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The Role of Ottoman Sultans' Reform and Modernization Policies in the Collapse of the Empire

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ABSTRACT

Abstract: This study examines the impact of reform and modernization policies implemented by Ottoman sultans on the eventual collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The research is grounded in the historical paradox whereby ostensibly progressive reforms coincided with heightened internal instability and increasing dependence on external powers. The principal objective is to determine whether these reforms constituted genuine processes of modernization or whether they contributed to the structural weakening of the Empire. Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative historical-analytical approach, drawing upon a multi-theoretical framework that incorporates modernization theory, dependency theory, cultural hegemony, and underdevelopment theory. The analysis demonstrates that although the reforms introduced administrative innovations and legal restructuring, they failed to produce sustainable socio-economic transformation or secure national autonomy. The findings indicate a growing reliance on Western institutional models, which undermined internal cohesion and ultimately accelerated the Empire's decline. The study concludes that reform, when pursued without systemic independence, may reinforce structural dependency rather than generate institutional resilience. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of semi-peripheral modernization processes and their implications for state stability and political collapse.

Keywords: *Ottoman Empire; modernization; reform policies; dependency theory; cultural hegemony; underdevelopment; state collapse*

Introduction

The decline and eventual collapse of the Ottoman Empire has long been examined through competing analytical lenses in historical and political scholarship. Within criminological and sociological theory, structural transformation and institutional adaptation are frequently analyzed not merely as administrative developments but as processes shaped by moral frameworks, power asymmetries, and systemic pressures (1, 2). From the seventeenth century onward, the Empire confronted mounting administrative inefficiencies, military setbacks, and expanding external intervention, which prompted successive waves of reform. These reform initiatives—particularly those associated with the nineteenth-century Tanzimat period—sought to reorganize governance, law, education, and economic



administration. Conceptually, such efforts resemble institutional reform strategies that aim to recalibrate structural environments in order to restore legitimacy and stability (3, 4).

Despite these initiatives, the Empire continued to experience systemic weakening. This paradox—reform coinciding with decline—raises fundamental analytical questions regarding structural adaptation and unintended consequences. The literature on institutional transformation suggests that reform may not automatically generate stability; instead, reforms can produce normative drift, moral ambiguity, and weakened internal cohesion when not embedded within stable structural foundations (1, 5). The Ottoman case thus invites examination of whether modernization efforts strengthened institutional resilience or, conversely, created new vulnerabilities.

Existing scholarship reflects divergent interpretations of reform outcomes. Some analyses emphasize rational administrative recalibration, while others highlight uneven implementation and structural fragility. From a sociological standpoint, reforms implemented under external pressure may create moral distortions and adaptive behaviors that alter internal institutional logic (2, 6). Furthermore, when external actors exert sustained economic and political influence, internal reform trajectories can become entangled with dependency dynamics. Structural transformation in such contexts may appear progressive while simultaneously reinforcing asymmetrical relationships of power (4, 7).

This study investigates the relationship between reform policies introduced by Ottoman sultans and the Empire's eventual decline. Drawing upon a multidimensional theoretical framework—including modernization analysis, structural dependency perspectives, and the concept of cultural hegemony—the research evaluates whether institutional reforms fostered sustainable transformation or inadvertently intensified systemic fragility. Analytical parallels may be drawn to theoretical frameworks that examine how structural interventions can unintentionally generate deviant adaptations or institutional drift when normative coherence is disrupted (8, 9). Employing a qualitative historical-analytical methodology, the study assesses key reform episodes and their ideological underpinnings to determine whether they consolidated sovereignty or accelerated disintegration.

By situating Ottoman reform within broader discussions of structural adaptation, moral boundaries, and systemic asymmetry, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how institutional modernization can both stabilize and destabilize political systems. Structural change undertaken in conditions of unequal power relations may reinforce dependency rather than produce resilience (10, 11).

Theoretical Framework

Prior analyses of Ottoman reform frequently describe modernization as a rational, top-down process intended to replicate Western administrative and legal models. Such interpretations often overlook deeper structural contradictions and the ideological dimensions of adaptation. Contemporary criminological and sociological theory emphasizes that institutional reform must be examined within broader contexts of power, moral order, and environmental structure (3, 4). These perspectives underscore that structural change is rarely neutral; it is embedded within normative systems and influenced by external pressures.

This study integrates multiple theoretical perspectives to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Ottoman reform. Rather than assessing reform solely in terms of administrative intent or policy output, it explores how internal elite aspirations intersected with global asymmetries and ideological transformation. Structural adaptation in unequal systems may generate hybrid institutional forms characterized by negotiation, coercion, and normative realignment (7, 10).

The framework combines modernization analysis, structural dependency perspectives, and the concept of cultural hegemony, with additional insights into moral transformation and cognitive restructuring. Modernization theory provides a lens for identifying institutional and administrative shifts; however, it may underemphasize hierarchical global dynamics. Structural approaches in criminology demonstrate that environmental configurations and power asymmetries significantly shape behavioral and institutional outcomes (3, 4).

Dependency-oriented perspectives highlight how systems incorporated into dominant global structures may experience constrained autonomy. Institutional reforms undertaken within asymmetrical environments risk reinforcing structural subordination rather than generating independence. This logic parallels theoretical arguments that actors embedded within constrained contexts may rationalize adaptation through techniques of neutralization or normative reframing (8, 9).

Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, when examined alongside analyses of moral boundaries and normative transformation, illuminates the ideological dimension of reform. The internalization of external administrative and legal models by segments of the Ottoman elite may be understood as a process of normative realignment shaped by hegemonic influence (2, 6). Such processes demonstrate how power operates not only through coercion but also through consent and moral restructuring.

By synthesizing these perspectives, the study conceptualizes Ottoman modernization as a contested and multidimensional process marked by adaptation, contradiction, and systemic constraint. Reform is analyzed not merely as administrative innovation but as structural transformation occurring within an unequal global environment. This integrated framework allows for a critical reassessment of whether reform policies enhanced institutional resilience or inadvertently contributed to the Empire's collapse (10, 11).

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative historical-analytical approach, integrating multiple theoretical perspectives to examine the causes and consequences of reform policies in the Ottoman Empire. The analysis is grounded in contextual interpretation rather than quantitative modeling, emphasizing structural conditions, institutional adaptation, and ideological transformation. Drawing upon theory-informed critique, the study evaluates reform initiatives through a framework attentive to power asymmetries, normative realignment, and structural dependency. In doing so, it parallels analytical traditions that examine how institutional change operates within broader systems of constraint and moral restructuring.

Through critical textual analysis of historiographic materials and reformist writings, the research traces how modernization efforts intersected with emerging dependency dynamics and cultural transformation. Rather than treating reform as a purely administrative endeavor, the study conceptualizes it as a process embedded within structural hierarchies and shifting moral boundaries. This interpretive strategy aligns with theoretical approaches that emphasize normative drift, environmental pressure, and the rationalization of structural adaptation.

Mechanisms of Western Influence and the Emergence of Dependency in the Ottoman Empire

From the fifteenth century onward, the expansion of European maritime trade and geographic exploration significantly altered global economic balances. As Western economic power expanded, the Ottoman Empire's intermediary position in East–West commerce became increasingly vulnerable to external restructuring. Structural

analysis suggests that when global trade systems shift, peripheral or semi-peripheral actors may experience constrained autonomy and increasing dependence on dominant economic centers (4, 7).

Over time, growing European economic penetration intensified Ottoman integration into Western-centered markets. External privileges, trade concessions, and diplomatic arrangements facilitated foreign influence over domestic resources and fiscal mechanisms. Such dynamics resemble structural incorporation processes in which asymmetrical exchange relations gradually erode sovereign economic control. The rhetoric of modernization and commercial openness often obscures underlying dependency patterns (10, 11).

Attempts at internal reform, including military and administrative restructuring, sought to mitigate these pressures. However, when undertaken within asymmetrical global systems, reform efforts may inadvertently reinforce dependency rather than eliminate it. Theoretical perspectives on structural adaptation demonstrate that actors operating within constrained environments may rationalize integration into dominant systems as necessary for survival, even when such integration deepens vulnerability (8, 9).

Unbalanced trade relations—characterized by the export of low-value raw materials and the import of higher-value manufactured goods—undermined domestic production and constrained industrial development. Such patterns reflect broader dependency dynamics in which peripheral economies become structurally tied to external centers of capital accumulation. Institutional modernization without economic sovereignty may therefore intensify subordination rather than generate autonomy (4, 7).

By the nineteenth century, surplus capital in industrialized Europe increasingly flowed into semi-peripheral regions. Financial centers within the Ottoman domain became integrated nodes in a global capitalist network. Although this integration stimulated limited regional prosperity, it also heightened exposure to external fluctuations and normative influence. Structural incorporation processes often involve not only economic penetration but also ideological diffusion, reshaping elite conceptions of governance and legitimacy (2, 6).

Early Signs of Crisis in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries and the Ottoman Response

Following the height of imperial expansion, the Ottoman Empire entered a period marked by military setbacks, fiscal strain, and administrative fragmentation. Reform initiatives during this era frequently aimed at preserving established structures rather than undertaking systemic transformation. From a structural perspective, attempts to defend the status quo under conditions of shifting global hierarchies may exacerbate internal fragility (1, 3).

Changes in global trade routes and the rise of European commercial powers reconfigured economic flows, reducing Ottoman access to traditional revenue streams. Fiscal pressures intensified taxation and disrupted agricultural and industrial production. Such structural stressors often generate secondary social consequences, including migration, urban congestion, and shifting class dynamics. Environmental and economic disruptions may alter normative expectations and institutional coherence (2, 6).

The expansion of European trading companies and capitalist enterprise further consolidated Western dominance in global commerce. While European states leveraged new financial and industrial capacities, the Ottoman economy remained anchored to traditional structures. The imbalance between evolving global systems and domestic institutional inertia constrained adaptive capacity. Structural misalignment between internal governance and external economic systems frequently produces institutional strain and long-term vulnerability (4, 7).

Amid these pressures, segments of the Ottoman elite began articulating reform-oriented critiques. Intellectual treatises emphasized justice, meritocracy, administrative accountability, and the restoration of ethical governance.

Such writings can be interpreted as early efforts to redefine moral boundaries and reestablish normative legitimacy within a changing political order. Theoretical analyses of moral transformation highlight how elite discourse often seeks to recalibrate authority during periods of institutional crisis (8, 9).

These reformist thinkers advocated administrative restructuring, merit-based appointments, fiscal transparency, and judicial reform. Some also recommended selective engagement with European administrative and military practices, while cautioning against uncritical imitation. Their proposals reflected a tension between preservation of indigenous traditions and adaptation to external models. Normative negotiation in such contexts may signal both resilience and vulnerability, depending on the structural environment in which reform unfolds (2, 10).

Collectively, these reform efforts represented an internal attempt to diagnose and remedy systemic decline. They sought to respond to external pressures through institutional recalibration in education, military organization, and commerce. However, the misalignment between domestic socio-economic conditions and imported models often undermined implementation. Structural adaptation without congruent institutional capacity may generate fragmentation rather than consolidation, reinforcing patterns of dependency and accelerating decline (3, 11).

The Tanzimat Era (1839–1876)

The Tanzimat period was characterized by intensifying European influence and internal fragmentation, which accelerated the Empire's orientation toward Western institutional models. Structural transformation during this era can be interpreted through analytical perspectives that emphasize environmental pressure, institutional adaptation, and normative realignment (3, 4). From the late eighteenth century onward, Ottoman political and military decline deepened the asymmetry between the Empire and European powers. Although reform initiatives began under Selim III, the reign of Mahmud II marked a decisive turning point in the structural modernization of the state.

Mahmud II (1808–1839)

By the early nineteenth century, segments of the Ottoman elite recognized that superficial engagement with Europe was insufficient to reverse systemic decline. They increasingly advocated deeper scientific, technological, and institutional engagement. This shift reflects processes of normative and institutional recalibration observed in contexts of structural crisis (1, 5). A defining feature of Mahmud II's reign was the reorganization of the military. The abolition of the Janissary corps and the establishment of a new army structured along European lines represented a radical institutional restructuring. Such reforms align with modernization-oriented logic emphasizing rationalization, bureaucratic centralization, and professionalization of authority (3).

Mahmud II's military reforms included the employment of European instructors and the restructuring of training systems. These measures signaled an intentional alignment with European standards of organization and discipline. From a structural perspective, however, institutional borrowing under conditions of asymmetry may generate dependency rather than autonomy (4, 7). Social reforms—such as mandating European-style dress for officials—symbolized a broader cultural shift toward Western norms. These measures illustrate how institutional modernization often entails symbolic and ideological transformation in addition to administrative change (2, 6).

The abolition of the timar system and the consolidation of centralized authority further demonstrate the pursuit of bureaucratic rationalization. By curbing provincial autonomy and transferring authority to the center, Mahmud II aimed to strengthen the state apparatus economically and politically. Such efforts reflect structural adaptation strategies designed to restore coherence amid fragmentation (3).

Educational reforms marked another transformative dimension. The establishment of modern military academies, the adoption of French as a language of instruction, and the creation of specialized institutions—including the Military Medical School—produced a generation increasingly exposed to European intellectual frameworks. The translation and diffusion of Western scientific knowledge reveal a process of normative realignment and epistemological transformation (2, 10). The emergence of a new intellectual elite familiar with Western administrative and scientific paradigms gradually reshaped Ottoman political culture.

During this period, prominent reformist thinkers analyzed the Empire's crisis and advocated structural change. They emphasized legal codification, institutional accountability, military modernization, and economic liberalization. Their proposals illustrate how elites sought to redefine moral and administrative boundaries in response to systemic decline (8, 9). Economic reform proposals, including liberalization and the creation of financial institutions, reflected an attempt to recalibrate state–market relations in accordance with perceived European models. However, structural adaptation undertaken within unequal global systems risks reinforcing dependency patterns (4, 11).

The transition from Mahmud II to Abdülmecid I marked a shift in elite consciousness. Increasing engagement with Europe facilitated the internalization of Western political and philosophical ideas. This process can be interpreted through the lens of cultural hegemony, wherein dominant norms are adopted not solely through coercion but through ideological consent (2, 6).

Abdülmecid I (1839–1861)

With Abdülmecid's accession, Western-oriented reform became formalized state policy. The issuance of the Gülhane Edict in 1839 institutionalized administrative reforms modeled on European legal systems. This development reflects deliberate structural modernization aimed at rational governance and legal standardization (3). The translation of reform decrees into French and the growing prominence of French as a cultural language facilitated the diffusion of European intellectual frameworks. Language adoption functioned not merely as a communicative tool but as a vehicle for epistemological transformation (2).

The expansion of scientific education, especially in military and medical fields, reinforced Western-oriented institutional restructuring. Young Ottomans studying in European institutions became conduits for ideological and technical transfer. Such processes exemplify how hegemonic influence can operate through educational integration and elite formation rather than direct political domination (10).

Franco-Ottoman cooperation during the Crimean War further intensified technological and intellectual exchange. Exposure to European military organization and scientific advancements strengthened reformist momentum. However, structural incorporation into European political alliances also deepened dependency on Western powers, illustrating the ambivalence of modernization under asymmetrical conditions (4, 7).

The elevation of French language and culture as symbols of refinement signaled a broader cultural reorientation. Intellectuals increasingly associated linguistic proficiency with progress and modernity. This phenomenon corresponds with analyses of moral and normative transformation, where dominant cultural models redefine standards of legitimacy and advancement (6).

The emergence of a modern press, including official gazettes and private newspapers, marked a critical development in the Ottoman public sphere. The press facilitated dissemination of reformist ideas and contributed to the formation of a modern intellectual class. From a structural perspective, the expansion of communication networks can both consolidate reformist discourse and amplify ideological diffusion (3).

Figures such as İbrahim Şinasi exemplified the intellectual shift toward European philosophical thought. Engagement with Enlightenment ideas and the simplification of language to reach broader audiences reflect deliberate efforts to transform cultural and epistemic frameworks. By the end of Abdülmecid's reign, French cultural influence had significantly reshaped elite identity and political discourse. The gradual "Francization" of institutional and intellectual life embodied both the aspirations and contradictions of Ottoman modernization. While these reforms aimed to secure survival and progress, they simultaneously embedded the Empire more deeply within Western normative and structural hierarchies (4, 11).

Abdülaziz (1861–1876)

The reign of Sultan Abdülaziz was deeply shaped by modernization initiatives and by efforts to align the Empire with what was perceived as the advancement of Western civilization. These developments reflected the growing internalization of Western norms among segments of the Ottoman elite and contributed to the formation of a new cultural and political identity. From a structural perspective, this phase illustrates how sustained exposure to dominant external systems can generate ideological realignment and normative transformation within ruling classes (2, 6).

Educational reform became a central pillar of this transformation. Plans for the establishment of modern elementary schools, curricular restructuring, and the incorporation of subjects such as mathematics, science, and foreign languages marked a decisive shift away from traditional educational models. Modern pedagogical techniques gradually replaced conventional modes of instruction. Such institutional restructuring corresponds to rationalization processes identified in modernization-oriented frameworks, where bureaucratic reorganization and standardized knowledge transmission are viewed as essential to systemic advancement (3).

However, modernization in education also carried significant cultural consequences. The introduction of European subjects and languages contributed to a widening divide between traditionalist and reformist elements within society. The tension between preservation of established moral boundaries and adoption of external epistemologies reflects broader dynamics of normative drift observed in contexts of rapid institutional change (1, 5). Critics argued that these reforms risked eroding religious and cultural identity, thereby intensifying internal fragmentation.

The establishment of institutions such as Dârü'l-Muallimîn, girls' schools, and later the Galatasaray Lycée further institutionalized Western-oriented education. The use of French as the language of instruction, particularly at Galatasaray, symbolized a deepening epistemological shift. Such linguistic adoption may be interpreted through the lens of cultural hegemony, whereby dominant norms are internalized through consent rather than overt coercion (2). The education of a multi-ethnic elite within these institutions facilitated cross-cultural exchange but simultaneously embedded Western intellectual frameworks within Ottoman governance.

From the Gülhane Edict to the First Constitutional Era, Western legal and commercial models increasingly reshaped the Ottoman institutional structure. Reforms in judicial systems, land administration, and commercial regulation aimed to align the Empire with European standards. The codification of property rights and the legal facilitation of free trade reflected deliberate integration into global capitalist structures. Structural incorporation into dominant economic systems, however, often entails asymmetrical dependency rather than autonomous development (4, 7).

The transformation of commercial treaties from the 1840s onward accelerated this integration. Liberal trade agreements constrained economic sovereignty and oriented fiscal policy toward European industrial interests. Such developments mirror dependency-oriented analyses, in which peripheral states become structurally subordinated through unequal exchange relations (10, 11). Rather than generating endogenous industrialization, these arrangements reinforced patterns of raw material export and manufactured goods import, limiting independent productive capacity.

The establishment of permanent embassies and an expanded diplomatic network signaled a growing awareness of international political structures. While these missions reflected strategic adaptation to global diplomacy, they also demonstrated the Empire's embeddedness within a Western-dominated international order. Structural adaptation within asymmetrical systems may simultaneously enhance participation and deepen vulnerability (3, 4).

Legal reforms in the 1850s and 1860s, including the restructuring of courts and the introduction of secular commercial tribunals, marked a decisive break from exclusively religious legal frameworks. The Hatt-ı Hümayun and subsequent legislation institutionalized equality among subjects and expanded foreign economic privileges. Although framed as modernization and liberalization, these reforms facilitated external influence over internal legal mechanisms. Such processes exemplify how institutional borrowing under conditions of asymmetry can reconfigure sovereignty itself (2, 7).

The increasing role of European capital—particularly through financial institutions and foreign-funded banks—further entrenched dependency. Integration into international financial systems created short-term fiscal stabilization but constrained long-term autonomy. Structural incorporation into global markets often generates hybrid institutional forms characterized by adaptation, negotiation, and persistent inequality (10, 11).

European supervision of reform implementation intensified under the guise of ensuring compliance with modernization commitments. This oversight strengthened minority elites economically and politically, provoking resentment among segments of the Muslim population. The resulting polarization reflected competing normative visions within Ottoman society: one faction embraced Western models as instruments of progress, while another perceived them as threats to sovereignty and tradition (8, 9).

Critics argued that wholesale transplantation of European institutions into the Ottoman context risked weakening rather than strengthening the state. Their skepticism aligns with theoretical perspectives emphasizing that institutional reform divorced from structural congruence may exacerbate instability (1). The deaths of leading reformist statesmen and shifts in European power dynamics prompted renewed evaluation of Tanzimat policies and stimulated revivalist currents emphasizing Islamic unity and traditional legitimacy.

Ultimately, the Tanzimat reforms reveal the contradictions inherent in adopting external models within a structurally dependent environment. The outcome was neither full Westernization nor preservation of established traditions, but the emergence of a hybrid institutional crisis. Modernization, when pursued without addressing asymmetrical power relations and normative fragmentation, may generate institutional strain rather than resilience. This case underscores the necessity of integrating modernization analysis with structural dependency and cultural hegemony perspectives to understand the Empire's gradual disintegration (4, 6).

Abdul Hamid II (1876–1909)

Repeated military defeats and geopolitical pressures reinforced the perception among Ottoman policymakers that fundamental reform was unavoidable. During the reign of Abdul Hamid II, emphasis shifted toward

strengthening Islamic solidarity as a unifying ideological framework capable of counterbalancing both Western encroachment and internal fragmentation. This orientation may be understood as an attempt to reconstruct moral boundaries and reassert collective identity in response to normative dislocation generated by rapid modernization (2, 6).

Abdul Hamid II sought to curtail the influence of Western-oriented intellectuals and to cultivate a new intellectual class rooted in traditional principles while remaining responsive to social transformation. Education was regarded as a strategic instrument for shaping public consciousness and preserving cohesion. This approach reflects a recognition that institutional reform must be accompanied by ideological consolidation; otherwise, normative drift and elite fragmentation may intensify systemic instability (1, 5).

The repeated defeats of Muslim polities by Western powers in the late nineteenth century fueled skepticism toward Westernizing policies. Under these circumstances, Islam emerged as an alternative ideological foundation aimed at restoring unity and legitimacy. From a structural perspective, this shift can be interpreted as an attempt to resist hegemonic cultural penetration by reinforcing endogenous normative frameworks (2). Critics argued that Western-educated elites had absorbed superficial aspects of European culture without fully comprehending its structural foundations, producing hybrid intellectual identities detached from indigenous traditions. Such patterns resemble theoretical analyses of cognitive rationalization and partial internalization of dominant norms, which may result in fragmented reform agendas (8, 9).

The emergence of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya reflected efforts to articulate an Islamic modernist ideology capable of reconciling religious principles with contemporary governance. By reinterpreting foundational texts through modern political concepts, proponents sought to construct a unified front against imperial intervention. This ideological project illustrates the contested nature of modernization within a dependent environment, where alternative normative visions compete to define legitimacy (10).

Simultaneously, new political groups—including reformist bureaucrats and intellectual movements—viewed Abdul Hamid II's centralized authority as an obstacle to progress. They advocated constitutional governance, rule of law, and parliamentary representation as solutions to structural decline. The promulgation of the 1876 Constitution marked a decisive institutional shift, reflecting engagement with European legal models and the codification of civil rights. Institutional borrowing of this magnitude demonstrates the interplay between modernization aspirations and external influence (3, 4).

The constitution, however, embodied competing ideological interpretations. When the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) consolidated power following the 1908 revolution, it reinterpreted constitutional principles to expand parliamentary authority and curtail the Sultan's prerogatives. Structural realignment of executive and legislative powers illustrates how reform frameworks may be appropriated by dominant political actors to consolidate authority. Institutional transformation under such conditions often generates hybrid governance arrangements characterized by oscillation between liberalization and centralization (7).

Subsequent amendments between 1912 and 1916 steered the political system toward semi-autocracy, as executive dominance resurfaced under new configurations. The use of "temporary" laws and expansion of executive authority reflected the instability of constitutional modernization when embedded within polarized political contexts. Structural reform without stable normative consensus may therefore reproduce authoritarian tendencies rather than institutional balance (1).

The broader modernization trajectory—initiated to preserve imperial survival—ultimately produced a profound rupture between tradition and imported modernity. The Tanzimat reforms, intensified in later decades, restructured military, legal, and administrative institutions but simultaneously displaced traditional religious frameworks from central governance roles. Modernization proceeded unevenly, disrupting established socio-political balances without generating coherent synthesis. Such asymmetrical adaptation often deepens dependency on external models while eroding internal legitimacy (4, 11).

Rather than harmonizing tradition and innovation, Ottoman modernization generated a hybrid crisis. Islamic-traditional identity was undermined, yet Western institutional forms remained only partially localized. The resulting structural fragmentation and unmet reform promises created conditions for further radical transformation. Ultimately, the Empire's collapse and the subsequent establishment of the Republic of Turkey reflected not only geopolitical defeat but also the cumulative consequences of modernization pursued within an environment of dependency, ideological contestation, and unresolved normative tension (4, 6).

Conclusion

The reform efforts undertaken in the Ottoman Empire from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries cannot be reduced to reactive responses to internal decline. Rather, they unfolded within a broader web of global entanglements shaped by the Empire's asymmetrical engagement with an increasingly dominant Europe. Military defeats and political crises acted as catalysts, but the reform trajectory was equally influenced by ideological confrontation and cultural transformation, which gradually reshaped Ottoman institutions, governance structures, and collective self-understanding.

Initially driven by segments of the ruling elite and later supported by emerging urban and intellectual classes, the reform movement reflected mounting internal pressures for institutional renewal. Legal codification, administrative centralization, and educational restructuring were pursued as instruments of regeneration. Reformist thinkers increasingly framed knowledge production and institutional rationalization as essential to overcoming stagnation. The promulgation of the constitution symbolized both a strategic and ideological attempt to align the Empire with contemporary political norms and to project vitality within a rapidly transforming international order.

However, Ottoman modernization did not follow a linear path of progress. It was marked by deep contradictions. While reforms introduced visible institutional changes and stimulated new political discourses, they frequently relied on the emulation of Western models without adequate adaptation to the Empire's sociopolitical fabric and historical conditions. This imbalance generated structural tensions between tradition and imported frameworks. The resulting hybrid institutional order neither fully preserved established norms nor successfully internalized Western paradigms in a coherent manner.

Consequently, modernization became ambivalent in its effects. Although it aimed to strengthen sovereignty and administrative efficiency, it often intensified dependency, fragmented authority, and undermined long-standing sources of legitimacy. Reforms reshaped legal, military, and educational institutions but failed to resolve entrenched fiscal, geopolitical, and identity-based crises. Rather than functioning solely as instruments of renewal, modernization policies at times exposed and deepened systemic vulnerabilities that ultimately contributed to imperial dissolution.

By situating Ottoman reforms within a multidimensional analytical framework, this study underscores that modernization was not a uniform or inevitable process. It was the product of continuous negotiation between

domestic ambitions and external constraints. Efforts to transplant institutional models across civilizational and structural divides encountered limitations rooted in global inequality and internal fragmentation. Economic integration without autonomy, political reform without stable consensus, and cultural adaptation without balanced synthesis produced a fragile equilibrium.

The failure of Ottoman modernization, therefore, cannot be attributed to insufficient intention or lack of reformist energy. Instead, it reflects the structural contradictions inherent in attempting transformation under conditions of dependency and contested identity. The Ottoman experience illustrates the complexity of reform in peripheral contexts, where the pursuit of modernity may simultaneously promise renewal and generate destabilization.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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