brushing to urge turning off taps to save clean water millions.
43	Tide	"Turn to Cold"	Partnering with celebrities to advocate for shifting to cold water laundry, saving electricity, and household utility bills.
44	Clorox	"Clorox EcoClean"	Introducing plant-based disinfecting formulas proving strong cleaners can be biodegradable and water-safe.

45	GE	"Ecomagination"	Promoting massive wind turbines and clean water filtration tech for major cities as part of major B2B green initiatives.
46	NextEra Energy	"Building America's Clean Energy Future"	Mapping out solar and wind farms gradually replacing traditional coal-fired power plants.
47	WWF	"Lungs"	Presenting print posters where leaves resemble human lungs, conveying that destroying forests strips human breath.
48	Greenpeace	"Deforestation continues with the turn of a page"	Illustrating print ads where flipping a page transforms a tropical rainforest into waste paper shreds.
49	National Wildlife Federation	"Restoring coastal resilience"	Partnering with brands on educational ads emphasizing the need to restore natural wildlife corridors.
50	FedEx American Express /	"Priority Earth" / Recycled Ocean Plastic Card	Committing to global carbon-neutral shipping by 2040 and launching credit cards made from beach-recovered plastics.

Appendix B

Language Strategy Matrix for Green Discourse and Transparent Advertising

Communication Situation / Objective	Discursive & Pragmatic Strategy (Speech Acts)	Lexicogrammatical & Semantic Tools (SFL - Halliday)	Visual Tools (Visual Grammar - Kress & van Leeuwen)	Application in ESP Marketing Curriculum Design
1. Presenting Product Attributes (Avoiding vague buzzwords & the “part-for-whole” trap)	Claims should be based on empirical evidence, steering clear of vague qualitative descriptors.	Material Processes combined with measured Circumstances (e.g., a 20% reduction in water usage). Not allowed: Relational Processes employed for labeling (e.g., “Environmentally friendly”).	Analytical Structures: Close-up shots of materials or technical specifications. Avoid: Artificial natural backgrounds (leaves, blue skies).	Vocabulary and Syntax Activity: Ask students to revise misleading environmentally-friendly advertisements (for instance, “Eco-friendly coffee”) into statements that highlight Material Processes and provide actual measurements (“Coffee cultivated using 50% less water”).
2. Future Commitments & Roadmaps (Avoiding unbacked empty promises)	Favorable Commissive Actions: Promises need to be supported by necessary preparatory conditions and actual capabilities for execution (e.g., Microsoft pledging to eliminate carbon emissions from 1975 onward).	Modality System: Powerful modal verbs (such as will, commit to) paired with particular Temporal and Manner Circumstances.	Linear/Timeline Formats: Showcasing the years in which milestones are achieved rather than idealized representations.	Analysis of the Case Study: Evaluate the corporate commitments made by Apple and Microsoft alongside those of an automotive brand to assess the legitimacy of modal verbs.
3. Call to Action (CTA) (Avoiding shifting total ecological responsibility onto consumers)	Bilateral Directive Acts: Creating a mutual responsibility agreement between the brand and the consumer (e.g., IKEA reselling pre-owned furniture, REI shuttering stores).	Mood & Theme Framework: Switching between “We” (the brand pledging to take action) and “You” (the consumer participating in collaboration) topical themes.	Balanced/Parallel Composition: Positioning brand action visuals alongside consumer action visuals on the same level.	Text for Copywriting Task: Ask students to create a Call to Action (CTA) for a sustainable fashion initiative utilizing a bilateral We and You framework.
4. Handling Legal Compliance (Avoiding framing standard regulations as unique features)	Eliminating Expressive Acts: No self-congratulation or boasting over mandatory legal obligations (e.g., eliminating CFCs).	Avoiding Attitudinal Adjuncts: Stripping away flattering modifiers (“Pioneering”, “Breakthrough”). Maintaining an objective declarative structure.	Low Salience: Placing legal compliance information in the margin with small font sizes, keeping it out of the visual focus.	Critical Reading: Have students identify “compliance-as-merit” errors in corporate PR materials to foster critical thinking.

Transforming Public Sector Corporations in Tanzania: A Capability-Based Framework for Addressing Persistent Governance, Financial, and Organizational Weaknesses

Josephat Lotto¹, College of Business Education. Email: tathioga@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

Public and Statutory Corporations (PSCs) remain important instruments for economic transformation, strategic investment, and public service delivery in developing economies. Governments establish PSCs to address market failures, provide essential services, support industrial development, and advance national economic objectives. However, despite growing interest in PSCs' governance, several gaps remain in existing literature. *First*, many studies focus primarily on ownership structures, privatization outcomes, and financial performance while paying limited attention to internal institutional capabilities. *Second*, existing performance assessments frequently identify weaknesses without developing systematic approaches for measuring recurring organizational constraints. *Third*, limited attention has been given to mechanisms that translate oversight findings into continuous organizational improvement. The study, therefore, addresses these gaps by developing the Public Sector Corporation Performance Weakness Index (PSC-PWI), an analytical framework designed to identify and measure recurring institutional weaknesses affecting PSCs' performance. The development of the index was done using the directed qualitative content analysis of official documentary evidence from Controller and Auditor General (CAG) audit reports and Treasury Registrar (TR) performance evaluation reports, covering the period 2019/20–2023/24. The study analyzed 30 purposively selected PSCs using a structured coding framework designed to identify recurring institutional weaknesses. The findings reveal 264 recurring weaknesses categorized into seven dimensions: *governance and accountability, financial management, operational efficiency, strategic implementation, human capital capability, digital transformation, and risk management*. Financial management weaknesses constitute the largest proportion of identified deficiencies (23.5%), followed by governance weaknesses (20.5%), operational inefficiencies (17.0%), strategic implementation challenges (14.4%), risk management weaknesses (11.4%), human capital limitations (8.0%), and digital transformation gaps (5.2%). To address this gap, the study proposes the Capability-Based Reform Model as an institutional mechanism capable of transforming oversight findings into practical reform interventions. The broader implication is that effective public ownership requires more than control and supervision. Governments must develop the institutional capability to support, improve, and transform the organizations they own. Strengthening PSCs' performance, therefore, requires a shift from a compliance-based reform model toward a capability-based institutional development approach. The PSC-PWI and Capability-Based Reform Model developed in this study provide a practical pathway for achieving this transformation. Although developed within the Tanzanian context, the framework offers broader relevance for developing countries seeking to improve the performance, accountability, and sustainability of public corporations. Future research may extend this study by applying the PSC-PWI quantitatively across larger samples of public corporations, examining relationships between capability weaknesses and financial outcomes, and evaluating the long-term effectiveness of capability-based reform interventions.

Keywords: Public and Statutory Corporations; Public Enterprise Reform; Institutional Capability; Governance; Organizational Performance; Documentary Analysis; PSCs Performance Weakness Index.

1. Introduction

Public Sector Corporations (PSCs) continue to occupy a central position in the economic development strategies of many developing countries. Unlike ordinary government departments, PSCs are established to combine public ownership with operational autonomy, allowing governments to pursue strategic economic objectives while maintaining commercial principles. They operate in sectors where governments consider private markets insufficient to achieve national development objectives, including energy, transport, telecommunications, finance, natural resources, infrastructure, and strategic manufacturing. Consequently, PSCs represent important mechanisms through which governments promote industrialization, expand access to essential services, and support long-term economic transformation (OECD, 2023; World Bank, 2024).

However, the performance of PSCs has remained a persistent concern internationally. While some PSCs have achieved significant economic and social contributions, many continue to experience financial losses, operational inefficiencies, weak accountability, delayed strategic projects, and inadequate service delivery. These challenges have generated extensive debates regarding the appropriate role of governments as owners, regulators, and managers of public corporations. Traditional reform approaches have frequently focused on privatization, commercialization, restructuring, or strengthening monitoring systems. Although such reforms have produced improvements in some contexts, evidence increasingly demonstrates that ownership transformation alone does not guarantee improved performance because organizational effectiveness depends heavily on internal capabilities, governance quality, and institutional arrangements (OECD, 2021; Cuervo-Cazurra et al., 2022).

The Tanzanian context reflects these broader international challenges. PSCs have historically played an important role in supporting national development priorities, particularly within strategic sectors such as energy, transport, communication, finance, and infrastructure. The government has undertaken several reforms aimed at improving accountability, strengthening ownership oversight, and enhancing institutional performance. The Office of the Treasury Registrar (OTR) has been responsible for monitoring public corporations, while the Controller and Auditor General (CAG) provides independent assessments of financial accountability, compliance, and institutional effectiveness.

Despite these reforms, evidence from official oversight reports indicates that many PSCs' weaknesses remain persistent. Repeated observations concerning weak governance systems, inadequate financial controls, inefficient asset utilization, delayed project implementation, poor risk management, and limited organizational capability continue to appear across multiple reporting cycles. The recurrence of similar weaknesses suggests that existing mechanisms have been relatively effective in identifying institutional problems but less effective in addressing the underlying organizational capabilities required to prevent their continuation.

This situation raises an important research question: why do similar weaknesses continue to recur despite extensive oversight, evaluation, and reform initiatives? Existing explanations often emphasize external factors such as political interference, ownership arrangements, regulatory weaknesses, or financial constraints (Teece, 2022). While these factors remain important, this study argues that a significant part of PSCs' underperformance is rooted in internal organizational capability limitations. PSCs require not only resources and formal governance structures but also the ability to manage resources effectively, implement strategies, develop human capabilities, adopt appropriate technologies, and manage institutional risks.

The organizational capability perspective provides an alternative explanation for understanding PSCs' performance. Dynamic capability theory argues that organizations achieve sustainable performance when they possess the ability to integrate, develop, and reconfigure resources in response to changing environments (Teece, 2020). Applied to PSCs, this perspective suggests that performance depends on whether corporations possess the institutional capabilities necessary to convert public resources into sustainable economic and social outcomes.

Similarly, institutional theory emphasizes that formal structures alone do not automatically produce effective organizational behaviour. Institutions create rules, incentives, and governance arrangements, but their effectiveness depends on the capabilities of actors operating within those structures (North, 1990; Scott, 2014). Therefore, the existence of boards, reporting systems, and regulatory frameworks does not necessarily guarantee effective performance unless these systems are supported by appropriate organizational capabilities.

Despite growing interest in PSCs' governance, several gaps remain in existing literature. *First*, many studies focus primarily on ownership structures, privatization outcomes, and financial performance while paying limited attention to internal institutional capabilities. *Second*, existing performance assessments frequently identify weaknesses without developing systematic approaches for measuring recurring organizational constraints. *Third*, limited attention has been given to mechanisms that translate oversight findings into continuous organizational improvement.

This study addresses these gaps by developing the Public Sector Corporation Performance Weakness Index (PSC-PWI), an analytical framework designed to identify and measure recurring institutional weaknesses affecting PSCs' performance. The study further proposes a *Capability-Based Framework* as an institutional reform mechanism capable of transforming oversight evidence into practical organizational improvement.

The study makes three related contributions. *First*, it contributes theoretically by extending institutional and organizational capability perspectives into the study of public corporations, demonstrating that PSCs' performance is shaped not only by ownership structures but also by internal capability systems. *Second*, it contributes methodologically by demonstrating how documentary evidence from oversight institutions can be systematically transformed into an analytical framework for understanding public sector performance challenges. *Third*, it contributes practically by proposing an institutional reform model that strengthens the capacity of the state to support and improve public corporations.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. The *next* section reviews relevant literature and develops the theoretical foundation of the study. The *third* section explains the methodology, including the documentary analysis approach, data sources, sample selection, and analytical procedure. The *fourth* section proposes an institutional reform model that strengthens the capacity of the state to support and improve public corporations. The *final* section discusses theoretical and policy implications before presenting conclusions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Framework

State-owned enterprises represent hybrid organizations operating at the intersection of public administration, corporate governance, and market competition. Unlike private firms whose primary objective is shareholder wealth maximization, PSCs are expected to simultaneously achieve commercial sustainability and public policy objectives. This hybrid nature creates inherent tensions regarding accountability, efficiency, strategic direction, and performance evaluation (Grossi et al., 2021; Bruton et al., 2021).

The contemporary literature increasingly rejects the traditional assumption that PSCs are inherently inefficient because of state ownership. Instead, researchers argue that performance outcomes depend largely on institutional arrangements, governance quality, managerial capability, ownership structures, and the alignment between political objectives and operational autonomy (Cuervo-Cazurra et al., 2022; Musacchio & Lazzarini, 2023). Efficient PSCs can generate substantial economic and social value when supported by professional governance systems, clear mandates, competent leadership, and effective accountability mechanisms (OECD, 2024).

Recent evidence suggests that successful PSCs in countries such as Singapore, China, Norway, and Malaysia have demonstrated that state ownership can coexist with high operational efficiency when governance arrangements minimize political interference and promote professional management (Bruton et al., 2021; Cuervo-Cazurra et al., 2022). Conversely, weak institutional environments frequently transform PSCs into vehicles for political objectives, inefficient resource allocation, and fiscal dependency (Musacchio & Lazzarini, 2023).

Therefore, the central issue is not whether governments should own enterprises, but rather how ownership is structured, governed, monitored, and strategically managed. This perspective shifts the debate from ownership ideology toward institutional design and organizational capability development.

2.2 Theoretical Underpinning

2.2.1 Agency Theory

Agency Theory offers one of the most powerful descriptions of performance challenges within PSCs. According to Jensen and Meckling (1976), agency problems arise when ownership and control are separated, creating information asymmetry and conflicting interests between principals and agents. In PSCs, the government represents the ultimate owner, while managers and boards are considered agents responsible for operational decisions. However, unlike private firms where shareholders can directly discipline managers through market mechanisms, PSCs often include multiple principals such as government ministries, regulators, taxpayers, employees, political actors, and service beneficiaries. This brings about what researchers such as Grossi et al. (2021) and Schillemans & Bjurström (2022) describe as a multiple principal problem, where conflicting expectations weaken monitoring effectiveness and managerial accountability.

In developing economies, agency problems are strengthened by limited board independence, political appointments, weak performance contracts, inadequate disclosure requirements, and insufficient monitoring capacity (Khan et al., 2021; Musacchio & Lazzarini, 2023). These challenges are often evident through recurrent audit findings involving weak internal controls, procurement irregularities, ineffective risk management, and failure to implement strategic plans. The most recent empirical studies, such as Kaunda & Pelser (2023) and Matutu & Chalu (2024), confirm that stronger governance mechanisms, including independent boards, professional directors, transparent reporting, and performance-based executive contracts, meaningfully improve PSCs' efficiency and accountability. In this study, Agency Theory elucidates why recurring weaknesses reported by the Controller and Auditor General and Treasury Registrar may persist despite repeated recommendations. Weak accountability relationships between government owners, boards, and executives create conditions where corrective actions remain incomplete and organizational learning becomes limited.

2.2.2 Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory provides another important explanation for PSCs' performance variations. Institutional theorists argue that organizations operate within broader regulatory, political, and social environments that shape their structures, behaviors, and legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2022). PSCs are particularly influenced by institutional pressures because they operate under government ownership and are embedded within political systems. While formal institutions such as laws, regulations, audit requirements, and governance codes establish expected behaviors, informal institutions—including political relationships, administrative culture, and organizational norms—often determine actual practices (Scott, 2022). A central concept within institutional theory is institutional decoupling, where organizations adopt formal structures to demonstrate compliance while actual practices remain unchanged. In PSCs, this may occur when organizations establish audit committees, risk management frameworks, strategic plans, or governance policies but fail to effectively implement them (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Bromley & Powell, 2021). This perspective is particularly relevant to Tanzania, where repeated audit findings suggest that formal governance reforms have not always translated into improved organizational practices. The persistence of similar weaknesses across multiple years may indicate a gap between institutional compliance and substantive organizational transformation. Recent public administration research emphasizes that improving PSCs' performance requires strengthening institutional capacity, not merely introducing additional regulations. Sustainable reform depends on changing organizational routines, incentives, leadership behavior, and accountability cultures (van Dooren et al., 2023).

2.2.3 Resource-Based View

The Resource-Based View (RBV) argues that organizational performance depends on the possession and effective utilization of valuable, rare, difficult-to-imitate, and non-substitutable resources (Barney, 1991). While originally developed within private sector strategy literature, RBV has increasingly been applied to public organizations to explain differences in institutional performance. From a PSC's perspective, critical resources include managerial

expertise, technological capabilities, financial resources, organizational knowledge, innovation capacity, and governance systems. Organizations with stronger internal capabilities are better positioned to execute strategies, manage risks, improve efficiency, and adapt to environmental changes (Kraaijenbrink et al., 2022). Recent research demonstrates that many PSCS failures are not caused solely by insufficient financial resources but by weak organizational capabilities. Poor project management, ineffective procurement systems, inadequate information systems, and weak human capital management reflect capability deficiencies rather than isolated technical problems (Teece, 2023). The RBV therefore supports the argument that improving PSCS performance requires investments in organizational capabilities rather than focusing exclusively on financial restructuring.

2.2.4 Dynamic Capabilities Theory

Dynamic Capabilities Theory extends RBV by emphasizing an organization's ability to renew, modify, and reconfigure resources in response to environmental changes (Teece, 2023). Modern PSCs operate in increasingly complex environments characterized by technological disruption, climate change, globalization, fiscal pressures, and changing stakeholder expectations. Consequently, organizations must continuously develop capabilities related to innovation, digital transformation, strategic flexibility, and organizational learning. Recent studies indicate that PSCs with stronger dynamic capabilities demonstrate superior resilience, innovation performance, and service delivery outcomes (Warner & Wäger, 2021; Teece, 2023). Conversely, organizations characterized by bureaucratic rigidity and weak learning systems often struggle to respond effectively to emerging challenges. This theory is relevant to Tanzania because several recurring weaknesses reported by oversight institutions—including outdated systems, weak digital integration, ineffective strategic execution, and limited innovation—reflect inadequate adaptive capabilities.

2.2.5 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory emphasizes that organizations must create value for multiple stakeholders rather than focusing exclusively on owners (Freeman, 1984). In the context of PSCs, stakeholders include government, citizens, employees, regulators, suppliers, communities, and private sector partners. Unlike private firms, PSCs have explicit social responsibilities because they manage public resources and provide essential services. Therefore, performance assessment must consider not only financial outcomes but also service quality, accessibility, social impact, transparency, and public trust (Bryson et al., 2021). Recent public management studies argue that stakeholder-oriented governance improves legitimacy and organizational sustainability because it aligns institutional objectives with societal expectations (Bryson et al., 2021; Mazzucato & Rodrik, 2023). The SPI Index developed in this study incorporates this perspective by including dimensions beyond financial performance, including service effectiveness, accountability, compliance, and strategic contribution.

2.2.6 Public Value Theory

Public Value Theory provides a broader framework for understanding PSCs' effectiveness. Developed by Moore (1995), the theory argues that public organizations should be evaluated based on their capacity to generate socially valuable outcomes rather than merely achieving efficiency. For PSCs, public value includes economic contribution, quality service delivery, employment creation, infrastructure development, environmental sustainability, and citizen welfare. Consequently, performance measurement systems must capture both operational efficiency and societal impact (Bryson et al., 2021). This theoretical perspective challenges narrow financial evaluations and supports the development of multidimensional performance frameworks such as the SPI Index.

2.3 Empirical Evidence

Recent empirical studies provide substantial evidence that governance structures, managerial autonomy, accountability mechanisms, and institutional capabilities are central determinants of state-owned enterprise performance. A major strand of empirical research demonstrates that improving corporate governance

arrangements enhances PSCs' efficiency by reducing agency problems, strengthening monitoring mechanisms, and improving managerial incentives. Using panel data from state-owned enterprises in emerging markets, Aivazian et al. (2022) find that corporatization reforms significantly improve PSCs' profitability, productivity, and operational efficiency by introducing clearer performance objectives and strengthening managerial accountability. Their findings suggest that transforming PSCs from traditional administrative entities into commercially oriented organizations creates stronger incentives for managers to improve resource allocation and financial outcomes.

Similarly, Boubakri et al. (2021) provide cross-country empirical evidence showing that governance reforms combined with market liberalization improve PSCs' performance. Using international firm-level data, the study demonstrates that PSCs operating under stronger corporate governance systems achieve higher profitability and productivity compared with enterprises characterized by weak monitoring and excessive state intervention. The authors emphasize that ownership reform alone is insufficient; rather, improvements in transparency, board effectiveness, and shareholder protection are necessary conditions for sustainable PSCs' performance.

Evidence from developing economies further confirms the importance of governance quality. Using data from nine state-owned companies over an extended period, Kaunda and Pelsier (2023) employ fixed-effects, random-effects, and generalized method of moments (GMM) estimations to examine the relationship between governance mechanisms and PSCs' performance. Their findings indicate that board characteristics, ownership structures, disclosure practices, and capital management significantly influence PSCs' outcomes. The study concludes that weak governance arrangements contribute to inefficiency, while stronger governance systems enhance accountability and financial performance.

Country-specific evidence from Africa also highlights persistent governance challenges affecting PSCs. In Tanzania, Matutu and Chalu (2024) examine 50 PSCs using data collected from 300 respondents and apply partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). Their findings reveal that corporate governance improves management control systems, which subsequently enhance financial performance. However, the study also finds that governance structures alone do not automatically generate better outcomes unless supported by effective internal control systems, strategic monitoring, and managerial accountability. This demonstrates the importance of complementary organizational capabilities in translating governance reforms into improved performance outcomes.

A similar conclusion is reached by Situmorang and Muchtar (2024), who investigate Indonesian PSCs using panel data from listed enterprises between 2018 and 2022. Their findings show that corporate governance significantly improves financial performance, although macroeconomic conditions such as inflation influence the strength of this relationship. The study highlights that PSCs' performance depends not only on internal governance mechanisms but also on the broader economic environment in which enterprises operate.

Recent empirical research has also identified accountability, transparency, and board effectiveness as critical drivers of PSCs' performance. Mulenga (2024), studying PSCs in Zambia, finds that weaknesses in governance implementation, inadequate disclosure practices, and politically influenced board appointments undermine organizational performance. The study argues that although many African countries have established formal governance frameworks, implementation gaps remain a major constraint limiting PSCs' effectiveness. These findings are consistent with broader international evidence from the OECD (2024), which emphasizes that effective PSCs' governance requires clear ownership policies, independent boards, transparent reporting systems, and professional management practices.

Beyond governance reforms, empirical studies increasingly demonstrate that management control systems and performance measurement frameworks play an important role in improving PSCs' effectiveness. Bouckaert and Halligan (2021) find that public organizations achieve better outcomes when performance information systems are integrated into strategic decision-making processes rather than being used merely for compliance purposes. Their comparative analysis shows that organizations with effective performance measurement systems demonstrate stronger accountability, improved resource utilization, and enhanced service delivery.

Similarly, Moynihan and Pandey (2022) provide empirical evidence that organizational learning and management systems significantly improve public sector performance. Their findings suggest that public organizations become more effective when managers use performance information to adapt strategies, correct operational weaknesses, and promote continuous improvement. These findings are particularly relevant for PSCs because many performance problems originate from weak monitoring systems, limited strategic learning, and insufficient alignment between organizational objectives and managerial incentives.

Institutional capacity has also emerged as a significant determinant of PSCs' success, especially in developing countries. Kiggundu (2022) demonstrates that African public enterprises frequently suffer from political interference, weak accountability structures, inadequate managerial capacity, and limited operational autonomy. The study argues that improving PSCs' performance requires institutional reforms that strengthen professional management, reduce political influence, and enhance accountability mechanisms. Similarly, Muriu and Wanyoike (2023) find that institutional capacity, managerial competence, and governance quality significantly explain differences in public sector performance across developing countries. Their findings suggest that organizational capability development is essential for translating reforms into measurable improvements.

Another important empirical dimension concerns technological capability and digital transformation. Recent evidence shows that PSCs must develop digital capabilities to improve efficiency, innovation, and competitiveness. Using extensive empirical evidence, Bharadwaj et al. (2021) demonstrate that digital business capabilities enhance organizational agility, innovation capacity, and competitive advantage. Their findings indicate that digital transformation is not simply a technological investment but requires organizational restructuring, new managerial capabilities, and strategic alignment.

Extending this argument, Warner and Wäger (2021) provide empirical evidence that successful digital transformation depends on dynamic capabilities, particularly the ability of organizations to identify technological opportunities, integrate new systems, and redesign organizational processes. Their study shows that organizations with stronger digital sensing, adaptation, and transformation capabilities achieve superior performance outcomes. Similarly, Vial (2021) finds that digital transformation improves organizational performance when technology adoption is accompanied by changes in organizational structures, processes, and managerial practices.

Artificial intelligence and advanced analytics have also become increasingly important sources of organizational improvement. Mikalef and Gupta (2021) demonstrate empirically that artificial intelligence capability improves organizational performance through enhanced innovation capacity and operational efficiency. For PSCs, this suggests that adopting advanced technologies such as predictive analytics, digital platforms, and automated decision systems can strengthen financial management, service delivery, and operational effectiveness.

Risk management capability represents another critical factor influencing PSCs' resilience. Arena et al. (2022) provide empirical evidence that enterprise risk management improves organizational resilience when integrated into strategic planning and decision-making systems. Their findings indicate that fragmented risk management approaches are ineffective, whereas organizations that embed risk considerations into strategic processes are better positioned to manage uncertainty and improve long-term performance.

Finally, emerging empirical evidence highlights the growing importance of sustainability and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices in improving PSCs' performance. Using listed enterprises from Hong Kong between 2018 and 2022, Li (2025) finds that stronger ESG performance improves financial flexibility by reducing financing constraints and strengthening stakeholder confidence. However, the study also shows that the effect is weaker among PSCs because ownership structures and governance characteristics influence how ESG practices translate into financial outcomes.

Overall, the empirical literature demonstrates that improving PSCs' performance requires a multidimensional approach combining governance reform, managerial autonomy, accountability mechanisms, institutional capacity building, digital transformation, risk management, and sustainability practices. Evidence from emerging

economies, particularly Africa, indicates that many PSC failures are not caused by the absence of policies but by weak implementation, limited managerial capability, political interference, and ineffective control systems. Therefore, successful PSC transformation requires integrated reforms that address both structural governance weaknesses and organizational capability constraints.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design based on directed qualitative content analysis to examine recurring organizational weaknesses affecting Public and Statutory Corporations (PSCs) in Tanzania. Directed qualitative content analysis was selected because the study aimed to systematically analyse official documentary evidence through a theoretically informed coding framework while simultaneously generating a new analytical construct, namely the Public and Statutory Corporation Performance Weakness Index (PSC-PWI). Unlike conventional content analysis, directed content analysis combines deductive coding derived from existing theoretical perspectives with inductive identification of emerging patterns from empirical evidence. This approach enables researchers to validate existing concepts while allowing new dimensions of institutional weakness to emerge from documentary data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The documentary research approach was appropriate because reports produced by the Controller and Auditor General (CAG) and the Treasury Registrar (TR) represent independent, longitudinal, and formally verified sources of evidence concerning governance effectiveness, financial sustainability, operational performance, strategic implementation, and institutional capability. Unlike perception-based surveys, documentary analysis reduces social desirability bias and organizational self-reporting limitations because observations originate from statutory oversight institutions responsible for evaluating public sector accountability. The design was further informed by institutional theory and organizational capability perspectives, which emphasize that persistent performance problems within public organizations are often embedded in governance arrangements, managerial systems, organizational routines, and institutional capacities rather than isolated managerial decisions. Therefore, the methodology focused on identifying recurring structural weaknesses rather than individual operational failures.

3.2 Data Sources

The study relied exclusively on official documentary sources obtained from the Controller and Auditor General and the Office of the Treasury Registrar covering the financial years 2019/20–2023/24 as presented in Table 1 below. These two sources were selected because they provide complementary perspectives on PSCs' performance. While CAG reports primarily assess compliance, financial accountability, internal controls, procurement practices, and implementation effectiveness, TR reports evaluate broader institutional performance including profitability, strategic execution, governance arrangements, and operational efficiency. The combination of these sources enabled methodological triangulation by comparing recurring weaknesses identified through independent oversight mechanisms. The use of multiple documentary sources strengthened credibility through source triangulation because identified weaknesses were required to demonstrate persistence across reporting systems rather than appearing in only one institutional assessment.

Table 1: Documentary Sources Analysed in the Study

Source	Reporting Period	Number of Reports	Primary Purpose	Evidence Extracted
Controller and Auditor General (CAG) Annual General Reports	2019/20–2023/24	5	Identification of audit-related institutional weaknesses	Governance failures, procurement weaknesses, financial management problems, internal control deficiencies, implementation failures

Treasury Registrar Annual Performance Evaluation Reports	2019/20– 2023/24	5	Assessment of PSC performance and institutional effectiveness	Financial performance, governance effectiveness, strategic implementation, operational efficiency
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3.3 Selection of Public and Statutory Corporations

The study analyzed 30 Tanzanian Public and Statutory Corporations selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because the objective of the study was not statistical generalization but analytical explanation of recurring institutional weaknesses affecting strategically important PSCs.

The selected corporations represented different economic sectors, including energy, transport, telecommunications, finance, infrastructure, agriculture, manufacturing, and public services. The sample included both commercially oriented corporations and non-commercial public entities to capture variations in organizational mandates and performance challenges.

Selection was based on three main criteria as reflected in Table 2 below. *First*, corporations had to appear consistently in CAG and Treasury Registrar documentation during the study period. *Second*, sufficient documentary information had to be available to enable systematic coding of institutional weaknesses. *Third*, selected corporations had to represent strategically significant areas of the Tanzanian economy.

The purposive approach enabled the study to focus on corporations where institutional weaknesses could be examined systematically over time

Table 2: Selection Criteria for Public and Statutory Corporations

Criterion	Explanation
Documentary availability	Inclusion in CAG and TR reports throughout the study period
Strategic importance	Contribution to national economic and social objectives
Sector representation	Coverage of major productive and service sectors
Evidence sufficiency	Availability of detailed observations for coding

3.4 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis was the recurring organizational weakness documented within PSCs' performance reports. A weakness was classified as recurring when substantially similar observations appeared in at least three of the five reporting periods examined. This criterion was adopted to distinguish persistent institutional weaknesses from temporary operational challenges. Consequently, only weaknesses demonstrating repeated occurrence were incorporated into the PSCs' Performance Weakness Index (PSC-PWI). Each documentary observation was treated as a coded analytical unit and classified according to its contribution to organizational capability dimensions.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

The following analytical sequence from documentary evidence through thematic consolidation to institutional intervention design demonstrates a transparent methodological pathway. This approach ensures that the final output of the proposed capability-based framework emerges from empirically identified institutional weaknesses and provides a theoretically grounded mechanism for improving PSC performance. The documentary analysis was undertaken through four sequential analytical stages.

Stage One: Identification of Recurring Organizational Weaknesses

The first stage involved systematic examination of CAG and TR reports to identify repeated observations relating to governance, financial management, operational efficiency, strategic implementation, human resource capability, digital transformation, and risk management.

Each observation was assigned an initial code representing its organizational capability category. Similar observations appearing under different terminology were consolidated into common analytical themes as highlighted in Table 3 below

Table 3: Initial Documentary Coding Framework

Code	Documentary Observation	Initial Theme
GOV ₁	Weak board oversight	Governance
GOV ₂	Accountability deficiencies	Governance
FIN ₁	Revenue leakages	Financial Management
FIN ₂	Unsupported expenditure	Financial Management
FIN ₃	Weak debt recovery mechanisms	Financial Management
OPS ₁	Low asset utilization	Operational Efficiency
OPS ₂	Delayed project implementation	Operational Efficiency
STR ₁	Weak strategic plan execution	Strategic Implementation
HR ₁	Skills and capacity constraints	Human Capital
DIG ₁	Weak ICT systems	Digital Transformation
RSK ₁	Weak internal controls	Risk Management

Following initial coding, observations were compared across the five reporting cycles to determine persistence as reported in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Frequency of Recurring Weaknesses Across Reporting Periods

Organizational Weakness	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Years Reported
Weak board oversight	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Weak internal controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Procurement irregularities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Poor debt recovery	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Delayed strategic projects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Low operational efficiency	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Weak ICT systems	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5

Weak risk management	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
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The consistency of these observations across all reporting periods indicates that the weaknesses represent systemic institutional capability limitations rather than isolated managerial incidents.

Stage Two: Development of the Public and Statutory Corporation Performance Weakness Index (PSC-PWI)

The second stage involved consolidating individual observations into broader organizational capability dimensions. This process involved comparing coded weaknesses with theoretical concepts derived from institutional theory, dynamic capability theory, and public management literature. Seven dimensions emerged from the analysis: governance and accountability, financial management, operational efficiency, strategic implementation, human capital capability, digital transformation, and risk management. These dimensions formed the foundation of the PSC Performance Weakness Index. The seven dimensions collectively form the PSC-PWI analytical framework as reflected in Table 5 and their respective definitions and key indicators are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 5: Development of the PSC Performance Weakness Index

PSC-PWI Dimension	Number of Indicators	Representative Weaknesses
Governance and Accountability	8	Weak boards, accountability gaps, ineffective oversight
Financial Management	12	Revenue losses, unsupported expenditure, weak debt management
Operational Efficiency	10	Low productivity, idle assets, inefficient processes
Strategic Implementation	7	Poor execution of approved plans
Human Capital Capability	6	Skills shortages, weak succession systems
Digital Transformation	5	Manual processes, fragmented ICT systems
Risk Management	7	Weak internal audit and risk monitoring

Table 6: Structure of the PSC Performance Weakness Index

Dimension	Operational Definition	Key indicators
Governance and Accountability	Effectiveness of oversight structures, accountability mechanisms, and decision-making systems	Board effectiveness, accountability systems, oversight mechanisms
Financial Management	Ability to manage financial resources efficiently and sustainably	Revenue management, expenditure controls, debt management
Operational Efficiency	Capacity to transform organizational resources into outputs and services	Asset utilization, productivity, service delivery
Strategic Implementation	Ability to execute approved strategies, programmes, and projects	Strategy execution, monitoring systems, project implementation
Human Capital Capability	Availability and utilization of organizational skills and competencies	Skills, leadership development, organizational learning
Digital Transformation	Integration of technology into organizational systems and processes	ICT systems, automation, information management
Risk Management	Ability to identify, assess, and manage institutional risks	Internal controls, risk identification, and enterprise risk systems

Stage Three: Construction of the Evidence Matrix

The third stage involved mapping documentary observations against PSC-PWI dimensions to establish relationships between reported weaknesses and organizational capability failures as reported in Table 7. The matrix demonstrates that PSC weaknesses are multidimensional and interconnected. For example, procurement failures reflect both financial control weaknesses and governance limitations.

Table 7: Evidence Matrix Linking Documentary Findings to PSC-PWI Dimensions

Documentary Finding	GOV	FIN	OPS	STR	HR	DIG	RSK
Procurement irregularities	✓	✓					✓
Unsupported expenditure		✓					✓
Weak ICT systems			✓			✓	
Weak board oversight	✓			✓			✓
Low productivity			✓		✓		
Poor strategic implementation	✓			✓			
Weak debt management		✓					✓

3.6 Construction of the Public and Statutory Corporations Performance Weakness Index (PSC-PWI)

The identification of recurring institutional weaknesses provided the empirical foundation for developing the Public Sector Corporation Performance Weakness Index (PSC-PWI). Unlike conventional performance assessment approaches that primarily evaluate financial outcomes, profitability, or service delivery indicators, the PSC-PWI focuses on the underlying organizational weaknesses that generate poor performance outcomes.

The rationale for developing the PSC-PWI is based on the argument that performance failures within PSCs are often symptoms of deeper institutional capability deficiencies. A corporation may experience financial losses because of weak revenue systems, poor operational processes, ineffective governance arrangements, inadequate human capital, or weak risk management. Therefore, measuring outcomes alone provides limited information about the causes of underperformance. The PSC-PWI addresses this limitation by providing a multidimensional diagnostic framework. Each dimension represents a specific organizational capability area, while the combined index provides an overall assessment of institutional weakness intensity.

The documentary analysis of Controller and Auditor General (CAG) audit reports and Treasury Registrar (TR) performance evaluation reports revealed that performance weaknesses affecting Public Sector Corporations (PSCs) in Tanzania are systemic, interconnected, and persistent. Unlike temporary operational problems that emerge during specific periods, the identified weaknesses appeared repeatedly across multiple reporting cycles, demonstrating that many PSC challenges are embedded within organizational systems and institutional arrangements. Across the five years from 2019/20 to 2023/24, the analysis identified 264 recurring institutional weaknesses from the selected PSCs (Table 8). These observations were classified into seven capability dimensions forming the Public and Statutory Corporation Performance Weakness Index (PSC-PWI): governance and accountability, financial management, operational efficiency, strategic implementation, human capital capability, digital transformation, and risk management.

The findings demonstrate that PSCs' underperformance cannot be attributed to a single organizational deficiency. Instead, weaknesses interact across multiple dimensions. For instance, weak governance systems contribute to ineffective financial controls, poor strategic implementation, and weak risk management. Similarly, limited digital capability constrains financial reporting, operational monitoring, and decision-making effectiveness. Therefore, PSC performance problems should be understood as interconnected institutional capability challenges rather than isolated management failures. The distribution of coded weaknesses provides an empirical foundation for understanding the relative importance of different capability constraints.

The results indicate that financial management represents the most frequently identified weakness, accounting for 23.5 percent of all coded observations. Governance and accountability weaknesses represent the second largest

category, accounting for 20.5 percent. Together, financial and governance weaknesses constitute approximately 44 percent of all identified institutional deficiencies, demonstrating that PSC performance challenges are strongly associated with weaknesses in accountability systems, resource management, and organizational control mechanisms (Table 8)

Operational efficiency challenges account for 17 percent of observations, reflecting persistent problems associated with resource utilization, productivity, and service delivery. Strategic implementation weaknesses represent 14.4 percent, indicating a significant gap between strategic planning and execution. Risk management, human capital capability, and digital transformation weaknesses collectively account for 24.6 percent, demonstrating that enabling capabilities also influence PSC effectiveness (Table 8). The overall pattern suggests that PSCs' reform requires a comprehensive capability-development approach rather than isolated interventions targeted at individual weaknesses.

The index was constructed through three analytical steps. First, documentary observations were coded according to their organizational meaning. Second, similar observations were grouped into broader capability dimensions. Third, the frequency and persistence of weaknesses were used to determine their relative importance within the overall framework. All these were shown in Tables 3-7

Table 8: Final Structure of the Public Sector Corporation Performance Weakness Index

PSC-PWI Dimension	Main Indicators	Relative Evidence Weight (%)
Financial Management	Revenue management, expenditure control, debt management, financial reporting	23.5
Governance and Accountability	Board effectiveness, oversight, accountability systems	20.5
Operational Efficiency	Asset utilization, productivity, process efficiency, service delivery	17.0
Strategic Implementation	Strategy execution, monitoring, project implementation	14.4
Risk Management	Internal controls, risk identification, enterprise risk systems	11.4
Human Capital Capability	Skills, leadership development, organizational learning	8.0
Digital Transformation	ICT systems, automation, information integration	5.2

The PSC-PWI provides two important analytical advantages. First, it identifies priority areas requiring institutional intervention. Since financial management and governance weaknesses account for nearly half of all identified deficiencies, these areas require immediate attention within PSC reform strategies. Second, it recognizes that weaknesses are interconnected. Improving financial performance, for example, requires not only stronger accounting systems but also improved governance, digital capability, and risk management. The development of the PSC-PWI represents an important contribution because it transforms fragmented oversight observations into a structured framework for understanding public corporation performance challenges. It provides a bridge between accountability evidence and institutional reform.

4. Empirical Findings

4.1 Governance and Accountability Weaknesses

Governance and accountability weaknesses emerged as one of the dominant institutional constraints affecting PSC performance, as shown in Table 9. Although PSCs generally operate within established governance structures involving boards of directors, management teams, and government ownership oversight mechanisms, the documentary evidence indicates that the effectiveness of these structures remains uneven. The analysis identified repeated concerns regarding weak board oversight, inadequate accountability mechanisms, limited monitoring of management performance, and delays in implementing strategic decisions. These findings indicate that governance

challenges are not primarily associated with the absence of formal structures but rather with limitations in governance capability.

Table 9: Recurring Governance and Accountability Weaknesses

Governance Weakness	Years Reported	Implication
Weak board oversight	5	Limited strategic supervision and accountability
Accountability gaps	5	Weak enforcement of responsibilities
Poor performance monitoring	4	Limited ability to track organizational outcomes
Delayed implementation of board decisions	4	Weak governance execution
Inadequate governance reporting	3	Transparency limitations

Source: Author's coding of CAG and TR reports.

The persistence of governance weaknesses across all reporting periods suggests that formal governance arrangements alone have not generated effective organizational control. This finding supports institutional theory, which emphasizes that formal structures require supporting organizational practices and capabilities to influence performance outcomes (North, 1990; Scott, 2014). For PSCs, effective governance requires boards capable of providing strategic direction, monitoring management performance, evaluating organizational risks, and ensuring accountability for results. Therefore, governance reform should move beyond establishing governance structures toward strengthening governance competence. This includes improving board selection processes, introducing competency-based appointments, strengthening board evaluation mechanisms, and enhancing coordination between ownership institutions and corporation management.

4.2 Financial Management Weaknesses

Financial management weaknesses constituted the largest category of institutional deficiencies identified in the analysis as presented in Table 10. The findings demonstrate that many PSCs continue to experience challenges related to revenue management, expenditure control, debt recovery, financial reporting, and resource utilization. These weaknesses have significant implications because financial sustainability represents a fundamental requirement for PSC effectiveness. Corporations that fail to manage financial resources efficiently become increasingly dependent on government support, limiting fiscal space for other development priorities.

Table 10: Recurring Financial Management Weaknesses

Financial Weakness	Years Reported	Implication
Revenue leakages	5	Reduced financial sustainability
Weak debt recovery systems	5	Liquidity challenges
Unsupported expenditure	5	Weak financial accountability
Poor budgeting practices	4	Inefficient resource allocation
Delayed financial reporting	4	Reduced decision-making effectiveness

Source: Author's coding of CAG and TR reports.

The persistence of financial weaknesses suggests that many PSCs face deeper institutional limitations rather than isolated accounting problems. For example, recurring revenue leakages may reflect weaknesses in internal controls, information systems, operational processes, and accountability mechanisms. Similarly, repeated concerns regarding debt recovery indicate limitations in financial management capability, including customer management systems, enforcement mechanisms, and data availability. These findings extend existing PSCs' performance literature by demonstrating that financial weaknesses should be interpreted as indicators of broader organizational capability constraints. Strengthening PSCs' financial performance, therefore, requires integrated financial diagnostics, improved management information systems, professionalized finance functions, and continuous monitoring mechanisms.

4.3 Operational Efficiency Weaknesses

Operational efficiency weaknesses represented 17 percent of all identified institutional deficiencies. These challenges relate to the ability of PSCs to convert available resources into productive outputs and effective public services. The documentary evidence identified recurring problems associated with underutilized assets, delayed projects, inefficient processes, and weak service delivery systems as shown in Table 11

Table 11: Operational Efficiency Weaknesses

Operational Challenge	Years Reported	Implication
Delayed projects	5	Reduced implementation effectiveness
Low asset utilization	5	Inefficient resource deployment
Inefficient operational processes	4	Reduced productivity
Service delivery constraints	4	Limited public value creation

The findings indicate that resource availability does not automatically translate into organizational performance. PSCs require operational capabilities that enable effective planning, coordination, execution, and monitoring of activities. This observation is consistent with dynamic capability theory, which emphasizes that organizations achieve sustained performance when they possess the ability to transform resources into valuable outcomes (Teece, 2020, 2022). In the Tanzanian PSC context, improving operational efficiency requires process redesign, stronger performance management systems, improved asset management practices, and greater use of operational data for decision-making.

4.4 Strategic Implementation Weaknesses

The analysis identified a significant gap between strategic planning and strategic execution. Many PSCs possess strategic plans and institutional objectives; however, recurring documentary observations indicate difficulties translating these plans into measurable results as stipulated in Table 15

Table 15: Strategic Implementation Weaknesses

Strategic Challenge	Years Reported	Implication
Delayed implementation of strategic projects	5	Weak execution capability
Limited monitoring and evaluation systems	4	Weak performance tracking
Poor alignment between plans and resources	4	Strategic coordination problems
Inadequate reporting of strategic outcomes	3	Limited accountability

These findings suggest that strategic planning processes within PSCs often emphasize document preparation rather than implementation capability. Effective strategies require alignment between organizational goals, financial resources, human capabilities, operational processes, and accountability systems. Therefore, strengthening PSC performance requires developing strategic execution capabilities, including stronger monitoring systems, implementation teams, performance indicators, and accountability mechanisms.

4.5 Human Capital, Digital Transformation, and Risk Management Weaknesses

Although human capital and digital transformation weaknesses represented smaller proportions of total observations, they represent critical enabling capabilities that influence all other performance dimensions. Human capital weaknesses included skills shortages, limited professional development opportunities, inadequate succession planning, and weak organizational learning mechanisms. These challenges reduce the ability of PSCs to adapt, innovate, and respond to changing operational environments.

Digital transformation weaknesses included fragmented ICT systems, manual processes, and limited integration of information systems. While accounting for only 5.2 percent of coded weaknesses, digital capability affects financial management, operational efficiency, transparency, and strategic decision-making. Risk management weaknesses involved weak internal controls, inadequate risk identification systems, and reactive approaches to

institutional risks. The recurrence of these weaknesses suggests that many PSCs continue to operate using compliance-based rather than proactive risk management approaches.

4.6 Comparative Interpretation of PSC Weakness Dimensions

The findings demonstrate that PSC performance challenges in Tanzania are characterized by institutional interconnectedness. The dominance of financial and governance weaknesses suggests that many performance problems originate from weaknesses in control systems, decision-making processes, and accountability relationships. Financial management weaknesses represent the immediate manifestation of deeper institutional problems. Revenue leakages, expenditure weaknesses, and poor financial reporting reduce organizational sustainability, but these problems are frequently linked to governance limitations, inadequate monitoring, and weak information systems.

Governance weaknesses similarly influence multiple dimensions of performance. Weak boards or ineffective accountability systems reduce the ability of PSCs to implement strategies, control resources, manage risks, and improve operations. Operational and strategic weaknesses demonstrate that many PSCs face challenges in converting plans and resources into measurable outcomes. This suggests a gap between institutional intention and implementation capability.

The relatively lower frequency of digital transformation and human capital weaknesses should not be interpreted as indicating limited importance. Rather, these dimensions represent enabling capabilities that influence the effectiveness of other organizational systems. For example, improved digital systems can strengthen financial controls, operational monitoring, and transparency, while improved human capital enhances leadership, innovation, and institutional learning. Therefore, PSC reform requires a systemic approach where interventions address interconnected capability constraints rather than isolated weaknesses.

5. Development of an Institutional Capability-Based Reform Model

5.1 Rationale for the Model

The empirical findings demonstrate a critical limitation in existing PSC governance arrangements. Tanzania possesses relatively strong oversight mechanisms through the Controller and Auditor General and the Treasury Registrar; however, repeated weaknesses across reporting periods indicate that identifying problems does not automatically generate organizational improvement. The current oversight model is primarily diagnostic and accountability-oriented. CAG audits identify financial and compliance weaknesses, while Treasury Registrar evaluations assess performance outcomes. These functions are essential for transparency and accountability, but they provide limited mechanisms for supporting PSCs in implementing corrective measures. The persistence of similar weaknesses suggests the need for an additional institutional function: a capability-development mechanism that transforms evidence into practical improvement. This study, therefore, proposes the establishment of Capability-Based Reform Model. The Capability-Based Reform Model is conceptualized as a specialized institutional platform responsible for diagnosing organizational weaknesses, designing improvement interventions, providing technical assistance, and monitoring capability development within PSCs. Unlike traditional oversight institutions, the model would not replace auditing or regulatory functions. Instead, it would complement existing institutions by focusing on organizational learning, technical support, and continuous improvement.

5.2 Conceptual Foundation of the Capability-Based Reform Model

The proposed model is based on three principles. *First*, PSCs' improvement requires evidence-based diagnosis. The PSC-PWI provides a systematic mechanism for identifying institutional weaknesses and prioritizing interventions. Rather than applying uniform reforms to all corporations, interventions would be tailored according to specific capability deficiencies. *Second*, sustainable reform requires implementation support. Audit recommendations often fail to produce lasting change because organizations lack the technical capacity, resources, or expertise to implement improvements effectively. The Think Tank addresses this limitation by providing specialized expertise during reform implementation. *Third*, public ownership requires state capability.

Governments that own corporations must possess the institutional capability not only to monitor performance but also to strengthen organizational effectiveness. The Think Tank, therefore, represents an investment in state capacity for managing public assets.

5.3 Structure and Functions of the Capability-Based Reform Model

The structure of the model is directly aligned with the seven PSC-PWI dimensions which will be handled by expertise team. Each team would provide specialized expertise addressing specific institutional weaknesses identified through documentary analysis.

Table 12: Proposed Structure of the Capability-Based Reform Model

Model Arm	Core Responsibility
Governance and Institutional Reform Team	Board strengthening, accountability systems, and governance improvement
Financial Diagnostics Team	Financial sustainability assessment, revenue improvement, and cost management
Operational Excellence Team	Process improvement, productivity enhancement, asset utilization
Strategy and Performance Team	Strategic implementation, monitoring systems, and performance management
Human Capital Development Team	Skills development, leadership improvement, succession planning
Digital Transformation Team	ICT modernization, automation, and data systems
Risk Management Team	Enterprise risk management, internal controls, resilience systems

The proposed structure ensures that PSCs reform becomes aligned with evidence-based institutional needs. Each technical arm would work with PSC management teams to develop corporation-specific improvement strategies.

5.4 Operational Process of Capability-Based Reform Model

The operational process of the Capability-Based Reform Model would follow a continuous improvement cycle consisting of diagnosis, intervention, implementation support, and reassessment. The first stage involves institutional diagnosis using PSC-PWI assessments. Data from CAG reports, Treasury Registrar evaluations, financial statements, strategic plans, and operational records would be integrated to generate corporation-specific capability profiles. The second stage involves prioritization of weaknesses. Since PSCs differ in their operational environments and institutional challenges, interventions would focus on the most significant constraints affecting each corporation. The third stage involves implementation support. Technical experts would work collaboratively with PSCs' boards and management teams to implement improvement initiatives. This may include financial restructuring, process redesign, governance strengthening, digital modernization, or leadership development. The final stage involves reassessment using PSC-PWI indicators to determine whether institutional weaknesses have declined and whether performance capabilities have improved.

Table 13: Operational Cycle of the Capability-Based Reform Model

Phase	Activity	Output
Diagnosis	PSC-PWI assessment and evidence analysis	Capability profile
Prioritization	Identification of critical weaknesses	Reform priorities
Intervention Design	Development of improvement plans	Corporation-specific strategy
Implementation Support	Technical assistance and monitoring	Improved organizational systems
Reassessment	Follow-up PSC-PWI evaluation	Evidence of capability improvement

This approach transforms PSC reform from a reactive process based on repeated problem identification into a proactive system focused on institutional learning and improvement.

5.5 Expected Outcomes of the Reform Model

The Capability-Based Reform Model is expected to generate several improvements in PSC governance and performance. *First*, it would strengthen state ownership capability by enabling the government to move beyond monitoring toward active performance improvement. Effective ownership requires the ability to understand organizational weaknesses and provide appropriate support. *Second*, it would reduce the recurrence of audit and performance weaknesses by addressing root causes rather than individual symptoms. For example, instead of repeatedly reporting revenue leakages, interventions would focus on strengthening revenue systems, controls, technology, and accountability mechanisms. *Third*, the model would promote evidence-based public management. Through the PSC-PWI framework, government decisions regarding PSC interventions would be based on systematic analysis rather than isolated observations. *Finally*, the Think Tank would encourage knowledge sharing across PSCs by creating a platform where successful practices, innovations, and improvement strategies can be exchanged.

6. Discussion and Implications

6.1 Understanding PSC Performance Through an Institutional Capability Lens

The findings of this study provide important insights into the persistent performance challenges affecting Public Sector Corporations (PSCs) in Tanzania. The central argument emerging from the analysis is that PSC underperformance is not primarily a consequence of isolated managerial failures but reflects deeper institutional capability limitations. The recurrence of similar weaknesses across five reporting cycles demonstrates that many challenges are embedded within organizational systems, routines, and governance arrangements. Existing debates on public corporation reform have traditionally focused on ownership structures, privatization, commercialization, and regulatory arrangements. While these approaches remain relevant, the findings suggest that they provide only a partial explanation of PSC performance outcomes. The evidence demonstrates that even where formal governance structures, oversight mechanisms, and strategic plans exist, PSCs may continue to underperform when they lack the internal capabilities required to effectively manage resources, implement strategies, control risks, and adapt to changing environments.

This finding supports the organizational capability perspective, which emphasizes that sustainable performance depends on an organization's ability to develop, integrate, and reconfigure resources in response to environmental demands (Teece, 2020, 2022). In the context of PSCs, resources such as public investment, infrastructure, and statutory authority do not automatically generate performance. They must be supported by organizational capabilities that enable corporations to convert resources into productive outcomes. The study, therefore, extends existing PSC literature by shifting analytical attention from ownership arrangements toward capability development. The state's role as an owner should not only involve establishing corporations, appointing boards, and monitoring compliance. It should also involve developing institutions capable of strengthening organizational performance.

6.2 Governance Reform Beyond Formal Structures

Governance weaknesses emerged as one of the most significant determinants of PSC underperformance. This finding confirms previous research emphasizing that governance quality represents a critical factor influencing public corporation effectiveness (OECD, 2021, 2023; Grossi et al., 2021). However, the study provides a deeper interpretation by demonstrating that governance challenges are frequently associated with capability limitations rather than simply inappropriate structures. Many PSCs possess formal governance arrangements, including boards of directors, ownership oversight systems, and reporting requirements. Nevertheless, repeated observations concerning weak oversight, limited accountability, and ineffective monitoring indicate that formal structures have not always translated into effective governance practices. This finding has important implications for governance reform. Strengthening PSC governance should not be limited to establishing institutional arrangements; it should focus on improving the competence and effectiveness of those responsible for implementing governance functions. Board members require appropriate technical expertise, strategic understanding, and performance management capabilities. Similarly, ownership institutions require a stronger analytical capacity to evaluate performance and

provide informed guidance. The proposed Capability-Based Reform Model directly addresses this governance challenge by creating a specialized institutional mechanism capable of supporting boards, management teams, and ownership institutions with technical expertise and evidence-based guidance.

6.3 Financial Sustainability as a Capability Challenge

Financial management weaknesses represented the largest category of institutional deficiencies identified in the study. This finding highlights the continuing challenge of achieving financial sustainability within PSCs. Previous studies have often interpreted PSC financial problems through the lens of inefficiency, political interference, or weak commercial incentives. While these explanations remain important, this study demonstrates that financial weaknesses frequently reflect broader institutional capability gaps. For example, persistent revenue leakages may indicate weaknesses in information systems, operational processes, internal controls, and accountability arrangements. Similarly, poor debt recovery performance may reflect limitations in customer management systems, organizational processes, and managerial decision-making capacity. Therefore, financial reform should move beyond periodic financial corrections toward developing stronger financial management capabilities. This requires integrated financial systems, improved managerial information, professional finance functions, and continuous performance monitoring.

The findings also have fiscal implications. Weak PSC financial performance creates risks for public finances because governments may be required to provide additional support to sustain failing corporations. Strengthening PSCs' financial capability, therefore, contributes not only to organizational improvement but also to broader fiscal sustainability.

6.4 Operational Efficiency and the Challenge of Implementation

The findings reveal a significant implementation challenge among PSCs. While corporations often possess strategic plans, operational systems frequently fail to translate these plans into measurable results. This gap between planning and implementation represents a major institutional weakness. The results support public management literature emphasizing that effective organizations require implementation capabilities rather than merely strategic documents (George et al., 2021). Strategies generate value only when organizations possess the systems, resources, leadership, and accountability mechanisms necessary for execution.

Operational weaknesses identified in the study, including delayed projects, inefficient processes, and underutilized assets, demonstrate that PSC improvement requires stronger operational management capabilities. This involves redesigning processes, improving performance monitoring, strengthening project management systems, and enhancing managerial accountability. The implication is that PSC reform should focus not only on what corporations intend to achieve but also on whether they possess the organizational capacity required to achieve those objectives.

6.5 Digital Transformation and Human Capital as Enabling Capabilities

Although digital transformation and human capital weaknesses accounted for relatively smaller proportions of identified observations, their strategic importance extends beyond their numerical frequency. These dimensions represent enabling capabilities that influence performance across all other areas. Digital systems support financial transparency, operational monitoring, decision-making, and accountability. Weak digital capability can therefore amplify problems in governance, finance, and operations. Similarly, human capital determines whether organizations possess the expertise required to manage complex technical, financial, and strategic challenges. The findings suggest that PSC modernization should treat digital transformation and human capital development as strategic investments rather than administrative support functions. Digital transformation requires organizational readiness, skilled personnel, process redesign, and leadership commitment. Likewise, human capital development requires continuous learning systems, leadership development, and succession planning.

6.6 Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several theoretical contributions to public administration and public management literature. *First*, it extends institutional theory by demonstrating that formal institutional arrangements require organizational capabilities to generate effective outcomes. The existence of governance structures, reporting requirements, and

oversight mechanisms does not guarantee performance unless organizations possess the capacity to operationalize these arrangements. *Second*, the study contributes to dynamic capability theory by applying the concept to PSCs. While dynamic capabilities have traditionally been applied to private sector organizations, this study demonstrates their relevance in understanding public corporation performance. PSCs require the ability to learn, adapt, innovate, and reorganize resources in response to changing economic and institutional environments. *Third*, the development of the PSC-PWI contributes a new analytical framework for studying public corporation weaknesses. Existing approaches often evaluate performance outcomes without systematically examining the institutional weaknesses generating those outcomes. The PSC-PWI addresses this limitation by providing a diagnostic framework focused on organizational capability constraints.

6.7 Methodological Contributions

The study also contributes methodologically by demonstrating the value of documentary analysis in public sector research. Official oversight reports are often treated primarily as administrative documents rather than analytical data sources. This study demonstrates that such documents can provide rich evidence regarding institutional behaviour, organizational weaknesses, and reform challenges. The directed qualitative content analysis approach enabled systematic transformation of documentary observations into theoretical constructs. Through coding, categorization, and interpretation, fragmented audit and evaluation findings were converted into a comprehensive performance weakness framework. This approach is particularly relevant in developing country contexts where administrative records and oversight reports may provide more reliable institutional evidence than large-scale surveys.

6.8 Policy Implications

The findings have several implications for policymakers responsible for PSC governance and reform in Tanzania. The first implication concerns the need to redefine the role of ownership institutions. The state should move beyond a monitoring-oriented ownership model toward a capability-building ownership model. Government ownership should involve supporting corporations to improve rather than only evaluating whether they have failed. The *second* implication concerns reform sequencing. Many PSC reforms focus on structural changes, leadership replacement, or compliance improvements. While these measures may sometimes be necessary, sustainable improvement requires strengthening organizational capabilities. Reform efforts should therefore prioritize governance competence, financial systems, operational processes, digital infrastructure, and human capital development. The *third* implication concerns institutional coordination. The effectiveness of PSC reform depends on stronger coordination between oversight institutions, ownership agencies, PSC boards, and technical experts. The proposed Capability-Based Reform Model provides a mechanism for achieving this coordination by linking evidence generation with improvement support. The *fourth* implication concerns performance measurement. Traditional assessments focusing mainly on financial outcomes may fail to identify underlying causes of poor performance. Incorporating the PSC-PWI into annual assessments would enable earlier identification of institutional weaknesses and more targeted interventions.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the systemic determinants of Public and Statutory Corporation performance weaknesses in Tanzania using documentary evidence from the Controller and Auditor General and Treasury Registrar reports covering the period 2019/20–2023/24. Through directed qualitative content analysis, the study identified 264 recurring institutional weaknesses and organized them into seven dimensions forming the Public Sector Corporation Performance Weakness Index. The findings demonstrate that PSCs underperformance is not primarily caused by isolated operational failures but by persistent institutional capability deficiencies. Financial management and governance weaknesses emerged as the dominant constraints, followed by operational inefficiency, strategic implementation challenges, risk management weaknesses, human capital limitations, and digital transformation gaps. The study argues that existing oversight mechanisms, although essential for accountability, require complementary institutions focused on organizational improvement. To address this gap, the study proposes the Capability-Based Reform Model as an institutional mechanism capable of transforming oversight findings into practical reform interventions. The broader implication is that effective public ownership requires more than

control and supervision. Governments must develop the institutional capability to support, improve, and transform the organizations they own. Strengthening PSCs' performance, therefore, requires a shift from a compliance-based reform model toward a capability-based institutional development approach.

The PSC-PWI and Capability-Based Reform Model developed in this study provides a practical pathway for achieving this transformation. Although developed within the Tanzanian context, the framework offers broader relevance for developing countries seeking to improve the performance, accountability, and sustainability of public corporations. Future research may extend this study by applying the PSC-PWI quantitatively across larger samples of public corporations, examining relationships between capability weaknesses and financial outcomes, and evaluating the long-term effectiveness of capability-based reform interventions.

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Framing the Border as a National Security Threat: Fox News Immigration Coverage in the 2016 and 2024 Election Cycles

Jenny Xu¹

¹ Rye Country Day School

Abstract

While previous scholarship has established the existence of U.S. right-wing ideological media framing and its evolution over time, there is limited research exploring how influential outlets like Fox News have framed immigration across two critical election cycles: 2016 and 2024. These years represent key moments in recent American history, extreme-right-wing media narratives, and how that shapes public perception of emotionally charged topics, such as that of “illegal immigration” in the United States. This research paper explores the question: How has Fox News framed the U.S.–Mexico border and immigration policy during election cycles, particularly in 2016 and 2024? It argues that Fox News strategically frames immigration as a national security threat during the 2016 and 2024 election cycles. I conduct a content analysis of the language, guests, and visuals used on Fox News programming, such as Hannity, to highlight how Fox News deliberately intensified its framing of the U.S.–Mexico border as a national security threat to influence public perception and invoke fear. This paper contributes to the fields of media studies and political communication by providing a multi-year analysis of threat-based storytelling that Fox News uses to shape public opinion. It deepens our understanding of the interplay between media bias, national security threats, and commercial incentives.

Keywords: Border Security, Election Cycles, Media Framing, Partisan Media, Threat Narratives

1. Introduction and Background

Immigration has been an integral feature of U.S. politics for a considerable period, serving as an ongoing political issue that periodically surfaces, especially in election politics. Political arguments concerning the U.S.-Mexico border often center on crime, sovereignty, economic security, and identity, making the politics of immigration particularly salient. Under these circumstances, the role of mass media is critical not only for conveying news about the border but also for influencing public understanding of these events. Among all other U.S. media organizations, Fox News occupies a position that holds special significance, especially for its conservative audience, and it is for that reason that it has emerged as an arena for constructing immigration politics.

This paper examines how Fox News discusses and frames issues surrounding the U.S.-Mexico border and immigration policy during the 2016 and 2024 U.S. presidential election cycles. Indeed, these events mark two critical moments in modern U.S. politics, characterized by extreme polarization, the use of populist rhetoric, and the increasing salience of immigration as a defining campaign theme. Prior scholarly research has examined the existence of ideological bias and audience effects associated with right-wing media outlets. However, there is a relative lack of research on how specific outlets strategically frame immigration policy and employ national

security/threat rhetoric. This paper argues that Fox News frames immigration as a national security threat and that this occurs most intensely during U.S. presidential election cycles.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Frame

2.1. Media Framing and Partisan Interpretation

The term “media framing” refers to the mechanisms by which media channels present or highlight particular aspects of reality that foster specific interpretations. The term “frame” does not merely refer to the way information is offered; rather, it is concerned with the very definition of the issue or the problem at hand, the attribution of blame, as well as the manner of response to the said issue. This demonstrates the pivotal role that framing plays in the comprehension of complex matters, such as immigration, which may be perceived as abstract or distant.

This process is also significantly affected by the role of partisan media outlets. Instead of functioning as purely neutral conduits for information dissemination, partisan media often rely on various sources of secondhand information, as well as expert commentary and storylines that fit a particular ideological profile. This creates the agenda for the audience they serve, not only in the selection of issues but also in how those issues are understood or interpreted. Conservative media systems are known to rely on outrage-based narratives to engage their audiences.

2.2. Securitization and the Construct of Threat

Media framing can be defined as “the process by which news organizations choose, highlight, or otherwise make salient certain aspects of reality and via this process influence the public salience of those issues. This means that framing is not just about the reporting of information, since frames can shape an individual’s comprehension of a particular problem, assign a problem, attribute responsibility for the problem, and provide a solution to a problem. As such, framing could have a significant influence on a person’s comprehension of a particular problem, particularly when the problem is perceived to be abstract, distant, or emotionally salient, such as an issue pertaining to immigration.

Perhaps the most impactful framing device used in the context of immigration has been securitization, whereby a social or political phenomenon is constructed as a threat, a threat that is existential in nature. When the policy of immigration is securitized and framed in the context of national security, it ceases to become a policy issue with trade-offs and becomes a crisis defined in terms of danger, invasion, and loss of control. In the conservative media literature, researchers have identified the significance of threat perception in influencing media consumption.

2.3. Election Cycles and Threat Spikes

As election seasons are upon us, the focus of political storytelling shifts to crisis. Presidential campaigns are particularly susceptible to this phenomenon, especially when governance is portrayed in more dramatic and critical tones. According to existing literature on political communication and framing effects, threat-based frames are particularly potent during campaigns and tend to increase voter turnout. Immigration is particularly susceptible to this kind of framing. As it intersects with crime, economic security, demographics, and national sovereignty, it is easily subject to threat-based frames. This becomes more pronounced when campaigns amplify existing partisanship and create clear lines of differentiation between parties. As the concept of threat spikes suggests, it is possible to identify when language becomes more prevalent and more intense in framing immigration in more dramatic and critical tones.

During these spikes, words such as invasion, disorder, lawlessness, and crisis are more likely to feature in campaign discourse. Rather than focusing on the policy and ethical dimensions of immigration, it becomes portrayed in more dramatic and critical tones. This phenomenon does not occur in isolation but is part of a larger array of storytelling and framing of immigration and other instability and threats to governance and society. Election seasons are likely to amplify these existing frames and make them more defining characteristics of the

campaigns. This research seeks to identify whether this intensification of threat-based frames in immigration discourse is evident in the 2016 and 2024 presidential campaigns and whether the framing of immigration in more critical and dramatic tones in the two campaigns differs from each other. By examining the language and policy focus of these campaigns and identifying whether immigration is portrayed in more dramatic and critical tones during the campaigns and whether it differs in the two campaigns.

2.4. Existing Research

Existing research on the impact of Fox News has largely focused on its audience effects, including its relationship to media consumption and political attitudes or behavioral outcomes. For instance, Hoewe et al. (2020) show that Fox News is significantly related to issue salience, partisan polarization, and perceptions of threats across a range of issues, including immigration and national security issues. The research places Fox News at the center of agenda-setting within the current landscape of political communication. Nevertheless, although important for understanding Fox's measurable political impact, such research has largely conceptualized Fox News as an independent variable within models of audience response, rather than as a media organization actively engaged in the production of discourse.

In parallel, a considerable body of research has examined media representations of the U.S.-Mexico border as a symbolic and metaphorical space of contestation. For example, Fleuriet & Castellano (2020) argue that media representations of the U.S.-Mexico border during the ascension of Trump to U.S. leadership were part of a process of place-making that constructed the border space as chaotic, dangerous, and racially charged. Through concept-metaphors such as invasion and disorder, the border space was constructed not merely as a geographical space but also as a space of national crisis.

However, although Fleuriet and Castellano (2020) shed light on the symbolic construction of the border, and although Hoewe et al. (2020) examine the attitudinal consequences of Fox News, no research has systematically examined the ways in which a national level partisan cable news organization contributes to the securitization of immigration discourse across multiple presidential election cycles. While the current body of research largely examines the audience consequences or symbolic representation of the border, no work has examined the ways in which Fox News, as an institutional actor, contributes to the securitization of immigration discourse across multiple presidential election cycles. What is largely unexplored is the ways in which Fox News, as an institutional actor, uses recurring language, structure of authority, tone, and visual grammar to construct immigration as a national-level existential threat to security within flagship partisan cable news programs across multiple presidential election cycles. This paper, therefore, addresses the theoretical and methodological shortcomings of the current body of research by shifting the focus from the consequences of media exposure to the ways in which Fox News, as an institutional actor, constructs immigration as an existential threat to national level security within the 2016 and 2024 presidential election cycles. By means of this cross-cycle approach to institutions, the present research extends the existing literature by showing that it is not only the case that Fox News is associated with increased perceptions of threat, but also that this threat is discursively constructed, made normal, and amplified in electoral contexts.

3. Case Selection and Methodology

3.1. Why Fox News?

Fox News was chosen as the focus for this research because previous studies have established that Fox News is a uniquely important media outlet for conservative audiences, and that its content is strongly connected to Republican issue salience and attitudes. Specifically, previous research has established that Fox News is a significant outlet for conservative attitudes, especially regarding issues such as immigration, and that its audience is uniquely clustered around the network compared to the audiences for other major cable news networks. Further, previous studies have established that the content of Fox News is significantly related to conservative attitudes regarding issues such as the construction of a border wall, and that its audience is uniquely clustered around the network compared to the audiences for other major cable news networks.

Because this is a study of securitization, and because previous studies have established that if a particular issue is repeatedly framed as a crisis rather than a policy issue, then Fox News is one of the most important sites for that issue-framing, normalization, and amplification. As Hoewe, Brownell, and Wiemer note, Fox News is a uniquely important media outlet because it has established a uniquely close relationship with conservative audiences, and because it has a long history of promoting an “outrage-based” style of political discourse. Unlike previous studies, this research treats Fox News as a discourse producer, rather than focusing on its effects on audiences. This is because, as noted, previous studies have established that Fox News is an important media outlet, but have not addressed the question of how Fox News itself constructs the issue of immigration as a national security threat, and does so repeatedly over multiple election cycles.

3.2. Sampling Strategy

This study follows a comparative qualitative sampling approach, with an emphasis on two presidential electoral cycles, 2016 and 2024. The two electoral cycles have been selected because they have taken place in two highly polarized contexts, and the salience of the issue of immigration was high in the campaign rhetoric of the two electoral cycles. The earlier sections of the paper have argued that the electoral cycles are the times when threat spikes are most visible, as the campaigns heighten the dramatic rhetoric around crisis, disorder, invasion, and loss of control. By examining the 2016 and 2024 electoral cycles, the analysis is able to assess the continuity and change in the Fox News framing. The sample is designed around the flagship Fox News programs that are most relevant to the discourse on the border and immigration. The analysis focuses on the Hannity and Fox & Friends programs, as they are most relevant to the ideological rhetoric and repeatedly feature the themes of the electoral campaigns. The focus is consistent with the earlier studies that have found Fox News programs and their hosts have been most visible in the construction and propagation of immigration and other related issues and the construction of conservative political discourse.

The analysis is designed to examine the episodes that are part of the campaign periods when the issues of immigration and the border are most salient. Rather than examining the entire campaign period, the analysis is focused on the window of the electoral cycle to capture the moments when the threat rhetoric is most likely to spike. The analysis is designed to include the episodes when the issues of immigration, the U.S. -Mexico border, asylum, migrant crossing, border crime, cartel violence, deportation, and the border wall are discussed as primary issues. The sampling strategy is designed to keep the analysis focused on the discourse most relevant to the question being asked in the paper.

3.3. Unit of Analysis

The basic building block of analysis will be the segment of an episode that deals with issues of immigration, borders, asylum, migrant crossings, and similar issues. The segment will be considered a self-contained unit if there is a coherent discussion or debate about one or more of these issues. The segment will be considered more appropriate than analyzing entire episodes because an episode could potentially have several political issues, some or all of which will be completely unrelated, while the framing mechanisms will be concentrated in one or more of the relevant discussions.

The analysis will be qualitative, and content analysis will be employed. The content will be concerned with several prominent features, including whether there was a framing of immigration as a crisis or threat, whether there was criminalization, whether there was an appeal to authority, whether blame was attributed to political entities, and what policy interventions were proposed as necessary. The approach will be similar to previous research into media framing, including research that has shown how border issues tend to be addressed through concept-metaphors such as invasion, disorder, and lawlessness. Fleuriet and Castellano, for instance, have shown how media discourses around the U.S. -Mexico border tend to construct the border, rather than just being a geographical location, as a symbolic location that represents threat, danger, and national crisis.

The analysis will be extended to include rhetorical devices, including visuals and tone, where relevant, because, as previous research has shown, the border will not only be constructed through what is said, but also through what is visually repeated, including symbolic and rhetorical devices that construct fear, threat, and national vulnerability.

4 . Findings Part 1: The Border as a National Security Threat (2016)

4.1. Crisis Construction

Fox News coverage during the 2016 election cycle consistently framed immigration and the U.S.-Mexico border as an immediate national crisis. Programs such as *Hannity* and *Fox & Friends* repeatedly used language emphasizing “chaos,” “lawlessness,” “invasion,” and “loss of control” to portray migration as an existential threat to American sovereignty. Immigration was rarely discussed as a humanitarian or administrative issue; instead, it was framed as evidence of state failure and governmental weakness.

This framing aligned closely with Donald Trump’s campaign rhetoric, particularly the argument that the United States had “lost control” of its border. Through repeated references to migrant caravans, unauthorized crossings, and border instability, Fox News constructed a sense of urgency designed to elevate immigration into a defining campaign issue.

4.2. Criminalization

A central feature of Fox News’ 2016 framing was the criminalization of migrants and asylum seekers. Coverage frequently connected immigration to gang violence, drug trafficking, terrorism, and violent crime. Although discussions occasionally acknowledged humanitarian dimensions, the dominant narrative associated migrants with danger and disorder. This criminalization process reflected broader patterns identified in prior scholarship, particularly the use of “invasion” and “threat” metaphors in conservative media discourse. Rather than presenting migrants as individuals responding to economic hardship or political instability, Fox News frequently portrayed them as risks to public safety and national identity.

4.3. Policy solutions

Fox News also emphasized hardline policy responses as necessary solutions to the perceived border crisis. Border wall construction, increased surveillance, expanded deportation efforts, and stronger law enforcement presence were framed as practical and urgent responses to disorder. Importantly, these policies were not presented as one option among many but rather as the only realistic means of restoring national security. This narrowed the policy debate by portraying compromise or reform-oriented approaches as signs of weakness.

4.4. Guests and Authority

The programs analyzed frequently relied on Republican politicians, border patrol officials, law enforcement representatives, and conservative commentators as primary sources of authority. These guests reinforced the securitized framing of immigration by emphasizing crime statistics, border instability, and governmental failure. Voices representing migrants, immigration advocates, or humanitarian organizations appeared far less frequently, contributing to a relatively one-sided narrative environment. The repeated use of ideologically aligned guests strengthened the perception that immigration represented a unified national threat requiring immediate action.

4.5. Visual Language

Visual framing reinforced the narrative of crisis. Segments often included footage of border fencing, migrant crossings, armed patrol agents, crowded detention centers, and maps highlighting the southern border. Such visuals amplified the perception of instability and danger even when statistical or contextual information was limited. The

repetition of these images normalized the association between immigration and insecurity, reinforcing the broader securitization narrative identified throughout the analysis.

5 . Findings Part 2: The Border as a National Security Threat (2024)

5.1. Continuities from 2016

Many of the central framing patterns identified in 2016 remained visible during the 2024 election cycle. Fox News continued to portray immigration as a threat to sovereignty, law enforcement, and national stability. The themes of crisis, invasion, and governmental failure remained central to coverage. Programs continued to rely heavily on emotionally charged rhetoric and fear-based framing devices. Border crossings were repeatedly presented as evidence of systemic collapse, and immigration remained one of the defining campaign issues in conservative political discourse.

5.2. Intensification and Evolution

Although the core framing remained consistent, the rhetoric in 2024 became more intensified and emotionally charged. Compared to 2016, there was greater emphasis on systemic collapse, urban disorder, and the idea that the border crisis had spread into the American interior. Terms such as “open border,” “national emergency,” and “invasion” appeared with greater frequency and intensity. The framing increasingly suggested that immigration threatened not only border communities but also the broader social and political order of the United States.

5.3. Partisan Attribution

In 2024, Fox News placed significantly greater emphasis on assigning blame directly to Democratic leadership, particularly the Biden administration. Immigration was framed not simply as a policy failure but as the intentional consequence of weak or negligent governance. This partisan attribution transformed immigration into a symbolic marker of broader political decline. Border insecurity became linked to inflation, crime, cultural instability, and distrust in federal institutions.

5.4. Guest Ecosystem Shifts

The 2024 cycle also demonstrated changes in the guest ecosystem appearing on Fox News. While law enforcement and Republican politicians remained prominent, the programs increasingly featured activists, state governors, and media personalities associated with populist nationalist movements. This shift contributed to a more ideologically consolidated discourse environment in which competing interpretations of immigration policy were largely absent.

5.5. Visual Escalation

Visual framing in 2024 became more dramatic than in 2016. Programs increasingly used drone footage, large crowd images, surveillance clips, and emergency-style graphics to emphasize perceptions of disorder. The visual presentation often mirrored the language of crisis reporting, contributing to an atmosphere of urgency and instability. This escalation reinforced the emotional intensity of the coverage and amplified threat perception among viewers.

6. Comparative Analysis: What Changes Between 2016 and 2024, and What Stays the Same

6.1. Continuity

Across both the 2016 and 2024 election cycles, Fox News consistently framed immigration and the U.S.-Mexico border as issues of national security rather than humanitarian policy. In both periods, flagship programs such as *Hannity* and *Fox & Friends* repeatedly emphasized themes of invasion, lawlessness, cartel violence, and governmental failure. Immigration was rarely discussed primarily through the lens of asylum law, labor

economics, or humanitarian responsibility. Instead, migrants were often portrayed as symbols of instability and threats to American sovereignty.

This continuity reflects broader patterns identified in existing scholarship on conservative media systems. Hoewe, Brownell, and Wiemer (2020) argue that Fox News plays a major role in reinforcing perceptions of threat among conservative audiences, especially regarding immigration. Likewise, Fleuriet and Castellano (2020) demonstrate that media discourse surrounding the border frequently constructs the border not merely as a geographic location, but as a symbolic site of insecurity and crisis. Fox News coverage during both election cycles strongly reflected these broader patterns of securitization and threat construction.

Another major continuity was the repeated use of emotionally charged rhetoric. Terms such as “crisis,” “invasion,” “chaos,” “danger,” and “loss of control” appeared frequently throughout both election cycles. This rhetorical consistency contributed to the normalization of immigration as a national emergency requiring extraordinary policy responses.

6.2. *Change*

Although the core framing remained consistent, the rhetoric surrounding immigration intensified significantly between 2016 and 2024. During the 2016 election cycle, immigration was primarily framed as a growing border crisis associated with illegal crossings, cartel activity, and weak border enforcement. By 2024, however, Fox News increasingly portrayed immigration as evidence of broader national decline and institutional collapse.

Rather than presenting border insecurity as a regional issue limited to the southern border, the 2024 coverage connected immigration to crime, inflation, urban disorder, and cultural instability across the United States. Immigration became symbolic of a wider breakdown in governance and national identity. This represented a significant escalation from the 2016 framing, which focused more narrowly on border enforcement and physical security.

The emotional intensity of the rhetoric also increased in 2024. In 2016, immigration was often described as a serious problem requiring immediate action. In 2024, the rhetoric frequently suggested that the United States was already experiencing the consequences of an “open border” and that national sovereignty itself was under direct threat. This shift transformed the framing from warning-oriented discourse into discourse centered on collapse and emergency. Additionally, partisan attribution became far more explicit in 2024. Fox News increasingly framed immigration not simply as a policy failure but as the direct result of Democratic leadership and governmental incompetence. This strengthened the connection between immigration discourse and broader partisan polarization within American political communication.

6.3. *Mechanisms*

Several mechanisms contributed to the securitization of immigration across both election cycles. One major mechanism was repetition. Fox News repeatedly used threat-oriented language and recurring narratives concerning invasion, criminality, and disorder. This repetition normalized the perception of immigration as a national security crisis rather than a complex policy issue. Another important mechanism involved selective sourcing and authority structures. Fox News programs frequently relied on Republican politicians, border patrol officials, law enforcement representatives, and conservative commentators as primary voices of authority. These guests reinforced narratives emphasizing insecurity, governmental failure, and the need for stronger enforcement policies. Perspectives from migrants, humanitarian organizations, or immigration advocates appeared far less frequently.

Visual framing also played a critical role. Segments commonly included footage of migrant crossings, border fencing, law enforcement patrols, surveillance imagery, and crowded detention facilities. By 2024, visual presentation became even more dramatic, often using drone footage, flashing graphics, and emergency-style visuals to intensify perceptions of crisis and instability. Finally, partisan framing served as a major mechanism through which immigration became linked to broader political narratives. Fox News increasingly connected

immigration to themes of national decline, institutional weakness, crime, and cultural instability. These framing strategies transformed immigration into a symbolic issue representing broader anxieties concerning sovereignty, identity, and political control.

7. Discussion: Why This Framing Matters

7.1. Public Perception and Policy Imagination

The repeated portrayal of immigration as a national crisis significantly shapes public perception and policy imagination. Threat-based framing encourages audiences to perceive immigration through fear-oriented narratives focused on danger, instability, and national vulnerability. This can increase public support for restrictive immigration policies such as expanded border enforcement, deportation measures, detention programs, and border wall construction.

At the same time, this framing narrows the range of policy solutions considered politically acceptable. Humanitarian or reform-oriented approaches may increasingly appear unrealistic or dangerous when immigration is consistently associated with invasion and disorder. The framing therefore influences not only public attitudes toward migrants but also broader assumptions about what kinds of immigration policies are possible or legitimate.

7.2. Political Communication and Electoral Mobilization

Threat-based framing is especially effective during presidential election cycles because it generates emotional engagement and political mobilization. Immigration intersects with issues of race, national identity, sovereignty, crime, and cultural change, making it particularly vulnerable to emotionally charged political narratives.

Fox News coverage during both election cycles repeatedly emphasized these emotional dimensions. Rather than focusing primarily on technical policy discussions, the network frequently framed immigration as evidence of broader national decline and governmental failure. These narratives encouraged viewers to interpret immigration as one of the defining political crises facing the country. This dynamic reflects broader patterns within partisan political communication. Emotionally intense narratives concerning fear and insecurity can strengthen ideological loyalty, increase voter turnout, and deepen partisan polarization. Immigration therefore became not simply a policy issue but a symbolic issue central to electoral mobilization.

7.3. Commercial Incentives

The findings of this study also highlight the role of commercial incentives within partisan media systems. Outrage-driven coverage increases audience engagement by generating strong emotional reactions such as fear, anger, and anxiety. Fox News' repeated emphasis on crisis narratives surrounding immigration reflects this broader commercial media logic.

Hoewe et al. (2020) describe Fox News as relying heavily on an "outrage-based" style of political discourse. Immigration is particularly effective within this framework because it can easily be connected to multiple forms of perceived instability, including crime, economic insecurity, and cultural change. Simplified narratives of invasion and crisis are often more emotionally engaging than nuanced policy discussions concerning asylum systems or labor markets.

As a result, immigration coverage may prioritize emotional intensity and audience engagement over complexity and contextualization. This contributes to the persistence and amplification of threat-based framing during election periods.

7.4. Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis focuses specifically on Fox News and therefore does not provide a systematic comparison with other cable news networks such as CNN or MSNBC. As a result, the study cannot fully assess the extent to which Fox News framing differs quantitatively or qualitatively from competing networks. Second, the study relies primarily on qualitative content analysis rather than large-scale quantitative coding. Although qualitative analysis allows for deeper examination of rhetoric, symbolism, and framing mechanisms, future research could strengthen these findings through broader statistical analysis of language patterns and framing frequency.

Finally, the study focuses primarily on selected flagship programs and election-related periods rather than the entirety of Fox News programming. While these programs are highly influential within conservative media discourse, they do not represent every dimension of immigration coverage across the network.

7.5. Future Research

Future research could expand this project in several ways. A larger quantitative study comparing immigration framing across multiple cable news networks would provide valuable comparative insight into partisan media dynamics. Researchers could also examine audience responses to threat-based framing through surveys or experimental studies measuring changes in political attitudes and policy preferences. Another important area for future research involves the relationship between television discourse and social media amplification. Immigration narratives originating on cable news are frequently circulated through digital political ecosystems, potentially increasing both their emotional intensity and political reach. Future scholarship could also explore how immigration framing differs across international contexts and how populist political movements in other countries use media narratives surrounding borders, migration, and national security.

8. Conclusion

This paper examined how Fox News framed immigration and the U.S.-Mexico border during the 2016 and 2024 presidential election cycles. Through qualitative analysis of flagship programs such as Hannity and Fox & Friends, the study found that Fox News consistently portrayed immigration as a national security threat and that this framing intensified during election periods.

Across both election cycles, immigration was framed through recurring narratives of invasion, criminality, disorder, and governmental failure. These narratives contributed to the securitization of immigration by presenting migration not as a policy issue involving humanitarian and economic complexity, but as an existential threat to national sovereignty and public safety.

Although the underlying framing remained relatively consistent, the rhetoric evolved significantly between 2016 and 2024. By 2024, threat narratives became more emotionally escalated and increasingly connected to broader themes of national decline and institutional collapse. Immigration was no longer framed solely as a border issue but as evidence of systemic political failure throughout the United States. Ultimately, this research demonstrates the important role partisan media organizations play in shaping political discourse and public understandings of immigration. Fox News functioned not merely as a passive transmitter of political information but as an active institutional actor involved in constructing and amplifying immigration-related threat narratives during periods of heightened electoral polarization.

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Demographic Decline and Economic Challenges in East Asia: A Comparative Analysis of the Republic of Korea, Japan, and China

Seri Yoon¹

¹ Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan

Abstract

Although the Republic of Korea, Japan, and China are experiencing similarly rapid fertility decline and population aging, the socioeconomic consequences of these changes differ considerably across the three countries. Population decline does not operate through a single mechanism; rather, its effects are shaped by the structural conditions of households, labor markets, and local economies. Unlike Korea, where demographic anxiety is heavily concentrated in the overheated metropolitan housing market, Japan absorbs its aging burden primarily through a bifurcated labor system. China complicates this regional narrative further. Despite a shrinking national population, the slowing domestic economy is paradoxically struggling to absorb a record influx of university graduates. Across the three countries, unpaid care work remains unevenly distributed between women and men, adding to the pressures surrounding employment, marriage, and family formation. These differences imply that demographic policy cannot rely on a uniform set of incentives. Therefore, policy interventions are more likely to be effective when they respond to the particular institutional and socioeconomic constraints operating within each country.

Keywords: Demographic Decline, East Asia, East Asian Demographic Challenges, Republic of Korea, Japan, China

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

The demographic contraction in East Asia is no longer a future projection; it is a current structural reality. The Republic of Korea, Japan, and China have all experienced steep fertility decline alongside rapid population aging, but these changes have not produced identical economic pressures. Instead, demographic change interacts with labor-market institutions, patterns of spatial concentration, and household conditions in ways that vary across countries. Much of this work, however, remains centered on individual national cases. As a result, less attention has been given to the mechanisms that connect similar demographic pressures to different economic outcomes. A comparison of Korea, Japan, and China provides a way to examine these institutional differences directly.

1.2 Explore Importance of the Problem

All three countries face pronounced demographic pressures, yet their labor-market institutions, patterns of spatial concentration, and systems of family support differ substantially. Examining them together makes it possible to distinguish regional demographic trends from country-specific mechanisms. This distinction matters for policy as well. A policy that responds effectively to one country's demographic constraint may have considerably less effect elsewhere if the underlying problem is different.

1.3 Describe Relevant Scholarship

1.3.1 Demographic Transition

While existing literature extensively tracks fertility decline across East Asia, most studies treat these demographic shifts within isolated national boundaries. Frameworks such as the Second Demographic Transition have emphasized the role of industrialization and changing social values in this process (van de Kaa, 1987). East Asia, however, has experienced these changes at an unusually rapid pace, placing considerable pressure on welfare systems and longer-term economic growth (Colacelli & Corugedo, 2018). For this reason, the present comparison places greater emphasis on the institutional conditions through which demographic change is translated into labor-market and household outcomes.

1.3.2 Gender and Family Formation

One recurring theme in the literature concerns the tension between women's growing participation in paid employment and the continued unequal distribution of care responsibilities. This tension is especially important in East Asia, where expectations surrounding employment, marriage, and caregiving often remain strongly gendered. This imbalance has been linked to changes in marriage formation and fertility decisions, as women may face a choice between career advancement and family formation (International Labour Office & UN Women, 2023).

1.3.3 Demographic Change and Labor Markets

Population aging does not automatically eliminate labor-market insecurity. Japan offers a clear illustration. Despite persistent labor shortages, the country continues to exhibit substantial segmentation between regular and non-regular employment (Xu & Chahande, 2023; International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2023).

China presents a different situation. There, the expansion of higher education has produced a growing pool of highly educated young workers at a time when economic growth has slowed and suitable employment opportunities have become more difficult to secure.

1.3.4 Comparative Research Gap

A comparative approach makes it possible to identify those mechanisms while also recognizing the limits of treating East Asia as a single demographic or economic case.

1.4 Research Question and Analytical Approach

This study asks how similar demographic pressures are translated into different socioeconomic outcomes across the Republic of Korea, Japan, and China. Rather than testing a causal hypothesis, the study uses structured comparison to identify how differences in labor-market institutions, spatial inequalities, housing conditions, and gendered care arrangements shape the economic consequences associated with demographic decline.

2. Method

2.1 Comparative Case-Study Design and Selection Rationale

The Republic of Korea, Japan, and China share a baseline of rapid economic development and steep fertility decline, yet they filter these pressures through different institutional and socioeconomic conditions (Przeworski & Teune, 1970). Their institutional differences provide a basis for examining why similar demographic pressures are associated with different economic outcomes.

This study adopts a structured, focused comparison approach (George & Bennett, 2005), applying the same analytical dimensions to all three country cases. This approach allows the study to examine a shared regional demographic phenomenon while identifying differences in the institutional mechanisms through which demographic change is associated with socioeconomic outcomes. Each country is first examined within the common analytical dimensions, after which the findings are compared across cases to identify both shared demographic pressures and divergent economic mechanisms.

2.2 Data Sources

The analysis draws on both internationally comparable indicators and national statistical sources. Data from the World Bank, IMF, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], and UN Women provide the basis for cross-country comparison. Where greater country-specific detail is required, the analysis also uses data from KOSIS (Korean Statistical Information Service).

2.3 Analytical Dimensions

To move beyond purely descriptive demographics, this analysis examines four institutional and socioeconomic dimensions through which demographic change is associated with different outcomes. For each dimension, country-level evidence is examined using comparable indicators where available and contextual national sources where direct comparability is limited. These dimensions were selected because they connect population change to the economic and household-level pressures examined in the study.

The analysis examines four institutional and socioeconomic dimensions, with the relative weight of each dimension varying according to the structural characteristics of each case: demographic trajectories, labor-market structures, spatial and housing inequalities, and gender disparities in unpaid care.

2.4 Limitations

This study's purpose is to identify broad structural relationships and differences across the three cases. The findings should therefore be interpreted as comparative evidence rather than as definitive estimates of causal impact.

3. Results

3.1 Republic of Korea: Demographic Decline, Housing, and Metropolitan Concentration

The demographic situation in the Republic of Korea is particularly acute, with ultra-low fertility emerging alongside rapid population aging. The scale of the decline has become sufficiently serious for the government to declare a "demographic emergency" (S. Kim, 2024). By early 2024, the total fertility rate had fallen to 0.76, well below the OECD average (Kang, 2025; see Figure 1).

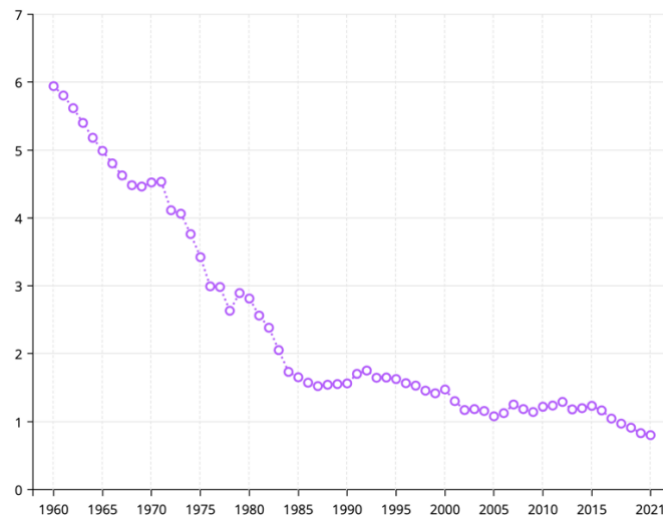


Figure 1: Fertility rate, total (births per woman) - Korea, Rep.

Source: World Bank

Demographic pressure is closely connected to the spatial distribution of economic opportunities and housing demand, particularly in and around Seoul. Since 2020, over half of the national population resides in the Seoul metropolitan area (see Figure 2). Metropolitan concentration affects family formation through several channels, including housing costs, competition for employment and education, and regional inequality (Ha, 2020). For younger adults in particular, the decision to establish a household is therefore shaped by conditions in the metropolitan housing market as much as by demographic preferences themselves.

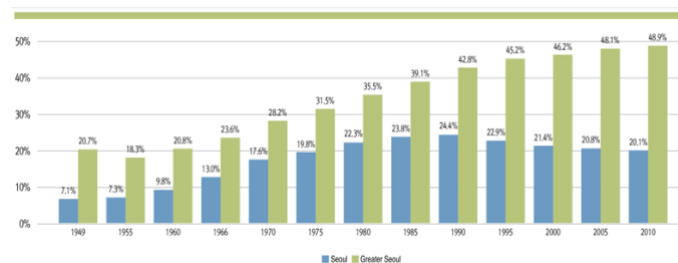


Figure 2: Trends in the proportion of population in Seoul and the metropolitan area

Source: Seoul Research Data Service

The housing-price gap illustrates the scale of this spatial divide. In 2024, the apartment-price gap between Seoul and provincial areas widened to approximately KRW 900 million (Y. Kim, 2024). In 2015, the price of one Seoul apartment was roughly equivalent to two provincial apartments; by 2024, the ratio had risen above three to one (see Figure 3, Statistics Korea, 2024). The widening price gap raises the cost of establishing a household in the capital region. It is also associated with greater movement of younger households toward Gyeonggi-do, alongside continued population loss in non-metropolitan areas.

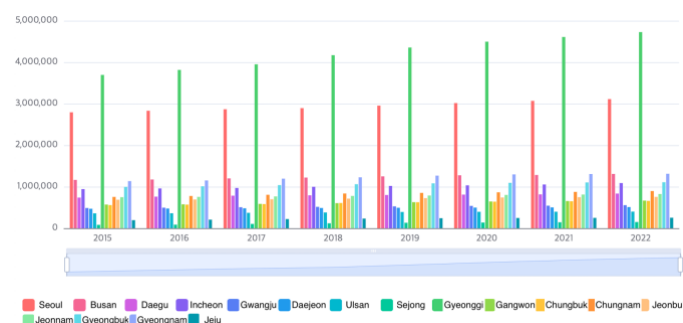


Figure 3: Number of housing units by city and regional price gaps in the Republic of Korea

Source: Statistics Korea (KOSIS)

3.2 Japan: Population Aging, Labor-Market Dualism, and Wage Stagnation

Japan's population was approximately 124 million in 2024. It is projected to fall to around 87 million by 2070, while the share of people aged 65 and over is expected to reach 40% (The Guardian, 2024; see Figure 4).

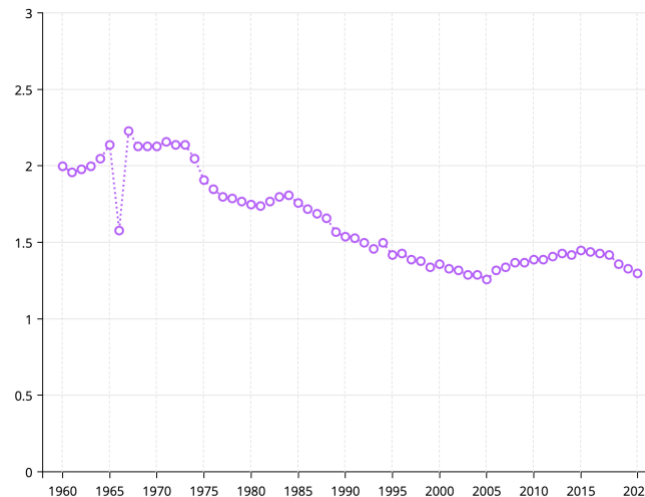


Figure 4: Fertility rate, total (births per woman) - Japan

Source: World Bank

Demographic change in Japan is unfolding within a highly dualized labor market. Weak income growth, associated with the country's prolonged period of economic stagnation, has further complicated this adjustment (Tsuchiya, 2016). To manage labor shortages, companies have increasingly relied on non-regular employment. Since 2013, approximately 2.5 million women have entered the labor force, with around half taking part-time positions. Older workers, meanwhile, have increasingly remained economically active beyond the traditional retirement age. Many are re-employed in non-regular positions after age 60, often at lower wages, while only about one-fifth of companies allow them to retain regular employment status (IMF, 2023). Japan has increased labor-force participation without eliminating the segmentation between regular and non-regular employment (see Figure 5).

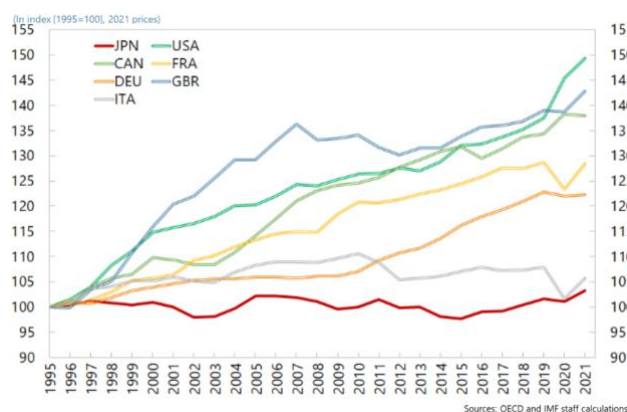


Figure 5: Real Average Annual Wages for Full-Time Workers

Source: IMF

Japan's prolonged wage stagnation is closely associated with this employment structure. A comparison by the Korea Enterprises Federation found that wages at large Korean firms increased by 157.6% between 2002 and 2022, whereas wages in Japan declined by 6.8% over the same period (Lee, 2024). Indeed, wage growth strengthened in 2024, with the shunto negotiations resulting in increases of 5.58%, the highest level in several decades (Kimura, 2024). This recent improvement, however, does not by itself erase the longer-term pattern of wage stagnation identified in the literature.

Wage stagnation reflects the structure of regular and non-regular employment. Regular employees generally benefit from greater job security, firm-specific training, and relatively stable career progression, whereas non-regular workers tend to receive less firm-specific training and have fewer opportunities for advancement (Xu & Chahande, 2023; IMF, 2023). Seniority-based promotion and limited labor mobility remain important features of the regular employment system, while non-regular workers face greater employment insecurity and lower wages. Firms, however, gain flexibility from non-regular employment when responding to labor shortages and changing demand. The expansion of this form of employment has consequently reinforced differences in wages, training, and career opportunities (see Figure 6).

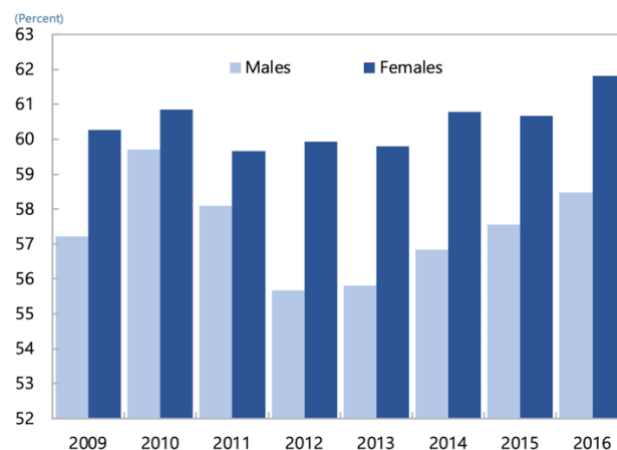


Figure 6: Share of Regular and Non-Regular Employment and Wage Gaps

Source: IMF

The implications extend beyond wages to productivity and household income generation. Non-regular workers are less likely to receive extensive firm-specific training or stable opportunities for career development. The growing share of non-regular workers may constrain productivity growth and long-term skill accumulation. Japan has partly offset immediate labor shortages by channeling women and older workers into part-time and non-regular positions. In contrast, this adjustment fails to resolve the structural challenges associated with population aging.

3.3 China: Demographic Decline, Economic Slowdown, and Youth Employment

In China, the demographic challenge takes on a distinctly different structural form. The population is projected to fall from 1.41 billion to below 1.39 billion by 2035 (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2024; see Figure 7).

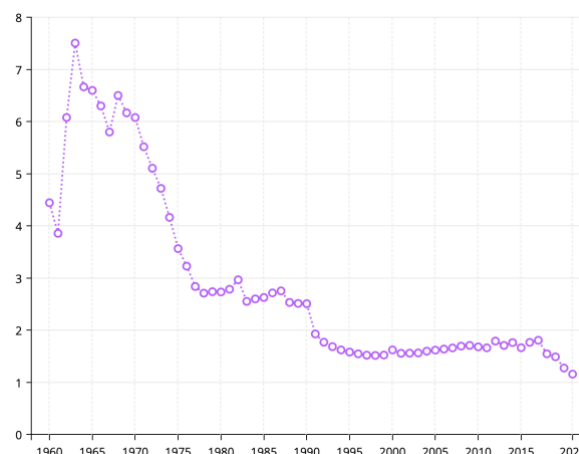


Figure 7: Fertility rate, total (births per woman) - China

Source: World Bank

Even as the total population declines, young workers continue to face intense employment competition. Economic growth has moderated from the high single-digit rates recorded before 2015 to around 5% in 2024, while some domestic manufacturers have moved production overseas as they restructure their supply chains (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2024; Tan et al., 2023; Wang, 2022; see Figure 8).

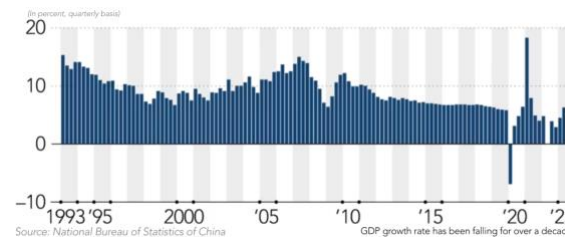


Figure 8: China's economic growth trend and slowdown

Source: Tan et al. (2023)

Youth unemployment reached 21.3% among urban workers aged 16–24 in June 2023, roughly three times the rate reported for the Republic of Korea (Fu, 2023; Choi, 2023). Meanwhile, 11.58 million college graduates entered the workforce in 2023, contributing to a growing mismatch between educated workers and suitable employment (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2024; KIEP, 2021).

Regulatory tightening under the "Common Prosperity" agenda further reduced opportunities in some technology-intensive industries, including major platforms such as Alibaba and Didi (Son, 2023; Hankyung Economy, 2024). This mismatch is also reflected in graduates' choices: 4.74 million students took the 'Kaoyan' exam in 2022, while approximately 2.59 million competed for 37,000 national civil service positions in 2023 (Hankyung Economy, 2024). Thus, population decline has not automatically improved youth employment, as slower growth and expanding higher education have altered the balance between educated labor supply and suitable jobs (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2024; Hankyung Economy, 2024).

Declining marriage rates have accompanied delayed labor-market entry and financial dependence. China's marriages fell to 6.83 million in 2022, the lowest since 1986 (Shin, 2024), suggesting that employment insecurity may also affect family formation.

3.4 Comparative Findings

3.4.1 Common Demographic Pressures

Fertility has fallen sharply across all three countries, population aging is accelerating, and patterns of marriage and family formation are changing. These developments place broadly similar pressure on economic growth and social-security systems, even though the mechanisms through which those pressures emerge are not the same.

3.4.2 Divergent Economic Mechanisms

Looking at these three cases concurrently reveals that demographic decline is not a monolithic event. Population change provides a common starting point, but its consequences depend heavily on the institutional environment in which it occurs. The Korean case is most visible in housing inflation and metropolitan concentration. Japan presents a different problem, with demographic aging interacting with labor-market segmentation. In China, the pressure appears most clearly in the mismatch between the supply of young graduates and available employment.

Table 1: Comparative Dimensions of Demographic and Economic Challenges

Dimension	Republic of Korea	Japan	China
Demographic trajectory	Ultra-low fertility	Advanced aging	Rapid fertility decline
Main demographic concern	Fertility decline	Population aging	Population decline & aging

Labor-market challenge	Labor-market/housing pressures on young households	Dual labor market	Youth employment mismatch
Spatial challenge	Seoul concentration	Regional depopulation	Urban concentration
Gender challenge	Unequal care burden	Unequal care + employment dualism	Persistent care burden
Major policy priority	Housing/fertility/family	Labor/productivity	Employment/structural adjustment

Source: Author's synthesis based on the sources cited in the paper

3.4.3 Gender and Unpaid Care

What happens inside households also matters, particularly the way unpaid care is distributed between women and men. OECD data indicate that women in Korea and Japan perform more than four times as much unpaid domestic work as men (4.43 and 4.76 times, respectively) (OECD, 2019). UN Women data for China likewise indicate persistent gender differences in childcare, child instruction, and adult-care responsibilities, although the overall unpaid-care gap has narrowed modestly over the past decade (see Figure 9, International Labour Office & UN Women, 2023).

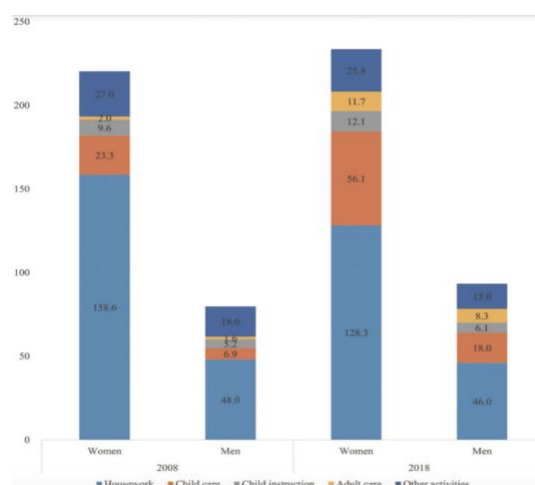


Figure 9: Gender Differences in Unpaid Care Work in 2008 and 2018

Source: UN Women

3.4.4 Comparative Findings on Youth Employment

These differences are particularly visible in youth employment. While cross-country comparisons require caution due to different unemployment reporting methods (such as China's urban statistics versus ILO-modeled estimates), the broader regional pattern shows that a shrinking labor pool has not shielded young adults from job insecurity. National institutions shape how this instability unfolds (see Figures 10, 11, and 12).

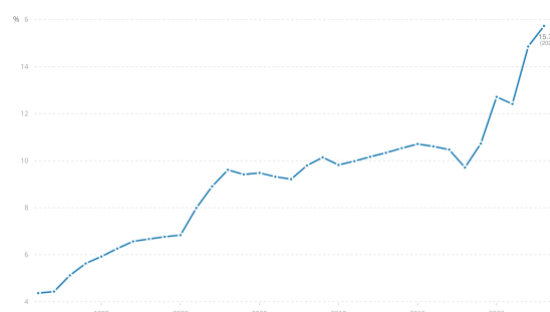


Figure 10: Unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15-24) (modeled ILO estimate) – China

Source: World Bank

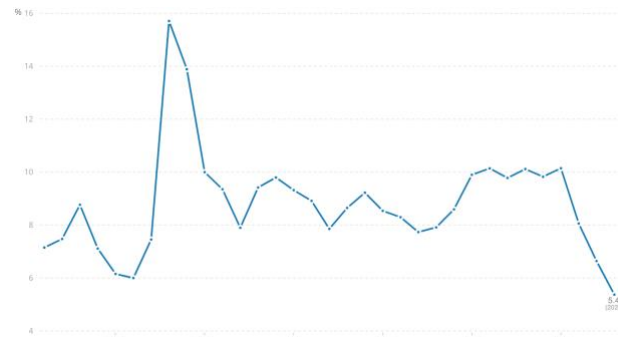


Figure 11: Unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15-24) (modeled ILO estimate) - Korea, Rep.
Source: World Bank

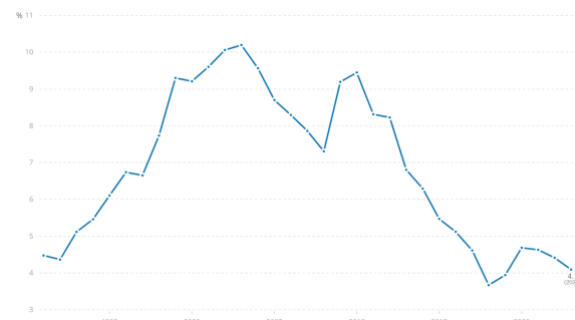


Figure 12: Unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15-24) (modeled ILO estimate) – Japan
Source: World Bank

4. Discussion

4.1 Policy Implications and Regional Cooperation

The policy implications differ because the binding constraints differ. In Korea, housing and spatial concentration are central; in Japan, labor-market segmentation is more prominent; in China, the transition from education to employment is a key concern.

4.1.1 Gender and Family Support

Improving work-family reconciliation requires more than expanding childcare provision. Care responsibilities also need to be distributed more evenly within households. This includes expanding accessible childcare, incentivizing fathers' participation in parental leave, and continuing work-style reforms to facilitate flexible, yet secure, employment for women. In Korea, the Neulbom School initiative represents an effort to integrate childcare and after-school services within the school system, thereby reducing the time constraints faced by working parents (Ministry of Education, 2023). Its broader significance lies in connecting education policy with the everyday conditions that shape family decisions.

4.1.2 Labor-Market Adaptation and Social Security Alignment

Reducing the gap between regular and non-regular employment could address one of the structural weaknesses identified in the Japanese case. Introducing more flexible employment models, such as open-ended contracts with greater mobility and merit-based promotion, could help reduce segmentation between regular and non-regular workers. Social-security rules also deserve attention. Differences in health insurance and pension insurance, in particular, can create financial disincentives for dual-income households and secondary earners. These rules may encourage female workers to remain in low-wage, part-time positions.

4.1.3 Housing and Regional Balance

The case of the Republic of Korea illustrates how spatial inequality can become a demographic constraint in its own right. When extreme metropolitan concentration drives up property values, standard financial incentives for childbirth are easily offset by housing inflation. Relieving this pressure fundamentally depends on decentralizing employment opportunities and expanding affordable housing for young households. Without such measures, financial support for childbirth may have limited effects in areas where the cost of establishing a household remains prohibitively high.

4.1.4 Regional Cooperation

Although demographic pressures are rooted largely in domestic institutions, the shared experience of population aging creates opportunities for regional learning. For example, Japan's experience with care-related technologies, including AI and other digital tools used in long-term care, provides a useful reference point for Korea and China as they confront similar pressures associated with population aging (OECD, 2024). Cross-border exchanges in youth employment and skills could help balance localized labor shortages and surpluses. This regional employment mobility could also help younger workers benefit from cross-border cooperation in skills development.

4.2 Conclusion

The comparison demonstrates that demographic decline is mediated by institutions rather than transmitted directly from population change to economic outcomes. Demographic decline is not simply a question of population size. It also affects where people live, what kinds of jobs they can obtain, and how households divide unpaid care work.

Labor markets, social security systems, housing distribution, and the division of unpaid care all need attention. Policy responses should therefore be adapted to the specific institutional constraints identified in each country. Therefore, the analysis shows that sustainable demographic policy must shift its focus from merely boosting population size to dismantling the specific institutional rigidities that make family formation economically untenable in each respective country.

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