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Research Article

Crisis Governance in Public Infrastructure: A Political Philosophy Analysis from the Thai State

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine crisis governance in the context of public infrastructure collapse through a political philosophy perspective of the Thai state. The objectives of the study were: (1) to examine how the Thai state exercised crisis governance in response to the collapse of the Office of the Auditor-General's building, particularly in terms of coordination, decision-making, and crisis communication; (2) to analyze the roles, interactions, and authority structures among key actors involved in the crisis governance process; and (3) to identify institutional implications for strengthening crisis governance and public infrastructure management within the Thai state. This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in interpretive and analytical inquiry. Data were collected through documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews, and field-based observations. Key informants were selected through purposive sampling and consisted of government officials and administrators, policy experts and scholars, practitioners and professionals, and disaster response volunteers involved in crisis management and public infrastructure governance. The data were analyzed using descriptive and interpretive analysis to examine governance processes, institutional dynamics, and crisis response practices.

The findings revealed that crisis governance in the Thai state evolved through a dynamic transition from fragmented governance to adaptive institutional integration. First, crisis governance was initially characterized by fragmented coordination, dispersed decision-making, and inconsistent communication, but gradually developed into a more integrated and adaptive governance structure under conditions of uncertainty. Second, the interactions among actors

demonstrated that authority structures and institutional roles were not fully predetermined, but emerged through adaptive coordination and negotiation during the crisis process. Third, the study found that institutional capacity should be understood as a dynamic and process-oriented phenomenon rather than a fixed attribute of the state. The crisis also revealed the fragility of state legitimacy and the importance of governance processes in maintaining public trust during conditions of institutional disruption.

1.Introduction

In contemporary societies, crises associated with public infrastructure are no longer understood solely as technical failures or isolated disasters. Instead, they increasingly reflect deeper institutional conditions related to governance capacity, state legitimacy, accountability, and the ability of public institutions to manage uncertainty under conditions of disruption. Within this broader analytical shift, infrastructure crises are increasingly interpreted as governance events that expose structural vulnerabilities in state systems rather than merely engineering deficiencies. The collapse of the new Office of the Auditor-General building in Bangkok on 28 March 2025, following seismic tremors originating in Myanmar, represents one of the most significant public infrastructure crises in Thailand in recent years. Although Thailand was not the epicenter of the earthquake, the incident resulted in severe structural failure, casualties, and widespread public concern, transforming a physical disaster into a national governance crisis. The event drew substantial public attention not only because of the scale of destruction but also due to the institutional significance of the building involved.

The significance of this incident extends beyond engineering or construction-related explanations. The Office of the Auditor-General is a constitutional institution responsible for transparency, accountability, and the auditing of public resources within the Thai state. Consequently, the collapse of its headquarters during construction generated profound symbolic and political implications regarding state capacity, institutional reliability, and governance legitimacy. In this sense, the crisis revealed not only the fragility of physical infrastructure, but also the fragility of institutional governance mechanisms embedded within modern state structures. From the perspective of political philosophy and governance theory, crises are not merely disruptive events but institutional conditions that expose how authority, coordination, legitimacy, and state power operate under uncertainty. Rosenthal, Charles, and ’t Hart (1989) conceptualize crisis as a condition that threatens institutional stability and functioning, requiring urgent decision-making under conditions of pressure and ambiguity. Similarly, Boin, ’t Hart, Stern, and Sundelius (2017) argue that crises reveal the adaptive capacity of governance systems and the ability of states to maintain legitimacy amidst disruption. These perspectives shift analytical attention away from proximate technical causes toward the broader governance processes through which institutional systems respond to disruption.

This study further adopts governance-oriented approaches that conceptualize crisis management as “crisis governance” rather than merely operational emergency response. Crisis governance emphasizes institutional coordination, authority structures, communication processes, and adaptive decision-making across multiple actors and sectors (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Christensen, Lægreid, & Rykkja, 2016). Within this framework, the state is understood

not as a unified actor but as a complex institutional system composed of interacting organizations and governance arrangements. Accordingly, crises become critical moments that reveal fragmented coordination, structural limitations, and latent vulnerabilities embedded within institutional systems. In the context of public infrastructure, governance considerations become particularly salient because infrastructure projects function not only as physical systems but also as symbolic representations of state capacity and public trust. Flyvbjerg (2014) argues that large-scale infrastructure projects often reflect broader governance risks involving accountability gaps, coordination failures, and institutional complexity. Similarly, Suchman (1995) emphasizes that institutional legitimacy is continuously constructed through performance and public perception. When public infrastructure collapses, the resulting crisis is therefore simultaneously operational and symbolic, raising fundamental questions regarding the credibility and authority of the state. The motivation for this study arises from the observation that existing research on disasters and infrastructure crises in Thailand tends to emphasize technical, engineering, or administrative dimensions, while paying insufficient attention to governance and political-philosophical interpretations of crisis. This study addresses this gap by examining the collapse of the Office of the Auditor-General building as a governance phenomenon that reveals the relationship between crisis, institutional fragility, authority structures, and state legitimacy. Rather than focusing solely on why the structure collapsed, the study investigates what the crisis reveals about governance capacity and the nature of the Thai state under conditions of uncertainty.

The significance of this study lies in both its theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it contributes to governance scholarship by conceptualizing crisis governance as a dynamic and adaptive institutional process rather than a static administrative mechanism. It further advances understanding of institutional capacity as an emergent property shaped through coordination, communication, and multi-actor governance interactions during crises. Practically, the study offers insights for strengthening crisis governance, institutional coordination, and public infrastructure management in Thailand. More broadly, it contributes to ongoing debates on how states maintain legitimacy and public trust during periods of institutional disruption and uncertainty.

2. Research Objectives

1. To examine how the Thai state exercised crisis governance in response to the collapse of the Office of the Auditor-General's building, particularly in terms of coordination, decision-making, and crisis communication processes.

2. To analyze the roles, interactions, and authority structures among key actors involved in the crisis governance process.

3. To identify institutional implications for strengthening crisis governance and public infrastructure management within the Thai state.

3. Methodology

3.1 Documentary and Theoretical Review This study employed a qualitative research approach grounded in interpretive and analytical inquiry. The documentary review focused on examining concepts, theories, and academic literature related to crisis governance, political philosophy, governance theory, institutional capacity, public infrastructure governance, state legitimacy, and disaster management. Relevant materials included academic books, journal articles, policy documents, legal frameworks, government reports, disaster management

plans, institutional guidelines, and publications from international organizations such as the OECD, the United Nations, and the World Health Organization. The documentary analysis aimed to establish the conceptual and theoretical framework for interpreting the crisis surrounding the collapse of the Office of the Auditor-General's building within the broader context of governance, institutional fragility, and state legitimacy.

3.2 Field Study The field study focused on investigating crisis governance practices and institutional responses related to the collapse of the Office of the Auditor-General's building in Bangkok. The study examined how state agencies, professionals, and response actors managed coordination, decision-making, communication, and governance processes during the crisis situation. Fieldwork was conducted through qualitative engagement with individuals directly involved in, or possessing expertise concerning, disaster response, governance processes, and public infrastructure management. This approach enabled the researcher to obtain in-depth insights into institutional dynamics, operational practices, and governance challenges emerging during the crisis.

3.3 Key Informants The study employed purposive sampling in selecting key informants based on their direct involvement, expertise, and relevance to the research objectives. The key informants consisted of four groups: 1) Government officials and administrators responsible for disaster management, public infrastructure, emergency response, and policy coordination.2) Policy experts and scholars specializing in governance, public administration, disaster management, and political analysis. 3) Practitioners and professionals, including engineers, planners, and infrastructure-related specialists involved in construction supervision or crisis response. 4) Disaster response volunteers and civil society actors involved in rescue operations and emergency management during the crisis. The number of informants was determined according to the principle of data saturation, whereby data collection continued until no substantially new themes or insights emerged.

3.4 Research Instruments and Methods The study employed qualitative research instruments designed to capture institutional experiences, governance processes, and interpretations of crisis governance. 1) In-depth Interviews Semi-structured in-depth interviews served as the primary research instrument. Interview questions focused on key themes including: crisis governance and institutional coordination, decision-making processes under uncertainty, authority structures and actor interactions, crisis communication, governance limitations and institutional challenges, and lessons for strengthening public infrastructure governance. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility for informants to elaborate on experiences and perceptions while maintaining alignment with the research objectives.

3.5 Data Collection Data collection was conducted through documentary analysis, in-depth interviews, and field-based observations. Documentary materials were systematically reviewed to identify governance structures, policy frameworks, and institutional arrangements related to crisis governance and public infrastructure. Interview data were collected through face-to-face and contextual qualitative interviews with key informants. Field observations and experience notes were also used to capture practical interactions, operational coordination, and governance practices during crisis response processes. All participants voluntarily participated in the study, and ethical principles concerning confidentiality, anonymity, and academic use of information were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

3.6 Data Analysis The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and interpretive qualitative analysis. The analysis focused on identifying patterns, governance dynamics, institutional interactions, and processes of crisis governance emerging from the empirical data. The researcher employed thematic analysis to categorize data into key dimensions, including:

coordination mechanisms, decision-making under uncertainty, authority and leadership structures, crisis communication, institutional capacity, and state legitimacy. The interpretation of findings was conducted in relation to governance theory, political philosophy, crisis governance frameworks, and institutional perspectives in order to develop analytical explanations concerning the Thai state's response to the crisis.

3.7 Research Findings and Presentation The findings of the study were synthesized and presented through descriptive and analytical discussion. The presentation emphasized the dynamic processes of crisis governance, institutional fragility, governance adaptation, and state legitimacy in the context of public infrastructure collapse. The study further developed a conceptual interpretation of crisis governance as an adaptive institutional process, contributing to political philosophy and governance scholarship concerning the relationship between crisis, institutional capacity, and the modern state.

4. Results

Objective 1: To examine how the Thai state exercised crisis governance in response to the collapse of the Office of the Auditor-General's building, particularly in terms of coordination, decision-making, and crisis communication processes.

The findings revealed that crisis governance within the Thai state evolved through a dynamic process from fragmented governance toward adaptive institutional integration. In the pre-crisis phase, governance structures were characterized by fragmented oversight, dispersed institutional responsibilities, and limited integration of information systems, resulting in latent governance vulnerabilities within public infrastructure management. During the crisis onset phase, the Thai state encountered conditions of uncertainty, incomplete information, and urgent pressure for rapid response. Initial coordination among agencies operated in a parallel rather than integrated manner, leading to inconsistencies in operational processes and communication. However, as the crisis response progressed, governance mechanisms gradually became more structured through strengthened communication channels, clearer coordination processes, and more systematic decision-making arrangements. The findings further demonstrated that crisis governance was not a fixed administrative mechanism but an adaptive institutional process shaped by uncertainty, institutional interaction, and evolving governance practices. Institutional capacity emerged dynamically through coordination, leadership alignment, communication, and authority consolidation during the crisis response process.

Objective 2: To analyze the roles, interactions, and authority structures among key actors involved in the crisis governance process.

The findings revealed that the roles and interactions among actors involved in crisis governance were not fully predetermined by formal institutional arrangements but evolved adaptively throughout the crisis process. In the early stages of the crisis, actors operated primarily within their organizational boundaries, resulting in fragmented coordination, decentralized decision-making, and overlapping operational responsibilities. The study found that authority structures were initially dispersed among multiple agencies and actors, allowing rapid operational responses but also creating ambiguity in governance processes and communication practices. As the crisis evolved, coordination mechanisms gradually became more integrated, and authority structures became clearer and more consolidated. This

transition enabled improved institutional alignment, more coherent decision-making, and more effective governance coordination. In addition, the findings demonstrated that both formal institutional arrangements and informal governance practices played important roles in crisis response. Real-time communication, adaptive interaction, situational judgment, and interpersonal coordination among actors significantly influenced the effectiveness of crisis governance under conditions of uncertainty and institutional stress.

Objective 3: To identify institutional implications for strengthening crisis governance and public infrastructure management within the Thai state.

The findings revealed that crisis governance in the context of public infrastructure collapse should be understood as a continuous and process-oriented governance phenomenon extending across pre-crisis conditions, crisis response, and post-crisis institutional learning. The study identified fragmented oversight, inconsistent regulatory enforcement, and limited integration of information systems as major structural limitations contributing to governance vulnerabilities. The study further found that institutional capacity should not be interpreted as a static characteristic of the state, but rather as an emergent and adaptive process developed through coordination, communication, leadership, and governance interaction during crises. These finding challenges conventional perspectives that conceptualize governance capacity primarily in terms of formal structures or resource availability. Moreover, the findings indicated that state legitimacy and public trust were strongly influenced by governance performance during the crisis. Public perception of institutional credibility depended not only on the occurrence of the infrastructure collapse itself, but also on how governance processes, crisis communication, and institutional responses were enacted and perceived during conditions of uncertainty. Consequently, the study emphasized the importance of integrated governance systems, preventive coordination mechanisms, adaptive institutional capacity, and transparent communication practices for strengthening crisis governance and public infrastructure management within the Thai state.

New Body of Knowledge

This study generated a new body of knowledge through the synthesis of crisis governance as a dynamic and adaptive institutional process within the context of public infrastructure collapse. The study proposes a conceptual framework entitled: “Reactive–Adaptive Crisis Governance Model” The model explains that crisis governance is not a fixed administrative mechanism, but an evolving governance process shaped by institutional interaction, uncertainty, authority restructuring, coordination, and legitimacy formation under conditions of crisis.

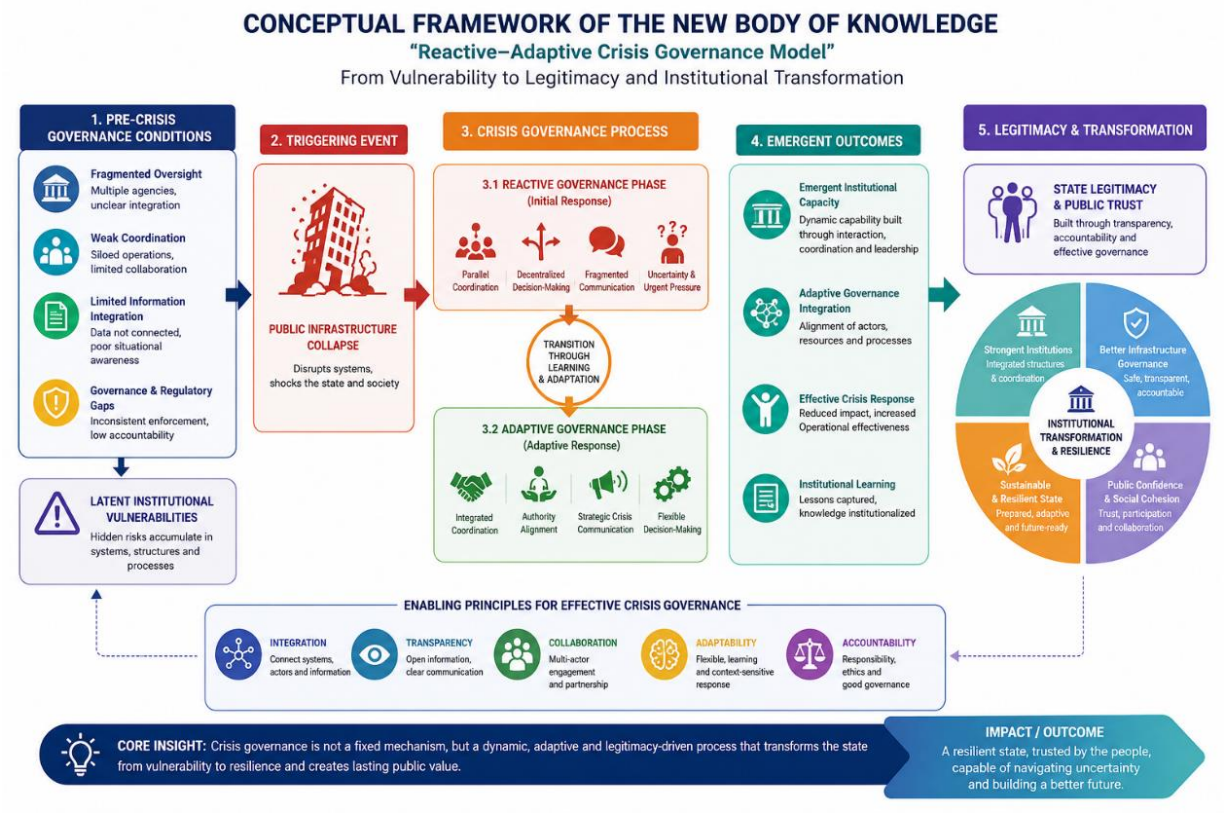

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

5. Discussion

The findings in relation to Objective 1 revealed that crisis governance within the Thai state evolved through a dynamic transition from fragmented governance toward adaptive institutional integration. Initially, governance processes were characterized by fragmented coordination, decentralized decision-making, and inconsistent communication under conditions of uncertainty and urgency. However, governance mechanisms gradually became more integrated and adaptive through clearer coordination structures, strengthened communication channels, and authority alignment. This occurred because crisis situations disrupted routine governance mechanisms and forced institutions to adapt under conditions of uncertainty, time pressure, and intense public scrutiny. The crisis therefore functioned not merely as a disaster event but as a governance condition that exposed the institutional capacity of the state and its ability to reorganize governance structures in real time. These findings are consistent with the concepts of Boin, 't Hart, Stern, and Sundelius (2017), who argued that crisis governance operates as an adaptive process shaped by uncertainty, institutional interaction, and the capacity of the state to maintain legitimacy under pressure. The findings also correspond with the governance-oriented perspective of Christensen, Lægreid, and Rykkja (2016), which emphasizes that institutional capacity is revealed through governance coordination and adaptive response rather than through formal structures alone. Furthermore, the findings align with Ansell and Gash (2008), who emphasized the importance

of collaborative governance and inter-organizational coordination in managing complex governance situations.

The findings in relation to Objective 2 revealed that the roles, interactions, and authority structures among actors involved in crisis governance were not fully predetermined by formal institutional arrangements, but instead evolved dynamically throughout the crisis process. During the early stages of the crisis, actors operated primarily within organizational boundaries, resulting in fragmented coordination and dispersed authority structures. Over time, however, governance processes became increasingly integrated through adaptive interaction, clearer authority alignment, and strengthened coordination mechanisms. This occurred because crisis situations require institutions and actors to respond under rapidly changing conditions where routine organizational structures are often insufficient. Governance effectiveness therefore depended not only on formal institutional design, but also on adaptive interaction, informal coordination, and situational decision-making among actors involved in the crisis response process. These findings are consistent with the collaborative governance framework proposed by Ansell and Gash (2008), which conceptualizes governance as an interactive process emerging through negotiation, communication, and institutional collaboration among multiple actors. The findings also correspond with the crisis leadership perspective of who emphasized that authority structures and leadership roles in crisis situations are often constructed and stabilized through adaptive interaction rather than predetermined institutional hierarchy. Moreover, the findings align with Moynihan (2009), who argued that effective crisis response depends on network-based governance and interdependence among institutional actors operating under uncertainty.

The findings in relation to Objective 3 revealed that crisis governance and public infrastructure management within the Thai state should be understood as a continuous and process-oriented governance phenomenon extending across pre-crisis conditions, crisis response, and post-crisis institutional learning. The study found that fragmented oversight, weak coordination mechanisms, inconsistent regulatory enforcement, and limited integration of information systems contributed significantly to governance vulnerabilities within public infrastructure systems. This occurred because institutional vulnerabilities embedded within governance structures often remain latent under routine conditions but become highly visible during crisis situations. The collapse of public infrastructure therefore exposed not only operational weaknesses but also deeper governance limitations associated with institutional fragmentation, authority dispersion, and limitations in preventive governance mechanisms. These findings are consistent with the perspective of Flyvbjerg (2014), who argued that public infrastructure projects frequently involve governance complexity, accountability gaps, and institutional risks beyond technical dimensions alone. The findings also align with Suchman (1995), who conceptualized legitimacy as a socially constructed and continuously negotiated outcome shaped by institutional performance and public perception. Furthermore, the findings correspond with Tierney (2014), who emphasized that disasters and crises reveal deeper structural vulnerabilities embedded within social and governance systems. Consequently, this study extends existing crisis governance literature by demonstrating that institutional capacity and state legitimacy are not fixed attributes of the state, but dynamic outcomes produced through governance processes enacted under crisis conditions.

6. Conclusion

This study examined crisis governance in the context of public infrastructure collapse through a political philosophy analysis of the Thai state, using the collapse of the Office of the Auditor-General's building as a critical case for understanding the relationship among governance, institutional capacity, authority structures, and state legitimacy under conditions of uncertainty. The findings demonstrated that crisis governance should not be understood merely as a technical or administrative response mechanism, but rather as a dynamic and adaptive institutional process shaped by uncertainty, institutional interaction, fragmented coordination, and evolving governance structures. The study revealed that pre-crisis governance conditions, including fragmented oversight, dispersed institutional responsibilities, inconsistent regulatory enforcement, and limited integration of information systems, contributed significantly to latent institutional vulnerabilities within public infrastructure governance. During the crisis process, governance initially operated through fragmented coordination, decentralized decision-making, and inconsistent communication. However, under conditions of institutional pressure and public scrutiny, governance mechanisms gradually evolved toward greater integration, adaptive coordination, authority alignment, and more systematic crisis communication. The study therefore demonstrated that institutional capacity is not a fixed characteristic possessed by the state in advance, but an emergent phenomenon developed dynamically through governance interaction and adaptive institutional processes during crises. The study further revealed that crises involving public infrastructure possess both operational and symbolic dimensions. The collapse of the Office of the Auditor-General's building exposed not only weaknesses in governance systems but also broader questions concerning state legitimacy, institutional credibility, and public trust. In this sense, crisis situations function as moments of institutional revelation through which the underlying conditions of governance become highly visible to society.

The new body of knowledge developed through this study, namely the "Reactive–Adaptive Crisis Governance Model," contributes to political philosophy and governance scholarship by conceptualizing crisis governance as a processual and legitimacy-driven institutional phenomenon. The framework also provides practical implications for strengthening integrated crisis governance systems, preventive coordination mechanisms, institutional learning processes, and public infrastructure governance within the Thai state. Ultimately, the study concludes that effective crisis governance depends not solely on technical capability or formal administrative structure, but on the state's ability to adapt, coordinate, communicate, and sustain legitimacy under conditions of uncertainty and institutional disruption. Crisis governance therefore becomes not only a mechanism of response, but also a reflection of the resilience, fragility, and evolving nature of the modern state itself.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Recommendations from the Study

1. The Thai state should develop integrated crisis governance mechanisms that strengthen coordination among agencies responsible for public infrastructure, disaster management, and emergency response. Integrated governance systems would reduce institutional fragmentation and improve the effectiveness of crisis response under conditions of uncertainty.

2. Government agencies should establish centralized information integration systems for public infrastructure governance in order to improve risk monitoring, communication, and institutional visibility across different organizational levels. Effective information integration would support preventive governance and early risk detection.

3. The state should strengthen preventive governance mechanisms through clearer accountability structures, more consistent regulatory enforcement, and continuous monitoring processes in large-scale public infrastructure projects. Preventive governance should be emphasized alongside reactive crisis response mechanisms.

4. Crisis communication systems should be improved to ensure transparency, consistency, and timely dissemination of information during crisis situations. Effective communication is essential for maintaining public trust and reducing uncertainty during institutional disruption.

5. Public infrastructure governance should incorporate institutional learning mechanisms that allow lessons from crisis situations to be systematically translated into governance reform, policy adjustment, and long-term institutional resilience.

6. The Thai state should promote adaptive institutional capacity by encouraging inter-agency collaboration, governance flexibility, and dynamic decision-making processes capable of responding effectively to rapidly changing crisis conditions.

7.2 Recommendations for Future Research

1. Future studies should conduct comparative analyses of crisis governance across different types of public infrastructure crises in order to examine similarities and differences in governance dynamics, institutional capacity, and legitimacy formation.

2. Further research should explore crisis governance from interdisciplinary perspectives by integrating political philosophy, sociology, governance studies, and public administration in order to deepen theoretical understanding of state responses under conditions of uncertainty.

3. Future studies should examine the role of digital governance, information systems, and emerging technologies in shaping crisis governance and institutional coordination within modern states.

4. Additional research should investigate public perception, trust formation, and legitimacy dynamics during crisis situations in order to better understand the relationship between governance performance and societal confidence in state institutions.

5. Future research may expand the Reactive–Adaptive Crisis Governance Model developed in this study by applying it to international cases or other governance contexts in order to test its analytical applicability and theoretical contribution.

6. Further studies should examine long-term institutional learning and governance reform following crisis events in order to assess whether crisis governance leads to structural transformation or reproduces existing institutional vulnerabilities.

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