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***Uncovering the interplay between political will,
public management reforms, and outcomes:
a study of the United Arab Emirates***

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Abstract: The aim of the study is to fill the gap in the existing literature by presenting a comprehensive and theoretically sound framework that examines the interplay between the attributes of political will, public management reform design and implementation, the results they yield and the impact of external factors on these variables. Drawing upon the systematic literature review, the research develops a conceptual framework of political will and applies it to the context of public management reforms in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). A wide range of databases are used from secondary sources including Worldwide Governance Indicators, Failed State Index, Global Innovation Index, and Transparency International. The results show that the UAE government's strong commitment to reforms, as well as its ability to implement those reforms effectively, has contributed to positive outcomes in areas such as economic development and public service delivery. UAE has liberalized its economy and institutionalized innovative practices. All actors are involved in reform initiatives. Given the developmental clientelist regime in the UAE, political leadership has played an instrumental role in successfully implementing public management reforms. The UAE Government has ensured capacity-building efforts and proper incentives such as Government Excellence Awards are in place for the continuity of reform initiatives. Other government regimes could potentially benefit from the approaches employed by the UAE government in undertaking public management reform initiatives. The results challenge the common assumption that monarchical regimes are unable to drive such changes and instead demonstrate that a development-focused clientelist state can effectively implement incremental reforms in public management. The proposed conceptual model will also potentially guide future empirical research in the field.

Keywords: Political will. Public management reform. Middle East. United Arab Emirates

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Introduction

The presence or absence of political will is invoked as a major factor for the success or failure of policy or managerial intervention. Though previous research studies are few, political will, defined as the commitment and support of state decision makers to find sustainable solutions to specific problems, seems to have captured the attention of scholars who are concerned in the analysis of the successes or failures of reform initiatives. Despite its increasing appeal, the concept of political will remains ambiguous. More importantly, there is a serious absence of a comprehensive, theoretically grounded framework to understand the relationships among the characteristics of political will, design, and implementation of public management reforms (PMRs), outcomes, and external factors. Although anti-corruption reforms have received some attention in the theoretical discourse of political will, the latter's impact on managerial reforms in the civil service has remained neglected. Moreover, given the limitations of the existing conceptual frameworks of political will, the current study endeavours to address this gap and develop a conceptual framework which is applied in the context of the PMRs in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The UAE government initiated PMRs in the late 1990s which have been accelerated over the last decade. Though discrete studies are available, there is no comprehensive study of PMRs. More specifically, this study identifies political will as a critical variable in the analysis of PMRs in the UAE. The most pressing reason for choosing the UAE as a case study lies in its uniqueness in terms of the nature of the state and the implementation of various reforms as opposed to the claims of subverted reforms under the neo-patrimonial system. In this context, our study aims to investigate the relationship between political will, PMRs, and outcomes in the United Arab Emirates. Specifically, the study aims to uncover how the level of political will in the country affects the implementation and success of PMRs, and how these reforms impact various outcomes such as efficiency, effectiveness, citizen satisfaction and accountability.

The study is important because it addresses a gap in the literature on the relationship between political will, PMRs, and outcomes in the UAE. The UAE has undergone rapid development and modernization in recent years and an understanding of how political will and PMRs have contributed to these outcomes is crucial for policymakers and government officials. Additionally, the results of this study could be useful for other countries in the region and beyond, as they aim to improve their own public management systems and outcomes. Furthermore, it also highlights the need for a better understanding of the context-specific factors that drive the implementation and success of PMR efforts, as well as the role of political will in these efforts.

1. Literature review

1.1. Understanding political will

Political will has been defined in various ways and contexts across disciplines (Treadway, 2012). In recent years, there has been a surge of literature on employing political will as an analytical form across disciplinary boundaries (Cash, 2016; Kapoutsis et al., 2017; Carbonetti et al., 2014; Shaughnessy et al., 2017; Spehar, 2018). Despite its tremendous importance, the concept remains ambiguous. While a vast majority of the literature on different kinds of reforms has lamented the lack of political will as an obstacle, very few studies are interested in dissecting and analysing the concept. Despite these debates, different scholars have come forward with different definitions. In general, political will is used as the fortitude of an individual political actor to do and say things that will produce a preferred outcome. Kpundeh (1998) defines political will as ‘the demonstrated credible intent of political actors (e.g., elected or appointed leaders, civil society watchdogs, stakeholder groups, etc.) to attack perceived causes or effects of corruption at a systemic level’. According to Post et al. (2010), political will is ‘the extent of committed support among key decision makers for a particular policy solution to a particular problem’. According to Persson & Sjöstedt (2012), political will ‘broadly understood as the will of leaders to initiate and sustain reform—is, in other words, rightly put forward by the policy-making community and policy-oriented academic scholars as an important causal factor in the development process’. From an objective point of view, political will has two distinct meanings. First, it is one of the processes or courses of action that attempts to change the perceptions and behavior of elite political actors through state institutions at higher levels of work. Secondly, this is a political and policy process that aims to create opportunities at the grassroots for ordinary people by changing popular perceptions and behavior.

1.2. Public management reform (PMR)

PMR means planned attempts by governments to revise and guide the operations of public sector organizations (Haligan, 2022). PMR is directed toward systemic and sustainable performance improvement in the structure, processes, and functions of the executive government (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). After decolonisation, the developing world opted for the standard Western model (impersonal bureaucracy) for structural and functional changes. For most developing countries, the model did not fit well into the pre-capitalist economic and clientelist political system (McCourt, 2018; Levy, 2015) while in other developing country contexts, the model succeeded in building the capacity of their public bureaucracy despite the prevalence of clientelism (Levy, 2015).

Being influenced by public choice, transaction cost and principal-agent theories, the neo-liberal market model emerged with a set of market principles for managing

public organisations. While there are several models under the umbrella of the neo-liberal model, new public management (NPM) is the most pertinent one. Although there is disagreement as regards the actual meaning of NPM, it goes without saying that business management precepts were expected to supplant conventional bureaucratic administrative practices (Pollitt & Bouchaert, 2017). Since the advent of the new millennium, the application of information and communication technology (ICT) has become part and parcel of the reform discourse (Gil-Garcia et al., 2018). In fact, it has facilitated the achievement of the goals of diverse PMR items such as strategic management, total quality management and business process reengineering (BPR).

1.3. Political will and PMR: theoretical perspectives

Though the literature on the political will-PMR nexus is limited, significant insights can be garnered from related literature on political will and different kinds of reforms. This article presents a summary of the key sources and findings around political will and PMR in global and UAE contexts (Table 1). This section highlights some of the notable study findings based on the study questions. For example, Post et al.'s (2010) influential article has unearthed a number of components of political will including capable public officials, a common understanding of formal agenda, support and effective policy solution. However, this model seems to be inadequate in identifying appropriate components and their implications for PMRs that lead to desirable outcomes. Brinkerhoff (2000) assessed political will for anti-corruption efforts which is very valuable for PMR. He developed this model based on some influential components such as perceived urgency, actors, incentive structure, capacity, and continuity of effort. He then suggested several environmental factors including the regime type, social, political, and economic stability, civil society and private sector, and donor-government relationships.

**Table 1. Key sources and findings around political will
and public management reform**

Sources	Findings
<i>Global</i>	
Kingdon (1984)	Desirable policies depend on the political will of government players that can overcome inertia and industry lobbying
Brinkerhoff (2000)	The model is built around several pillars: the characteristics or indicators of political will, environmental factors, support for reforms, design and implementation of anti-corruption reforms and reform outcomes. Locus of initiative, degree of analytical rigor, mobilisation of support, application of credible sanctions and continuity of efforts are the characteristics of political will. Environmental factors such as regime type, socio-economic and political stability, group pressures, civil society and private sector interaction with the characteristics and the reform outcomes.

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Sources	Findings
McCourt (2003)	The notion of political commitment explores the effects of antecedents such as political and administrative capacity on the implementation of reforms
Abdulai (2009)	Political will, defined as the government's commitment, has a role to place to eradicate public sector corruption. The lack of political will expressed as 'tolerant corruption' is a major hurdle to the success of the anticorruption reforms.
Post et al. (2010)	Political will exists when a sufficient set of decision-makers with a common understanding of a particular problem on the formal agenda is committed to supporting a potentially effective policy solution
Kickert (2011)	Politicians' sustained commitment to investing resources is mandatory for any policy change.
Treadway (2012)	Political will is present when political actors are motivated to engage in strategic, goal directed behavior that advances their personal agenda and objectives. It inherently involves risking their relational or reputational capital and exhibiting a credible intent to promote or block change at a systemic level.
Carpenter and Krause (2012)	Politicians' lack of attraction to several aspects associated with specific policy areas might reduce their motivation to act even over the long-term. Politicians might try to claim credit for positive events to convince the public of their competence and might increase public funding for reforms to promote their chances of re-election. Their decision-making can also be predicted by their desire to avoid blame for negative events and the resulting bad press that might damage their self-interests
Carbonetti et al. (2014)	Capacity is viewed as the potential that is only realised when some actor is willing to make use of it to achieve a goal.
Cash (2016)	Though there is no precise framework of political will, empirical findings show that well-developed plans prepared by professional planners are subverted by political leaders. Political leaders biased with particular political ideology seriously lack the genuine political will to implement a people-oriented land use policy
Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017)	"Political party ideas" as an important element in management reform that require ideas about how they would like to govern, including issues of structure, style, and process
Ankamah & E-Khoda (2018)	The role of political will in curbing corruption where political will includes four components: the origin of initiative, comprehension and extent of analysis, credible sanctions and resource dedications and sustenance
Pham et al. (2019)	The proposed framework contains five dimensions of measurement of political will including initiation, assessment, mobilization, allocation, and enforcement
Cohen (2022)	The problems of non-governability and political instability that create the need for administrative reform also create powerful barriers to it—particularly the lack of political will

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Sources	Findings
<i>UAE</i>	
Rahman et al., 2018	This study examined the relationship between organizational culture elements (i.e., trust, communication between employees, reward, leadership, and learning and development), organizational socialization, and knowledge transfer in government organizations in Dubai, UAE.
Elbanna (2013)	This study on the public sector highlights that the practice of strategic management has become regular and standard and can be considered the centerpiece of PMR in the UAE. There is relatively high awareness of strategic planning among both the federal and local organizations which is largely beneficial to the federal and local organizations.

Source: Authors' contribution

McCourt (2018) mentions diverse public service reforms such as decentralization, pay and employment, NPM, and bottom-up reforms. He draws upon the psychology literature and contends that the personal or individual level commitment could be voluntary, explicit, challenging, public, and irrevocable. Ankamah and E-Khoda (2017) draw upon the work of Brinkerhoff (2000) and present four dimensions of political will such as resource dedication and substance, credible sanctions, comprehension and extent of analysis, and origin of the initiative. This model considers only dimensions of political will and fails to consider how these dimensions relate to the design and implementation of PMRs and associated outcomes in addition to their interaction with environmental factors. The measurement framework proposed by Pham et al. (2019) assesses political will for accountability and proposes five dimensions of measurement of political will including initiation, assessment, mobilization, allocation, and enforcement. This framework does consider different dimensions of political will but fails to link these dimensions with the external factors, design and implementation, and the outcomes of PMRs. Based on the existing literature, Lassa et al. (2019) have developed five measurement variables of political will in the context of disaster risk reduction. These include commitment to understand risk, governability of disaster risk, commitment to invest in disaster risk reduction, administrative commitment to disaster preparedness, and early warning systems. Recently, Cohen (2022) explored public administration reform in the context of political instability in Israel where he examined how political instability adds more costs to politicians' cost-benefit calculations on promoting public administration reform, as well as how it blocks their desire to engage in everyday work when large, visible reforms are proposed. The findings indicated that the problems of non-governability and political instability that create the need for administrative reform also create powerful barriers to it—particularly the lack of political will.

Figure 1. Key interventions within political will toward public management reform



Source: Authors' contribution

This is argued that none of the theories is tenable to analyse the dynamics of PMR and its outcomes as most of these are based on diverse sectoral contexts. However, the review of these theories highlights some interventions of the political will toward to achieving PMR (Figure 1) that include goal orientation, dedication, motivation, and awareness among government and public, enforcement, institutional and human capacity, environmental factors, NPM, common understanding, effective policy, and political stability. These interventions are interrelated and reinforce each other. This study explores the role of political will in achieving the desirable results through PMRs in the UAE context.

2. Research methodology

First, the current study conducts a systematic literature review to unfold the existing literature on political will and PMRs as well as the limitations of the extant literature. Second, drawing upon the available literature, the current study proposes a conceptual model to show the interplays between political will, PMRs, and outcomes. Third, drawing upon the secondary data sources, the proposed model is applied to the case of UAE to highlight how the proposed model can be used for future studies.

2.1. Systematic review of literature

The study is based on the systematic review of literature where the Scopus search engine is used with three keywords such as ‘political will’, ‘public management reform’, and ‘political will and public management reform’ during the last ten years (2013-2022) (Table 2). This study only considered the Scopus indexed journal articles from the social sciences category. Data showed that the number of publications on ‘political will’ is much higher than the ‘public management reform’ which is more than ten times that in all three sub-categories i.e., global, Asia and UAE.

**Table 2. Year-wise number of publications on political will
and public management reform**

Year	Political will (PW)			Public management reform (PMR)			PW and PMR		
	Global	Asia	UAE	Global	Asia	UAE	Global	Asia	UAE
2022	2175	57	3	197	4	0	10	0	0
2021	3984	152	5	335	3	0	15	0	1
2020	3007	111	7	335	7	0	16	2	0
2019	4021	164	1	328	9	0	9	0	0
2018	4020	164	0	309	4	1	9	0	0
2017	3969	182	6	331	9	0	15	0	0
2016	3448	156	2	284	3	0	15	0	0
2015	3121	109	6	324	7	0	10	1	0
2014	3114	151	1	305	7	0	19	1	0
2013	3300	136	2	286	10	2	11	1	0
Total	34,159	1382	33	3044	63	3	297	5	1

Source: Scopus, 2022

2.2. Eligibility and exclusion criteria

The keywords as mentioned earlier, and some criteria were selected and fixed for this systematic review. This research only considered Scopus indexed English language research articles in social sciences. In some cases, books and other sources were reviewed for conceptual definitions and analysis of political and PMRs in UAE.

2.3. Systematic review process

This systematic review procedure was done on 16 September 2022. First, the same keywords were selected for the Scopus database for searching documents. After searching Scopus, and other sources, 80 articles were recorded (37 from UAE and 43 from Asia and Global) which are considered more relevant to the study questions. In the final stage, this study considered 32 articles (14 from UAE and the rest 18 from Global and Asia) that covered political will and PMRs for this systematic review. This is remarkable that the number of publications in UAE is scarce where only 33 journal articles are found on political will and only 3 on public management

reform. It is further found that the number of journal publications on political will and public management reform is very low, with 297 global, only 5 in Asia, and only 1 in UAE (Table 2). However, the knowledge gap on political will and PMRs in Asia, as well as UAE, is very high.

2.4. Data simplification and analysis

At the outset, this study identified the themes from the selected studies. Afterward, the themes were selected by reading through the abstracts and full articles for identifying the applicable categories.

2.5. Limitations of the research

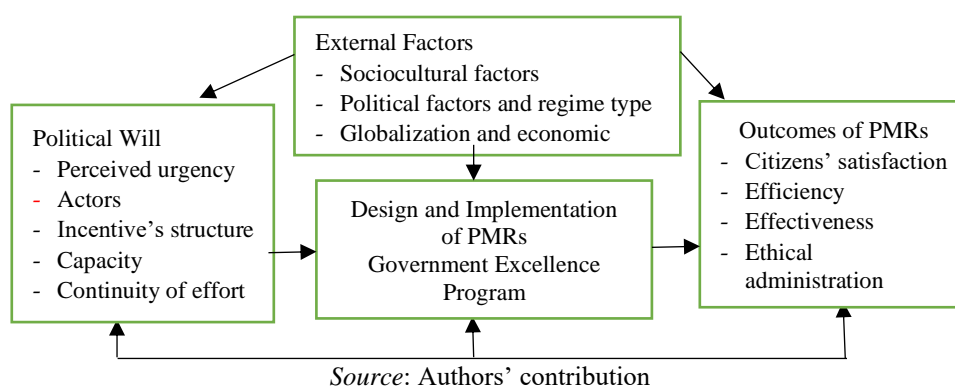
This systematic review has some limitations. First, the research employed the systematic review where researchers have limited freedom to overcome the shortfalls of such kind of literature review (Sultana et al., 2022). Secondly, the study covered global and Asian journal articles on political will and PMR which are large in numbers. In some cases, the study cannot incorporate all authors' ideas within this limited word limit. Thirdly, it was difficult to generalize the findings gathered through diverse articles on the local contexts and political ideologies across the global and Asian countries.

3. Research results and discussions

3.1. Theoretical underpinnings of political will and the implications for PMRs in UAE

Drawing upon the above theoretical discussion, the current study proposes the following conceptual framework (Figure 2) depicting the relationships between political will, PMRs and outcomes in UAE perspective and additionally, also considering the impact of the external factors on these variables.

Figure 2. Conceptual framework of political will and public management reforms in UAE



3.2. Characteristics of political will

Perceived urgency

Public leadership grasped the necessity of opening up the economy and streamlining the administration. The ‘UAE Leadership School’ exemplified by the roles of the Sheikhs and Rulers has always underscored the concepts of excellence, quality, and modernity in state administration (Jones, 2017; Rahman & Said, 2015; Matias et al., 2019; Mathias, 2017a; 2017b). The UAE Vision 2021 has placed managerial reform at the 2nd track which aims at institutionalising innovative practices with the support of an integrated system of modern tools (Sarker & Al Athmay, 2019).

Actors

Political leadership comprising the members of the royal families is basically the orchestrator of reforms. With the critical signals received from the bureaucracy and informal networks, major reform initiatives are undertaken. The role of the bureaucracy has to be seen in the context of the developmental clientelist regime in the UAE. Senior government officials have to work keeping in view the expectations of the ruling elites (Jones, 2017; Mathias et al., 2019; Sarker & Al Athmay, 2019; Ahrens, 2014). While the actors act at the collective level, in this type of developmental clientelist regime, political actors’ actions at the individual level cannot be ruled out, since the system of administration is quite centralised. Nevertheless, critical decisions taken at the individual political level are well-grounded with facts, figures, and logical consistencies (Hvidt, 2009; Rahman & Said, 2015). The private sector has also played a very supportive role in facilitating the formulation and implementation of reform programs (Al Khouri, 2014).

Capacity

Massive investments have been made in education and development to create a pool of 21st century civil servants in general and public leadership in particular (Mathias et al., 2019; Jones, 2017; Mathias, 2017a; 2017b). Intensive training and development programs are in place in collaboration with the world-renowned institutions. On top of this, strategic alliances with internationally renowned firms for technological infrastructural development and maintenance have contributed to capacity building (Al-Khouri, 2014; Ahrens, 2013; Al Khouri, 2014). Capacity building particularly in the realm of public services through the formulation and implementation of a coherent framework involving modern management practices and the application of ICT is a glaring example (Hujran et al., 2021).

Incentive structure

Following numerous reforms, the structure of incentives/disincentives has been revamped to ensure a performance culture in the public management system. Currently, the Government Excellence Award is given in both the federal and the

local governments. Government excellence is awarded for 20 categories which are divided into two groups: institutional and employee excellence (Ahrens, 2014; Rahman & Said, 2015; Jabnoun & Khalifah, 2015; AlZawati et al., 2020). The system has established a clear connection between job performance and rewards of various kinds (Sarker & Al Athmay, 2019; Al-Khouri, 2014).

Continuity of efforts

The government has taken the necessary measures regarding the continuity of efforts. It has a well-designed institutional and organisational structure with sufficient human and financial resources. (Al Ahababi et al., 2019; Mathias, 2017a; Mathias et al., 2019; Al Marzouqi, 2019). The Ministry of Cabinet Affairs has deployed diverse mechanisms such as, Customer Satisfaction Study, Mystery Shopper, Employee Opinion Study, UAE Federal Feedback Gateway ‘MY GOV’, Happiness Meter, and Customer Happiness Studies, and the results are used as inputs to feed key performance indicators (KPIs) and Sheikh Khalifa Government Excellence Program (Brixi, et al., Woolcock, 2015; Al Marzouqi, 2019; Jabnoun & Khalifah, 2015; Sarker & Al Athmay, 2019). Abdel-Ahmed et al. (2015) in their empirical research on the UAE federal and local government organizations have shown the usefulness of performance information for strategy formulation and implementation.

3.3. External factors impacting political will, design, and implementation of PMRs and the outcomes

Socio-cultural factors

The transition of the UAE from a tribal society to a modernized one is featured with the presence of distinct socio-cultural institutions including hereditary rule and social networks. PMRs have taken into cognizance the role of these institutions. In fact, these institutions have impacted positively fortifying political will (Jones, 2017) that led to the proper design and implementation of PMRs and the achievement of positive outcomes (Sarker & Al Athmay, 2019).

Political factors and regime type

The UAE is regarded as a clientelist developmental state (Hvidt, 2009). The significant characteristic of this type of regime is the combination of soft, traditional power systems with formalised structures (Mathias, 2017a). The state is developmental in that all the developmental efforts are state-directed; there is the insulation of state decision-makers from clientelist groups in critical decision areas and there is an overwhelming focus on bureaucratic efficiency (Mathias et al., 2019; Hvidt, 2009). Contrary to the pessimistic view about the clientelist states (Persson & Sjöstedt, 2012), Jones (2017) has shown how a monarchy-dominated system upholds the spirit of administrative reforms. While the administrative system is centralized, critical policies mandated by political leadership are initiated and implemented with

urgency along with establishing institutional structure and dedicated resources (Sarker & Al Athmay, 2019; Hivdt, 2009).

Globalization and economic factors

Like all countries, the UAE has been predisposed to the forces of globalization that have resulted in the restructuring of production, minimizing the dependence on the oil sector, focusing on the new frontiers of the service economy, liberalizing the economy, and implementing efforts to maximizing efficiency and effectiveness of public sector employees. An efficient public service system became an urgent necessity to render valuable services for thriving local and foreign private investment (AlZawati et al., 2020; Sarker & Al Athmay, 2019).

Technological factors

Because of the 4th Industrial Revolution, the knowledge economy has been prioritized in the UAE. After implementing e-government, the UAE government is now focusing on the application of artificial intelligence, blockchain and agility in streamlining public services (Sarker & Al Athmay, 2019). The advent of ICT appeared as a boon when it needed it most. It not only spurred many of the characteristics of political will (e.g., perceived urgency, capacity, and continuity of efforts) but also facilitated the implementation of PMRs that ultimately resulted in efficient and effective public services.

3.4. Design and implementation of PMRs

The UAE is predominantly an executive-dominated state. The size of the public sector is quite robust in terms of the GDP-expenditure ratio. Though the private sector has flourished considerably over the last four decades, state involvement in the economic sphere remains quite dominant (Sarker & Al Athmay, 2019; Jones, 2017; Hvidt, 2009). Historically, the rulers remain at the helm of power. Civil service management embraced the Weberian principles to a large extent at the both federal and local governments levels. In an era of globalization when most countries embarked on PMRs, the UAE government also seized the opportunity. Though there is no dominant mode, NPM has dominated the discourse of PMRs in the UAE. The UAE adopted a few critical elements of NPM which are embodied in the Government Excellence Model (GEM). The government of Dubai first adopted the quality management approach known as the Dubai Government Excellence program in the mid-1990s following the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM). Later through trial and error, the model has been reshaped and tailored to the modernization drive of public sector management. The federal government adopted the GEM for the federal government entities. Subsequently, other local governments have also implemented the GEM.

A careful look at the GEM reveals that it is not merely a quality management initiative. It is an integrated model that encompasses the diverse elements of NPM

such as strategic management, total quality management, business process reengineering, competition, customer satisfaction, incentives, co-creation, and the digital-era governance precepts. The GEM (G 4.0) entails six core values including futuristic vision, excellence and integrated capabilities, qualitative value, sustainable and pioneering performance, proactive and agile government, and leading innovation. The system is founded on the three pillars such as achieving vision, innovation, and enablers. Each pillar is associated with appropriate managerial practices.

3.5. Outcomes of PMRs

This section focuses on the outcomes of PMRs in the UAE in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, ethical administration, enhanced citizen satisfaction and trust. The available global data are used to substantiate the arguments. Table 3 shows the outcomes of PMRs in the UAE as found in different international comparative databases. Though limited in scope, IMD Competitiveness data provides a small glimpse of government efficiency. The table shows an excellent level of governmental efficiency in the UAE. It is limited in scope, in the sense that the indicators relate to how easy or difficult governments make it for investors to invest in the country.

Governmental effectiveness has been highlighted in worldwide governance indicators (WWGIs), failed state index (FSI) and global innovation index (GII). The WWGIs divulge a significant leap in the UAE governmental effectiveness (see Table 3). The Fund for Peace's FSIs measures fragility in terms of 12 parameters. Public services are one of them. This indicator focuses on the presence of basic state functions that serve the people, including the provision of essential services, as well as the state's ability to protect its citizens, such as from terrorism and violence, through perceived effective policing. Table 3 confirms the gradual improvements in public services over the last decade. In fact, the status of public service effectiveness can only be compared with that of advanced countries. Table 3 also shows the findings of GII. While the rank of the UAE was 36 in 2012, it rose to 20 in 2021.

The pursuit of ethical administration has also generated some positive results. The Federal Human Resource Law of 2008 and the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct enforced by the newly established Federal Authority for Human Resources (FAHR) seem to have provided some benefits in establishing ethical administration. WWGIs on the control of corruption and the CPI of Transparency International bear testimony to this claim.

Enhancement of clients' satisfaction and trust in the government has been another positive outcome of innovations in the UAE public management. According to the Eldman Trust Barometer Global Report (2018), trust in the UAE government is 77 percent, just below that of China. A World Bank empirical study (Brixi et al., 2015) has unequivocally found high levels of citizen satisfaction with both education and health services.

Table 3. Summary of the outcomes of PMRs in the UAE

Year	Government Efficiency (IMD World Competitiveness Center, 2022)	Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism		Government Effectiveness						Integrity (Control of Corruption)							
		Score	Percentile Rank (0-100)	WWGI (World Bank, 2022)	Government Effectiveness Score (-2.5 to +2.5)	Percentile Rank (0-100)	FSI (The Fund for Peace, 2022)	Score	Rank	GII (World International Property Organization, 2022)	Score	Rank	WWGI (World Bank, 2022)	Percentile Rank (0-100)	Score	Rank	CPI (Transparency International, 2022)
2021	3	-	-	-	-	-	2.9	151	81.2	20	-	69	24	-	69	24	-
2020	3	0.63	66.04	1.33	87.98	1.9	152	82.1	19	1.11	87.17	71	21	1.11	87.17	71	21
2019	2	0.69	69.34	1.38	89.42	1.6	149	80.4	19	1.11	83.17	71	21	1.11	83.17	71	21
2018	4	0.70	69.34	1.43	90.39	1.9	146	80.3	18	1.15	83.65	70	23	1.15	83.65	70	23
2017	4	0.62	66.67	1.40	90.38	2.2	147	81.6	16	1.13	82.69	71	21	1.13	82.69	71	21
2016	7	0.56	65.24	1.40	90.38	2.4	145	80.1	19	1.17	84.13	66	24	1.17	84.13	66	24
2015	3	0.76	70.48	1.51	91.35	2.7	144	73.0	28	1.07	82.69	70	23	1.07	82.69	70	23
2014	1	0.77	71.90	1.44	89.42	3.2	143	71.3	28	1.20	83.17	70	25	1.20	83.17	70	25
2013	-	0.89	74.88	1.18	83.41	2.9	142	64.5	34	1.28	87.20	69	26	1.28	87.20	69	26
2012	-	0.86	73.46	1.15	83.41	3.1	140	61.5	36	1.16	83.89	68	27	1.16	83.89	68	27

Source: Compiled from World Bank, 2022; World International Property Organization, 2022; Transparency International, 2022; The Fund for Peace, 2022; IMD World Competitiveness Center, 2022

Other empirical studies on strategic management in the UAE federal and local government organizations have also shown the positive impact of strategic management, BPR and e-government on the efficiency and effectiveness of the public service delivery system (Elbanna, 2013; Elbanna & Fadol, 2016; Al-Khouri, 2014). In addition to conventional performance outcomes, the UAE government's efficacy in managing different crises deserves attention. Different studies vindicate the effectiveness of the UAE government to respond to health, social and economic crises during the Covid-19 pandemic (Serikbayeva et al., 2021; Al Gharaibeh et al., 2021; 2021; Sundarakani & Onyia, 2021). Amidst numerous crises confronting the globe, political and sectarian violence and terrorism remain a serious concern. Following 9/11 and the Arab Springs, the UAE state has shown efficacy in ensuring public safety through the steadfast adoption of meaningful strategies (Antwi_Boateng & Binhuawaidin, 2017; Al Hosany, 2021).

A more comprehensive framework of political will is needed which underlines the effects of different characteristics of political will on the design and implementation of PMRs and subsequent outcomes. Moreover, it is also pertinent to understand the effects of environmental factors on political will, design, and implementation of PMRs, and outcomes. It is also relevant to explore how the outcomes of PMRs could possibly affect different characteristics of political will. These effects are not fully considered in earlier models of political will. The application of the proposed model in the case of UAE also highlights various dimensions of political will and other associated factors.

A wide range of environmental factors influence different characteristics of political will. For example, globalization and the need for economic diversification and the UAE regime have enabled reformers and actors in the government to underpin the perceived urgency and ensure the right incentive structures and capacity building in place (AlZawati et al., 2020). To seek better results, different sets of incentives, both financial and non-financial, have been introduced which have in fact produced positive results (AlZawati et al., 2020; Ahrens, 2013; 2014; Al-Khouri, 2014; Khalid & Sarker, 2019).

The availability of resources on a continuous basis underlines the higher level of political will towards designing and implementing reforms (Al Marzouqi, 2019). The associated outcomes of reforms are also continuously monitored. Citizen's satisfaction and efficiency measures have been used to improve the design and implementation of PMRs (Al Ahababi et al., 2019). The direct feedback effects of these outcomes have also affected the perceived urgency, actors' involvement, relevant structures, capacity building, and continuity of efforts in the UAE (AlZawati et al., 2020; Jabnoun & Khalifah, 2015; Al Ahababi et al., 2019, Abdel-Ahmed et al., 2015).

The Government Excellence program 4th G is a flagship PMRs that has basically integrated many NPM precepts as well as the digitalization of public services. The program itself is a direct response to the influence of external factors - globalization, socio-economic and cultural factors, and technological advancements (Khalid &

Sarker, 2019; AlZawati et al., 2020). The proposed model also shows the effects of the external factors on the outcomes of PMRs. The factors such as technology and regime type significantly affect citizen's satisfaction, efficiency, and effectiveness (Al Khouri, 2014; Sarker & Al Athmay, 2019; Al Ahababi et al., 2019).

The regime type, socio-cultural globalization, and economic and technological factors can also affect the design and implementation of PMRs. The findings suggest that the nature of the regime in the UAE is conducive to the design and implementation of the PMRs. Contrary to the view that a monarchical regime is not capable of pursuing reforms (Persson & Sjöstedt, 2012), this study demonstrates that a clientelist state with strong development orientation is quite capable of pursuing incremental reforms in public management in collaboration with other stakeholders (Andrews et al., 2017; Levy, 2015; Sarker & Al Athmay, 2019; Hvidt, 2009).

However, despite some successes as measured by the international comparative datasets, certain concerns remain there. First, there is an urgent need for the shift from the state-anchored model to collaborative governance to ensure sustainable public management performance. Second, skill gaps and the lack of local expertise might create hurdles in the long run as ascertained in a government report (Government of the United Arab Emirates, 2020). Mathias (2017) finds more serious problems pertaining to the low supply of quality leaders at both the middle and upper levels of public sector organizations (Matias, 2017). Third, there remain gaps in engaging citizens in the process of public value creation (Sarker & Rahman, 2020). Still there is a great deal to know empirically the actual situation. This essentially underpins that the proposed framework will provide the necessary impetus to encourage future conceptual and empirical research on political will. Particularly, the proposed framework can also be applied in a developing country context in which a better understanding of the relationship between political will, PMRs and outcomes is highly relevant and timely.

4. Conclusions

The study is an examination of the relationship between political will, PMRs, and outcomes in the UAE. The phrase 'political will' is widely used in public management literature. The lack of political will is also attributed to the failure of PMRs to render positive impact on public service delivery. This study has taken into cognizance of available literature on political will, PMRs and the outcomes and found out that there is a lack of an appropriate conceptual model which can be applied empirically. This study offers some new insights. First, the primary motivation behind this article has been to develop a conceptual model which can posit the concept of political will in a proper context and link it to the design and implementation of PMRs and the outcomes. Second, special attention has been rendered for the appropriate selection of the characteristics of political will and the external factors. The model shows that external factors impact significantly political will, the design and implementation of PMRs and the outcomes of reforms. Third,

the role of feedback is not prominent. This article has given immense importance to feedback. Performance data and information generated to ascertain the nature of outcomes carry significance for both political will and the design and implementation of PMRs. In fact, feedback plays a critical role in facilitating the survival of the reform program. Fourth, conventionally the presence of liberal democracy is considered a critical factor for political will that results in the successful implementation of PMRs and positive outcomes. However, this study has shown that PMRs can be successful and enhance public service delivery in the presence of illiberal democracy.

Finally, the new research framework will serve as a springboard for empirical research across diverse public administrative systems in the world. The strength of this framework rests with the interactive relationships among external factors, political will, PMRs and outcomes. The UAE case study reveals the relative success of PMRs which has been accelerated by the strong political will of the state with capacity, systems and structures in place. Governments looking to implement similar reforms should ensure that they have strong leadership and commitment to reform at the top levels of government. The study proposes that other countries should conduct their own studies to understand the interplay between political will, PMRs, and outcomes in their own context.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no potential conflict of interest.

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