



Government effectiveness, economic growth and the socio-political role of the middle class in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of the study are to develop an understanding of major changes such as the effectiveness of government, economic growth, religion and the socio-political role of the middle class people that have taken place in the society and politics of Bangladesh of the last few years. Apart from that this study also intends to analyze the crisis of the democratic system in Bangladesh and the widespread influence of religion on politician of the society. In addition to that, the context of the developments of economic growth in Bangladesh is significant over the last few decades, which has helped in the emergence and development of a new middle class in the country. In the past, it has been said theoretically and in the light of the experience of different countries that economic growth and development of the middle class simultaneously strengthen democracy and reduce the political appeal of religion in the society and politics. All in all, this study attempted to presents some hypotheses on the particular issues of Bangladesh.

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1. INTRODUCTION

For those who follow the politics of Bangladesh closely and keep an eye on the events of the last few years, it is clear that two major changes have taken place in politics. One is the crisis of the democratic system in Bangladesh; the other is the widespread influence of religion on politics and society.

The crisis of the democratic system in Bangladesh is not new in the sense that the country has failed to make the democratic system permanently since independence. This situation is likely to change after 1990. But even in that case, the level of success in the first decade and a half was not promising. Many feared that Bangladesh would return in 1975, with the onset of indirect military rule in the wake of the 2008 political crisis. For those who view events from a long-term perspective, the reason for this apprehension is not only the history of Bangladesh but also the experience outside Bangladesh. Political scientists have seen in the experience of the last few decades that a fragile democracy in any country cannot be sustained in the long run. The emergence of authoritarian regimes from 'fragile democracy' is more likely. In that context and based on Bangladesh's experience, it seems that the country is moving towards military authoritarianism. But soon it became clear that history was not repeating itself in Bangladesh. At the end of 2008, a civilian elected government was formed in the country through an election. It is assumed that Bangladesh has escaped the danger of authoritarian rule. But the change in the constitution and the behavior of the ruling party give different

indications. Despite the boycott of almost all opposition parties in 2014, the ruling party held elections alone, leaving no opposition party in Parliament. Before that election and after the 2014 election, the ruling party has taken steps that are questioning whether it can be considered democratic, institutionally, or in essence. Considering the history of Bangladesh, it can be seen that the main message of the independence movement in Bangladesh was the desire for democracy. The three foundations of the liberation war of Bangladesh — human dignity, equality, and social justice — its essence is the assurance of equality and the democratic rights of all citizens. With this promise, even though the country became independent, democracy in Bangladesh has not only failed in institutional form, but now the question is whether the country has started its journey again despite its experience with several authoritarian regimes.

The second issue that has attracted the attention of researchers and in the discussion of society and politics of Bangladesh in 2016, whether it is in the media or at the policy-making level, is being discussed again and again is the significant role of religion in society and politics. The 1972 constitution of Bangladesh, declaring 'secularism' (also called 'secularism' in the Bengali version of the constitution) as a state principle and imposing a ban on the formation of religion-based organizations, found that the relationship between the state and religion was settled and settled. The walls between the two have been removed, and the direct influence of religion on politics and society has been removed. But since the late 1970s, restrictions on religion-based political parties have been gradually lifted, secularism as a state ideology has been abolished, religion-based parties have emerged in politics, Islam has been incorporated into the constitution as a state religion and religious symbols have been used regardless of party affiliation. In the nineties, not only did religion increase its influence in politics, but also its widespread and visible presence in society and daily life became noticeable. The number of Islamist groups increased and different types of Islamist groups — reformist, conservative, extremist, and violent extremist have been developed. Although the 15th amendment to the constitution, 'secularism', has been reinstated in the constitution, the state religion Islam has remained in force and there is no sign of state neutrality on the question of religion. In addition, the presence of internal, regional, and global Islamist militant organizations began to occur. The most significant thing is the presence of Islam in social life. Instead of the long-standing dominance and influence of local and synchronic Islam in the society of Bangladesh, the influence of a literal and global interpretation of Islam became visible and growing.

Already 50 years have passed since the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state in 1971. During this time changes have taken place in the state and society of Bangladesh. State formation is an ongoing process, so change is still ongoing and not uncommon. When it comes to the changes that have taken place in Bangladesh over the last few decades, the first thing that almost everyone says is that its economy is changing. According to PricewaterhouseCoopers, Bangladesh will be the 27th largest economy in the world by 2030 and the 23rd largest by 2050. The size of the total economy will rise from 628 billion to 1324 billion and 3084 billion respectively (Jamal, 2016).

According to North (1990), "governments and institutions are humanly-devised constraints that shape human interactions and that affect the incentives of economic agents." The strong institutions as well as economic development are generally related to play critical roles in protecting societies from the economic perspective. According to a report by African Capacity Building Foundation (2018), "good governance is a fundamental component of Africa's resurgence, as the structural change and tremendous task of socioeconomic development seem related to it." According to Zafar and Ali, (2017, pp-76), "Bangladesh lacks a political democratic culture, even in educational and political line spacing institutions democratic learning opportunities are not available. Rule of law is an absurdity in Bangladeshi democracy; the most trending political culture is to turn blind eyes to the real offenders and took action against oppositions."

On the other hand, in term of religion, economic and government effectiveness different observations have been argued which needs to be analyzed. Freedman (2009), "rising religious extremism, civil society can play a positive and constructive role in fostering tolerance between communities and religious traditions." According to Chaney, P., & Sahoo, S. (2020), the Bangladeshi

context is similar to India for secularism refers not to the separation of religion and politics, but the peaceful coexistence of diverse religious communities and the exercise of religious freedom. Similarly, Cf. Sullivan et al., (2015), stated that religious freedom is a complex and contested concept one that is considered central to upholding values of secularism. Moreover, as Anis (2015, p. 17) has argued that secularism has had a beleaguered existence in Bangladesh. For many it has never meant a full separation of religion and state, but rather a peaceable side-by-side existence of different religious communities.

There are many observations have been made by different scholars regarding the same. According to Alesina and Rodrik (1994), the positive relativity between growth and investment which results to lower growth as income inequality increases. The income inequality in a particular country or region can bring the political conflicts in the society as well. Kazi, S. A. (2011), has pointed out that the income inequality, political conflicts, inefficiency of local administration, taxation fraudulent, corruption at government levels, cartel of business syndicates are barricading the country from prospering ahead and achieve development as it was supposed to have.

Regarding the development in a country, Dutta, N., Pal, S., & Roy, S. (2011) have observed that “relatively modern theories of economic development emphasize the role of social and political institutions in fostering economic development and growth.”

On the other hand, Hasan, B., Sultana, M., & Hasan, M. N. (2014), have said that “it is crystal clear from evidence as well as pronouncement of our policy makers and international donors that Bangladesh’s improvement in the governance realm is not keeping pace with the progress achieved in some areas of economic and social policies. Such a gap in the country’s governance efforts implies that political regime management has become a central constraint to further consolidation of democracy as well as improvement of the quality of governance in Bangladesh as well.” Apart from that, it has been observed by other scholars in terms of losing power provided that the government fails to ensure the required security for the citizens. Uddin, M. A., et. al. (2017, Pp-612), have argued that “if the government cannot ensure the basic services it provides for people, such as security and the possibility of procuring food and shelter, it loses the power to enforce laws and political instability ensues.” According to Khan, M. M. (1999), the bureaucratic corruption and inefficiency are taking a heavy toll on the Bangladesh economy, causing hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of loss in terms of unrealized investment and income.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The state, society, and economy are not static or immutable; all these changes are normal. In addition, they are not isolated from each other but affect each other. It is not correct to assume that one will change but the other will remain the same. Sociology has long debated which influences which. Those who believe in 'economic determinism' or economic determinism; and consider the economy, especially the production structure of a society and the relations of production as the basis, claim that change in the economy is the driver of other changes. Some Marxists follow this idea. There are also sociologists outside the realm of economic determinism who have emphasized economics. They have shown that it is not just a matter of internal economy, how any state is connected with the world economic system, what is its role in the global economy; it also affects different aspects of state structure and society, and plays a decisive role in certain cases. Those who have discussed the history of change in the structure of the world economy have shown that the expansion of capitalism as a global system and what role a state will play in that structure depends on the character, nature, and capabilities of the state.

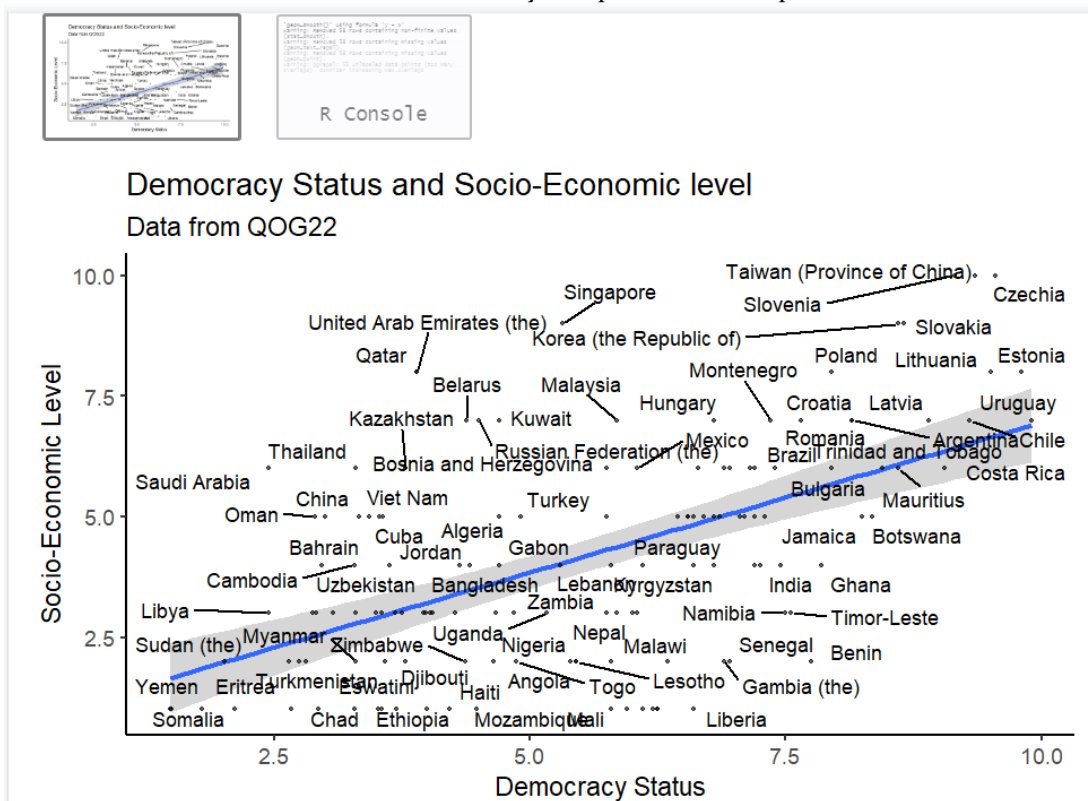
Many sociologists believe that the forces that exist in society are not simply controlled by economic relations. They state that the prevailing customs, values, and behaviors of society play a decisive role in many ways. In their view, culture includes religion, faith, and education; some include caste and ethnicity. We can call them 'cultural determinants'. One of the major arguments in the sociologist Max Weber's book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-5) is that Puritan ethics is the reason for the development and success of capitalism in Northern Europe. Weber discusses

the context of society and economics with religion, and the sociology of religion, in three more books. If we consider religion as culture, then the question of culture is important, as is clear from Weber's statement. *S. Huntington (1991)* states in his most widely discussed 'Third Wave of Democracy' that most Protestant-majority countries established democracy before the 1970s. Many sociologists have used similar terms in their analysis of society, economics, politics, and states outside of Europe.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Data Analysis

The hypothesis on the variables of practice of proper democracy allows having an economic growth and freeing to exercise of religious activities in the society of Bangladesh. However, to analysis the data, the below chart has been used which is providing the information about the democracy status and socio-economic level in countries that are my independent and dependent variables.



These two variables indicate that good practice of democracy will bring positive effectiveness in terms of economic in a particular country. In addition to that, where the democracy is widely practice without any barrier by the government, the socio-economic status is better than the country where the democracy is poorly practiced.

Moreover, having analyzed the above data it can be said that the democracy may greatly influence on the economic development in many ways. By tightening the revolution constraint, creating rising inequality or simply increasing the level of income in the society as well. On the other hand, while the increase in GDP may be the primary method of measurement, there is much more, such as forming or greatly changing productive relationships, migrating firms and workers to cities up to affecting human capital and technology having practiced of democracy in a particular country. Since democracy creates better opportunities for both economic growth and cultural progress than authoritarian regimes and Milton Friedman argued that a higher degree of rights fostered economic development (1962), and a wealth of other studies suggest that democracy promotes economic

liberalization (Fidrmuc, 2001, Peev and Murrler, 2012), and that democracy is preferable for long-term and sustainable growth.

3.2 Regression Analysis

In this section, the government effectiveness, estimate has relationship with dependent variable socio-economic level in the society.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
(Intercept)	0.73 (0.47)	4.80 *** (0.40)	4.75 *** (0.42)
bti_ds	0.62 *** (0.08)	0.04 (0.06)	0.06 (0.07)
wbgi_gee		2.33 *** (0.16)	2.45 *** (0.17)
ccp_freere1			-0.01 (0.01)
R ²	0.31	0.73	0.74
Adj. R ²	0.30	0.73	0.73
Num. obs.	136	136	127

*** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05

Here the government effectiveness for this analysis of the relationships between Socio-economic status such as capital, education, religion and their effects play crucial role on economic development in the society.

According to a report by the [United Nations \(2005\)](#), “good governance, by promoting more efficient divisions of labor, more productive investment and faster implementation of social and economic policies, leads to higher economic growth.” On the other hand, another statement has been made by [Hall and Jones \(1999\)](#), “institutions and government policies determine the economic environment within which individuals accumulate skills, and firms accumulate capital and produce output.” In a word, economic growth may depend on government effectiveness in particular country.

3.3 Discussion on Bangladesh's Economy and the Development in the Society

The discussion of the emergence of the middle class in India, especially in Bengal during the British colonial period, is well established based on the research findings. The Bengali middle-class ‘gentlemen’ the members of which were Calcutta-centric, religiously Hindu originated in the nurturing of the colonial state. The seeds of this middle class were rooted in the permanent settlement; the Calcutta-centric ‘Babu’ community became a middle class in terms of education and employment. In the case of Pakistan too, the middle class has developed in favor of the state. The beginning of the Muslim middle class not only in West Pakistan but also in East Pakistan is in favor of the state. Thus, the abolition of the zamindari system in 1950 paved the way for the emergence of the middle class. But in the case of East Pakistan which happened a decade and a half after the establishment of Pakistan, practically in the 1970s, during the rule of the military ruler Ayub Khan. The size of the middle class was small, mainly Dhaka-centric, in the economy inherited by the directors after the establishment of Bangladesh. Only a part of this middle class was in power. In the light of experience, class character, and reality, this class was dependent on the state for its development, seeking to use the state for its development. The task of accelerating the success of that task took place in the hands of post-1975 military rulers when state institutions were handed over to them. As a result, when the direct military rule came to an end in 1990, a medium-sized middle class emerged in Bangladesh ([Riaz, 2005](#)). Bangladesh has already become integrated into the global economy.

In other words, the values prevailing in society have played a role in the formation of a special kind of state. The concept of "Asian values" was promoted in the 1990s to establish the notion of authoritarian rule in Singapore and Malaysia and to explain their economic success (Inuguchi and Newman, 1997). The danger of relying solely on cultural determinism is that it can be misused. This is what we see in the theory of Asian values, as well as in the discussion of the Middle East; A notable example is Huntington's critically acclaimed theory of the Clash of Civilizations (Huntington, 1996). Some analysts have tried to portray the absence of democracy in the Middle East as a feature of Islam. Therefore, it must be made clear that the importance of culture in changing society does not mean that it alone plays a decisive role.

Proponents of economic determinism and cultural determinism seem to agree on one thing: they believe that the state is not a determinant, but a product of the economic system or cultural heritage. To understand what has happened in the class structure of Bangladeshi society, especially in the case of the middle class, we need to look at things that are easily visible in the economy of Bangladesh. The last few decades, especially since 2001, have seen tremendous economic growth; Despite the ups and downs of the global economy and internal political instability over the past decades, average annual growth has remained close to 6 percent, during which time poverty rates have fallen and per capita incomes have risen. The number of millionaires in Bangladesh is more than 1 lakh 19 thousand as of January 2016, which proves the presence of wealth in the society (Manabjain, 2016).

3.4 The Socio-Political Role of the Middle Class

In discussing the theories of the relationship between the state, society, economy, and politics, we have seen that the development of the middle class is considered to be conducive to the development of the middle class, even if it is not a prerequisite for democracy or the presence of the middle class does not guarantee democracy. Apart from the experience of different countries, the history and education of Bangladesh say so. Mujahidul Islam Selim, leader of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, summed up the social and political role of the middle class. But beyond these movements, the issue of struggle for democracy and democratic rights and the establishment of the national rights and the right of national self-determination of the Bengali nation have come to the fore. These struggles originated mainly from the educated middle class. The student community had a leading and proactive role in the national struggle of that time. The role of the middle class was paramount (Selim, 2015). Jatin Sarkar said the same thing, 'Those who had active participation in the liberation struggle of the country, the majority of them were the people of the rural peasantry. In economic terms, most of them belonged to the lower class, and some of them were in the quota of the poor. But the leadership of that struggle was not in their hands. The liberation struggle of Bangladesh was mainly led by the middle-class people' (Government, 2016). The results of the research on the background of the establishment of Bangladesh also clearly indicate that the middle class has been playing a leading role in the freedom and independence movement of Bangladesh. In addition, this class has played an important role in the struggle for democracy against military rule in the 1980s.

But have we seen such a reaction from the middle class in the last decade? One analyst says that there is a growing apathy among the general public on what will be the character of the state, how democracy and accountability will be ensured there, how to increase people's participation in running the state, etc. (Khan, 2016). At the same time, some pro-government intellectuals have been demanding the establishment of a 'democratic dictatorship'. At the same time, the concept calls for the continuation of "all opportunities and rights of democracy for the people" and the introduction of a new system of dictatorship against special political forces (war criminal Jamaat and all their allies) (Hossain, 2014). It also recommends that citizens not be deprived of their basic human rights (in the words of Hussein, "the power to impose fundamental rights during a state of emergency will be suspended under Article 141 / C"). It has been advised to do it and not to interfere in it. This suggestion has been made, acknowledging that there are 'various compromises, corruption, unnecessary excesses, and fascist tendencies' within the ruling party (Akash, 2015).

It is also worth mentioning here that in the last few years, especially since the 2014 elections, the ruling Awami League has been drawing a dividing line between development and the democracy

which is presenting them as alternatives or rivals (Chowdhury, 2015). In the light of this notion, the ruling party and its supporters argue that conventional democracy creates political instability, which is an obstacle to development, and that the path to "less democracy, more development" is a positive one for the country. The countries they cite as examples include Malaysia and Singapore. The debate over the division of democracy and development and the presentation of one as an alternative to the other is well known. Since 2014, various statements have made it clear that a special concept of 'development' has been brought to the fore, ignoring that debate and not taking into account other aspects of its political-institutional elements. Wahiduddin Mahmud draws our attention to this and questions the applicability of the so-called 'Malaysia model' in Bangladesh (Mahmud, 2014). This position of the government is also being described as authoritarian (our Wednesday, 2015). At the same time, it should be noted that such a position conflicts with the objectives mentioned in the Declaration of Liberation War of Bangladesh.

In recent times, we have seen a great deal of interest in religion in the society of Bangladesh, especially among the middle and upper classes of the society which is manifested through the public presentation of religion. Evidence of this is also found in various types of sentences, phrases, and greetings used in daily life. The most notable evidence of this is the widespread use of some Arabic words, such as the use of "Allah Hafez" instead of the popular "Khoda Hafez". In addition, its effect is visible in the traditional dress in Bangladesh. Some have identified it as 'Arabization' (Hashmi, 2014; Hardig and Sajjad, 2015). As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, the question of religion has become quite important in the politics of Bangladesh in the last few decades, but outside of the polymorphic or unilateral discussion on this issue, religion and politics, religion and society and religion and state.

In the same way, does the preaching of religion to a large section of the middle class in Bangladesh indicate that there will be no division between the state and religion in the future? The process of secularization has never been strong in Bangladeshi society, but a section of the middle class, which was once considered the mainstream of cohesive Islam, probably no longer carries that trend. It is important to identify the reasons behind this change.

4. CONCLUSION

These observations on the behavior of the middle class in the question of democracy and religion do not mean that it applies to the whole middle class. Of course, a section of the middle class behaves differently and they try to play a traditional role. But based on my observations over the last decade, I infer that these questions have created a great deal of division within the middle class. In that case, the part of the middle class that has developed over the last decade or so, which I would like to call the 'new middle class, has less appeal to the liberal aspects of democracy and at the same time calls for a direct and open role of religion in society and state as well.

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