



Bureaucratic Politics in Bangladesh: Analyzing the Generalist-Specialist Divide and Pathways for Reform

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ABSTRACT

Bangladesh's bureaucratic framework remains central to the functioning of its administration and governance system. A growing area of concern within this structure is the ongoing debate between generalist and specialist bureaucrats, especially regarding their roles in policy efficiency, autonomy, and development outcomes. Generalists, largely recruited through the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS), are often praised for their broad administrative capabilities and mobility across sectors. Nonetheless, there is growing criticism that their dominance frequently overshadows specialists – including professionals such as engineers, doctors, and economists – who possess sector-specific expertise crucial for informed policymaking. This research explores both the historical background and the current state of this divide, analyzing the ways institutional arrangements, politicization, and career advancement practices deepen the divide between generalists and specialists in the civil service. By incorporating international perspectives and focusing on the local context, the study highlights the need to rethink bureaucratic roles in light of increasingly complex governance demands, such as technological advancement, climate change adaptation, and innovation in public service delivery. The paper concludes with recommendations to foster a more equitable and competence-based bureaucracy that balances administrative skills with specialized knowledge

INTRODUCTION

According to Rashid (2014), the bureaucracy plays a pivotal role in policymaking in Bangladesh, often shaping agendas and outcomes through its administrative expertise and entrenched institutional practices. With that aim in view, the Government of Bangladesh, since its inception, has been trying to do away with the colonial legacy of generalist dominance and the reservation of key administrative posts for one particular class. This objective was reflected in the recommendations of the Administrative and Service Reorganization Committee (ASRC, 1972) and the Pay and Service Commission (P&SC), which resulted in the formation of the long-cherished unified civil service structure of the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) and the Senior Service Pool (SSP). The goal was to establish an egalitarian apex cadre of senior officers of proven quality, drawn from all branches of the civil service on the basis of merit tested in an objective manner (Obaidullah, 1996). As a country that inherited the Westminster-style administrative framework from its colonial past, Bangladesh continues to face challenges in finding the right balance between efficiency, accountability, and expertise in its civil service. At the heart of this struggle lies a longstanding debate: should the administration rely more on generalist officers with broad management skills, or specialists with deep technical knowledge in specific areas? This generalist-specialist debate is not unique to Bangladesh. Around the world, governments and scholars alike have questioned which group is better equipped to serve the public – those with versatile administrative experience or those with focused expertise (Aberbach, Putnam & Rockman, 1981). However, in Bangladesh, this issue is particularly complex due to historical patterns, political interference in civil service appointments, and the ongoing demands of development. Generalists in Bangladesh, primarily recruited through the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) exams, are appreciated for their adaptability and ability to work across different ministries. Yet, their limited technical knowledge often proves to be a drawback in areas like health, education, and technology that require specialized skills (Jamil, 2002). Conversely, specialists – such as doctors, engineers, and subject matter experts – frequently find themselves excluded from important policy decisions, despite having the relevant expertise and practical experience. This divide is further reinforced by the structure of the bureaucracy itself, which tends to privilege generalists by offering them more leadership opportunities and faster promotions. As a result, many specialists feel marginalized, with little influence over the very sectors they are trained to manage. The dominance of generalists has also sparked concerns over inefficiency, poor decision-making, and resistance to innovation in the public sector. Ultimately, this is more than just a professional rivalry; it has real consequences for governance and development in Bangladesh. As the country confronts increasingly complex issues – from managing climate risks to adopting digital technologies – the need for technically informed leadership is growing. Addressing the imbalance between generalists and specialists is therefore crucial for building a more competent and future-ready bureaucracy. This paper explores the politics behind this divide, tracing its historical roots, analyzing its impact on administrative performance, and offering policy

suggestions for a more merit-based and inclusive civil service system in Bangladesh.

LITERATURE RIVIEW

The tension between generalist and specialist bureaucrats in Bangladesh reflects a broader struggle between legacy-based administrative practices and the demands of modern governance. Early analysis underscores how reforms have repeatedly failed to shift the balance toward technical expertise. Sarker (2004) critically examines administrative reform efforts over three decades, charting how entrenched interests and weak political will consistently undermined transformative change. Jahan's (2006) working paper from BRAC University adds to this narrative by identifying politicisation and recruitment flaws as persistent roadblocks to reform, where bureaucrats and politicians often prioritise vested interests over institutional integrity, a dynamic that perpetuates generalist dominance and sidelines specialists. Complementing this, Jamil (2002) probes the sociocultural roots of bureaucracy in Bangladesh, arguing that traditional norms and centralised authority shape how policies are implemented and resist meritocratic shifts, with administrative culture favouring conformity and hierarchy over adaptive specialisation. Against this institutional backdrop, recent news coverage illustrates how reform proposals can surface deep-seated friction; a Dhaka Tribune report (2025) shows how adjusting promotion quotas, designed to empower non-generalist cadres, triggered protests and administrative turbulence, demonstrating that the debate is no longer theoretical but actively reshaping bureaucratic politics. While these challenges are soundly documented, comparative perspectives add further insight: Jamil's (2020) work on institutional trust points to cultural traits such as deference to authority that sustain bureaucratic power regardless of reform, and Zafarullah (2007, 2013) maps how bureaucratic culture is tightly woven into the political framework, where clientelism and self-preservation often dilute reform agendas. Contemporary research by Arafat and Fahmida (2025a, 2025b) highlights historical and systemic political factors that reinforce hierarchical structures and complicate accountability, while Arafat et al. (2025) examine how national integrity and institutional barriers further influence administrative behavior. Barua, Shahan, and Hassan (2025) analyse how regional representativeness has evolved in Bangladesh's administrative cadre service, highlighting structural shifts that have influenced recruitment and promotion dynamics. Although administrative reforms in Bangladesh have often struggled to achieve their intended outcomes, some initiatives have shown partial success in tackling inefficiencies and the generalist-specialist divide. For instance, the Government Performance Management System emphasised professional training, merit-based promotion, and institutional capacity building, which helped enhance the responsiveness of certain service cadres. The Government of India introduced the concept of a Performance Management System in 2009, which uses defined objectives, benchmarks, and performance indicators to evaluate and rate the effectiveness of various government departments and line ministries. Similarly, the introduction of digital governance tools and e-service platforms has

improved transparency and streamlined administrative processes, reducing delays in public service delivery. While these measures have not fully transformed the bureaucracy, they illustrate that carefully targeted policies and capacity-building efforts can produce tangible improvements, offering a critical perspective on how specific reforms influence bureaucratic behaviour in practice. The crucial reforms to Bangladesh's civil service have been stalled for 27 years, largely because of the opposition of a section of top bureaucrats and a lack of political will. At least 16 commissions and committees, constituted in the last 53 years since the country's independence, made recommendations for having an efficient, merit-based and service-oriented civil administration. However, most of those recommendations fell on deaf ears (Khan, 2024). Additionally, the formation of the Public Administration Reform Commission in 2024 underscores the government's commitment to enhancing efficiency, transparency, and accountability in public service. The commission's efforts are focused on proposing necessary reforms in administrative structures and governance practices, indicating a proactive approach towards addressing longstanding bureaucratic issues, still, there are significant challenges and resistances. Taken together, the literature shows that the generalist-specialist divide extends beyond administrative inefficiencies, reflecting cultural inertia, political resistance, and the complex interplay of reform and tradition. However, what remains underexplored is how current reforms, particularly those directly affecting career trajectories and cadre balance, are generating new forms of resistance within bureaucracy, thereby making this research timely and necessary to understand the evolving contours of governance in Bangladesh.

METHODOLOGY

Research means a systematic finding and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new results (Arafat, 2024). This study follows a qualitative approach, relying entirely on secondary sources of information. It involves a careful review of existing literature such as academic journals, research articles, books, and reliable newspaper reports to understand the ongoing debate between generalists and specialists in Bangladesh's bureaucracy. Since no primary data was gathered, the analysis is based on previously published work. The study uses well-known theoretical models, including bureaucratic politics, incremental decision-making, and Weber's concept of rational-legal authority, to examine how internal dynamics and power structures shape administrative behavior. This method helps provide thoughtful insights into how the system works and where reforms are needed to improve governance. This study relies exclusively on secondary data, which is both appropriate and sufficient for the generalist-specialist debate within Bangladesh's bureaucracy. The issue is deeply rooted in historical, structural, and institutional developments that are already well documented in academic research, government reports, policy documents, and media analyses. Given that the debate centres not on individual perceptions but on systemic patterns, secondary sources provide the necessary breadth and depth to capture its evolution. Furthermore, the bureaucratic system in Bangladesh is highly politicised and sensitive, limiting the feasibility of obtaining candid primary data

from serving officials. Thus, a secondary qualitative approach is not only pragmatic but also methodologically sound, offering a credible means of assessing the persistence of the generalist–specialist divide in Bangladesh.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Bureaucratic Politics

The bureaucratic politics approach argues that policy outcomes result from a game of bargaining among a small, highly placed group of governmental actors. These actors come to the game with varying preferences, abilities, and positions of power. Participants choose strategies and policy goals based on different ideas of what outcomes will best serve their organizational and personal interests. Bargaining then proceeds through a pluralist process of give-and-take that reflects the prevailing rules of the game as well as power relations among the participants. Because this process is neither dominated by one individual nor likely to privilege expert or rational decisions, it may result in suboptimal outcomes that fail to fulfill the objectives of any of the individual participants. Bureaucratic politics has been conceptualized by several prominent theorists in political science and public administration. Allison and Halperin (1972) describe it as a game in which government actors, positioned hierarchically, negotiate over decisions influenced more by personal and organizational interests than by a single rational calculation, highlighting how policy outcomes result from the interplay of bureaucrats with differing institutional agendas. Similarly, March and Simon (1958) argue that decisions within bureaucracies are not the product of fully rational actors but emerge from complex processes involving competing subunits and individuals operating under bounded rationality with divergent goals. Lindblom (1959) adds that policymaking often unfolds through a process of successive, limited comparisons among competing bureaucratic interests, where outcomes emerge from mutual adjustment rather than comprehensive rational planning. Together, these perspectives portray bureaucratic politics as a dynamic, negotiated, and incremental process shaped by the interaction of multiple actors and organizational priorities.

Generalist Cadre in Bangladesh Bureaucracy

In common parlance, a generalist is often described as a jack of all trades, master of none. However, in administration the term carries a deeper connotation. A generalist, in administration, is a person who can think conceptually, is capable of analysing different aspects of a situation in relation to one another, can conceive distant objectives as well as those close at hand, and is skilled in both the formulation and implementation of policies (Dimock & Dimock, 1964, p. 50). The generalist cadre in Bangladesh, primarily composed of BCS Administration Cadre officers, plays a central role in managing government functions such as policy coordination, district administration, and public service delivery (Jamil, 2002). Valued for their adaptability, generalists often move between ministries, which is advantageous in a system marked by frequent political shifts. Their training focuses on administrative leadership rather than technical specialization. However, critics highlight inefficiencies when generalists lead complex sectors like health or digital governance without

relevant expertise (Sarker, 2004). Their dominance in top policymaking roles is often supported by institutional privilege, elite training, and political connections, sidelining technically skilled professionals. This imbalance raises concerns about bureaucratic elitism and the lack of merit-based decision-making.

Specialist Cadre in Bangladesh Bureaucracy

The specialist cadre in Bangladesh includes professionals with specific technical expertise – such as engineers, doctors, economists, and agriculturists – recruited through various BCS professional cadres (e.g., Health, Education, Engineering). These officials are crucial to delivering public services and executing sector-specific policies. Despite their qualifications and ability to offer evidence-based policy input, specialists often lack influence in high-level decision-making due to structural biases within the civil service (Jahan, 2006). Top administrative roles are typically reserved for generalists, limiting career advancement for specialists regardless of their competence. This lack of mobility and recognition leads to frustration and reduced motivation among professionals. Furthermore, the bureaucratic culture tends to overlook technical knowledge, with decisions often driven by administrative norms and political considerations. As a result, the underuse of specialist talent adversely affects governance quality, especially in vital areas like healthcare, education, and infrastructure (Sarker, 2004).

Debate Between Generalist and Specialist Cadres in Bangladesh Bureaucracy

The enduring discourse surrounding the roles of generalist and specialist cadres in Bangladesh's bureaucracy highlights deeper issues related to administrative efficiency, fairness, and the need for systemic reform. At the center of this debate is the question of who is more suitably equipped to meet the evolving demands of modern governance: broadly trained administrators or technically proficient professionals. Advocates of the generalist cadre emphasize their adaptability, leadership skills, and capacity to operate across multiple administrative domains. Selected through the competitive Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examination, these officers are entrusted with responsibilities ranging from public order to policy implementation and regional governance. Their frequent transfers between ministries are seen as an asset, particularly within a political environment marked by centralization and fluidity (Jamil, 2002). Generalists are also credited with effectively translating political mandates into practical policies, a crucial trait in a dynamic policymaking context. Nevertheless, the predominance of generalists has drawn criticism for sidelining technical expertise in key sectors like healthcare, education, and infrastructure. Scholars argue that placing generalists in charge of technically specialized departments often results in uninformed decisions and reduced efficiency (Sarker, 2004). Their ascent to high-level positions is frequently attributed to political networks and privileged access to elite training rather than subject-specific merit, contributing to a bureaucratic hierarchy resistant to reform and innovation. In contrast, specialist officers – including engineers, medical professionals, economists, and sectoral experts – offer in-depth technical knowledge essential for targeted policy design and effective public service delivery. When provided with leadership opportunities, these professionals can enhance program outcomes and strengthen policy implementation (Jahan, 2006).

However, specialists often encounter systemic hurdles in their career progression. Despite their qualifications, they are typically excluded from top administrative roles, which remain dominated by generalists. Institutional biases that prioritize general administrative experience over technical acumen hinder their advancement. Moreover, the bureaucratic culture in Bangladesh frequently undervalues specialized knowledge, relegating experts to secondary roles. This not only affects their morale but also limits the state's ability to harness specialized talent in critical sectors (Sarker, 2004).

Conflicts Among Cadres on the Rise in Government Services

Officials of different cadres of Bangladesh Cadre Service (BCS) are facing off with varying demands including posts and promotions, giving rise to inter-cadre conflict. Currently officials from other cadres alongside the admin cadre can also be promoted to deputy secretary post. For the deputy secretary posts, admin cadre officials get a 75 per cent quota while the remaining 25 per cent officials are taken from other cadres. The Public Administration Reform Commission recently proposed a 50:50 quota between the admin cadre and the other cadres. Moreover, it proposed separating education and health cadres from the cadre system. These proposals have brought to fore the inter-cadre conflict.

Core Issues in the Generalist VS. Specialist Cadre Debate in Bangladesh Bureaucracy

The ongoing discourse between generalist and specialist cadres in Bangladesh's civil service centers on fundamental concerns such as structural disparities, leadership control, promotional pathways, and the integration of technical knowledge in governance. These issues reflect broader challenges related to merit-based governance, institutional efficiency, and administrative reform.

Leadership Control and Administrative Authority

Generalist officers, mainly from the BCS Administration cadre, frequently occupy senior positions in ministries and key administrative roles, often irrespective of the technical nature of those departments. Conversely, specialists—including doctors, engineers, and educators—typically remain confined to mid-level positions, despite their specialized knowledge and qualifications. This imbalance in leadership allocation undermines the quality of policy implementation in critical sectors like education, health, and infrastructure (Jamil, 2002).

Example: In January 2025, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) delegated sweeping administrative powers to its Secretary—an officer deputed from the bureaucracy. This included control over postings, promotions, and investigations, effectively undermining the Commission's independence.

Implication: This move sparked criticism from civil society and Transparency International Bangladesh, who warned that bureaucratic dominance was eroding institutional autonomy.

Disparity in Promotion and Career Trajectories

A prominent issue is the unequal access to promotions. Generalists benefit from accelerated career advancement and are more likely to reach top-tier roles such as Deputy Secretary and Secretary. In contrast, specialists face systemic

barriers and slower progression, largely due to entrenched norms and preferences favoring generalist experience over specialized skills.

Example: In February 2025, the Public Administration Reform Commission proposed reducing the promotion quota for the BCS (Administration) cadre from 75% to 50% for Deputy Secretary posts. This triggered protests by administration cadre officers, who opposed equal promotion opportunities for other cadres like health, education, and engineering.

Implication: The incident highlighted deep inter-cadre resentment and the long-standing dominance of generalist officers over specialists.

Meritocracy Versus Administrative Flexibility

Advocates for generalists highlight their capacity for administrative coordination and leadership across multiple sectors, which is valuable in a centralized and politically influenced system. However, critics argue that this breadth often compromises depth, especially in technically complex ministries. Specialists, although more adept in sectoral planning and evidence-driven decision-making, are often sidelined from strategic roles (Sarker, 2004; Jahan, 2006).

Example: A 2025 study published in *Public Administration and Policy* revealed that political interference and patronage had eroded meritocracy in Bangladesh's civil service. The report noted that under the previous regime, appointments were often made based on loyalty rather than competence.

Implication: The politicization of recruitment and promotion processes weakened bureaucratic professionalism and public trust.

Policy Reform and Quota Controversies

Proposals by the Public Administration Reform Commission—such as revising the current 75:25 quota for Deputy Secretary positions in favor of a 50:50 split and excluding the education and health cadres from the cadre system—have intensified tensions. These reforms have triggered protests from both administrative and professional cadres, illustrating deep-seated inter-cadre rivalry.

Example: In July 2024, the High Court reinstated the 30% freedom fighter quota in government jobs, reversing the 2018 abolition. This led to massive student protests, a nationwide curfew, internet shutdowns, and the deaths of over 200 people in less than 10 days.

Implication: The protests exposed the fragility of policy continuity, the tension between merit and representation, and the state's repressive response to dissent.

Influence of Politics and Bureaucratic Culture

Bangladesh's bureaucratic environment is heavily influenced by political patronage, which often benefits generalist officers. Specialists, lacking similar political leverage, are frequently excluded from key decision-making processes. This imbalance discourages innovation and undermines performance in public sector institutions (Grindle, 1997).

Example: Recent analytical works describe how bureaucratic elitism and colonial-era practices persist in Bangladesh. Promotions, postings, and institutional behavior remain heavily influenced by political loyalty and hierarchical culture.

Implication: This entrenched culture resists reform, discourages innovation, and prioritizes control over service delivery.

Conflicts Mainly Over Promotions and Privileges

Officials are appointed in 26 cadres of the Bangladesh Civil Service through three phases of recruitment tests under the PSC. These cadres are administration, police, foreign affairs, taxation, agriculture, Ansar, audit and accounts, cooperatives, customs and excise, family planning, fisheries, food, forest, general education, technical education, health, information, livestock, postal, public health engineering, public works, railway engineering, railway transportation and commercial, roads and highways, statistics and commerce cadres. Job nature, as well as posts, promotions, opportunities and facilities, varies in these cadres, and that mainly contributes to the conflicts, people concerned said. Officials from various cadres alleged admin, police, foreign affairs and taxation cadre officials supersede in promotion. People concerned said had promotions taken place timely this problem would have gone away. Recruitment expert and former additional secretary Firoz Miah told Prothom Alo the main task of the Public Administration Commission was to emphasise how public service can be more accessible, instead, they are talking about the opportunities and facilities in different cadres. Cadre does not necessarily imply public admin and cadre is a small beneficiary part of the public admin. Taking them into consideration only will not work and now it will be very difficult to mitigate the situation due to the face-off of both sides. The government will have a hassle, and eventually the entire administration might come to a standstill. Besides, conflict also exists in non-cadres, and who would solve that? So, a separate committee might be formed to mitigate these conflicts and discrimination because it is a matter of long-time scrutiny, as well as it is not a task of the Public Administration Commission either, he added (Ahmed, 2024).

Impact of Cadre Conflict on Civil Service in Bangladesh

The cadre conflict within Bangladesh's civil service has far-reaching consequences, undermining administrative effectiveness, inter-ministerial collaboration, and the quality of governance. Tensions persist between generalist cadres—mainly from the BCS Administration—and specialist cadres such as those in health, education, agriculture, and engineering. This friction largely stems from disparities in access to leadership roles, unequal promotion prospects, and a general undervaluing of technical expertise. Generalists, backed by institutional power and political connections, often dominate top

administrative posts even in technically demanding sectors (Jamil, 2002). Meanwhile, specialists – despite their professional qualifications – are frequently sidelined to mid-tier roles, limiting their ability to contribute fully to sectoral development. This imbalance has resulted in low morale among specialists, curbed innovation, and hampered service delivery in areas requiring domain-specific knowledge like healthcare, education, and infrastructure (Sarker, 2004). Recent developments have intensified these tensions. The Public Administration Reform Commission's recommendations – such as adjusting the promotion quota from 75% to 50% for generalists and proposing the exclusion of education and health cadres from the cadre system – have provoked strong reactions from both sides. These proposals have heightened existing grievances, leading to public protests and further straining internal cohesion within the bureaucracy. The resulting mistrust impairs cross-cadre cooperation and complicates the implementation of coordinated policy efforts. Furthermore, the cadre rivalry exacerbates the politicization of the bureaucracy. When professional advancement is influenced more by cadre affiliation than by competence or merit, favoritism and patronage become entrenched, weakening institutional integrity. This environment discourages reform and stifles accountability, ultimately leading to inefficient resource use, delays in policy execution, and declining administrative standards. Scholars stress the importance of reforming the civil service to balance both administrative skill and technical expertise. A merit based and inclusive approach to appointments and promotions could help foster a more functional and future-ready bureaucracy (Grindle, 1997; Aberbach, Putnam & Rockman, 1981). Without such reforms, continued cadre-based rivalries threaten to undermine the credibility and capability of Bangladesh's public administration.

Legal and Constitutional Framework of Cadre Structure and Conflict in Bangladesh Civil Service

The legal and constitutional structure governing the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) significantly influences the dynamics between different cadres, particularly in terms of authority, administrative roles, and inter-cadre relations. Grasping this legal context is vital to understanding the origins of conflicts between generalist and specialist officials, as well as identifying potential solutions. Firstly, the Constitution of Bangladesh – specifically Article 29 – ensures equal opportunities in public employment, emphasizing merit and qualifications as the basis for appointments and promotions. Despite this constitutional guarantee, entrenched administrative practices and historical preferences have led to systemic advantages for generalist cadres, especially those in the BCS (Administration) stream. Secondly, legal instruments such as the Bangladesh Civil Service (Reorganisation) Order of 1980 and various administrative directives outline the classification and functions of the different cadres, including those in education, health, technical fields, and administration. While these laws formally acknowledge the legitimacy of all cadres, they fall short in providing clear legal safeguards for equal career advancement. This legal gap enables administrative cadres to monopolize leadership roles, often justified by their broader management roles. Promotion mechanisms further complicate matters. These are regulated through ministerial directives and service rules

rather than a comprehensive legal framework. For example, the commonly referenced 75:25 promotion ratio that benefits the administration cadre for senior posts like Deputy Secretary is not part of statutory law but is instead a product of executive circulars. The lack of legal transparency and consistency in such rules exacerbates perceptions of inequality and fuels inter-cadre dissatisfaction. The Ministry of Public Administration (MoPA), which oversees the civil service, is heavily staffed by administration cadre officers. This has given rise to criticism from specialist groups who claim that the ministry's decisions on promotions, postings, and policy reforms are biased, thereby contravening the constitutional promise of fairness and neutrality (Jahan, 2006). Judicial involvement in resolving cadre disputes has been minimal. Although courts have occasionally addressed individual service-related grievances, they have largely stayed away from broader structural reforms. This limited judicial oversight underscores the absence of a robust legal framework capable of ensuring equitable treatment and resolving systemic cadre-related issues.

In summary, while the Constitution promotes equality in public service, the lack of a uniform civil service law and the dominance of executive discretion in cadre management have resulted in legal ambiguities and institutional bias – key drivers of the ongoing conflict between generalist and specialist cadres.

Comparative Perspective of Cadre Conflict Between Bangladesh and India

The cadre conflict between generalist and specialist officers in the civil services of Bangladesh and India reflects deep-rooted administrative traditions, institutional structures, and reform trajectories. While both nations share a colonial legacy that favored generalist administrators, their post-independence approaches to cadre management have diverged, leading to distinct challenges and dynamics.

Bangladesh: Entrenched Generalist Dominance and Specialist Marginalisation

In Bangladesh, the civil service is characterized by a pronounced dominance of the BCS (Administration) cadre. This cadre occupies a disproportionate number of senior positions, including roles in technical ministries, often sidelining specialists with domain-specific expertise. The structural bias is perpetuated by promotion policies and administrative practices that favor generalists, leading to frustration among specialists and a brain drain from technical sectors. Efforts to reform the system, such as the establishment of the Senior Services Pool (SSP), aimed to create a more equitable structure. However, these initiatives often faltered due to resistance from entrenched interests within the generalist cadre, which viewed such reforms as threats to their established privileges. The lack of a comprehensive legal framework to enforce equitable promotion and appointment practices further exacerbates the conflict.

India: Institutional Mechanisms and Persistent Challenges

India's civil service, particularly the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), also stems from a colonial generalist tradition. However, India has developed more structured mechanisms to integrate specialists into governance. Specialized services like the Indian Revenue Service (IRS), Indian Forest Service (IFS), and

Indian Health Service (IHS) operate alongside the IAS, with defined roles and promotion pathways. While the IAS continues to hold significant influence, especially in policymaking and administrative leadership, the presence of these specialized services provides avenues for domain experts to contribute meaningfully to governance. Nonetheless, challenges persist. The IAS's centralized structure can impede decentralization and the inclusion of local expertise. Moreover, the allure of generalist roles sometimes draws specialists away from their domains, leading to a dilution of technical expertise in critical sectors.

Comparative Analysis

While both countries grapple with the generalist-specialist dichotomy, Bangladesh's challenges are more acute due to the lack of institutional checks and a legal framework that ensures equitable treatment of specialists. India's diversified civil services and structured promotion pathways offer a more balanced approach, though not without issues. Arora and Goyal (2022) provide a comprehensive overview of Indian public administration, discussing its institutions and prevailing issues. The key difference lies in the institutional mechanisms and the political will to implement reforms that recognize and value specialized expertise.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Civil Service Between Bangladesh and India

Aspects	Bangladesh	India
Total Number of Civil Service Cadres	26 cadres: 10 general, 12 professional, 4 mixed	Over 20 services under All India and Central Civil Services
Deputy Secretary Promotion Quota	BCS (Administration)	Indian Administrative Service (IAS)
Representation in Top Bureaucratic Positions	Approximately 83% of Deputy Secretaries, 75 of Additional Secretaries, and 70% of Secretaries are from the Administration Cadre	IAS officers predominantly occupy top positions; exact percentages vary by department and state
Recent Reform Proposals	Proposal to adjust Deputy Secretary quota to 50% Administration Cadre and 50% other cadres	Discussions on lateral entry and cadre parity; no specific quota changes implemented

Source. Developed by the Authors Based on Collected Data from Different Sources

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Recommendations to Address Cadre Conflict in Bangladesh Civil Service

Addressing the intensifying cadre conflict within Bangladesh's civil service demands a comprehensive reform approach grounded in merit-based practices, inclusiveness, and sectoral specialization. A key priority is the introduction of an equitable promotion framework that evaluates both generalist and specialist officers based on their competencies, professional achievements, and leadership capacity – rather than cadre origin. Introducing open competitive examinations for senior roles such as Deputy Secretary and above would promote fairness and reduce cadre-based discrimination (Jahan, 2006). Additionally, embedding functional specialization within ministries would significantly improve sector-specific governance. Experts with technical qualifications should be appointed to lead ministries aligned with their areas of expertise—such as those focusing on health, education, agriculture, or ICT. Grindle's (1997) "fit-for-purpose" concept supports assigning leadership roles to professionals with appropriate technical backgrounds for greater administrative effectiveness. To enhance inter-cadre understanding and resolve disputes, the government should create an Inter-Cadre Coordination Council composed of representatives from all major cadres. This body would serve as a mechanism for dialogue, policy feedback, and promoting transparency in cadre management (Sarker, 2004). In addressing the deep-rooted structural imbalance, the Public Administration Reform Commission (PARC) should be restructured to include specialists and academic experts. Their participation would ground the reform process in empirical evidence and diverse perspectives, increasing both legitimacy and relevance. Furthermore, adopting modern Human Resource Management (HRM) techniques—including performance-driven evaluations, continuous professional development, and leadership training—can foster a more capable and adaptable workforce across all cadres.

Lastly, it is imperative to depoliticize the civil service by ensuring strict adherence to impartiality in recruitment and promotion decisions. Curbing political favoritism in cadre governance will help rebuild trust in public institutions and cultivate a more collaborative and accountable bureaucratic environment (Aberbach, Putnam & Rockman, 1981).

Conclusion

The analysis makes it clear that the long-standing divide between generalist and specialist cadres in Bangladesh's bureaucracy is more than an internal rivalry; it reflects structural biases, politicization, and outdated administrative traditions that limit the effectiveness of governance. Generalists, with their broad administrative reach, continue to occupy top positions, but their dominance often comes at the cost of technical insight in crucial sectors. Specialists, despite their expertise, remain confined to secondary roles, which undermines morale and deprives policymaking of evidence-based input. The resulting imbalance not only fuels cadre-based tensions but also weakens efficiency, accountability, and public trust in the civil service. If Bangladesh is to strengthen its administrative capacity and meet the demands of modern governance, reforms must prioritize merit over privilege, ensure fair promotion

pathways, integrate technical expertise into leadership roles, and reduce political interference. Only then can the bureaucracy move toward a more balanced, competent, and forward-looking system.

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Informed Consent

This study did not involve human participants, and therefore, informed consent was not applicable.

Ethical Approval

As this research was entirely based on theoretical analysis, secondary data, and document review, no ethical approval was required in accordance with institutional guidelines.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings and conceptual insights of this study are theoretical in nature, derived exclusively from secondary literature and existing educational research. No primary datasets were generated or analyzed. All relevant information is contained within the article. For further queries, interested readers may contact the corresponding author.

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