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Administrative Revolution and the Pursuit of Good Governance in a Post-Conflict Small State: A Conceptual Synthesis from Timor-Leste

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Abstract

Background.

Public administrations worldwide are being pushed to move from rule-bound command structures towards service-oriented, digitally enabled and accountable governance. In small post-conflict states, where the bureaucracy was assembled quickly from heterogeneous colonial, occupation-era and international-transitional layers, this shift is especially demanding, yet it remains under-theorised and is rarely documented in internationally accessible scholarship.

Purpose.

This article asks what an “administrative revolution” would consist of in such a setting, which constraints bind it, and how its components can be sequenced. It uses Timor-Leste as the analytical case.

Design.

The study is a document-based qualitative synthesis. A comprehensive Tetun-language monograph on public administration and good governance (168 pages, three parts, fifteen sub-chapters) was analysed through directed and inductive thematic coding, triangulated against international scholarship and against secondary data from three national oversight institutions (the Inspectorate-General of the State, the Provedoria for Human Rights and Justice, and the Anti-Corruption Commission) for 2020–2023.

Findings.

Five cross-cutting themes emerge: (1) politicised appointment and placement of officials; (2) unconstrained administrative discretion combined with weak answerability; (3) digitalisation as a promising but dependency-prone instrument; (4) participation that is invited but seldom institutionalised; and (5) a generational and cultural lever for change. These are integrated into the *Administrative Revolution Framework* (ARF), which specifies four constitutive shifts (appointment, accountability, delivery, legitimacy), three enabling conditions, and six testable propositions.

Originality and implications.

The article converts a locally situated, non-English body of knowledge into a theory-building contribution, and proposes a “good-enough” sequencing logic for thin-capacity states. Policy implications are set out as a staged roadmap with measurable indicators. The framework requires empirical testing; limitations are discussed.

Highlights

• Defines “administrative revolution” as a paradigm-level shift in four logics: appointment, accountability, delivery and legitimacy.

• Integrates merit, integrity, digital and participatory reforms, usually studied separately, into one testable framework.

• Uses oversight-institution data from Timor-Leste to identify binding constraints.

• Argues that digitalisation amplifies existing administrative patterns rather than correcting them.

• Proposes a “good-enough” sequencing roadmap for small post-conflict states.

1. Introduction

The state’s administrative apparatus is where political promises become services, rules and resources. Over the last four decades the expectations placed on that apparatus have shifted markedly. Citizens expect services that are fast, accessible, transparent and responsive; governments face fiscal limits, technological change and pressure to demonstrate integrity (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). The vocabulary of reform has moved correspondingly, from administration to management, and then to governance, public value and digital-era governance (Hood, 1991; Dunleavy et al., 2006; Bryson et al., 2014). In established administrative states these paradigms were layered onto institutions that already possessed professional civil services, functioning courts and dense oversight. In small post-conflict states the layering happens on much thinner foundations.

Timor-Leste illustrates the problem. The country restored its independence in 2002 after centuries of Portuguese rule, a quarter-century of Indonesian occupation and a United Nations transitional administration. Its civil service therefore draws on Portuguese-derived legal and administrative concepts, Indonesian-era practices and the technical-assistance models of international advisers, while operating in a society where customary authority and kinship obligations remain strongly salient (Hohe, 2002; Nixon, 2012; Ingram et al., 2015). The state has established the formal architecture of a modern administration, including a civil-service commission, an inspectorate, a human-rights and good-governance ombudsman and an anti-corruption commission. Yet the data these institutions themselves produce point to persistent maladministration, complaints about governance, and losses to the state from corrupt acts (Section 5).

Three gaps motivate this article. First, reform scholarship tends to treat bureaucratic professionalisation, integrity systems, digitalisation and citizen participation in separate literatures, with the consequence that their interdependence is under-specified. Second, small and post-conflict states, particularly in Southeast Asia and in the Lusophone world, are under-represented in the theoretical literature on administrative reform, which more often draws on large or high-capacity administrations (Andrews et al., 2017). Third, a considerable body of analysis written in Tetun and Indonesian by practitioners and

academics in the region does not circulate in international journals, so its conceptual insights are not available for comparison or testing.

The article addresses these gaps through a document-based synthesis of a comprehensive Tetun-language monograph on administrative revolution and good governance (Soares, 2025), read against international theory and against the national oversight data that the monograph reports. It poses three research questions:

- **RQ1.** How does the Tetun-language corpus conceptualise the transformation from administration to good governance, and which constitutive shifts does it imply?
- **RQ2.** What do the available national oversight data indicate about the binding constraints on that transformation?
- **RQ3.** How can the shifts be integrated into a testable framework, and in what sequence should they be pursued in a thin-capacity state?

The article makes three contributions. Conceptually, it defines administrative revolution as a discontinuous change in four organising logics rather than as a programme of incremental technical fixes. Theoretically, it proposes the Administrative Revolution Framework (ARF) with six propositions that can be tested in other small states. Practically, it translates the framework into a staged roadmap with indicators that national institutions could adopt.

The remainder of the article is organised as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literatures and derives sensitising lenses. Section 3 sets out the methodology. Section 4 describes the Timor-Leste context. Section 5 presents the thematic findings. Section 6 develops the framework and propositions. Section 7 discusses implications and the roadmap, Section 8 states limitations and future research, and Section 9 concludes.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 From classical administration to governance

The intellectual history of public administration is conventionally traced to Wilson's (1887) call for a science of administration separate from politics. Early twentieth-century theory then supplied the technical core of the field: Taylor's (1911) scientific management with its emphasis on task design and measurement, Fayol's (1949) general principles of administration such as unity of command and division of work, and Weber's (1978) ideal-type legal-rational bureaucracy, characterised by hierarchy, written rules, impersonality and recruitment on technical competence. These contributions remain the vocabulary of administrative organisation and are the starting point of the monograph analysed here.

Later paradigms challenged the claim that rule-bound hierarchy is sufficient. The New Public Management movement stressed performance measurement, disaggregation and market-type mechanisms (Hood, 1991; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). The New Public Service critique countered that

public servants serve citizens and the public interest, rather than steering clients or managing customers (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000). Digital-era governance argued that information technology is now a driver of re-integration, needs-based holism and digitisation of administrative processes (Dunleavy et al., 2006). In parallel, the governance literature shifted attention from government to networks of public, private and civic actors and to the capacity to steer them (Rhodes, 1996; Kooiman, 2003). Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017) caution that reforms arrive in cycles and that their effects depend on the administrative and political context, which is a point of particular relevance for states whose administrative traditions are layered.

2.2 Political–administrative relations

Goodnow's (1900) separation of politics (the expression of the state's will) from administration (its execution) provided the classic normative boundary. Subsequent scholarship showed that the dichotomy is analytically untenable but normatively useful: administrators interpret, shape and sometimes obstruct policy, while politicians intervene in administration (Rosenbloom, 1983; Svara, 2001). Street-level discretion in particular means that policy is effectively made at the point of delivery (Lipsky, 1980). Comparative work on the politicisation of civil services shows that political control over appointments ranges from legitimate responsiveness to patronage and loyalty-based recruitment, with measurable costs for professionalism and continuity (Peters & Pierre, 2004). Cross-national evidence indicates that "Weberian" features, namely meritocratic recruitment and predictable careers, are associated with better bureaucratic performance and developmental outcomes (Evans & Rauch, 1999; Rauch & Evans, 2000). The question for new states is therefore not whether politics and administration interact, but how the interaction is bounded.

2.3 Ethics, discretion and corruption

Klitgaard's (1988) heuristic, in which corruption tends to rise with monopoly power and discretion and to fall with accountability, links the ethical concerns of administrative practice to institutional design. Rose-Ackerman (1999) shows how bureaucratic procedures, discretion over scarce benefits and weak sanctions create incentives for bribery. Where corruption is systemic, it may be better understood as a collective-action problem in which individual honesty is irrational if others are expected to be corrupt (Persson et al., 2013), which is why isolated integrity measures often fail (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2006). Accountability itself is multidimensional, spanning information, justification and the possibility of sanction (Bovens, 2007). Ethics codes, independent oversight and transparency are therefore best viewed as parts of one integrity infrastructure, not as alternatives.

2.4 Digital transformation and e-government

Stage models describe e-government as moving from web presence through interaction and transaction to vertical and horizontal integration (Layne & Lee, 2001). Digital transformation is not merely technical but involves organisational and cultural change (Mergel et al., 2019). Evidence from developing countries emphasises the "design–reality gap": systems fail or are used ceremonially when the assumptions built into the technology differ from local conditions of skills, infrastructure, incentives and institutions

(Heeks, 2002; Heeks, 2006). This literature suggests that digitalisation is conditional on the administrative environment into which it is introduced.

2.5 Participation, innovation and public value

Citizen participation ranges from manipulation and tokenism to genuine delegated power (Arnstein, 1969), and its democratic value depends on who participates, how decisions are shaped and how influence is exercised (Fung, 2006). Public value approaches define the purpose of administration in terms of outcomes that citizens and their representatives value, and stress legitimacy and operational capacity as joint conditions (Moore, 1995; Bryson et al., 2014). Systematic review evidence shows that public-sector innovation depends on organisational conditions, leadership and collaboration more than on technology alone (de Vries et al., 2016).

2.6 Good governance

The UNDP (1997) formulation identifies nine characteristics of good governance: participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability and strategic vision. Critics have noted that this list is long and potentially unachievable in low-capacity settings, and have proposed “good-enough governance”, which prioritises sequenced, context-specific improvements over a full agenda (Grindle, 2004, 2007). Fukuyama (2013) argues that governance quality should be assessed as the capacity of the state to implement rules and deliver services, separate from the extent of democracy or the size of the state. Rothstein and Teorell (2008) propose impartiality in the exercise of public authority as the defining feature of quality of government. Composite indicators such as the Worldwide Governance Indicators operationalise these ideas at national level but offer limited guidance on internal administrative mechanisms (Kaufmann et al., 2010).

2.7 Sensitising lenses for the analysis

The review suggests four analytic lenses that guide coding in this study without pre-determining its findings: (a) the *appointment lens*, concerning how officials are recruited, placed and promoted, and how far political power penetrates these decisions; (b) the *accountability lens*, concerning how discretion is constrained and answerability secured; (c) the *delivery lens*, concerning how services are designed, measured and enabled by technology; and (d) the *legitimacy lens*, concerning how citizens, civil society and new generations take part in, and give consent to, administrative authority. The article’s findings both refine and challenge these lenses (Section 6).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

The study is a qualitative, document-based conceptual synthesis. It follows the logic of an integrative review, which combines and critically re-reads heterogeneous sources in order to generate new conceptual framings rather than to aggregate effect sizes (Torraco, 2005; Snyder, 2019). Analysis is

abductive: the four sensitising lenses of Section 2.7 structured the first reading, but themes were allowed to emerge, merge or be discarded as the corpus was coded. The design was chosen because the aim is theory building in a context where the primary body of knowledge is a single comprehensive text accompanied by secondary institutional data, which makes survey or experimental designs infeasible at this stage.

3.2 Corpus

The primary corpus is a Tetun-language monograph, *Revolusaun Administrativu: Teoria no Pratika ba Alkansa Governasaun Di'ak* (Soares, 2025), published in July 2025 with 168 numbered pages. It comprises three parts and fifteen sub-chapters, of about 35,000 words in total. Part I ("Public administration and transformation") covers the concept and principles of administration, its principal functions, administrative reform and digitalisation. Part II ("Administration and political power") covers political–administrative relations, administration in democracy, ethics, corruption and abuse of power, and public participation. Part III ("Administrative revolution and good governance") covers the concept, characteristics and principles of good governance, innovation, and the role of the younger generation.

Three categories of secondary material are analysed because they are reproduced or referenced in the monograph: (i) tabulated data from a seminar report prepared in 2024 by Master of Public Administration students at a Timorese university on the caseloads of the Inspectorate-General of the State (IGE), the Provedoria for Human Rights and Justice (PDHJ) and the Anti-Corruption Commission (CAC) for 2020–2023; (ii) policy statements, namely the 2017 institutional-strengthening implementation strategy of the Secretariat of State for Institutional Strengthening and the programme presented to Parliament by the IX Constitutional Government; and (iii) international literature cited in the monograph, which was re-verified and complemented by the broader literature in Section 2. The literature was selected purposively to represent foundational and high-influence contributions to each domain. It is not a systematic search and no claim of exhaustiveness is made.

3.3 Analytic procedure

Analysis followed five steps. (1) *Familiarisation and translation*: the corpus was read in full and translated from Tetun into English by the author, with a working glossary for terms with no exact English equivalent (for example, *governasaun di'ak* as good governance, *aparellu estadu* as state apparatus, and *funsionáriu mate klamar*, a locally used expression discussed in Section 5.1). (2) *First-cycle coding*: each sub-chapter was coded against the four lenses and open codes were added for material that did not fit. (3) *Theme construction*: codes were clustered into candidate themes and refined through iterative comparison, following the logic of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). (4) *Triangulation*: each theme was compared with the international literature and, where available, with the oversight data. (5) *Framework building*: themes were integrated through analytic generalisation into a framework and propositions, which are explicitly offered as hypotheses and not as findings.

Table 1
Corpus structure and mapping to analytic lenses and themes.

Part and sub-chapters	Core content	Principal lens	Theme (Section 5)
I: 1.1–1.3	Concept, principles and functions of administration; efficiency measurement	Delivery	T3, cross-cutting
I: 1.4	Administrative reform; bureaucratic neutrality; merit; oversight data	Appointment	T1
I: 1.5	Digitalisation and e-government; models, benefits, challenges, international cases	Delivery	T3
II: 2.1	Administration and political power; politicization	Appointment	T1
II: 2.2	Administration in democracy	Legitimacy	T4
II: 2.3–2.4	Ethics, discretion, corruption and abuse of power; anti-corruption data	Accountability	T2
II: 2.5	Public participation	Legitimacy	T4
III: 3.1–3.3	Concept, characteristics and principles of good governance	Outcome construct	Section 6
III: 3.4	Innovation and administrative revolution; bureaucratic culture	Delivery, Legitimacy	T3, T5
III: 3.5	Role of the younger generation	Legitimacy	T5

3.4 Trustworthiness, reflexivity and ethics

Trustworthiness was pursued through the criteria of credibility, transparency, resonance and ethics proposed for qualitative inquiry (Tracy, 2010). Credibility rests on triangulation across the monograph, international scholarship and institutional data. Transparency is served by the mapping in Table 1 and by labelling, throughout Section 5, which claims rest on the monograph's own observation and which are corroborated externally. The monograph is an insider, practitioner-academic account; it is treated here as data with the strengths (contextual depth) and risks (confirmation bias, normative advocacy) of emic knowledge. The study used only published documents and secondary institutional data and involved no human participants, so formal ethical review was not required.

4. Context: public administration in Timor-Leste

4.1 A layered administrative inheritance

The monograph observes that the concept of administration now used in Timor-Leste reached the country through the Portuguese colonial period and, more broadly, from south-western Europe, to which later Indonesian and international influences were added. This matches the scholarly account of an

institutional landscape in which international administration, local political legitimacy and customary authority interacted uneasily (Hohe, 2002; Nixon, 2012). The practical consequence is a civil service whose legal vocabulary, procedural habits and professional norms have multiple origins, and which must serve citizens whose everyday experience of authority is often mediated through kinship and community structures.

4.2 Institutional architecture and reform commitments

The monograph identifies the main components of the oversight and reform architecture. The Civil Service Commission (KFP) regulates recruitment at the request of ministries and of direct and indirect state administration bodies. The IGE audits and investigates administrative conduct. The PDHJ receives complaints on human-rights and good-governance matters. The CAC is described as an independent body with prevention and enforcement functions, including a national anti-corruption strategy, asset and income declarations, corruption-risk identification and public sensitisation. Reform commitments are articulated in the 2017 institutional-strengthening strategy and in the programme of the IX Constitutional Government, which pledges performance evaluation and promotion on merit, preventive anti-corruption measures with a code of conduct for members of government, e-government, administrative modernisation, institutional strengthening including review of organisational matrices, and training for local administration. Service-delivery innovations noted in the monograph include one-stop service counters (*Balkaun Úniku*) in each municipality and in the Special Administrative Region of Oecusse-Ambeno (RAEOA), online appointment systems for identity cards, certificates, criminal records and passports, and community development through the national programme for village development (PNDS).

4.3 Political environment

The monograph characterises the political system as multi-party, with benefits in representation and competition but risks of fragmentation, instability and complex decision making. Short electoral cycles are said to encourage short-term political calculation, and changes of government to bring changes in technical posts and policies. These features are important background to the findings on appointment and continuity reported below.

5. Findings

Five themes were constructed. Each is presented with its evidential base, labelled as monograph-based (M), externally corroborated (E) or both, and its interpretation.

5.1 Theme 1: Politicised appointment and placement of officials

The monograph returns repeatedly to the mismatch between officials' competences and the positions they occupy. It argues that strategic bureaucratic posts are frequently filled by political cadres, party

affiliates or relatives on subjective grounds, and that this is a recurring cause of mal-administration, rights violations and failures of good governance (M). It describes the locally used expression *funsionáriu mate klamar* for persons recruited through political channels, in response to the needs of party accommodation, without regard to merit, literacy, experience or the knowledge of the Civil Service Commission (M). It further reports that new institutional units are sometimes created inside ministries to accommodate party members, producing overlapping mandates, a less efficient structure and abuse of power (M), and that periodic rotation of officials for political reasons disrupts programme continuity (M).

These claims align with comparative findings that politicisation, when it shifts from legitimate responsiveness to loyalty-based patronage, damages professionalism and continuity (Peters & Pierre, 2004), and that meritocratic recruitment and predictable careers are associated with stronger state performance (Evans & Rauch, 1999; Rauch & Evans, 2000) (E). The monograph's contribution is to show how politicised appointment acts upstream of other reforms. Overlapping structures blur accountability, rotation breaks institutional memory and the placement of unqualified officials weakens both service delivery and the capacity to adopt technology. A methodological caution applies: the monograph's account rests on practitioner observation and the data available to the corpus do not measure the prevalence of politicised appointment. This theme therefore identifies a mechanism, not an estimate of its extent.

5.2 Theme 2: Unconstrained discretion and weak answerability

The monograph frames administrative discretion as a dilemma: administration must interpret and implement policy, yet that same discretion creates the possibility of abuse. Ethics is presented as a moral framework for exercising discretion, a standard for judging officials' conduct, a means of building public trust and a means of avoiding conflicts of interest (M). It proposes clear codes of ethics, effective independent oversight, transparent decision making, public participation in policy and continuous ethics training. It also lists forms of corruption and abuse of power (bribery, collusion, nepotism, cronyism, abuse of authority and embezzlement) and notes that small-scale payments for "facilitation" have become normalised as a way to make services work (M). Corruption is attributed to systemic, economic and political factors, including legal weaknesses, cumbersome procedures, weak individual integrity and low legal awareness (M).

Table 2 collates the oversight data reported in the corpus. The figures are reproduced as reported and have not been independently audited.

Table 2
Oversight-institution data reported in the corpus.

Institution and period	Reported indicator	Value as reported
IGE, 2020–2023	Registered cases	80 in total; 13 indications of crime and 68 cases of mal-administration (components sum to 81; the discrepancy is in the source and may reflect a dual-classified case)
PDHJ, Jan 2020–Dec 2023	Complaints registered	804 in total; 297 human-rights violations (36.9%) and 507 good-governance cases (63.1%)
CAC, 2020	Corruption cases identified	73; of which 30 under continuing investigation and 43 with completed reports; state loss identified US$115,588.58
CAC, 2021	Cases with state loss	36 cases; state loss US$2,256,583.21
CAC, 2022	Cases with state loss	63 cases; state loss US$975,553.33
CAC, monitoring	Programme monitoring	82 housing-programme projects in 6 municipalities; second-phase basic-basket programme in 12 municipalities covering 32 companies; US$307,812.18 linked to contract violations by 14 companies
CAC, 2020	Dominant offence types	Aggravated falsification, aggravated fraud, document falsification, embezzlement of use, passive corruption, abuse of power, harmful economic participation

Several points follow. First, in the PDHJ data, complaints on good governance outnumber human-rights complaints by about 1.7 to 1, which suggests that citizens' experience of the administration is more often one of procedural and conduct failure than of rights violation as such. Second, the IGE data are dominated by mal-administration, not by criminal indications, which implies that the larger share of the problem is located in ordinary administrative practice, an area in which prevention and supervision are in principle more tractable than prosecution. Third, the CAC offence profile is dominated by falsification, fraud and misuse of position, that is, offences that exploit discretion over documents, contracts and resources, which is consistent with a Klitgaard-type reading in which discretion without answerability creates opportunity (Klitgaard, 1988; Rose-Ackerman, 1999). The reported state losses sum to roughly US$3.35 million across the three years, but the denominators differ between years (identified, completed or loss-bearing cases), so the series should not be read as a trend.

The monograph also records that supervisory bodies often depend on political support to carry out their functions, which may limit their independence and effectiveness (M). If so, the integrity infrastructure itself is exposed to the pressures from which it is meant to protect the administration. This echoes the collective-action view of systemic corruption (Persson et al., 2013) and explains why the monograph's recommendation for ethics codes alone cannot suffice. Answerability needs information (transparency), justification (reporting and audit) and consequence (sanction) to operate together (Bovens, 2007).

5.3 Theme 3: Digitalisation as a promising but dependency-prone instrument

The monograph gives extensive treatment to e-government. It defines the concept as the use of information and communication technologies to improve efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and participation. It classifies interaction types as government-to-citizen (G2C), government-to-business (G2B), government-to-government (G2G), government-to-employee (G2E) and citizen-to-government (C2G), and it distinguishes growth-and-maturity, service-delivery and citizen-participation models (M). It lists benefits (24/7 access, lower costs, higher transparency, auditability and better data for policy) and challenges: digital divide, low digital literacy, privacy and cybersecurity, legacy systems, funding and maintenance, interoperability, legal gaps on electronic transactions, data protection and digital signatures, and resistance to change (M). It draws on examples from Singapore, Japan, Estonia, Indonesia and several developing countries, and ends with thirteen recommendations for Timor-Leste, including a national vision and phased approach, citizen-centricity, secure infrastructure, digital literacy, a legal framework, interoperability, and sustainable financing (M).

The analytically most important statement is that digital technology is only a tool, and that its governance value depends on how it is used and managed. The monograph adds that public servants' commitment is a determining factor in e-government success, and that poor discipline and punctuality among staff are a serious problem requiring strong leadership (M). This is consistent with evidence of design–reality gaps and with the argument that digital transformation is organisational and cultural (Heeks, 2002; Mergel et al., 2019) (E). Read together with Themes 1 and 2, it supports what is termed here the *amplifier thesis*: digital systems reproduce the administrative pattern into which they are introduced. Where recruitment is merit-based and answerability is real, they accelerate service and strengthen audit trails. Where appointment is politicised and discretion unconstrained, they risk digitising the same bottlenecks, concentrating access to data in the same hands, or being adopted ceremonially. The staged logic of Layne and Lee (2001) is relevant because integration stages require inter-agency coordination that politicised, overlapping structures make difficult. The international cases in the monograph are descriptive and secondary; they illustrate rather than prove the conditions of success.

5.4 Theme 4: Participation that is invited but seldom institutionalised

The monograph treats participation as both a democratic principle and a practical mechanism. It defines political participation using established formulations as voluntary activity by which citizens seek to influence the selection of leaders and public policy, and it distinguishes conventional from non-conventional forms (M). It lists objectives (better policy, accountability, trust and community empowerment), determinants (education, socio-economic status, age and political orientation) and obstacles (apathy, structural and bureaucratic barriers, and lack of accurate information), and proposes political education, strengthened parties, inclusive reform and the use of information technology (M). It

cites community involvement in planning and implementation of development programmes, including PNDS, as an example of participation in practice (M).

The monograph does not, however, document which participatory mechanisms are legally mandated, how frequently they are used or whether they alter decisions, and the corpus contains no outcome data on participation. The theme is therefore best characterised as normative endorsement with thin institutionalisation. This matters because participation produces different governance effects at different rungs of Arnstein's (1969) ladder and under different designs (Fung, 2006). Consultation without feedback is likely to yield formal compliance but little legitimacy gain. The monograph's observation that governance open to criticism is a habit that must be cultivated, and that citizens' access to information underpins their oversight role, points to the dependency between participation and transparency: participation without information is symbolic.

5.5 Theme 5: A generational and cultural lever

Part III contends that the transition to good governance demands a change in bureaucratic culture, from a habit of commanding and ruling to one of serving and assisting, and from paternalistic relations to flexible, collaborative and dialogue-based work (M). Drawing on organisational-culture scholarship, it distinguishes terminal values (excellence, stability, morality, quality) from instrumental values (honesty, creativity, high standards) and argues that cultural strategies must form new habits, sentiments and ways of thinking inside bureaucracy (M). It identifies young people as bearers of digital fluency, innovation and civic energy, and proposes education, civic and political education, internships, mentoring, youth representation, anti-corruption values and digital responsibility as channels. It acknowledges barriers: generational gaps, rigid hierarchical culture, limited access to information and technology, and lack of experience and opportunity (M).

The interpretation here is that generational change is a *lagged and mediated* lever. Entry of digitally literate cohorts expands capacity only if recruitment channels admit them on merit (Theme 1), if the organisation's culture allows initiative (Theme 5) and if integrity infrastructure protects them from socialisation into prevailing practices (Theme 2). Without these conditions, youth involvement may be limited to symbolic representation. De Vries et al. (2016) similarly show that innovation depends on organisational conditions and leadership.

5.6 Cross-cutting: performance measurement and service quality

Part I proposes a measurement logic that cuts across the themes: efficiency should be measured by results and not only by activities, with indicators such as waiting time, cost per unit of output, the share of complaints resolved, and user satisfaction, supported by cost–benefit analysis, benchmarking, satisfaction surveys and process analysis (M). The monograph adopts a five-dimension service-quality scheme (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy), which corresponds to the widely used SERVQUAL dimensions (Parasuraman et al., 1988) (E). The absence of reported results against

such indicators in the corpus is itself informative: measurement is advocated but, on the evidence available, not yet routinely published. This is a precondition for the accountability and legitimacy shifts discussed next.

6. The Administrative Revolution Framework (ARF)

6.1 Defining administrative revolution

In the monograph, “administrative revolution” denotes a fundamental renewal of the governance system rather than a marginal improvement of procedures. This article sharpens the term analytically. An *administrative revolution* is a discontinuous, paradigm-level change in the organising logics of the administration, as opposed to a change in the speed or volume of reform activity. “Discontinuous” refers to the logic and not to the tempo: the shifts can and, in thin-capacity states, should be implemented incrementally, but what changes is the principle by which the administration appoints, answers, delivers and gains consent. The label deliberately distinguishes this from reform programmes that modernise procedures while leaving the underlying logics intact, which the reform literature identifies as a frequent cause of ceremonial adoption (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).

The five themes of Section 5 collapse into four constitutive shifts that correspond to the four lenses. Table 3 summarises them.

Table 3
The four constitutive shifts of the Administrative Revolution Framework.

Shift	From	To	Principal mechanism	Theme	Illustrative indicators
S1 Appointment	Loyalty- and patronage-based placement	Merit-based recruitment, placement and promotion insulated from partisan control	Independent civil-service commission with enforceable rules; published competency profiles; stable tenure for technical posts	T1	Share of senior posts filled through open competition; share of appointments reviewed by the commission; average tenure of technical heads
S2 Accountability	Discretion without answerability	Bounded discretion with information, justification and consequence	Integrated ethics code, asset declarations, independent audit and complaint handling, protected whistle-blowing, sanctions	T2	Share of audit and inspectorate recommendations implemented; time to resolve complaints; proportion of cases with sanctions
S3 Delivery	Procedure-centred, paper-based service	Outcome-measured, citizen-centred and digitally enabled service	Published service standards; one-stop and online channels; interoperable systems; results-based indicators	T3, cross-cutting	Waiting time; cost per output; complaint-resolution rate; satisfaction scores on the five service-quality dimensions
S4 Legitimacy	Elite steering with symbolic consultation	Co-governance with institutionalised participation and generational renewal	Legally mandated consultation with feedback duties; open data; civic education; structured entry routes for young professionals	T4, T5	Share of consultations with published responses; participation of under-35s in advisory bodies; recruited graduates retained after five years

6.2 Enabling conditions

The analysis also identifies three enabling conditions that do not constitute shifts but determine whether shifts take hold. **E1: Political will and leadership.** The monograph insists that vision, commitment and strong leadership are indispensable for reform and for e-government. **E2: Legal and institutional framework.** The enforcement of civil-service law, the legal basis for electronic transactions, data protection and digital signatures, and the formal independence of oversight bodies are repeatedly named as preconditions. **E3: Human capital, infrastructure and finance.** Training, ICT infrastructure and sustainable financing are required for all four shifts, and are especially salient where digital divides and limited funds persist.

6.3 The outcome construct: good governance as legitimacy

The ARF treats good governance, understood through the nine UNDP (1997) characteristics, as the outcome of the four shifts rather than a fifth reform. Broadly, S1 supports rule of law, equity and effectiveness; S2 supports accountability, transparency and rule of law; S3 supports effectiveness and efficiency, responsiveness and transparency; and S4 supports participation, consensus orientation, equity and strategic vision. This reading is compatible with the view that governance quality is the impartial and capable exercise of public authority (Rothstein & Teorell, 2008; Fukuyama, 2013), and with the monograph's argument that good governance results from the synergy of a capable state, a competitive market and an independent civil society.

6.4 Propositions

The framework generates six propositions, offered as testable hypotheses for future research and not as established findings.

Table 4
Propositions of the ARF.

No.	Proposition	Rationale from analysis and literature	Suggested test
P1	Merit-based, insulated appointment (S1) is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the effectiveness of S2–S4: where S1 is absent, other reforms are adopted ceremonially or captured.	T1; Evans & Rauch (1999); Peters & Pierre (2004)	Comparative case study or QCA across agencies varying in appointment practice; track reform implementation fidelity
P2	Integrated integrity infrastructure (ethics, audit, protected reporting, sanctions) reduces opportunity for corruption more than formal ethics codes alone.	T2; Klitgaard (1988); Persson et al. (2013); Bovens (2007)	Multi-agency comparison; difference-in-differences around introduction of audit and reporting channels
P3	Digitalisation improves service and integrity outcomes only where S1 and S2 are present; otherwise it reproduces existing patterns (amplifier thesis).	T3; Heeks (2002); Dunleavy et al. (2006)	Interaction models of digital adoption by recruitment and oversight quality; process tracing in e-service units
P4	Participation increases perceived legitimacy only when linked to decision rights or mandatory feedback; consultation without feedback has no or negative effects.	T4; Arnstein (1969); Fung (2006)	Survey experiments and case comparison of consultation designs
P5	Investment in youth human capital and civic education improves governance outcomes with a lag, and the effect is mediated by organisational culture and by S1.	T5; de Vries et al. (2016)	Cohort tracking of entrants; mediation analysis with culture measures
P6	In thin-capacity states, anchoring S1 and S2 in a few critical agencies before scaling S3 and S4 yields more durable gains than simultaneous system-wide reform (good-enough sequencing).	Synthesis; Grindle (2004, 2007); Andrews et al. (2017)	Comparative longitudinal study of sequenced versus simultaneous reform trajectories in small states

6.5 Sequencing logic

The amplifier thesis and the dependency of oversight on political support imply an order of operations. In a first phase, S1 and S2 should be anchored in a limited number of critical agencies whose functions concentrate discretion and public contact, such as human-resource management, public procurement, licensing and civil registration. In a second phase, S3 builds on those anchors with service standards, performance measurement, interoperable systems and online channels. In a third phase, S4 is institutionalised through mandated consultation, open information and structured youth entry routes. The phases overlap and are not strictly linear, since light-touch feedback mechanisms and civic education can begin early and since digital channels can themselves support audit trails. The logic is one of good-enough governance: do first what unlocks the rest, rather than attempt the full list of nine principles at once (Grindle, 2004).

7. Discussion

7.1 Theoretical implications

The ARF offers four theoretical contributions. First, it integrates literatures that are normally separate. Evidence on Weberian recruitment (Evans & Rauch, 1999), on corruption (Klitgaard, 1988; Persson et al., 2013), on digital government (Heeks, 2002; Dunleavy et al., 2006) and on participation (Arnstein, 1969; Fung, 2006) is placed in one dependency structure with S1 at its base. Second, the amplifier thesis refines digital-era governance: technology is less a driver of re-integration than a multiplier of the existing administrative pattern, so its sign depends on appointment and accountability conditions. Third, the framework adds a political-administrative boundary condition to the New Public Service argument that public servants should serve rather than steer (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000): the orientation to serve cannot be sustained if officials owe their positions to patrons. Fourth, it responds to critiques of the good-governance agenda as overloaded (Grindle, 2004, 2007) by specifying a sequence in which a few shifts are prioritised.

The case also qualifies the common assumption that the politics–administration dichotomy can be restored by rule. The monograph, in line with Svara (2001) and Rosenbloom (1983), accepts that politics and administration interact but argues for a neutral and professional bureaucracy that serves the state and the people whichever party governs. Where short electoral cycles and a fragmented party system create strong incentives for patronage (Section 4.3), neutrality has to be built into institutions (S1 and S2) and cannot be left to norms. In a society where customary and kinship obligations remain strong, impersonal rules may also compete with legitimate local expectations of reciprocity. The question of how to reconcile Weberian impersonality with locally embedded legitimacy (Hohe, 2002; Nixon, 2012) is not resolved here and is a priority for future research; the ARF does not presuppose that formal rules must displace local forms of authority, only that appointments and resources be allocated by publicly justifiable criteria.

7.2 Policy implications and a staged roadmap

The roadmap in Table 5 translates the framework into stages and indicators. It is a proposal for deliberation by national institutions, and its feasibility and costs would need to be assessed locally.

Table 5
Staged roadmap derived from the ARF.

Horizon	Priority actions	Shift	Verification indicators
Short term (0–2 years): anchor	Publish competency profiles and open competition procedures for senior technical posts; require commission review of political-cadre appointments; consolidate ethics code with sanctions; protected reporting channels; mandate follow-up reports on inspectorate and audit recommendations	S1, S2	Share of senior posts filled competitively; recommendation implementation rate; number of protected reports received and processed
Short term (0–2 years): measure	Adopt a small set of service standards for the one-stop counters and civil registration; publish waiting times and complaints resolved	S3	Quarterly published service-standard report
Medium term (3–5 years): enable	Enact or update laws on electronic transactions, data protection and digital signatures; build interoperable registries; train staff in digital and ethics competencies; secure maintenance funding	S3, E2, E3	Number of interoperable services; share of staff trained; system uptime and maintenance budget
Medium term (3–5 years): open	Legally mandate consultation with published responses on major policies and budget stages; open-data portal for budget and procurement	S4, S2	Share of consultations with published responses; datasets released
Long term (5–10 years): renew	Structured entry routes (traineeships, mentoring, rotations) for young graduates with merit-based placement; civic education and public-administration curricula; periodic independent evaluation of the roadmap	S4, S1	Retention and promotion of entrants; independent evaluation findings published

7.3 Transferability

The framework is derived from a single case and should be extended with caution. Features that may make it transferable are shared by other small post-conflict or recently independent states: a bureaucracy assembled quickly from multiple sources, concentration of public employment in the state, short political cycles, reliance on donor-supported institutional models and a strong role for customary authority. These features can be examined in comparative designs, for example across Pacific and African small states, to test whether the dependency structure in P1–P3 holds.

8. Limitations and future research

Several limitations qualify the contribution. First, the primary corpus is a single monograph, which provides conceptual breadth but also means that the themes reflect one author's selection and interpretation; claims labelled (M) in Section 5 should be treated as informed practitioner observation, not as independently verified facts. Second, the secondary data come from a 2024 seminar report by students and are reproduced in the monograph. They contain an internal discrepancy (Table 2), use non-comparable denominators across years and have not been audited against the institutions' own annual

reports, which should be consulted in follow-up work. Third, the analysis is based on translation from Tetun, which introduces possible loss of nuance despite the glossary. Fourth, no primary data on civil servants' or citizens' perceptions were collected, so the framework's propositions remain untested. Fifth, the international literature was purposively selected and is not exhaustive.

Future research should test P1–P6 with designs that can bear causal and comparative inference. Candidate designs include a survey of civil servants on appointment practice, discretion and integrity climate; process tracing of recruitment decisions in selected agencies; comparative case studies or qualitative comparative analysis across small post-conflict states; longitudinal analysis of e-service adoption and complaint data; and experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation of consultation designs. Research is also needed on how impersonal merit systems can be reconciled with locally embedded norms of reciprocity and authority, and on the reliability and independence of oversight institutions in small polities.

9. Conclusion

This article asked what an administrative revolution would consist of in a small post-conflict state, which constraints bind it and how it should be sequenced. Drawing on a comprehensive Tetun-language monograph, triangulated with international scholarship and national oversight data, it identified five themes (politicised appointment, unconstrained discretion, dependency-prone digitalisation, thinly institutionalised participation and a lagged generational lever) and integrated them in the Administrative Revolution Framework. The framework defines the revolution as a change in four organising logics, appointment, accountability, delivery and legitimacy, enabled by political will, a supportive legal framework and human and financial capacity, and it yields six testable propositions and a staged roadmap.

The central argument is that technical modernisation cannot substitute for institutional change in the way officials are chosen and held to account. Digitalisation and participation are valuable, but they work as amplifiers of an administrative pattern and not as correctives of it. A good-enough sequence that first anchors merit and answerability in critical agencies, and then builds service measurement, digital channels and participation on that base, offers a plausible path for Timor-Leste and for comparable states. The propositions now require empirical testing, and the roadmap requires local deliberation about feasibility and cost.

Declarations

Declaration of competing interest.

The author declares that they are the author of the foundational monograph analysed in this study (author, 2025, "Revolusaun administrativu: Teoria no pratika ba alkansa governasaun di'ak"). This overlap is fully disclosed; the added value of the present article lies in its conceptual synthesis, the formulation

of the Administrative Revolution Framework (ARF), testable propositions, international literature triangulation, and the staged policy roadmap.

Declarations of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process. During the preparation of this work, the author used generative AI tools solely for English language editing, proofreading, and improving stylistic flow. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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Data availability.

The study analyzed published documents and secondary institutional data publicly referenced within the region. The primary monograph and institutional data are cited accordingly. The coding record and analytical glossary are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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