

Chapter 1

Introduction

Ishtiaq Jamil, Salahuddin M. Aminuzzaman and Sk. Tawfique M. Haque

This book explores and analyzes governance and policy issues in South, Southeast, and East Asia.¹ The authors map governance challenges and analyze current trends from the perspectives of politics and administration. Public administration and governance systems in these regions have undergone phenomenal changes during the last three decades and have played a key role in economic progress, especially in the Southeast and East Asian nations. The state has been the driving force for economic growth and social developments. Despite state dominance, in recent years other actors such as civil society organizations and NGOs, regional and local governments, supra-national entities such as the UNDP and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and other multilateral agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are increasingly finding space and setting priorities in policy making. The trend is now a tilt towards more network and multi-level governance. Rich with evidence and analyses, these chapters use empirical and other research methods to examine contemporary issues, trends, challenges, and best-practice paradigms. Their additional aim is to develop a greater understanding of changes in the forms of governance, both within individual national contexts and from a comparative perspective.

¹ South Asia includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Afghanistan has been considered part of South Asia since 2005. Our broad definition of Southeast and East Asia includes Burma in the west, China in the north, Japan and the Philippines in the east, and Indonesia in the south.

I. Jamil (✉)

Department of Administration and Organization Theory, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway
e-mail: ishtiaq.jamil@aorg.uib.no

S. M. Aminuzzaman

Department of Public Administration, University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh

PPG Program, North South University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

S. T. M. Haque

Department of Political Science and Sociology, North South University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

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The regions of South, Southeast, and East Asia contain enormous geographical, cultural, religious, and ethnic variation. They are also “diverse in political and constitutional systems and their performance in managing the economy is uneven” (Haque 2001, p. 1290). Some countries in Southeast and East Asia may already qualify as developed nations, but most of South Asia is beset with poor governance, lack of rule of law, uneven service delivery, and widespread corruption. This is the case despite these countries, in the last decade or so, experiencing steady and impressive economic growth. The huge differences in governance the South, Southeast, and East Asian countries reflect the countries’ unique cultures, history, demography, geography, political development, and economic growth (Cheung 2011, p. 139). Even within each region, we observe huge variations in how governance is practiced. These variations suggest that the trajectories of reforms and governance practices are influenced by the respective countries’ historical and institutional legacies and administrative and political cultures. Cultural features develop gradually and give a system of governance a distinct identity and ‘soul’. Different traditions and values create specific path dependencies; informal values in administrative practices, once established, will influence how policies are designed, formulated, adopted, and implemented.

Authoritarianism is common in most countries in these regions, and most policies are adopted and implemented in a top-down manner. Despite the introduction of NPM reform-measures in public administration, we observe that many policies and the way they are implemented reflect patron-clientelistic features. In fact, in South Asia, paternalism and informal relations are closely connected and have been dominant norms.

Governance is now a buzzword in the social sciences, yet it is being imbued with different meanings and used in different ways (Levi-Faur 2012, p. 3; Pierre and Peters 2000, p. 1). We constantly hear phrases such as “good governance”, “global governance” (Bevir 2011, p. 1), “sound governance” (Farazmand 2004), and “good enough governance” (Grindle 2004, 2007). Perhaps the popularity of the term can be chalked up to its inclusiveness: it is broader than the traditional *government* concept, and it encompasses other actors such as non-governmental organizations and civil society (Weise 2000). According to Fukuyama (2013, p. 4), governance means “[a] government’s ability to make and enforce rules, and to deliver services, regardless of whether that government is democratic or not”. This is similar to the definitions used by some multilateral organizations such as the World Bank and the UNDP, for whom governance denotes “the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources” (Weise 2000, p. 797).

The states in Southeast and East Asia are referred to as *developmental states* because of the key role the state has played in the social life and economic development in these countries. The financial crisis which began in 1997 has raised doubts about the capacity of the centralized state to sustain the “East Asian miracle”, calling for new institutional arrangements (Cheung 2007, p. 257). On the other hand, governance in South Asia has been varied; some countries are managing better than others in achieving steady economic growth, ensuring human security and safety, and political stability. Others are lagging behind and unable to maintain the basic

tenets of democracy, despite the fact that most of these countries have adopted democracy as the form of government (Jamil et al. 2013). Some South Asian countries are so beset with internal conflicts and confrontations amongst various groups and political parties that they may be termed ‘weak’ or even ‘fragile’ states.

Having said this, external and internal pressures are spurring reforms and institutional reconfigurations within political bodies and governance across Asia. Cheung (2011) observes an increasing number of reforms inspired by NPM, and good governance is being advocated by international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Internal pressures are associated with nation building and a state’s capacity-building processes, as well as with cultural contexts and political and administrative changes. As a result, we observe various implications of governance in the political, administrative, and economic spheres, which in turn have led to variations in governance practices and institutional arrangements. The reformers’ major concerns have been to improve the quality of governance through public-sector efficiency and efficacy, to make the sector more responsive to citizens’ demands and aspirations, to cut public expenditures, and to enhance political and administrative accountability (Christensen and Lægread 2011, p. 1). At the same time, questions arise about governmental inadequacy in setting up and sustaining standards of accountability, measuring performance, and about the means for ensuring the success of reform initiatives (Haque 2000, p. 600).

In our conceptualization, which is highlighted in the chapters in this volume, the focus of governance is on the *capacity of public institutions* (Fukuyama 2013) and *participatory democracy* (Norris 2012). The capacity of public institutions denotes delivering services and responding to citizens’ needs. This may take place both in multi-party democratic countries (such as in Japan) or in authoritarian regimes (many Southeast and East Asian nations, including China and Vietnam). The South Asian states score low on the World Bank’s Worldwide Indicators of Governance (see Khan’s chapter in this volume) as well as on other governance-quality indicators, and they are increasingly failing to deliver in accordance with citizens’ preferences. Consequently, citizens’ distrust of public and political institutions has increased (see Jamil and Askvik in this volume).

Participatory or representative democracy means that a wide range of actors participate in formulating policies. This trend is now unfolding in a number of South-east and East Asian nations, making them more flexible and open to reforms. They are allowing hitherto-discouraged actors such as civic organizations to join in the process of governance, to enter into public-private partnerships and public dialogue. Meanwhile, in the context of South Asian nations, despite an increase in non-governmental organizations and an active civil society, participation in governance has been limited. Paternalistic politics and patron-clientelism in policies have become widespread, leading to corrupt practices and non-accountable, non-transparent government activities.

Governance, as we observe today in South, Southeast, and East Asia, has changed considerably over the past few decades, but numerous challenges loom on the horizon. These developments, present practices, and challenges are summarized in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Nature of governance as practiced in South, Southeast, and East Asia. (Source: Developed by the authors based on the writings of Cheung (2007, 2011))

Nature of governance in South, Southeast, & East Asia			
Region	Historical paths	Contemporary trends	Challenges
South Asia	Break away from colonialism	Widening of scope, allowing others actors to join the process of governance	Establishing rule of law
	More government and less governance, i.e., over-extended and over-centralized state	NPM-inspired reforms allowing civil society and private sector engagement	Fostering citizens' trust in public and political institutions
	Experience with military and authoritarian leadership	Globalization and the primacy of economic growth	Reinventing government and bureaucracy as neutral, goal- and performance-oriented institutions
	Strong bureaucracy based on strong hierarchy	Policy transfer from international organizations in setting the policy agenda for reforms	Political and managerial accountability and transparency of actions
	Regulated economy	Paternalism in politics, leading to patron-clientelistic policy making	Making institutions perform and deliver
		Alliances amongst political parties are dividing nations, leading to infighting amongst various groups	Governance in terms of equity and citizenship rights, and providing human safety and security
			Solving 'wicked' problems (reducing corruption, access to health and education, making mega-cities more liveable, and addressing environmental hazards)
South-east & East Asia	Break away from socialism (Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea, and China)	State directed economy	Decentralization and power sharing with other societal actors (civil society) in the governance process, i.e., more openness and inclusion
	Statist approach to rebuild nations	Interlocking state-economy-social systems and elites in the process of governance	Pragmatic development in a globalized world, i.e., to adapt governance to the context and needs of each country
	The rise of developmental state	Increased use of network governance as a result of the increase in the number of semi-governmental units	Piecemeal reform measures rather than fast-track reform initiatives

Table 1.1 (continued)

Nature of governance in South, Southeast, & East Asia			
Region	Historical paths	Contemporary trends	Challenges
	The domination of one-party rule		
	Dominant authoritarian leadership		

As is evident from Table 1.1, the challenges to governance are formidable, especially in the South Asian nations. In spite of becoming wealthier through steady economic growth, these nations are still poorly managed. NPM-inspired reforms are being continuously pursued, yet many of the reforms have their own peculiar dynamics, and learning from mistakes is rare. Public policy making does not reflect citizens' interests, and public officials are not being held accountable for their actions. The major challenge for Southeast and East Asian governance is to open up by allowing other interests to participate in the policy making.

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The chapters in this volume emphasize that (a) for any country; governance processes have particular histories and legacies and are influenced by contextual frameworks. In other words, there is no universal form of governance, and each case is significantly affected by the respective country's culture and history. (b) There appear to be some paradoxical propositions and trends in the contemporary discourses and empirical observations on governance. The puzzle of governance is that some economies are doing tremendously well despite weak governance. (c) Governance is a product of its own 'ecology', and it tends to maintain a particular pattern. (d) Civil society organizations are emerging as strong actors to develop the demand side of governance. (e) There are some common challenges in addressing governance issues, especially in terms of policy formulation and implementation. (f) Public management reforms can be potential tools for improving governance, and it should be possible for governments to learn from each other's successful endeavours. (g) Piecemeal reform measures are more likely to succeed because in contrast to across-the-board reform initiatives, they can be adapted to local governance needs.

Is Good Governance Good Enough?

Ali Farazmand's introductory chapter, "Sound Governance in the Age of Globalization", sets a theoretical and practical tone for the discussions in this book. He raises the question of why governance has now become a key theme for discussion,

rather than “before the stampede of globalization”. He prefers the application of “sound governance” over “good governance”, which is the term prescribed by globally dominant institutions like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, USAID, and others. He argues that what is good for global institutions or advanced industrialized countries may be “bad or ugly” for developing or less developed nations.

History and Context Matter

Although discourse and discussion on governance have entered the limelight in the 1990s, they have a long history. Ancient and medieval political philosophers developed various perspectives on the better forms and functions of government in relation to given contexts. **Tawfique Haque** could be said to continue this tradition by analyzing the concepts of power and authority from South Asian perspectives. He explores the South Asian forms of governance on the basis of Hindu and Muslim political thought, making comparisons between them and analyzing how the relationships between the ruler and the ruled are conceptualized.

The Paradox of Good Governance

Good governance has been on the policy agenda of all countries and has been advocated by international organizations such as the UN, OECD, World Bank and IMF, being seen as an essential and necessary ingredient of economic growth and progress. However, experiences from South Asia and China reveal that economic progress has taken place without a simultaneous increase in the quality of governance. **Akbar Ali Khan**’s chapter discusses this conundrum: despite poor governance as measured according to the World Bank’s worldwide governance indicators, South Asia and China have demonstrated remarkable economic progress and growth. Another author, **Haroon Khan** analyzes the relationship between good governance and human development in general as well as in the context of South Asia, arguing that good governance is crucial for improving human development; without it, the objectives of good governance cannot be realized.

Citizens’ Trust in Public Institutions

Citizens’ trust—usually understood as an indicator of governance quality—is analyzed by **Ishtiaq Jamil** and **Steinar Askvik**. They ask whether social capital or governance quality matter for citizens’ confidence in government institutions. Their findings coincide with those from other studies showing that good governance matters for generating citizens’ trust in government.

The Ecology of Governance

Salahuddin Aminuzzaman discusses the question of how Bangladesh could achieve impressive and steady economic growth despite its struggle with corrupt practices such as poor governance and widespread patron-clientelism. This puzzle can be understood if we observe the policy making process, especially the policy formulation stage and how it is influenced by external demands, globalization measures, and internal commitment from the highest political leadership. Similarly, **Shamsul Haque** argues that behind NPM and post-NPM led reforms in Southeast Asian countries, there are external factors such as globalization that may have led to the neo-liberal reconfiguration of the state and the market-driven reinvention of state policies. Haque explains how the linkages between the globalization process, state formation and transformation, and public sector reinvention have led these states to embrace neoliberal reforms.

CSO as Partners of Policy Networks and Governance

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are emerging as strong actors on the demand side of governance. CSOs have the potential to positively collaborate with governments. They seem to have their own cultural characteristics, so the degree and nature of collaboration would vary at the level of economic and social development and in light of the political milieu. **Habib Zafarullah** discusses the rise of civil society organizations in Asia and how they interact and are involved with the government in policy networks. They are making significant inroads in social development policies, especially in areas such as healthcare, education, environmental protection, and citizens' empowerment, but experiences vary from country to country.

Similarly, concentrating on four large cities in South, Southeast, and East Asia (Tokyo, Seoul, Manila, and Dhaka), **Yutaka Tsujinaka**, **Shakil Ahmed** and **Yohei Kobashi** analyze how CSOs collaborate with governments through institutional mechanisms. Based on a large longitudinal data set, this research team argues that institutional arrangements have a positive impact on collaboration in developed countries. CSOs in Tokyo have better combined collaborative and institutional processes than those in the other three cities. Governance in Seoul is more polarized than in the other cities, and while CSOs in Manila and Dhaka have a high degree of institutionalized relations with the government, they still do not collaborate much with it. CSOs are also a topic of concern for **Mei Li** in her chapter on China. She discusses the challenges of reforming state-run and not-for-profit Public Service Units (PSUs), arguing that decentralization will continue to be an unavoidable reform strategy as China strides towards good governance in public service delivery.

The Challenges of Policy Formulation and Implementation

Even when a government sets up constitutional guarantees and a policy framework, if government agencies do not comply with the policies, or only to an insignificant degree, this will result in poor governance, and problems such as discrimination will not be solved. **Lasna Kabir** presents just such a scenario based on a study conducted in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. The study pursues the question of why so few women are found in the higher echelon of bureaucracy, despite the constitutional guarantee of equal rights and opportunities. Among other factors, the dominant socio-political culture imposes a permeable glass ceiling that blocks true gender representation in the public administration systems of these countries. **Santosh Mathew** and **Mick Moore** present a different case of policy gone awry: in the state of Bihar in India, certain political insiders intentionally weakened some aspects of the state's capacity in public service delivery—merely for sake of a narrow electoral gain.

Policy Learning and Design

Of course governance is conceptualized and practiced differently in different contexts. Nevertheless, despite the variance of conceptions, there is a great deal of consensus on the basic tenets of good governance. These, however, are poorly implemented in many developing countries, and the outcomes of many reforms have been unsuccessful. This may be due to reformers making overambitious demands about what governance should achieve, thus making it difficult to operationalize governance and its uses. In this regard, **Ahmed Shafiqul Haque** argues that many of the desired values of governance can be attained through the effective design and implementation of public management reforms. The case of Hong Kong demonstrates that public management reforms can be potential tools for updating and adjusting the structures and practices in developing countries. They can, he argues, help ensure the benefits of the desired values of governance, yet without taking the enormous risks that are involved in making and implementing decisions based on entirely political considerations.

In the concluding chapter, **Salaluddin Aminuzzaman**, **Ishtiaq Jamil** and **Sk. Tawfique Haque** contend that governance matters for the growth outcomes of developing countries. There is, however, a need for a tailored approach to governance reform—one that can maximize the impact and outcome of development.

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