

Interference of External Actors in Bangladesh Politics



Ph.D. Thesis

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Interference of External Actors in Bangladesh Politics

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**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
UNIVERSITY OF DHAKA, DHAKA, BANGLADESH**

Dedicated to

My loving Mother,

My inspiring Dad

And

My ever, My Husband.

Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled “Interference of External Actors in Bangladesh Politics” is an authentic record of the research work carried out by myself under the supervision and guidance of Dr. Nurul Amin Bepari, Professor, Department of Political Science, the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. I further declare that the thesis has not been submitted for any other degree in any university or research institution.

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To Whom It May Concern

This is to certify that the research paper titled “Interference of External Actors in Bangladesh Politics”, submitted by Tanjina Noushin, bearing Registration Number: 208/2011-2012 and Re-registration Number: 23/2024-2025, of the Department of Political Science, University of Dhaka has been carried out under my supervision.

I have thoroughly reviewed the content, methodology, and analysis presented in the paper. I am satisfied with the academic quality, ethical conduct, and the overall contribution of this research to the field of Political Science. The research is original, relevant, and meets the academic requirements and standards set by the department.

Accordingly, I hereby grant formal approval for the submission of this research paper in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Ph.D. in Political Science. I wish the researcher success in their future academic and professional pursuits.

Sincerely,

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With thanks,

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Abstract

Since its liberation in 1971, Bangladesh—one of South Asia’s least developed countries—has made concerted efforts to move toward sustainable development. Along this journey, the country has had to adopt various large-scale development projects, which often require significant financial investment. However, as a developing nation, Bangladesh frequently finds it difficult to generate the necessary funds internally. Consequently, it seeks assistance from donor countries and international agencies, either in the form of aid or loans.

It is an observable truth that human nature often gravitates toward the exercise of power. When one party is dependent on another—especially in an imbalanced power dynamic—the stronger side tends to exert influence over the weaker. This phenomenon holds true in the case of donor countries and lending agencies. Since Bangladesh’s inception, these entities have been providing financial support to the government. In return, they often attempt to shape or influence national policies and development priorities.

There is growing concern that certain members of the diplomatic corps in Bangladesh have been overstepping their boundaries, disregarding the norms outlined in the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. Particularly, some relatively junior diplomats, serving as Heads of Missions, have behaved in an overtly offensive and intrusive manner, openly interfering in Bangladesh’s internal affairs. It is hoped that future governments will uphold the principles of the Vienna Convention and ensure that diplomats operate within the appropriate legal and ethical frameworks.

Criticism has also been directed at diplomatic representatives and officials from multilateral financial institutions who have made inappropriate public remarks about Bangladesh’s internal political dynamics and governance. While it is understandable that they are concerned about good governance and fair elections—given their financial stake in the country’s development—such interventions often appear too blatant and disrespectful of national sovereignty.

Nevertheless, we must acknowledge their role as stakeholders. These nations and agencies, as development partners, have a vested interest in the stability, progress, and democratic integrity of Bangladesh. Their concerns stem not just from altruism but also from the realities of globalization: instability, poor governance, human rights abuses, terrorism, and corruption in one state can have ripple effects across an entire region.

Bangladesh, like all nations, must remember its history and learn from it. Accountability to international opinion should not be feared, nor should institutional reform be delayed. Over recent weeks, many diplomatic representatives have engaged in dialogue with political alliances across the spectrum, including the newly formed NCP – National Citizen Party. They are participating a number of meeting with the other top political countries in Bangladesh like: BNP – Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Jamaat-E-Islami, AB Party and many other small and big political parties in the country. They continued their meeting with the different levels of the Interim Government members as well. These discussions are taking place ahead of upcoming elections, as these diplomats prepare to send election observers to monitor the process.

Such international monitoring is now a widely accepted practice in assessing the legitimacy of electoral outcomes. It lends credibility to the democratic process and reassures the global community of a nation's political maturity.

Rather than viewing these actions with suspicion, we should engage in deeper introspection. Why are these foreign entities expressing concern? What conditions within our own political system have prompted such extraordinary involvement?

The answer seems to lie not in support for any particular political faction, but in a collective desire to see Bangladesh return to stability through free and fair elections. It is also evident that these diplomatic missions are acting in coordination with their home governments. Observing the political inertia that has characterized the current Caretaker Administration, they have stepped forward, not to interfere, but to assist.

We must interpret these actions within a broader international framework, rather than through a narrow, partisan lens. Political uncertainty is a silent killer of development; one we cannot afford.

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CHAPTER: 1

Background of Bangladesh Politics

1.1 Preamble:

Bangladesh, located in South Asia, has a rich and tumultuous political history that has been shaped by colonialism, liberation struggles, military coups, political instability, and the growing influence of external actors. The country's political history can be divided into several phases, each marked by distinct shifts in power dynamics, internal struggles, and foreign interventions. From its emergence as a nation in 1971 to its current political challenges, Bangladesh's journey has been shaped by both domestic and international forces.

1.2 Pre-Independence and the Liberation Struggle:

The roots of Bangladesh's modern political landscape can be traced back to the colonial period under British rule. However, following the partition of India in 1947, Bengal was divided into West Bengal (part of India) and East Bengal, which became East Pakistan as part of the newly formed state of Pakistan.

East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) was economically less developed than West Pakistan, and its political influence was minimal in the central government. This led to resentment among the people of East Pakistan, who felt excluded from the decision-making processes of the Pakistani state. This discrimination sowed the seeds for the eventual demand for independence of East Pakistan eventually.

By the late 1960s, the political situation had deteriorated significantly. The Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, emerged as the leading political party in East Pakistan, advocating for greater autonomy. The 1970 general elections saw the Awami League win a landslide victory in East Pakistan, but the central government in West Pakistan, led by the military dictator Yahya Khan, refused to transfer power to the Awami League. This led to widespread protests and political unrest in East Pakistan.

The situation escalated into full-scale violence, and in March 1971, Pakistan's military launched Operation Searchlight to suppress the rebellion. The ensuing violence resulted in significant loss of life and the displacement of millions. The war lasted for nine months and was characterized by brutal violence, with significant intervention from India, which supported Bangladesh's independence movement.

The bravery of Mukti Bahini led to the defeat of Pakistan and the creation of the independent state of Bangladesh. The war left Bangladesh deeply scarred, but it also marked the beginning of the nation's struggle for political stability and sovereignty.¹

1.3 Post-Independence Political Turmoil (1971–1990):

Following independence, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman became the first president of Bangladesh. His leadership was initially hailed as crucial to the nation's survival, but his government quickly faced significant challenges. The new nation was economically devastated after the war, and political instability was rampant. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's administration, which had initially promised democratic governance, quickly shifted toward authoritarian rule, establishing the one-party system of Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BAKSAL) in 1975.²

In 1975, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated in a military coup. The coup was followed by a series of military-led governments. In 1977, Ziaur Rahman, a former army officer, became the country's first military president. He made significant changes to the political system. He established the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in 1978, and his regime was marked by the consolidation of military power and the introduction of Islam into the state apparatus.

In 1981, Zia was assassinated in a coup, and General Hussain Muhammad Ershad took power. Ershad's rule was characterized by authoritarianism, though he also made attempts to incorporate democratic elements into the system. Ershad formally legalized political parties and oversaw the introduction of multi-party democracy, but his rule remained undemocratic in practice.

Ershad's regime was marked by widespread corruption, political repression, and human rights abuses. In the late 1980s, as public dissatisfaction grew, a popular movement led by the combined opposition parties, including the Awami League and the BNP, forced Ershad to resign in 1990. This marked the end of military rule and the restoration of parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh.³

¹ Brigadier R P Singh and Hitesh Singh, *From East Pakistan to Bangladesh: Recollections of 1971 Liberation War* (New Delhi, India: Vitasta Publishing Pvt. Ltd., 2022), 101-102

² Anthony Mascarenhas, *Bangladesh : A Legacy of Blood* (London, United Kingdom : Hodder and Stoughton, 1986), 86-87

³ Lawrence Ziring, *Bangladesh: From Mujib to Ershad: An Interpretive Study* (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 1992), 55-59

1.4 The Emergence of Two Dominant Political Parties:

Following the end of military rule in 1990, Bangladesh's political landscape was dominated by two major parties: the Awami League (AL), led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's daughter, Sheikh Hasina, and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Khaleda Zia, the widow of Ziaur Rahman. These two parties formed the backbone of Bangladesh's political system and were often involved in a bitter rivalry that sometimes erupted into violence.

The 1990s and early 2000s saw alternating rule between the Awami League and BNP, with both parties accusing each other of corruption, mismanagement, and authoritarianism. The political environment became increasingly polarized, with street protests, strikes, and violence becoming a common feature of the political landscape. The period also saw increased involvement from external actors, including international organizations like the United Nations and the United States, which frequently intervened in Bangladesh's electoral processes and governance.⁴

1.5 The Role of External Actors in Bangladesh's Politics:

From the very beginning of its independence, Bangladesh has been influenced by external actors, particularly neighboring India and global powers like the United States, China and India.

International actors, including the United States and multilateral organizations like the United Nations and the World Bank, have also played a significant role in shaping Bangladesh's political landscape. These actors have provided foreign aid, offered political support, and sometimes pressured the government to adopt specific reforms related to human rights, democracy, and governance (Ali et al., 2021). While this external support has been crucial in the nation's development, it has also been a source of tension, with accusations of foreign interference in Bangladesh's internal affairs.

The United States, in particular, has been a key player in Bangladesh's political landscape, often positioning itself as a promoter of democracy and human rights.

1.6 Contemporary Political Challenges:

In recent years, Bangladesh's political system has been characterized by increasing authoritarianism, with the government under Sheikh Hasina consolidating power. The

⁴ Mohiuddin Ahmad, *Awami League, BNP Kon Pothe* (Dhaka, Bangladesh, Baatighar, 2022), 84-85

Awami League has been in power since 2009, and during this time, political opposition has been marginalized, with many BNP leaders and activists facing imprisonment or exile. The 2014 and 2018 elections were marred by allegations of electoral fraud, violence, and repression, raising concerns about the state of democracy in Bangladesh.⁵

Moreover, Bangladesh continues to face significant challenges, including political violence, corruption, and the growing influence of external actors (Ali et al., 2021). The country's relationship with India remains a complex issue, particularly in the context of regional security and economic competition. Bangladesh's strategic importance in South Asia also means that it is increasingly caught in the geopolitical rivalry between the United States, China, and India.

The political history of Bangladesh is a story of struggle, resilience, and constant evolution. From its liberation war to its current political environment, the country has faced numerous challenges, both from within and from external actors. Understanding Bangladesh's political landscape requires examining the interplay between internal political forces and the influence of external actors. This background provides essential context for understanding the nature and impact of external interference in Bangladesh's political system, which remains a critical issue today.

1.7 Importance of this Research:

Why are we Studying “Interference of External Actors in Bangladesh Politics”:

The study of external interference in Bangladesh's politics is a crucial endeavor, not only for understanding the intricacies of Bangladeshi governance but also for gaining insights into the broader dynamics of international relations, sovereignty, and the role of external actors in the political and economic spheres of developing nations. External interference in the political processes of a sovereign country is a complex and often controversial issue, one that raises fundamental questions about national sovereignty, the limits of foreign influence, and the impact of such interference on a country's development and democracy. In the case of Bangladesh, external interference has played a significant role in shaping its political trajectory, influencing everything from electoral processes to policy decisions and governance structures.⁶

⁵ Ali Riaz, *Ami e Rāṣṭro: Bangladesh e Byaktitantrik Shoirotontro* (Dhaka, Bangladesh, Prothoma Prokashon, 2025), 64-68

⁶ Bryn Rosenfeld, *The Autocratic Middle Class: How State Dependency Reduces the Demand for Democracy* (London, UK, Princeton University Press, 2021), 278-279

This section explores the various dimensions of external interference in Bangladesh's politics, emphasizing the importance of studying this phenomenon for both Bangladesh and the international community. We will look at the direct and indirect forms of foreign involvement in Bangladesh's political system, its impact on the country's stability, governance, and sovereignty, and the broader implications for the study of international relations and political science.

1. Bangladesh's Political Landscape and Its Vulnerability to External Interference:

Bangladesh, as a developing country with a complex political landscape, is inherently vulnerable to external interference. The country's political history is marked by instability, authoritarianism, and political violence, factors that make it susceptible to foreign influence. Since its independence in 1971, Bangladesh has struggled with political turmoil, including military coups, authoritarian regimes, and a highly polarized political environment. The country has seen the rise of powerful political parties like the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), each with its own vision for the nation, and each seeking to control the political and economic apparatus.

At the same time, Bangladesh's geopolitical location in South Asia, bordered by India, Myanmar, and the Bay of Bengal, places it at the center of regional power dynamics. This location, along with its strategic importance in terms of trade, security, and regional influence, makes Bangladesh a focal point for external actors seeking to exert influence in the region. The involvement of India, the United States, China, and international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has had a significant impact on Bangladesh's domestic political processes.

2. External Interference and Sovereignty:

One of the central issues when discussing external interference in Bangladesh's politics is the tension between sovereignty and foreign influence. Sovereignty, which refers to a state's authority over its territory and the ability to make decisions without external interference, is a foundational principle of international law. However, in the case of Bangladesh, the country has frequently faced foreign pressures, both overt and covert, which challenge its sovereignty.⁷

External actors, particularly those from neighboring countries like India and global powers like the United States, often argue that their involvement is necessary to maintain regional

⁷ David Lewis, *Bangladesh: Politics, Economy and Civil Society* (Cambridge, United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 2011), 71-72

stability, promote democracy, and support human rights. For instance, India's involvement in Bangladesh's independence movement in 1971 is often viewed as a positive example of foreign support for a just cause. However, in recent years, India's political, economic, and military influence over Bangladesh has been perceived by some as a form of neo-imperialism, with Indian foreign policy sometimes dictating Bangladesh's domestic affairs, particularly regarding issues like border management, trade agreements, and regional security concerns.

Similarly, the United States and the European Union have often involved themselves in Bangladesh's political landscape under the pretext of promoting democracy, human rights, and good governance. While such involvement can be seen as supportive of Bangladesh's development, it has also led to criticism from local politicians and the public who view it as an infringement on the country's sovereignty. For example, foreign aid and the conditionalities attached to it can sometimes shape Bangladesh's domestic policies in ways that prioritize foreign interests over the needs and aspirations of the local population.

The question of sovereignty versus foreign influence is particularly relevant in Bangladesh's political context because the country's political leaders have often been caught between competing external pressures. On the one hand, Bangladesh needs foreign assistance for its development, economic growth, and disaster management, while on the other, it seeks to maintain its political autonomy and decision-making power. The delicate balance between accepting foreign aid and maintaining sovereignty remains a significant challenge for Bangladesh.

3. The Role of External Actors in Bangladesh's Democracy and Governance:

External interference can also have a significant impact on Bangladesh's democratic processes and governance. Bangladesh has experienced numerous instances where foreign actors have played a role in shaping or influencing its elections, political institutions, and policies. For instance, the United States, the European Union, and international organizations like the United Nations and the Commonwealth have frequently been involved in monitoring Bangladesh's elections, providing technical assistance, and promoting democratic reforms.

While these external actors often frame their interventions in terms of promoting democratic values, the impact on Bangladesh's political processes can be far-reaching and controversial. For example, in the aftermath of controversial elections, such as the 2014 and 2018 national elections, which were marked by allegations of fraud, voter suppression, and political violence, the international community, particularly the United States and the European Union, has criticized the lack of transparency and fairness in the electoral process.

However, their criticism has often been seen as insufficient, as they continue to provide financial and diplomatic support to the ruling government, even in the face of such accusations.

The involvement of foreign actors in Bangladesh's elections and political governance raises important questions about the effectiveness of foreign aid and diplomacy in promoting democratic change. While foreign actors may support the process of democratization, their influence can also undermine Bangladesh's political autonomy, especially if the interventions are perceived as favoring one political party over another or if they encourage policies that prioritize foreign interests over local needs.

4. Economic and Developmental Impact of External Interference:

In addition to political interference, external actors also influence Bangladesh's economic and developmental trajectory. Bangladesh is one of the world's most densely populated countries, with a significant portion of its population living in poverty. Foreign aid and international investments have played an essential role in the country's economic growth, particularly in areas such as infrastructure development, poverty alleviation, and disaster management.

International organizations like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and regional financial institutions have provided substantial loans and grants to Bangladesh over the years. However, these funds often come with specific conditions attached, which can shape Bangladesh's economic policies in ways that benefit international investors but may not always align with the country's long-term development goals. For example, structural adjustment programs (SAPs) introduced by the IMF in the 1980s and 1990s were aimed at stabilizing the country's economy but also led to austerity measures that adversely affected the most vulnerable segments of the population.

Furthermore, the increasing role of China in Bangladesh's infrastructure projects has raised concerns about the long-term economic implications of foreign investments. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has led to large-scale infrastructure projects in Bangladesh, such as roads, bridges, and power plants. While these projects contribute to economic growth, they also carry significant debt burdens, which could potentially lead to economic dependency on China.

The impact of foreign economic interventions on Bangladesh's development highlights the need for a balanced approach to foreign aid and investment. Bangladesh must navigate the

challenges of leveraging foreign support for its development while avoiding over-dependence on external actors who may prioritize their own interests.⁸

5. Implications for International Relations and Political Science:

Studying external interference in Bangladesh's politics is not only important for understanding the country's domestic political environment but also for contributing to the broader field of international relations and political science. Bangladesh's experience offers valuable lessons for other developing countries facing similar challenges, particularly in terms of managing foreign influence and protecting sovereignty while engaging with the international community.

The case of Bangladesh exemplifies how external interference can take various forms, including economic aid, diplomatic pressure, covert operations, and military intervention. The study of these forms of interference is critical for understanding how foreign powers shape the political landscapes of sovereign nations, often with long-lasting consequences. Bangladesh's experience also provides important insights into the ethical dimensions of foreign involvement in the political processes of other nations, raising questions about the responsibility of powerful nations to respect the sovereignty of smaller, less powerful states.

Additionally, Bangladesh's political history underscores the importance of building resilient democratic institutions that are capable of resisting undue external influence. The challenges faced by Bangladesh in terms of governance, democracy, and sovereignty are shared by many countries in the Global South, making the study of external interference highly relevant to the field of comparative politics.

The importance of studying external interference in Bangladesh's politics cannot be overstated. External actors have played a significant role in shaping the political, economic, and governance systems of Bangladesh, often with mixed outcomes. While foreign involvement has been essential in supporting Bangladesh's development, it has also raised critical questions about the limits of sovereignty, the balance between foreign aid and national autonomy, and the impact of foreign influence on democratic processes. Understanding these dynamics is crucial not only for Bangladesh but also for other countries navigating the complexities of global politics and foreign relations. By examining Bangladesh's experience with external interference, scholars and policymakers can gain

⁸ Azizur Rahman Khan, *The Economy of Bangladesh: A Quarter Century of Development* (London, United Kingdom: Palgrave Publication, 2015), 45-46

valuable insights into the challenges of managing external influence and safeguarding sovereignty in a rapidly changing world.

1.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, the interference of external actors in Bangladesh's political landscape has been a persistent and multifaceted phenomenon, shaped by global geopolitics, regional rivalries, and domestic vulnerabilities. Historical evidence shows that foreign influence has manifested through diplomatic pressure, economic leverage, aid conditionalities, intelligence operations, and media narratives — each leaving a distinct imprint on the country's political processes.

While some external engagements have contributed to development and state-building, many have also undermined Bangladesh's sovereign decision-making and internal stability. Interventions have at times exacerbated polarization among political parties, influenced electoral outcomes, and shaped policy choices in ways that reflect external interests rather than domestic priorities. This has created challenges for the consolidation of democratic norms, the independence of national institutions, and the articulation of an indigenous development agenda.

At the same time, Bangladesh has demonstrated resilience by asserting its agency and negotiating foreign involvement on its own terms. The evolution of its foreign policy — from the early post-independence reliance on superpower patrons to a more balanced, interest-driven diplomacy — reflects an effort to minimize undue external influence while maximizing strategic autonomy. Nonetheless, the enduring presence of external actors underscores the need for robust legal frameworks, transparent political processes, and an informed citizenry that can critically assess both domestic and foreign pressures.

Ultimately, safeguarding the integrity of Bangladesh's political system requires not only vigilance against unwarranted interference, but also strengthened institutions that can uphold national interests, promote accountability, and ensure that the voice of the Bangladeshi people remains central in shaping their own political destiny.

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CHAPTER: 2

Objectives and Scope of Research

2.1 Preamble:

The objective of this research is to provide an in-depth analysis of the interference of external actors in Bangladesh's political processes, highlighting how such interference has shaped the nation's political landscape, governance, and sovereignty. This study will explore the multifaceted dimensions of external interference, examining both the direct and indirect forms through which foreign powers, international organizations, and global economic actors have influenced Bangladesh's political system. Given Bangladesh's strategic location in South Asia and its political and economic significance, this research will also address the broader implications of foreign involvement for the country's sovereignty, democratic integrity, and long-term development goals.

This section will outline the specific objectives of the study and define the scope of the research, including the topics covered, the limitations, and the approach taken to address the research questions.

2.2 Objectives of this Research

The primary objective of this research is to investigate how external interference impacts Bangladesh's politics, focusing on the key actors involved and the mechanisms of influence. The research aims to address the following objectives:

2.2.1 Examine the Forms and Mechanisms of External Interference

One of the key objectives of this research is to explore the various forms and mechanisms through which external actors—such as foreign governments, international organizations, and multinational corporations—exert influence over Bangladesh's political processes. This includes both overt interventions, such as diplomatic pressure, electoral monitoring, and foreign aid conditions, and covert forms, such as economic coercion, trade agreements, and political lobbying.⁹

The study will distinguish between different types of interference, including:

- Political Interference: External Actors influencing political decisions, party alignment, and leadership changes.
- Economic Interference: The role of economic assistance, loans, and trade agreements in shaping Bangladesh's policies and economic strategies.
- Military Interference: The involvement of foreign powers in security affairs and the impact on national defense and regional stability.

⁹ A. T. M. Obaidullah, *Institutionalization of the Parliament in Bangladesh: A Study of Donor Intervention for Reorganization and Development* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 18-20

- Cultural and Ideological Interference: The spread of foreign values, ideologies, and cultural norms that influence national policies and public opinion.

By understanding these forms of interference, the study will shed light on how they affect Bangladesh's political autonomy and policy-making processes.

2.2.2 Investigate the Impact of External Interference on Bangladesh's Political Stability

A core objective of this research is to evaluate the effects of external interference on Bangladesh's political stability. Bangladesh has faced periods of political turbulence, including military coups, violent protests, and contested elections. This research will explore whether external actors contribute to, mitigate, or exacerbate these issues? By focusing on key moments of political instability—such as the 1971 Liberation War, the military regimes of Ziaur Rahman and Hussain Muhammad Ershad, and the more recent elections in 2014 and 2018—the study will assess the role of external actors in both supporting and challenging Bangladesh's political system.

Specific areas to be examined include:

- Support for Authoritarian Regimes: Whether external actors have supported military or authoritarian governments that have curtailed democratic progress.
- Promotion of Democracy: The role of foreign governments and international organizations in encouraging democratic reforms, electoral transparency, and human rights protection.
- Impact on Political Polarization: How external support or criticism has contributed to the deepening of political divides between major political parties, particularly the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) ?

2.2.3 Assess the Role of External Actors in Electoral Processes

A significant focus of this research will be to assess how external actors have influenced Bangladesh's electoral processes. Elections are central to Bangladesh's democratic governance, but they have often been fraught with controversy, allegations of rigging, voter suppression, and violence. International organizations such as the United Nations, the European Union, and the United States have been involved in monitoring elections in Bangladesh, and their involvement has raised questions about the fairness and transparency of the process.

Key areas of focus will include:

- Election Monitoring: The role of international organizations and foreign governments in overseeing the electoral process and their impact on ensuring free and fair elections.
- Diplomatic Pressure on Electoral Legitimacy: The influence of foreign governments and multilateral organizations in the aftermath of controversial elections, such as the 2014 and 2018 general elections, and their efforts to shape the outcome or hold the government accountable.
- Foreign Policy and Election Results: How the results of national elections in Bangladesh are perceived by foreign governments and whether this perception affects diplomatic relations and policy decisions.

2.2.4 Explore the Geopolitical Dynamics of Bangladesh's Foreign Relations

Given Bangladesh's strategic location in South Asia, the geopolitical dynamics involving neighboring countries like India, Myanmar, and global powers like China and the United States are essential to understanding external interference. This objective will focus on how Bangladesh's foreign policy decisions, security concerns, and economic relations are influenced by its interactions with these external actors?

Key themes under this objective will include:

- Bangladesh-India Relations: The role of India as both a strategic ally and a source of tension for Bangladesh, particularly in relation to regional security, border issues, and trade agreements.
- Bangladesh-China Relations: The growing influence of China in Bangladesh through investments under the Belt and Road Initiative and its implications for Bangladesh's independence in economic policy-making.
- Global Power Dynamics: How the influence of the United States and other Western powers shapes Bangladesh's foreign policy, particularly in terms of human rights, democracy promotion, and military cooperation ?

2.2.5 Analyze the Impact of External Economic Interference

The economic aspect of external interference is another critical area of this research. Bangladesh has received significant foreign aid from international financial institutions like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and bilateral aid from countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom. These financial resources often come with conditions attached, which can shape Bangladesh's economic policies and priorities.¹⁰

¹⁰ Hasnat Abdul Hye, *Economic Issues That Matter* (Dhaka, Bangladesh: Pathak Shamabesh, 2021), 45-46

The research will explore:

- **Economic Aid and Conditionalities:** The influence of foreign aid and loans on Bangladesh's economic policies, particularly in sectors such as infrastructure development, poverty reduction, and disaster management.
- **Trade and Investment Influence:** How foreign trade agreements and investment deals with countries like China, India, and multinational corporations impact Bangladesh's domestic economic policies?
- **Debt Dependency:** The implications of external debt on Bangladesh's economic autonomy and its ability to make independent policy decisions.

2.3 Scope of Research

The scope of this research is focused on the political, economic, and governance-related impacts of external interference in Bangladesh, specifically from the 1971 Liberation War to the present day. The scope includes an analysis of various external actors—bilateral, multilateral, and global—which have had a direct or indirect influence on Bangladesh's political system.

2.3.1 Timeframe and Historical Context

The study will cover a historical period spanning from Bangladesh's independence in 1971 to the present day. This timeframe is critical because it encompasses the major political events in the country, including the Liberation War, the rise and fall of military regimes, the restoration of democracy, and the evolving role of external actors in Bangladesh's political and economic spheres.¹¹

Key historical moments will be examined in relation to external interference:

- **1971 Bangladesh Liberation War:** The role of India and international actors in supporting Bangladesh's independence struggle.
- **Post-independence Political Developments:** The influence of foreign powers on the political stability of Bangladesh during the periods of military rule (1975–1990).
- **Electoral Crises of the 2000s and 2010s:** The role of international actors during contested elections, particularly the 2014 and 2018 general elections.

2.3.2 Geopolitical Focus

While the research focuses on Bangladesh's political system, it will also look at the broader geopolitical context in which external interference occurs. This includes examining Bangladesh's relationships with its immediate neighbors—India and Myanmar—and its

¹¹ Mohammad Mizanur Rahman, *Foreign Aid and Bangladesh: Donor Relations and Realpolitik* (London, UK, Routledge, 2025) 81-82

interactions with global powers such as the United States, China, and the European Union. The research will assess how these relationships influence political decision-making in Bangladesh.

2.3.3 Political and Economic Influence

The scope of the research will include both political and economic dimensions of external interference. Political interference will be analyzed through case studies of elections, foreign aid influence on governance, and foreign diplomatic pressure. Economic interference will be explored in terms of trade relations, international financial institutions' influence, and external investments. Both dimensions will be analyzed in terms of their cumulative effects on Bangladesh's sovereignty, policy autonomy, and long-term development trajectory.

2.3.4 Limitations

While the research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis, there are some limitations:

- **Access to Information:** The study relies on secondary sources, including scholarly articles, books, and reports. There may be limited access to classified or sensitive political information that could offer a more detailed understanding of certain instances of interference.
- **Scope of Analysis:** While the study focuses on Bangladesh, the external interference discussed may have broader implications for other developing countries facing similar geopolitical challenges. However, the specific context of Bangladesh will remain the primary focus.
- **Political Sensitivities:** Bangladesh's political environment is highly polarized, and external interference is a politically sensitive issue. This may impact the availability of primary data and the ability to gain access to certain perspectives on the topic.

The objectives and scope of this research are designed to provide a comprehensive analysis of external interference in Bangladesh's political processes, focusing on the key actors involved, the mechanisms of influence, and the consequences for Bangladesh's political stability, governance, and sovereignty. By examining these factors in historical and contemporary contexts, the research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities of external interference and its impact on Bangladesh's political landscape.

2.4 Hypothesis of the research on “Interference of External Actors in Bangladesh Politics”

"Foreign government involvement in Bangladesh's political affairs significantly influences domestic political stability, electoral outcomes, and policy direction."

Breakdown of the Hypothesis:

a) Independent Variable: Foreign government involvement (e.g., diplomatic pressure, funding, intelligence support, public statements, economic aid conditionalities).

b) Dependent Variables:

-Political stability (e.g., frequency of protests, violence, civil unrest).

-Electoral outcomes (e.g., shifts in party performance possibly linked to foreign support or opposition).

-Policy direction (e.g., alignment with foreign strategic or economic interests).

There are some Sub-hypotheses of this research as well, such as:

a) Foreign diplomatic pressure has a measurable effect on Bangladesh's domestic policy decisions.

b) Electoral campaigns in Bangladesh receive indirect or direct support from foreign actors, influencing voter perceptions.

c) Political instability in Bangladesh increases in correlation with active foreign involvement or statements during critical political junctures.¹²

2.5 Key Research Questions and Significance

The research will focus on the following key questions:

1. What are the primary forms of external interference in Bangladesh's political system, and how have they evolved over time?
2. How do external actors influence domestic political parties, electoral processes, and policy decisions in Bangladesh?
3. What have been the short-term and long-term impacts of foreign interventions on Bangladesh's political stability and governance?
4. How do Bangladeshi political leaders and institutions respond to external pressures, and what strategies do they use to resist or accommodate such interference?
5. What lessons can be drawn from Bangladesh's experience for other developing nations facing similar forms of external influence?

2.6 Conclusion:

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform policy discussions surrounding the relationship between sovereign nations and external actors. By exploring the specific case of Bangladesh, the research will contribute to a broader understanding of how external interference affects political outcomes in developing nations, especially in South Asia. This study is particularly relevant for policymakers, international organizations, and scholars of international relations who seek to balance the interests of external actors with the need to protect the political autonomy of sovereign nations.

¹² Kirti Singh Chauhan, *Foreign Policy of Bangladesh* (New Delhi, India: Kaveri Books, 2012), 112-113

References for Chapter 2

9. A.T. M. Obaidullah, *Institutionalization of the Parliament in Bangladesh: A Study of Donor Intervention for Reorganization and Development* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 18-20
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11. Mohammad Mizanur Rahman, *Foreign Aid and Bangladesh: Donor Relations and Realpolitik* (London, UK, Routledge, 2025) 81-82
12. Kirti Singh Chauhan, *Foreign Policy of Bangladesh* (New Delhi, India: Kaveri Books, 2012), 112-113

CHAPTER: 3

Literature Review

3.1 Preamble:

The concept of political interference by external actors has been extensively studied in various contexts, particularly in developing nations where state institutions are often susceptible to external influence. Scholarly works on political interference emphasize the mechanisms, motivations, and consequences of such interventions, providing a comprehensive understanding of its dynamics.

3.2 What is “External Actors” according to this research?

External actors refer to individuals, organizations, or governments outside a country's borders that influence or attempt to influence its political processes, decisions, institutions, or outcomes.

Types of External Actors

a) Foreign Governments:

- Diplomats, embassies, intelligence agencies.
- Influence through aid, sanctions, military cooperation, or diplomacy.

b) International Organizations:

- United Nations (UN), World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), etc.
- Influence through conditional loans, development aid, or peacekeeping missions.

c) Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):

- Human rights groups, election monitors, advocacy groups.
- Influence public opinion, policy, or political transparency.

d) Multinational Corporations:

Businesses investing in the country may lobby for favorable laws or trade agreements.

d)Diaspora Communities:

Citizens living abroad who fund political parties, lobby foreign governments, or influence narratives in the media.

e)Foreign Media:

International news outlets shaping perceptions and narratives about a country's internal politics.

Forms of Influence by External Actors

- Diplomatic pressure (e.g., calls for free elections or human rights observance).
- Financial support to political parties or civil society groups.
- Intelligence and surveillance collaboration.
- Propaganda or disinformation campaigns (especially in digital spaces).
- Economic leverage (trade deals, sanctions, or development loans).

Examples In Context of Bangladesh:

- 1) When a foreign country urges fair elections, funds opposition groups, or imposes sanctions on political figures — that’s external interference.
- 2) When an international agency demands anti-corruption reforms in exchange for aid — that’s external influence.

3.3 What is “Interference” according to this research?

Interference in a country’s internal affairs refers to unauthorized or unwanted involvement by foreign entities—such as governments, organizations, or individuals—in that country’s domestic political, economic, social, or legal matters.

Key Characteristics of Interference

1. Violation of Sovereignty
It undermines a nation's right to make decisions independently without external pressure or coercion.
2. Uninvited or Coercive Actions
It typically happens without the consent of the country involved and often seeks to influence outcomes in favor of foreign interests.
3. Political Motivation
The aim is usually to shape political decisions, weaken or support particular parties or groups, or manipulate public opinion.

Forms of Interference

Type	Examples
Political Interference	Funding political parties, influencing elections, supporting opposition groups
Economic Interference	Imposing sanctions, manipulating trade agreements to pressure domestic policies
Diplomatic Interference	Publicly criticizing a government’s decisions, threatening consequences for internal actions
Military Interference	Deploying troops, conducting covert operations, or supplying weapons to domestic actors
Cyber and Information Warfare	Spreading disinformation, hacking political institutions, manipulating social media

Example in Context

- If a foreign country funds a media campaign to influence election results in Bangladesh or pressures the government to change a law — it's considered interference.
- However, constructive engagement, like offering humanitarian aid or cooperating in trade with consent, is not interference.

Difference Between Influence and Interference

Influence (legitimate)	Interference (illegitimate)
Based on mutual consent	Done without consent or against national interest
Through diplomacy and cooperation	Through coercion, threats, or covert actions
Respects national sovereignty	Violates national sovereignty

3.4 Definition and Dimensions of Political Interference

Political interference refers to the actions by external actors—states, international organizations, or non-state entities—to influence the political processes, governance structures, or policy decisions of a sovereign nation. Such interference can manifest in several forms and dimensions, ranging from overt military interventions to more covert mechanisms like media manipulation and economic coercion. Understanding these dimensions is crucial for analyzing the varied impacts and implications of such interference.¹³

Definition of Political Interference

Scholars define political interference as any deliberate action by external actors aimed at altering or influencing the political trajectory of a nation. Krasner (1999) highlights that sovereignty is often compromised under the guise of globalization or international norms. This interference can take the form of direct interventions, such as regime change or election manipulation, or indirect measures, such as economic aid with political strings attached. Nye (2004) emphasizes the role of soft power, where cultural and ideological tools are used to subtly shape political outcomes without overt coercion.

Political interference is not a new phenomenon. Historical examples abound, from colonial-era interventions to Cold War politics. During the Cold War, for instance, the United States and the Soviet Union frequently interfered in the political affairs of developing countries to

¹³ Akber Ali Khan, *Obak Bangladesh: Bichitra Chohnajale Rajniti* (Dkaka, Bangladesh: Prothoma Prokashan, 2017), 235-236

expand their spheres of influence. These actions often resulted in prolonged instability and disrupted governance structures in the targeted states.

Forms of Political Interference

1. Direct Interventions:

-Military actions: Invasions, peacekeeping missions, or support for insurgent groups are common methods of direct interference. For example, the NATO intervention in Libya in 2011 was justified under the pretext of humanitarian concerns but had significant political ramifications.

-Election manipulation: This involves funding specific political parties or candidates, spreading propaganda, or even cyberattacks on electoral systems. Studies by Kelley (2012) explore how international election monitoring can sometimes be a guise for influencing outcomes in favor of donor countries.

2. Indirect Interventions:

-Economic Pressure: Conditional aid and trade agreements are often used to exert influence. Dreher et al. (2018) discuss how the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank impose structural adjustment programs that dictate economic and political reforms.

-Media Manipulation: The use of media to shape public opinion and political narratives has gained prominence. Herman and Chomsky (1988) describe how global media networks can act as tools for powerful nations to promote their agendas in weaker states.

-Cultural Influence: Exporting cultural norms and values, such as democracy and human rights, serves as a subtle yet effective form of interference. This aligns with Nye's (2004) concept of soft power, where influence is achieved through attraction rather than coercion.

3. Hybrid Mechanisms:

-Cyber Interference: In the digital age, cyberattacks and misinformation campaigns have emerged as powerful tools for political interference. Rid (2020) highlights the increasing sophistication of these methods, which can disrupt political systems without direct physical involvement.

-Proxy Wars: Supporting rebel groups or political factions within a country is a longstanding method of indirect control. These actions often exacerbate internal conflicts, as seen in Syria and Yemen.

3.5 Motivations Behind Political Interference

The motivations for political interference vary widely but are often rooted in the pursuit of national interests. Strategic objectives, economic gains, ideological promotion, and security concerns frequently drive these actions:

1. Strategic Interests:

Securing geopolitical advantages, such as controlling key trade routes or establishing military bases, is a common motive. During the Cold War, the superpowers sought to maintain their dominance by aligning with client states.

2. Economic Gains:

Exploitation of natural resources or the imposition of favorable trade terms are often disguised as development initiatives. Sachs (2005) discusses how resource-rich nations in Africa have been subject to economic interference that undermines their sovereignty.

3. Ideological Promotion:

Spreading democracy or religious ideologies is often used to justify interference. Western nations, for instance, have supported opposition groups in authoritarian regimes under the banner of promoting democracy.

4. Security Concerns:

Ensuring regional stability or countering the influence of rival powers can also drive interference. For example, India's involvement in Sri Lanka's civil conflict was motivated by regional security concerns.¹⁴

3.6 Implications of Political Interference

The implications of political interference are multifaceted and context-dependent:

1. Positive Outcomes:

-In some cases, interference has led to democratic reforms or improvements in governance. For example, the international community's role in South Africa's transition from apartheid is often cited as a success story.

2. Negative Outcomes:

-More often, interference undermines sovereignty, disrupts political stability, and fosters dependency. Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) argue that external interventions often weaken institutions in developing countries, making them more vulnerable to future interference.

¹⁴ Anthony Mascarenhas, *Bangladesh: A Legacy of Blood* (London, United Kingdom: Hodder & Stoughton Publications, 1986), 24-25

-Nationalist backlash: Interference can fuel anti-foreign sentiment, leading to strained international relations and internal conflicts.

3. Long-Term Dependencies:

-Prolonged interference creates economic and political dependencies that hinder sustainable development. Bangladesh's reliance on foreign aid, for instance, has often been criticized for limiting its policy autonomy.

Political interference encompasses a wide range of actions and motives, from overt military interventions to subtle cultural influences. While some interventions have led to positive outcomes, the majority undermine sovereignty and stability. By analyzing the dimensions of interference, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of its mechanisms and impacts, particularly in the context of Bangladesh's political landscape.

3.7 Motives Behind External Interference

The motives driving external interference in the politics of sovereign nations are diverse, often stemming from strategic, economic, ideological, and security interests. These motives illuminate why external actors choose to involve themselves in another country's internal affairs.

1. Strategic Interests

Strategic considerations are among the most significant drivers of external interference. Geopolitical factors, such as controlling vital trade routes, gaining military footholds, or countering the influence of rival powers, often prompt interference. During the Cold War, for example, the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in numerous interventions to expand their spheres of influence, with both superpowers supporting client states and opposition movements to ensure alignment with their respective blocs. The pursuit of strategic interests is not limited to superpowers; regional players also engage in interference to secure their borders and enhance their regional dominance. For instance, India's interventions in its neighboring countries have often been justified by strategic security concerns.

2. Economic Interests

Economic motives frequently underpin external interference. Foreign actors may seek to exploit a nation's natural resources, gain access to lucrative markets, or establish favorable trade conditions. Conditional aid and loans, provided by entities such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, often come with stringent requirements that influence the recipient nation's policy decisions. This form of interference can create

economic dependencies that undermine the sovereignty of the targeted nation. Jeffrey Sachs (2005) discusses how resource-rich countries in the Global South often become targets of economic exploitation disguised as developmental assistance, resulting in the erosion of their policy autonomy.

3. Ideological Promotion

The promotion of specific ideologies, such as democracy, human rights, or religious values, is another common driver of interference. Western nations, in particular, have historically used the rhetoric of democracy promotion to justify interventions in authoritarian states. This ideological motive is often intertwined with strategic and economic interests. For example, the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 was framed as a mission to establish democracy, though critics argue that underlying economic and strategic considerations played a significant role. Similarly, the export of religious ideologies by certain states has influenced political developments in regions like South Asia and the Middle East.

4. Security Concerns

National security concerns are a significant factor motivating interference. External actors may justify interventions as necessary to counter terrorism, prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, or address regional instability. The U.S. intervention in Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks is a prime example of security-driven interference. Similarly, regional powers often engage in interference to address perceived threats near their borders. For instance, India's involvement in Sri Lanka's civil conflict and China's increasing engagement in South Asia are often attributed to security considerations.

External interference is rarely driven by a singular motive; rather, it is often a confluence of strategic, economic, ideological, and security interests. Understanding these motives is essential for analyzing the complex dynamics of political interference and its implications for affected nations, including Bangladesh. By examining these drivers, this research aims to provide a nuanced perspective on the motivations behind interference and its broader geopolitical context.¹⁵

¹⁵ Faiz Ahmed Chowdhury, "Geo-politics Democratization and External Influence: The Bangladesh Case", *IGS Working Paper Series No: 05/2013* (Dhaka, Bangladesh: Brac Publications, 2013), 25-26

3.8 Methods of Political Interference

External actors employ a variety of methods to interfere in the political affairs of sovereign nations, ranging from overt interventions to covert operations. These methods are often tailored to achieve specific objectives while minimizing direct accountability.

1. Direct Methods

Military Interventions: Military actions, such as invasions, peacekeeping missions, or the provision of arms to factions, are among the most visible forms of interference. Examples include NATO's involvement in Libya in 2011 and the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. These actions are often justified on humanitarian grounds or for promoting democracy but frequently result in long-term instability.

Election Manipulation: External actors may directly influence electoral processes by funding specific political parties, spreading disinformation, or tampering with electoral systems. For example, allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election highlight the global prevalence of this method.

2. Indirect Methods

Economic Leverage: Conditional aid, loans, and trade agreements are frequently used to influence domestic policies. Institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank have been criticized for imposing structural adjustment programs that prioritize donor interests over local needs.

Cultural and Media Influence: The dissemination of cultural values and ideologies, often through media and educational programs, can subtly shape political attitudes. For instance, Hollywood and Western media have been instrumental in promoting liberal democratic values globally.

Diplomatic Pressure: International diplomacy, including sanctions and public condemnations, is a common tool for exerting influence. For example, the imposition of economic sanctions on Iran has been aimed at curbing its nuclear ambitions.

3. Covert Methods

Cyber Operations: Cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns are increasingly used to disrupt political systems and manipulate public opinion. The use of bots and fake news to sway elections is a growing concern in the digital age.

Intelligence Operations: Covert intelligence activities, including espionage and support for insurgent groups, have long been tools of interference. The CIA's involvement in orchestrating coups during the Cold War exemplifies this method.

Proxy Wars: Supporting armed groups or political factions within a country allows external actors to exert influence without direct involvement. The Syrian conflict serves as a contemporary example of proxy warfare.

4. Emerging Methods

Technological Influence: The integration of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and surveillance tools, enables more sophisticated forms of interference. These technologies can be used to monitor dissent, manipulate information, and influence public discourse.

Climate and Resource Manipulation: In an era of climate change, access to resources such as water and energy has become a tool of political leverage. Countries may use resource control to pressure neighboring states or achieve strategic goals.

The methods of political interference are diverse and continually evolving, reflecting changes in global politics and technology. By understanding these methods, this research aims to provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing how external actors shape the political trajectories of nations like Bangladesh.¹⁶

3.9 Effects of Political Interference

The effects of political interference on a nation's governance, stability, and socio-economic development are profound and multifaceted. These impacts vary depending on the nature, intensity, and duration of the interference but generally include political destabilization, economic dependency, and social fragmentation.

1. Political Destabilization

External interference often undermines the political stability of targeted nations. By manipulating electoral processes, supporting rival factions, or imposing external agendas, such interference disrupts the democratic functioning and governance of a country. For example, the U.S.-backed coup in Chile in 1973, which replaced a democratically elected

¹⁶ S. Dutta, "Caretaking Democracy: Political Process in Bangladesh", *Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses Journal*, Journal no: ISBN: 81-86019-59-6 (New Delhi, India: Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses Publications ,2006), 23-25

government with a military dictatorship, resulted in decades of political unrest and human rights abuses.

In weaker states, such interference can exacerbate existing political tensions, leading to civil conflicts or prolonged instability. The case of Libya post-2011 exemplifies how foreign intervention, even under the pretext of humanitarian concerns, can leave a power vacuum that fuels internal discord and external exploitation.

2. Economic Dependency and Exploitation

Economic interference, particularly through conditional aid or trade agreements, often creates a cycle of dependency. Nations become reliant on external financial support, limiting their ability to make independent policy decisions. Structural adjustment programs imposed by institutions like the IMF have been criticized for prioritizing the interests of donor nations over the developmental needs of recipient countries.

Moreover, the extraction of natural resources under the guise of development assistance often leads to economic exploitation. In many African nations, foreign companies have extracted vast mineral wealth with minimal benefits accruing to the local population, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality.

3. Social Fragmentation and Cultural Erosion

Interference often exploits and exacerbates existing social divisions, such as ethnic, religious, or class differences. By supporting specific factions or groups, external actors can deepen societal rifts, leading to prolonged conflicts and social instability. For instance, in Iraq, the U.S.-led intervention in 2003 significantly heightened sectarian tensions, contributing to years of civil strife.

Cultural interference, through the promotion of foreign values and ideologies, can also erode local traditions and identities. While some view this as a form of modernization, others argue that it undermines national sovereignty and cultural heritage, creating long-term societal discord.

4. Governance Challenges

The imposition of external agendas often undermines the capacity of national governments to address local needs. Policymaking becomes skewed toward appeasing external benefactors rather than addressing the concerns of the populace. This can lead to a loss of public trust in government institutions, further weakening state capacity and legitimacy.

In some cases, interference results in the establishment of puppet regimes that lack popular support and are heavily reliant on foreign backing. Such regimes are often unable to maintain stability or foster long-term development, perpetuating cycles of dependence and underdevelopment.

5. Geopolitical Implications

Interference in one nation often has ripple effects across the region. It can destabilize neighboring countries, disrupt regional trade, and provoke retaliatory actions from rival powers. The proxy wars in Syria and Yemen are stark examples of how external interference can escalate into broader regional conflicts, with devastating humanitarian consequences.

The effects of political interference are far-reaching and deeply intertwined with the broader geopolitical landscape. While some forms of interference may bring short-term benefits, such as removing oppressive regimes or fostering economic growth, the long-term consequences often include political instability, economic dependency, and social fragmentation. Understanding these effects is essential for crafting strategies to mitigate the adverse impacts of external interference on nations like Bangladesh.¹⁷

3.10 The Role of International Organizations

International organizations play a critical role in shaping the political, economic, and social landscapes of sovereign nations. These entities, including the United Nations (UN), World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), European Union (EU), and regional organizations such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), often intervene under the guise of promoting stability, democracy, and development. While their involvement can have positive outcomes, it also raises concerns about the extent to which these interventions respect the sovereignty of nations, particularly in politically sensitive regions like Bangladesh.

1. Advocacy for Democracy and Governance

One of the primary functions of international organizations is to promote democratic governance and uphold human rights. The UN, through its electoral observation missions, ensures transparency and credibility in elections. For instance, its initiatives have provided critical support to countries transitioning from autocratic regimes to democratic governance. Similarly, the EU has often tied financial aid to the adherence to democratic principles, encouraging reforms in governance.

¹⁷ S. Bryan & D. Baer, “Money in Politics: A study of Party Financing Practices in 22 countries”, *National Democratic Institute for International Affairs Journal*, ISBN 1-880134- 349 (Washington, DC, USA: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs Publications, 2009), 28-29.

However, these advocacy efforts can sometimes veer into the realm of political interference. Critics argue that imposing Western-style democratic norms on culturally diverse nations often disregards local contexts and traditional governance structures. For example, the introduction of rapid democratic reforms in post-conflict nations has occasionally resulted in instability rather than fostering inclusive governance. This dynamic underscores the tension between international norms and local realities.

2. Economic Influence and Conditionalities

International financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank significantly influence national policies through their economic interventions. By providing loans and development assistance, these organizations often impose conditionalities aimed at ensuring fiscal discipline and market liberalization. In Bangladesh, structural adjustment programs (SAPs) have required reforms in areas such as trade liberalization, privatization, and subsidy reduction.

While these reforms can stimulate economic growth, they often come at a cost. Critics argue that SAPs frequently prioritize the interests of donor nations over the developmental needs of recipient countries. For example, the reduction of subsidies in agriculture and essential services has at times exacerbated poverty and inequality. Moreover, these economic conditions can limit the autonomy of governments, effectively constraining their ability to address domestic priorities.

3. Humanitarian and Peacekeeping Roles

In times of crisis, international organizations often step in to provide humanitarian aid and facilitate peacebuilding efforts. The UN's peacekeeping missions, for instance, have been instrumental in stabilizing conflict zones and rebuilding war-torn nations. Bangladesh's participation in these missions highlights the dual role such organizations play—both as interveners and as platforms for member states to contribute to global peace.

However, the deployment of peacekeeping forces or humanitarian aid can sometimes mask broader political agendas. For instance, interventions that are ostensibly humanitarian may be strategically aligned with the geopolitical interests of powerful member states. This duality raises questions about the neutrality and impartiality of international organizations.

4. Mediation in Regional Disputes

Regional organizations like SAARC play a vital role in mediating disputes and fostering cooperation among neighboring states. In South Asia, where historical tensions and border

disputes are prevalent, SAARC has sought to create platforms for dialogue and regional integration. By promoting collaborative solutions, such organizations can mitigate the risk of external interference by fostering regional self-reliance.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of regional organizations often hinges on the political will of member states. In the case of SAARC, progress has been hindered by bilateral tensions, particularly between India and Pakistan. This lack of cohesion has limited the organization's ability to address pressing regional issues, including external interference in the political affairs of smaller member states like Bangladesh.

5. Challenges and Criticisms

Despite their stated objectives, international organizations face significant criticism for their perceived biases and lack of accountability. Powerful member states often dominate decision-making processes, leading to policies that reflect their interests rather than those of smaller nations. For instance, the voting structures in the IMF and World Bank disproportionately favor wealthier countries, undermining the principle of equal representation.

Additionally, the enforcement of international norms can sometimes clash with national sovereignty. While the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine aims to prevent atrocities, its implementation has been criticized for serving as a pretext for military interventions. These actions often leave affected nations politically destabilized and economically weakened.

6. Implications for Bangladesh

For Bangladesh, the role of international organizations is both an opportunity and a challenge. On the one hand, institutions like the UN and World Bank have provided critical support for development projects, disaster management, and poverty alleviation. On the other hand, their interventions have occasionally constrained Bangladesh's policy autonomy, particularly in areas influenced by donor-driven agendas.

In navigating these dynamics, Bangladesh must strike a balance between leveraging international support and safeguarding its sovereignty. Strengthening regional cooperation through platforms like SAARC and diversifying diplomatic engagements can reduce over-reliance on external actors, ensuring that international interventions align more closely with national priorities.

The role of international organizations in political interference is complex and multifaceted. While these entities can provide valuable support for governance, development, and stability, their actions often reflect broader geopolitical interests. For nations like Bangladesh, understanding and managing these dynamics is crucial to ensuring that international involvement contributes to sustainable growth and sovereignty rather than undermining it.¹⁸

3.11 Gaps in the Literature

While extensive research has been conducted on political interference and its implications, several critical gaps remain that merit further exploration. These gaps hinder a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, particularly in the context of countries like Bangladesh. Identifying and addressing these gaps is essential for developing more effective strategies to mitigate external interference and its consequences.

1. Limited Focus on Regional Contexts

Most studies on political interference tend to focus on global power dynamics or high-profile cases involving superpowers, leaving smaller nations underexplored. Research on South Asia, particularly Bangladesh, often examines the region in aggregate without delving into the unique socio-political and historical factors that shape each nation's vulnerability to external interference. This lack of specificity creates a gap in understanding how regional and local dynamics influence the nature and impact of interference.

For example, Bangladesh's geopolitical location, nestled between India and China, makes it a critical point of interest for both regional and global powers. However, existing literature often fails to analyze how this strategic importance translates into specific methods of interference, such as economic investments, cultural diplomacy, or covert political operations.

2. Insufficient Exploration of Non-Traditional Actors

Traditional literature primarily focuses on state actors and their influence on domestic politics through direct or overt means. While this perspective is valuable, it overlooks the growing role of non-state actors and multinational corporations in political interference. International NGOs, private corporations, and even social media platforms now wield significant power in shaping political narratives and influencing electoral outcomes.

¹⁸ S. DeSilva-Ranasinghe, "Impasse in Indo-Bangladesh Relations", *The Harvard International Review* (London, UK: Harvard UK Press, 2011), 21-22

For instance, the impact of digital platforms in spreading propaganda or manipulating public opinion remains underexplored in the Bangladeshi context. Social media's role as a tool for external actors to amplify political divisions or undermine democratic processes is an emerging area that requires more scholarly attention.

3. Overemphasis on Economic Dimensions

Many studies on external interference emphasize economic factors, such as foreign aid, debt diplomacy, and trade agreements. While these are undeniably important, this focus often comes at the expense of exploring other dimensions, such as cultural and ideological influences. External actors frequently use soft power—through media, education, and cultural exchanges—to shape political ideologies and alignments in target nations.

In Bangladesh, for example, foreign-funded educational institutions and media outlets play a subtle yet impactful role in shaping public opinion and policy preferences. However, these cultural and ideological dimensions are often relegated to secondary importance in academic discussions, creating a gap in holistic analysis.

4. Lack of Comparative Studies

Comparative analyses of external interference in different national contexts can provide valuable insights into patterns, methods, and outcomes. However, there is a noticeable scarcity of such studies involving Bangladesh. Most existing research either isolates Bangladesh's experiences or compares it only with immediate neighbors like India and Pakistan, missing the opportunity to draw parallels with other nations facing similar challenges.

Comparing Bangladesh's experiences with those of African, Latin American, or Southeast Asian countries could uncover common strategies used by external actors and identify best practices for resistance. This comparative perspective is crucial for situating Bangladesh's challenges within a broader global framework.

5. Minimal Examination of Long-Term Impacts

Research on political interference often focuses on immediate or short-term consequences, such as election outcomes or policy shifts. However, the long-term implications of sustained interference on governance, institutional stability, and national identity are less frequently examined. In Bangladesh, where political interference has spanned decades, understanding its cumulative effects is vital for addressing systemic vulnerabilities.

For instance, how does prolonged external involvement influence public trust in democratic institutions or the capacity of local leaders to formulate independent policies? These questions remain largely unanswered in the existing literature.

6. Underrepresentation of Local Perspectives

Much of the literature on political interference is produced by scholars and institutions based in the Global North. While these perspectives provide valuable theoretical frameworks, they often lack the nuanced understanding that comes from local experiences and viewpoints. In Bangladesh, local academics, policymakers, and civil society organizations are uniquely positioned to offer insights into the country's specific challenges and responses to external interference.

However, these local voices are often underrepresented in international academic discourse. Encouraging more research from Bangladeshi scholars and institutions can help bridge this gap and ensure that analyses are grounded in the country's socio-political realities.

7. Ethical Considerations and Accountability

Another overlooked area in the literature is the ethical dimension of external interference. While much has been written about the methods and outcomes of interference, there is less discussion about the ethical implications of such actions. For example, how should international organizations or donor nations balance their strategic interests with respect for national sovereignty? What mechanisms exist to hold interfering actors accountable for the negative consequences of their actions?

Addressing these ethical questions is particularly relevant in cases where interference undermines democratic processes or exacerbates social inequalities. Incorporating these considerations into future research can provide a more balanced and responsible approach to studying political interference.

The existing body of research on political interference provides valuable insights into the phenomenon but is marked by significant gaps that limit its applicability to countries like Bangladesh. Addressing these gaps—through localized studies, comparative analyses, and a broader exploration of non-traditional actors and dimensions—is essential for developing a comprehensive understanding of the issue. By prioritizing these areas, future research can contribute to more effective strategies for mitigating external interference and promoting sustainable governance.¹⁹

¹⁹ A Kumar, "Bangladesh: Country Prepares for Political Reforms", *South Asia Analysis Group Journal*, Paper no. 2248, (New Delhi, India: South Asia Analysis Group Publication, 2012), 12-14

3.12 Emerging Trends and Future Directions

The study of political interference is continuously evolving, shaped by the dynamic nature of international relations, technological advancements, and shifting geopolitical landscapes. Emerging trends in this field highlight new methods and motivations for interference, while future directions point to areas where further research and policy development are urgently needed. Understanding these trends and directions is critical for addressing the challenges posed by external actors in countries like Bangladesh.

1. Increasing Role of Technology in Political Interference

One of the most significant emerging trends is the growing use of technology in political interference. Digital platforms, artificial intelligence (AI), and big data analytics have revolutionized the way external actors influence domestic politics. Tools such as social media manipulation, cyberattacks, and algorithmic bias are now integral to interference strategies.

For example, social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have been exploited to disseminate disinformation, amplify polarizing narratives, and manipulate public opinion. These activities often target electoral processes, as seen in cases of foreign interference in major elections globally. In Bangladesh, social media has become a battleground for external actors seeking to influence political discourse and destabilize democratic institutions.

Future research must focus on understanding the mechanics of digital interference, including how algorithms can be weaponized and how governments can counteract such activities without infringing on freedoms of expression.

2. Shift from Hard Power to Soft Power Strategies

Another emerging trend is the increasing reliance on soft power strategies by external actors. While traditional forms of interference often involved military intervention or economic coercion, contemporary methods emphasize cultural diplomacy, educational exchange programs, and media influence. These strategies are subtler but equally impactful, as they shape societal values and political attitudes over time.

In Bangladesh, soft power is evident in initiatives funded by foreign governments to promote specific ideologies or political alignments. For instance, foreign-funded educational institutions and media outlets play a role in shaping public perceptions and policy preferences. Research on how these soft power tactics are employed and their long-term effects on national sovereignty is a critical area for future exploration.

3. Rise of Regional Powers in Political Interference

The geopolitical shift from unipolarity to multipolarity has increased the involvement of regional powers in political interference. In South Asia, countries like India and China have become prominent players, using economic investments, infrastructure projects, and diplomatic initiatives to exert influence. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), for instance, has implications for Bangladesh's political and economic decision-making.

This trend underscores the need for comparative studies on the influence of regional versus global powers. Understanding how regional dynamics shape political interference can help smaller nations develop strategies to navigate competing interests and maintain policy autonomy.

4. Growing Importance of Hybrid Interference Tactics

Hybrid tactics that combine traditional and non-traditional methods of interference are becoming increasingly prevalent. These tactics may include a mix of economic incentives, covert operations, cyber intrusions, and cultural diplomacy, creating a multi-faceted approach to achieving strategic objectives.

In Bangladesh, hybrid tactics have been observed in the form of combined economic aid and political lobbying efforts. These approaches complicate efforts to identify and counteract interference, as they often blur the lines between legitimate influence and undue interference. Future research should aim to develop frameworks for distinguishing between these forms of engagement.

5. Impact of Climate Change on Political Interference

Climate change is an emerging factor that influences political interference, particularly in vulnerable nations like Bangladesh. As climate-induced challenges such as rising sea levels and natural disasters escalate, external actors may leverage aid and resources to exert influence. For instance, foreign investments in climate resilience projects may come with strings attached, affecting domestic policies and governance.

Research on the intersection of climate change and political interference is still in its infancy. Exploring how environmental vulnerabilities are exploited for geopolitical gain will be crucial for developing resilient and adaptive governance models.

6. Strengthening International Norms and Cooperation

As the complexity of political interference grows, there is a parallel trend toward strengthening international norms and cooperation to address these challenges. Initiatives

such as the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime and UN resolutions on election integrity reflect global efforts to curb undue interference.

For Bangladesh, participation in such international frameworks can enhance its capacity to counteract external influence. Future research should examine the effectiveness of these norms and identify ways to improve their implementation at the national level.

7. Focus on Ethical Implications

The ethical dimensions of political interference are gaining attention in academic and policy circles. Questions about the morality of intervention, the responsibility of external actors, and the rights of sovereign nations are becoming central to discussions on this topic. Ethical considerations are particularly relevant in cases where interference undermines democratic processes or exacerbates social inequalities.

Bangladesh's experience with external actors highlights the need for a balanced approach that respects sovereignty while addressing legitimate international concerns. Research on ethical frameworks for engagement can guide policymakers in navigating these complex issues.²⁰

3.13 Conclusion:

Research on ethical frameworks for international engagement offers valuable guidance in this regard. Normative principles such as mutual respect, non-interference, transparency, accountability, and reciprocity can help shape more equitable relationships between Bangladesh and external actors. For example, development cooperation grounded in partnership rather than conditional dominance can enhance trust and sustainability. Similarly, diplomatic dialogue that prioritizes constructive engagement over public pressure may reduce political polarization and foster collaborative problem-solving.

Moreover, strengthening domestic governance structures—independent institutions, rule of law, transparent electoral processes, and a vibrant civil society—reduces vulnerability to destabilizing forms of external influence.

In this context, Bangladesh's path forward lies not in resisting all forms of external involvement, nor in uncritically accommodating foreign influence, but in cultivating principled, strategic partnerships. By grounding foreign engagement in ethical standards and clear national objectives, policymakers can better navigate the complexities of globalization

²⁰ W. Pye, *Asian Power and Politics: The Cultural Dimensions of Authority* (Massachusetts, USA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 14-15

while preserving the country's sovereignty, democratic integrity, and long-term development aspirations.

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CHAPTER: 4

Theoretical Perspectives

4.1 Preamble:

The analysis of external interference in Bangladesh's politics can be framed through several theoretical lenses, providing a comprehensive understanding of its causes and consequences.

4.2 Neo-Colonialism

The theory of neo-colonialism posits that, while formal colonial rule has ended, former colonial powers and other developed nations continue to exert control over developing countries through various economic, political, and cultural means. This modern form of domination is less overt than colonialism but equally significant in shaping the governance structures and economies of former colonies and other less-developed nations. In the case of Bangladesh, the theory of neo-colonialism is particularly relevant, as external actors, including former colonial powers and international financial institutions, continue to play a significant role in shaping the country's political and economic landscape.

Economic Dependency and Foreign Aid

One of the central arguments of neo-colonialism is that economic dependence remains a key tool through which former colonial powers and other global powers maintain their influence. Kwame Nkrumah (1965), a leading advocate of neo-colonialism theory, argued that even after gaining political independence, many African and Asian nations continued to face economic subjugation. In Bangladesh, this is evident in the country's continued reliance on foreign aid, trade agreements, and investment, all of which come with significant strings attached.

Foreign aid, which Bangladesh has received extensively since its independence in 1971, plays a crucial role in maintaining economic dependency. International financial institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and Asian Development Bank (ADB), along with individual donor countries, have provided Bangladesh with billions of dollars in aid. However, as is often the case with foreign aid, this assistance comes with strict conditionalities that influence Bangladesh's domestic policies.

Nkrumah's assertion that foreign aid perpetuates dependency is exemplified by the economic reforms mandated by international lenders. Structural adjustment programs (SAPs) and neoliberal policies, which emphasize market liberalization, privatization, and austerity measures, have been imposed as conditions for aid disbursement. These programs often prioritize the interests of donor countries or international financial institutions, such as the promotion of free-market capitalism, rather than addressing the social and developmental needs of Bangladesh's population. Economic policies that favor

multinational corporations or foreign investors can exacerbate inequality and undermine the local economy, making the country more reliant on external forces.

Bangladesh's reliance on foreign aid has led to economic vulnerability and limited its capacity for self-sustained development. As Nkrumah argued, this dependency effectively positions Bangladesh in a subordinate role within the global economic system. While the country has experienced significant economic growth over the past few decades, much of this growth has been shaped by external factors such as foreign investment, loans, and trade agreements that benefit foreign corporations and global powers more than Bangladesh's development agenda.

Political Manipulation and Sovereignty

Neo-colonialism also manifests through political manipulation, where external actors seek to influence governance structures to serve their own interests. In Bangladesh, this is particularly visible in the way foreign powers and international organizations shape the country's governance structures, electoral processes, and policy-making decisions. External interventions in Bangladesh's politics have been driven by the strategic interests of global powers, such as the United States, India, China, and the European Union, as well as international institutions like the IMF and the World Bank.

The role of foreign governments in shaping political outcomes is seen in their support for specific political parties or groups that align with their geopolitical interests. For instance, during the Cold War, the United States was accused of supporting military regimes in Bangladesh, such as the Ziaur Rahman and Hussain Muhammad Ershad administrations, due to their strategic alliance in the fight against communism. Although Bangladesh transitioned to democracy in the 1990s, foreign involvement continued, often in the form of support for specific political actors. This type of external intervention can influence electoral outcomes, governance reforms, and policy changes in ways that undermine Bangladesh's sovereignty and democratic processes.

In addition to foreign support for specific political actors, international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank exert substantial influence over Bangladesh's political decisions through conditionalities attached to loans and aid. The requirement to implement certain economic reforms as part of structural adjustment programs often forces the government to adopt policies that favor international interests over national priorities. For example, economic reforms pushed by these institutions often focus on privatization, deregulation, and trade liberalization—policies that may benefit multinational corporations but can undermine local businesses and limit government control over national resources.

Political sovereignty is thus compromised, as decisions regarding national governance are heavily shaped by external financial and political considerations.

The influence of external actors also manifests in election monitoring and human rights advocacy, where international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU), sometimes take a leading role in shaping Bangladesh's electoral processes and human rights practices. While these efforts can be seen as attempts to promote democracy and good governance, they can also lead to tensions between the government and external actors. The Bangladeshi state is often criticized for not adhering to international standards of democracy and human rights, with external actors exerting pressure for reforms, including electoral transparency and governance changes.²¹

The Role of International Financial Institutions

The influence of international financial institutions (IFIs) in Bangladesh highlights a particularly stark example of neo-colonialism. These institutions, such as the IMF and World Bank, hold immense power over the policies of developing countries, including Bangladesh, through the financial support they provide. As noted earlier, these loans are often conditioned on the implementation of neoliberal economic policies, which may not always align with the social or economic needs of the country.

For instance, the IMF has often imposed austerity measures on Bangladesh, reducing government spending on social welfare and public services to ensure debt repayment. While these measures may help to stabilize the country's economy in the short term, they can undermine poverty alleviation efforts and contribute to social inequality, leaving the most vulnerable segments of the population with fewer resources. The World Bank and other donor institutions have also pushed for privatization of state-owned enterprises, which can shift national resources into the hands of multinational corporations or foreign investors, further entrenching Bangladesh's reliance on external forces.

In conclusion, the theory of neo-colonialism offers a compelling framework for understanding the continued influence of former colonial powers and developed nations over Bangladesh's political and economic systems. As Nkrumah (1965) suggested, despite political independence, Bangladesh remains economically dependent on foreign aid and trade agreements that come with significant conditionalities. These external forces also manipulate political structures to serve their own interests, often at the expense of Bangladesh's sovereignty and national interests. Neo-colonialism theory provides valuable

²¹ Mohammad Mizanur Rahman, *Foreign Aid and Bangladesh: Donor Relations and Realpolitik* (Oxfordshire, England, UK: Routledge, 2025), 181-182

insights into the ongoing struggles that Bangladesh faces in asserting its independence and self-sufficiency in the face of global economic and political pressures.

4.3 Dependency Theory

Dependency theory provides a critical framework for understanding the economic and political relationships between developed and developing nations. Developed by scholars such as Cardoso and Faletto (1979), the theory posits that the development of the global South, including nations like Bangladesh, is fundamentally shaped by its dependence on the economic and political systems of the global North. This dependency creates a structural imbalance, where developing nations are trapped in a cycle of underdevelopment, exacerbating inequalities and limiting their ability to break free from external influence. Key elements of this theory, such as core-periphery relations and the impact on governance, help explain how Bangladesh's political and economic system is shaped by external forces.

Core-Periphery Relations

A central tenet of dependency theory is the concept of core-periphery relations, which highlights the unequal economic exchange between developed (core) nations and developing (periphery) nations. In this framework, core countries dominate global trade, finance, and technology, while peripheral nations are relegated to providing raw materials, labor, and cheap goods, all of which are essential to the economic growth of the core. Bangladesh's position in this global system is emblematic of the periphery. The country's economy is heavily dependent on exports such as textiles and garments, which are largely directed to markets in the developed world. Despite experiencing periods of economic growth, this reliance on low-value-added exports places Bangladesh in a subordinate position within the global economic system.

This economic dependency is sustained by the country's reliance on foreign aid, loans, and investment from international financial institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, and countries like the United States. These relationships often tie Bangladesh to policies and market conditions dictated by the interests of core nations. For example, Bangladesh's textiles industry, while a major driver of its economy, remains vulnerable to global price fluctuations and trade agreements largely determined by international powers. As Cardoso and Faletto (1979) argue, the global capitalist system is structured in such a way that peripheral nations like Bangladesh are integrated into the world economy in a manner that benefits core countries, perpetuating economic inequality.

Impact on Governance

In addition to economic dependence, dependency theory also addresses the political consequences of this global structure, particularly in terms of governance. The theory posits that the economic dependence of peripheral nations undermines their sovereignty and limits their ability to implement independent, autonomous policies. Bangladesh's political landscape has long been shaped by external pressures, and its dependency on foreign aid and international investment has made it susceptible to foreign influence. As Rahman (2012) points out, Bangladesh's governance is constrained by external actors, particularly the IMF and World Bank, whose loans often come with conditions that dictate economic and governance reforms.

For instance, structural adjustment programs (SAPs) and neoliberal reforms, which have been imposed as conditions for foreign loans, often prioritize market-driven policies, privatization, and trade liberalization—policies that benefit multinational corporations but may not align with the social needs of Bangladesh's population. Such reforms typically undermine the government's ability to pursue its own development agenda, as policies are often shaped by the demands of external institutions rather than the interests of the local population. This kind of external influence can hinder national policy-making and limit the government's capacity to focus on issues such as poverty reduction, public health, and education.

Moreover, the country's political stability has been undermined by foreign involvement in its governance. As Rahman (2012) suggests, the dependence on external financial aid has often led to political instability, as successive governments are forced to adopt policies that satisfy international donors rather than addressing domestic challenges. The continual pressure to conform to the dictates of international organizations has led to a situation where domestic governance is often at odds with the needs and desires of the population, resulting in a disconnect between political leadership and the people it serves.²²

The Role of External Actors

While dependency theory focuses on the relationship between developed and developing nations, it also underscores the role of external actors in shaping the political landscape of peripheral nations like Bangladesh. The influence of global powers such as the United States, India, and China, as well as international organizations like the IMF and World Bank, further reinforces Bangladesh's dependency. These actors often have a vested interest in the

²² Heraldo Muñoz, *From Dependency to Development: Strategies to Overcome Underdevelopment and Inequality* (Oxfordshire, England, UK : Routledge, 2019), 71-72

political and economic systems of Bangladesh, which they shape through aid, loans, and trade agreements.

The impact of this external influence is evident in Bangladesh's foreign policy and its engagement with global institutions. The country's reliance on foreign aid has made it difficult for Bangladesh to pursue fully independent foreign policies, as decisions are often shaped by the interests of donors and international lenders. For example, trade agreements and foreign investments that prioritize the interests of multinational corporations over local businesses further entrench Bangladesh's subordinate position in the global economy. As Rahman (2012) suggests, this dependence limits Bangladesh's ability to diversify its economy, improve domestic industries, or foster innovation, further reinforcing its position as a peripheral nation within the global capitalist system.

In conclusion, dependency theory offers a valuable framework for understanding the unequal power dynamics between Bangladesh and the developed world. Through its reliance on foreign aid, exports, and international loans, Bangladesh remains entrenched in the global economic system as a subordinate actor, reliant on the core nations for economic survival. This dependency shapes the country's political landscape, limiting its ability to implement independent policies and governance reforms. As Rahman (2012) highlights, the economic dependence of Bangladesh has profound implications for its political sovereignty, as external actors continue to shape the country's economic and political decisions. The theory of dependency provides a critical lens through which to analyze Bangladesh's struggle for economic independence and political autonomy in a world dominated by powerful external forces.

4.4 Realist Theory

Realist theory in international relations focuses on the pursuit of national interests and the quest for power as the central drivers of state behavior. It emphasizes that states operate in an anarchic international system, where security concerns, strategic calculations, and the balance of power define foreign policy decisions. In this context, Bangladesh's foreign policy is significantly shaped by its position in regional geopolitical rivalries and its pursuit of security interests. According to Waltz (1979), realism highlights the importance of strategic interests in foreign policy, where states act in their self-interest to maximize security and maintain sovereignty.

Geopolitical Rivalries

One of the key aspects of realist theory is the notion of geopolitical rivalries, where states compete for influence and control over strategic regions. In the case of Bangladesh, its

location in South Asia, bordering both India and Myanmar, places it in the midst of a geopolitical competition between several major powers, particularly India, China, and Western nations. Bangladesh's relations with these countries are deeply influenced by their competing strategic interests in the region.

India, as Bangladesh's closest neighbor and a regional power, has historically sought to maintain significant influence over Bangladesh's political and economic landscape. This influence is rooted in India's broader regional security concerns, particularly related to its rivalry with Pakistan and its interest in ensuring that Bangladesh remains aligned with Indian geopolitical objectives. India's involvement in Bangladesh's liberation struggle in 1971 against Pakistan further cemented the strong relationship between the two countries, with India seeing Bangladesh as a critical ally in its regional power dynamics. However, India also exerts pressure on Bangladesh in areas like border management, water-sharing agreements, and trade relations, aligning with realist theory's emphasis on strategic calculations.

At the same time, China has been increasing its influence in Bangladesh, particularly through economic and infrastructural investments as part of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China's strategic interests in Bangladesh are driven by its desire to expand its economic footprint and secure access to the Bay of Bengal, a critical shipping route for energy supplies and trade. The growing presence of Chinese companies in Bangladesh's infrastructure projects, such as the Padma Bridge and Deep Sea Port, reflects China's strategic use of economic power to gain influence in the region. From a realist perspective, China's actions are seen as part of its broader strategy to counterbalance India's influence in South Asia and increase its geopolitical footprint in the Indian Ocean region.

The involvement of Western powers—primarily the United States and the European Union—in Bangladesh's political and economic spheres also follows realist principles. Western countries have maintained interest in Bangladesh due to its strategic location, its role in regional trade and counterterrorism efforts, and its significant demographic market. Western powers often engage in aid programs, particularly those focused on democracy building, human rights, and economic reforms. However, from a realist standpoint, these efforts are also motivated by the desire to counterbalance Chinese and Indian influence and to ensure Bangladesh remains aligned with broader Western security interests in the region, particularly with respect to counterterrorism and regional stability.²³

²³ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York, United States: Alfred A. Knopf Publisher, 1948) 58-59

Security Concerns

A central tenet of realist theory is the emphasis on security concerns and the idea that states act to protect their sovereignty and territorial integrity in an anarchic international system. For Bangladesh, the concept of security is multifaceted, encompassing both traditional security threats from neighboring countries and non-traditional security threats such as climate change, natural disasters, and internal instability.

India's dominance in regional politics presents a challenge to Bangladesh's security, particularly in the context of unresolved border disputes, such as the Teesta River water-sharing issue and the complex political dynamics surrounding Rohingya refugees fleeing from Myanmar. From a realist perspective, Bangladesh must balance its security interests by maintaining a delicate relationship with India while also diversifying its alliances to reduce dependency on a single power. This is evident in Bangladesh's engagement with China, which provides an alternative security and economic partner, as well as its increasing participation in regional security forums like the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).

Furthermore, Bangladesh's strategic location along key maritime trade routes and its proximity to the Indian Ocean make it a critical actor in regional security dynamics. As a realist would argue, Bangladesh's foreign policy must prioritize regional security through a balance of diplomatic engagement and defense preparedness. The competition between India and China, as well as the complex security challenges posed by Myanmar and internal terrorism, necessitate that Bangladesh actively protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity while navigating the pressures exerted by these larger powers.

In conclusion, realist theory provides a valuable lens through which to understand Bangladesh's foreign policy and international relations. By focusing on geopolitical rivalries and security concerns, realism underscores the strategic calculations that shape Bangladesh's interactions with its neighbors and global powers. As Bangladesh seeks to maximize its national interests and protect its sovereignty, it must carefully manage its relationships with India, China, and Western powers, ensuring that its foreign policy reflects both regional realities and global strategic considerations. According to Waltz (1979), the drive for power and security is central to understanding the actions of states in the international system, and Bangladesh's foreign policy exemplifies the application of these realist principles in practice.

4.5 Constructivist Theory

Constructivism is a theoretical approach in international relations that emphasizes the role of ideas, norms, and identities in shaping state behavior and global politics. Unlike realism or liberalism, which focus on material power and institutional structures, constructivism argues that the social and ideological dimensions of international relations play a significant role in shaping how states interact. In the context of Bangladesh, constructivism provides a valuable framework for understanding how external actors influence the country's political landscape, as well as how Bangladesh's national identity and cultural values shape its resistance to foreign interference. Scholars like Alexander Wendt (1999) emphasize the importance of identity formation and the role of norms in the interactions between states, which are deeply embedded in social structures and collective meanings.²⁴

Cultural and Ideological Influence

One of the key tenets of constructivist theory is that external actors promote specific norms and values, which can influence the political behavior of states. In the case of Bangladesh, this is particularly relevant with regard to democracy, human rights, and liberalization. Bangladesh has been the subject of significant external pressure to adopt democratic reforms, improve human rights protections, and integrate more fully into the global economic system. This pressure has often come from Western powers, international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that advocate for democratic governance and civil liberties.

External actors often frame their interventions in Bangladesh as part of a broader ideological project aimed at spreading liberal democracy, protecting human rights, and promoting economic liberalization. Western powers, including the United States and the European Union, frequently emphasize the importance of democratic elections, free speech, media freedom, and anti-corruption measures in their diplomatic relations with Bangladesh. This ideological promotion can be seen in initiatives such as election monitoring, which aim to ensure that political processes in Bangladesh are fair and transparent. Constructivist theory suggests that these norms and values are not merely imposed, but rather that they influence the identities and political practices of the states they target.

However, the Bangladeshi government and segments of the population often resist these external pressures, viewing them as an infringement on sovereignty and national identity.

²⁴ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 56-57

In this context, constructivism helps explain why Bangladesh might reject or selectively adopt such reforms. External actors' attempts to influence Bangladesh's political system can be seen as cultural imperialism, which conflicts with the country's desire to maintain its autonomy and cultural distinctiveness. As Wendt (1999) suggests, identity is not fixed but socially constructed, and Bangladesh's resistance to external pressure is partly due to its desire to maintain its sovereign identity against the perceived imposition of foreign norms.

National Identity and Sovereignty

A key concept in constructivist theory is that the national identity of a state plays a critical role in shaping its behavior in international relations. In the case of Bangladesh, the country's identity as a sovereign and independent nation is strongly tied to its liberation struggle in 1971, where it gained independence after a brutal war of liberation. This historical experience of external intervention—especially by India—has created a strong sense of national identity that emphasizes self-determination and the desire to avoid foreign interference. Bangladesh's struggle for independence is deeply ingrained in its national consciousness, and this historical memory informs its modern political culture and its resistance to foreign interference in domestic matters.

Constructivist theory posits that identity is not only a matter of self-perception but also involves how a state is perceived by others. Bangladesh's foreign policy, therefore, reflects its desire to be recognized as a sovereign entity capable of making independent decisions. As Wendt (1999) argues, identities are shaped through interaction with others, and Bangladesh's engagement with external actors is mediated by its perception of sovereignty and autonomy. This dynamic can be seen in Bangladesh's engagement with both Western powers and regional neighbors, where it seeks to maintain a balance between cooperation and resistance. For instance, while Bangladesh accepts international aid and trade agreements, it is often wary of foreign intervention in its internal politics, especially in areas related to governance, human rights, and media freedoms.

The role of national identity is also evident in Bangladesh's foreign policy towards its immediate neighbors, such as India and Myanmar. Despite the complex and sometimes contentious relationship with India, particularly over issues like water-sharing agreements and border security, Bangladesh's identity as an independent state shapes its interactions. Similarly, Bangladesh's stance on the Rohingya refugee crisis, where it has hosted a large number of refugees from Myanmar, is a reflection of its humanitarian identity and commitment to protecting human rights, even when faced with pressure from Myanmar and other external actors to handle the issue differently.

The Role of Norms in Shaping Foreign Relations

Constructivism also emphasizes the role of international norms in shaping state behavior. Bangladesh's engagement with global institutions such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is often driven by the norms associated with global governance. Bangladesh participates in these organizations because it seeks to align with broader international standards on issues like human rights, trade, and security. However, as Wendt (1999) argues, these norms are not always adopted unconditionally. Bangladesh negotiates its participation in global frameworks based on how those norms align with its national identity and sovereignty.

For example, Bangladesh has participated in international agreements related to climate change and sustainable development, but it does so in a way that ensures the country's sovereignty is not compromised by external pressure. Similarly, Bangladesh's commitment to democracy and human rights is often mediated by its own understanding of these concepts, which may differ from the ideals promoted by external actors. In this way, Bangladesh's national identity acts as a filter through which external norms are interpreted and either accepted or resisted.

In conclusion, constructivist theory offers valuable insights into the interaction between Bangladesh and external actors, highlighting the role of identity, norms, and cultural values in shaping international relations. As a state that has historically struggled for its sovereignty and independence, Bangladesh's foreign policy is influenced by its desire to maintain its national identity and resist external interference. The influence of cultural and ideological norms, particularly in the realms of democracy and human rights, is shaped by Bangladesh's perception of its sovereignty and the historical experience of external intervention. Constructivism helps to explain why Bangladesh, despite being a beneficiary of international aid and support, remains cautious of the external imposition of political values and strives to balance cooperation with resistance to maintain its autonomy.

The literature on political interference, particularly in the context of developing countries like Bangladesh, provides a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in the relationship between external actors and domestic politics. This review has examined various theoretical frameworks and historical case studies that offer insights into how external forces, whether through economic, military, or diplomatic interventions, shape the political landscape of sovereign nations.²⁵

²⁵ Harun Ur Rashid, *Bangladesh Foreign Policy: Realities, Priorities and Challenges* (Dhaka, Bangladesh: Academic Press and Publishers Library (APPL), 2020) 41-42

The concept of political interference is multi-faceted, with scholars highlighting the distinction between direct and indirect interventions. Direct interventions, such as military actions and electoral manipulation, have historically been more overt, often driven by geopolitical and strategic interests. In contrast, indirect interventions—such as economic coercion through foreign aid and trade agreements—have become increasingly common in the modern era, reflecting the globalization of political influence. The soft power and economic leverage exerted by international organizations, such as the IMF, World Bank, and United Nations, demonstrate how external actors can influence domestic governance structures without the need for direct confrontation.

One of the primary motives for external interference is strategic interests, where powerful nations intervene in the domestic politics of weaker states to further their own geopolitical agendas. Bangladesh, situated in a region characterized by intense geopolitical rivalries, has seen its political landscape shaped by the competing interests of India, China, and Western powers. Economic dependency, fostered by foreign aid and trade relations, further exacerbates the country's vulnerability to external influence. Dependency theory and neo-colonialism provide valuable perspectives on how Bangladesh's reliance on foreign assistance and trade reinforces its subordinate position in the global economic system.

Moreover, the role of ideological and normative interventions, particularly through the promotion of democracy and human rights, reflects the broader global ideological push for liberalization in developing nations. However, as seen in Bangladesh, this promotion of values is not always embraced unconditionally. The strong national identity that emerged from Bangladesh's liberation struggle in 1971 often leads to resistance to external pressure, particularly when such interventions are perceived as undermining national sovereignty. Constructivist theory helps to explain these dynamics by emphasizing the role of national identity, cultural norms, and perceptions of sovereignty in shaping a state's response to external influence.

In terms of political stability, Bangladesh's post-independence history has been marked by cycles of political instability and authoritarian regimes. The political landscape has been shaped by both internal factors, such as the rivalry between the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and external influences, including the conditionalities attached to foreign aid and the role of international actors in managing elections and governance reforms. The military regimes of Ziaur Rahman and Hussain Muhammad Ershad illustrate how foreign aid and geopolitical interests can influence domestic governance, while the restoration of democracy in 1991 marked a new phase of

engagement with international organizations, particularly in the areas of electoral reforms and human rights.

4.6 Conclusion:

Ultimately, this literature review demonstrates the complex interplay between external interference and domestic sovereignty. While external actors, particularly in the form of international organizations and powerful states, play a significant role in shaping political processes, Bangladesh's sovereignty and national identity remain central to its political dynamics. Moving forward, understanding this balance will be crucial in analyzing the continued influence of external actors on Bangladesh's political trajectory and its broader engagement with the international community. The emerging challenges posed by cyber warfare, digital media manipulation, and climate change further complicate this relationship, underscoring the need for a nuanced approach to understanding external interference in the political systems of developing countries like Bangladesh.

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CHAPTER: 5

Research Methodology

5.1 Preamble:

This chapter outlines the methodological framework used to investigate the interference of foreign governments in the political affairs of Bangladesh. It explains the research design, data collection methods, analytical tools, and overall approach adopted to ensure a systematic and credible examination of the topic.

Understanding foreign interference in domestic politics is complex and often sensitive, involving a blend of political, historical, and international dimensions. Therefore, a carefully designed methodology is essential to capture the depth and nuances of this subject. This chapter begins by detailing the research approach—qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods—and justifies its appropriateness in addressing the research questions and testing the hypothesis.

Furthermore, it discusses the sources of data, such as primary data (interviews, surveys) and secondary data (official reports, academic publications, news archives), and the techniques used for analyzing the data. Consideration is also given to ethical issues, limitations of the study, and the reliability and validity of the research findings.

By clearly defining the methodological path taken, this chapter ensures transparency and enhances the overall credibility of the study.

5.2 Research Approach

Given the complexity and politically sensitive nature of the topic, this study employs a qualitative research approach. This approach is appropriate for exploring the deeper socio-political dynamics, narratives, and perceptions related to foreign interference, which are not easily captured through purely statistical or quantitative methods.

5.2.1 Explanation of Chosen Methodology (Qualitative)

In investigating the role of external interference in Bangladesh's political landscape, a qualitative research methodology is deemed the most appropriate approach. The rationale behind this choice lies in the complexity and depth of the subject matter, which involves understanding nuanced political dynamics, historical contexts, and the socio-cultural implications of external interventions. Qualitative research allows for a deeper exploration of these complexities, providing rich, detailed insights into the ways in which external actors influence domestic politics.

The use of qualitative methods aligns well with the objective of this study, which is to examine not only the extent and forms of external interference in Bangladesh's political

environment but also the underlying motivations, mechanisms, and consequences of such interventions. Qualitative research is particularly useful for studying phenomena that are difficult to quantify but require in-depth understanding and interpretation. Given that political interference often involves multifaceted and subjective factors such as power dynamics, ideologies, and national identity, qualitative methodologies are essential for capturing the richness and complexity of the political processes involved.

5.2.2 Rationale for Choosing Qualitative Research

Qualitative research offers several advantages when investigating political interference, particularly in the context of Bangladesh. One key strength of this approach is its ability to explore the subjective experiences of political actors and key stakeholders, which cannot be easily captured through quantitative data. As such, qualitative methods provide a platform for understanding the personal and institutional perceptions of political interference, both within Bangladesh and among external actors.

In addition to this, qualitative methods allow for flexibility in data collection and analysis, which is vital for studying complex and evolving political landscapes. Political interference can manifest in a variety of forms and may change over time, requiring the research design to be adaptable to emerging trends. Qualitative research also emphasizes contextual analysis, allowing for a detailed exploration of the historical, cultural, and geopolitical context in which external interference occurs.

Moreover, qualitative research emphasizes interpretive analysis rather than purely empirical data collection. It aims to understand the meanings, motivations, and discourses surrounding political interference, which is crucial for comprehending the strategic, ideological, and cultural factors that drive external interventions. This approach is consistent with the overarching objective of this research, which is to examine the interplay between external influence and Bangladesh's sovereignty in the contemporary political arena.²⁶

5.2.3 Theoretical Framework for Qualitative Research

The theoretical framework for this research draws on several key theories of international relations and political science to guide the qualitative analysis. These include:

- Neo-colonialism and Dependency Theory, which offer frameworks for understanding the ways in which external actors continue to influence the political and economic trajectories of former colonies and other developing nations (Nkrumah, 1965; Cardoso & Faletto, 1979).

²⁶ C.R. Kothari & Gaurav Garg, *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques* (New Delhi, India: New Age International (P) Limited, 2019), 87-88

- Realist and Constructivist theories of international relations, which highlight the significance of national interest, power dynamics, and ideologies in shaping external interventions in domestic politics (Waltz, 1979; Wendt, 1999).

These theories provide a conceptual basis for analyzing the motivations behind and mechanisms of external interference in Bangladesh, guiding the research process by framing the types of questions to be asked and the lenses through which the data will be interpreted.

5.2.4 Justification for Qualitative Approach in Bangladesh

The choice of a qualitative methodology is particularly pertinent for studying Bangladesh's political landscape, where external interference is often indirect and complex. Much of the external influence in Bangladesh, whether through foreign aid, electoral monitoring, or geopolitical alliances, is embedded within broader political, social, and economic structures. These interventions are shaped by various external actors with diverse interests, making it essential to adopt an approach that can uncover the nuanced and multi-layered nature of these influences.

For example, analyzing Bangladesh's interactions with international organizations such as the World Bank or the IMF requires an understanding of how these organizations shape national governance through conditions tied to loans or aid, which can often be difficult to quantify. Similarly, examining electoral interference or geopolitical rivalries (e.g., between India, China, and Western powers) necessitates capturing subjective experiences and the interpretations of political stakeholders, which quantitative methods alone cannot effectively address.

Further, Bangladesh's post-colonial context and its ongoing struggle for sovereignty amidst external pressures necessitate an approach that emphasizes historical and cultural factors, which qualitative research excels at uncovering. By adopting a qualitative methodology, this study can explore the significance of national identity, historical narratives, and political memory in shaping responses to external interventions. These factors are central to understanding the resistance to and acceptance of external influence in Bangladesh's politics.

5.3 Research Design

The research adopts a **descriptive and exploratory design**:

- **Descriptive** to document and explain known instances or patterns of foreign influence.

- **Exploratory** to investigate new or less-documented forms of interference and understand stakeholder perspectives.

5.4 Research Questions

1. What are the main forms of foreign interference in Bangladesh politics?
2. Which foreign governments are most involved, and in what ways?
3. How do such interventions impact political stability, elections, and policymaking?

5.5 Hypothesis

Foreign government involvement in Bangladesh's political affairs significantly influences domestic political stability, electoral outcomes, and policy direction.

5.6 Data Collection Methods

Primary Data

To gain firsthand insights, **semi-structured interviews** were conducted with:

- Political analysts
- Former diplomats
- Journalists
- Academics
- Representatives of civil society organizations

This method allows flexibility while maintaining focus on key themes such as foreign influence, national sovereignty, and political outcomes.

Secondary Data

Secondary data sources were also reviewed to provide context and support:

- Government reports and policy documents
- News articles and opinion pieces (local and international)
- Academic journals and books
- Reports from international organizations (e.g., UN, Human Rights Watch)

Given the qualitative nature of this research, multiple data collection techniques are employed to ensure comprehensive and triangulated findings. The primary techniques used in this study include:

1. Interviews: Semi-structured interviews with political experts, diplomats, members of international organizations, and academics specializing in Bangladesh's politics will provide in-depth insights into the motivations and consequences of external interference.

The semi-structured format allows for flexibility in exploring key themes while also ensuring consistency across interviews.

2. **Case Studies:** The use of case studies will enable a detailed analysis of specific instances of external interference in Bangladesh's political processes. This may include case studies on election monitoring, foreign aid conditionalities, and the influence of international organizations in shaping Bangladesh's governance reforms. Each case study will provide a concrete example of how external actors influence domestic politics.
3. **Document Analysis:** Analysis of key documents, such as policy reports, government records, and international agreements, will complement the interview and case study data. This will include reports from international organizations like the World Bank, IMF, and United Nations, as well as historical documents detailing Bangladesh's political history and the role of external actors.²⁷

5.7 Sampling Technique

A **purposive sampling** method was used to select participants with relevant expertise or experience related to foreign policy and political developments in Bangladesh. This non-probability sampling ensures that insights are drawn from informed and credible sources.

- **Sample Size:** 10–15 participants (adjustable based on availability and saturation)
- **Criteria:** Subject-matter knowledge, professional experience, non-partisan perspectives (as much as possible)

5.8 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected qualitative data were analyzed using **thematic analysis**, involving the following steps:

1. Transcription of interview data.
2. Coding responses based on recurring themes (e.g., types of foreign involvement, impacts, perceptions).
3. Organizing codes into broader categories.
4. Interpreting the data to answer the research questions and test the hypothesis.

NVivo or manual coding methods can be used, depending on access to software.

5.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was maintained throughout the research:

- **Informed consent** was obtained from all interview participants.

²⁷ Dr. Md. Abdus Salam Akanda, *Research Methodology: A Complete Direction for Learners* (Dhaka, Bangladesh: Akanda & Sons Publications, 2023), 96-97

- Identities of interviewees were anonymized (if requested).
- Participants had the right to withdraw at any time.
- Sensitive political content was handled with care to avoid harm or misrepresentation.

The research complied with institutional ethical guidelines.

Ethical considerations are paramount in qualitative research, particularly when dealing with sensitive topics such as political interference. Key ethical considerations include:

- **Informed Consent:** All participants will be fully informed about the purpose of the study, their role in the research, and the potential impact of their participation. Consent will be obtained prior to conducting any interviews.
- **Confidentiality:** To ensure participants feel comfortable sharing sensitive information, strict measures will be taken to maintain confidentiality. Identifying information will be anonymized, and participants will be given the option to review their interview transcripts.
- **Neutrality and Objectivity:** The researcher will strive to maintain neutrality and objectivity throughout the study, ensuring that personal biases do not influence the interpretation of the data.

5.10 Limitations of the Study

- **Access constraints:** Difficulty in reaching high-level political figures or foreign diplomats.
- **Bias:** Risk of subjective bias in qualitative responses.
- **Generalizability:** Findings may not be statistically generalizable due to the qualitative nature.
- **Data availability:** Limited access to classified or confidential documents relating to foreign interference.

While qualitative methods provide rich insights, there are some limitations to consider:

- **Subjectivity:** The subjective nature of qualitative research can introduce potential bias, particularly in interpreting interview responses. However, this can be mitigated through careful data triangulation and member checking.
- **Limited Generalizability:** As the study focuses on Bangladesh, the findings may not be directly applicable to other countries with different political contexts. However, the in-depth analysis of Bangladesh can offer valuable lessons for similar contexts.

5.11 Data Collection Techniques: Interviews, Case Studies, and Document Analysis

Data collection is a critical aspect of qualitative research, as it helps to gather detailed and contextualized information to address the research questions. For this study, which aims to

examine the role of external interference in Bangladesh's political landscape, the data collection techniques chosen include interviews, case studies, and document analysis. These methods allow for a comprehensive exploration of the topic, providing both primary and secondary data that offer rich insights into the nature, mechanisms, and consequences of external political influence.

Each of these techniques contributes to the overall understanding of the issue, bringing different strengths to the research process. The combination of interviews, case studies, and document analysis ensures a triangulated approach, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings by cross-referencing multiple sources of information. The following sections detail the rationale for selecting each technique, the methods for implementing them, and how they contribute to the study's objectives.²⁸

Interviews

Interviews are a primary data collection method in qualitative research. They offer an in-depth understanding of a participant's views, experiences, and insights related to the research topic. Given the sensitive nature of political interference, interviews with key stakeholders are particularly useful for gaining an insider perspective on the mechanisms and implications of external influence in Bangladesh's political environment.

Rationale for Interviews

Interviews are well-suited to this study because they allow for the exploration of participants' personal and professional experiences, which are essential to understanding the political processes in Bangladesh. In a study on political interference, interviews provide an opportunity to capture nuanced opinions, diverse viewpoints, and context-specific knowledge that is difficult to gather through surveys or other quantitative methods.

The main advantages of interviews in this study are:

- **Personal Insights:** Interviews provide a forum for political actors, diplomats, scholars, and other stakeholders to discuss their perspectives on how external actors shape Bangladesh's political dynamics. This approach allows participants to elaborate on their experiences, interpretations, and beliefs about the impact of foreign influence.
- **Flexibility and Depth:** Semi-structured interviews provide a balance between structured and open-ended questioning. This enables the researcher to guide the conversation toward key topics while also allowing space for participants to share their own observations and insights freely.

²⁸ Rajat Acharyya & Nandan Bhattacharya, *Research Methodology for Social Sciences* (New Delhi, India: Routledge India Imprint, 2019), 54-55

- Contextual Understanding: Through interviews, the study can obtain detailed and context-specific information that cannot be easily captured through other data collection techniques. Participants may describe particular incidents of political interference or provide reflections on the broader trends they have witnessed throughout their careers.

Implementation of Interviews

For this study, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a range of key stakeholders involved in Bangladesh's political, diplomatic, and international spheres. These will include:

- Political Leaders: Senior members of political parties (e.g., Awami League, Bangladesh Nationalist Party) who have experience with external political pressures or interventions.
- Government Officials: Senior bureaucrats and government advisers who have been involved in shaping or responding to foreign policies.
- Academics and Scholars: Experts in Bangladesh's political science, international relations, or development studies who can provide theoretical insights into the role of external interference.
- Diplomats and International Representatives: Representatives from international organizations (e.g., the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund) or foreign embassies that have influenced or monitored Bangladesh's governance.

The interviews will be conducted face-to-face, via video conferencing, or over the phone, depending on the availability and geographical location of the participants. Each interview will last between 45 minutes and 1 hour, and will follow a semi-structured interview guide that includes both open-ended and more focused questions on the role of external actors in Bangladesh's political landscape.

Ethical Considerations in Interviews

Before the interviews are conducted, participants will be informed about the study's purpose, their voluntary participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent will be obtained from all interviewees, ensuring that they understand their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. To maintain confidentiality, the interviewee's identities will be anonymized, and any sensitive data will be securely stored. Additionally, participants will have the opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews to ensure that their statements are accurately reflected.

Case Studies

Case studies are another critical data collection technique in qualitative research, particularly when examining specific events, policies, or instances of political interference. Case studies allow researchers to conduct a detailed investigation of particular events or phenomena within their real-life context. In this study, case studies will be used to explore specific examples of external interference in Bangladesh's political processes, providing rich contextual information that helps to illustrate broader patterns and dynamics.

Rationale for Case Studies

The use of case studies is particularly useful when the researcher aims to understand the deeper complexities of specific occurrences. Case studies provide an opportunity to explore how external actors have influenced Bangladesh's politics in concrete instances, allowing for a detailed examination of the interventions, reactions, and consequences. By studying particular cases, the research can also investigate the variability of external influence, considering how it has manifested in different political contexts, such as elections, governance reforms, or international relations.

Several case studies in this study might include:

- **Election Monitoring:** The role of international organizations such as the European Union or the United Nations in monitoring Bangladesh's elections, and how these interventions shape electoral outcomes and political legitimacy.
- **Foreign Aid and Conditionalities:** Examining the role of financial institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and bilateral donors in shaping Bangladesh's economic policies and governance reforms.
- **Geopolitical Rivalries:** The strategic competition between regional powers such as India and China in influencing Bangladesh's foreign policy and security environment.

Implementation of Case Studies

The case studies will focus on particular instances of political interference in Bangladesh, including detailed information on the timeline, actors involved, and outcomes. The methodology for selecting case studies will include a mix of critical cases that have had significant impact on Bangladesh's political trajectory, and illustrative cases that show more typical examples of interference.

Each case study will be developed using a combination of primary and secondary data sources, such as government reports, international organization documents, and media coverage. These will be complemented by insights drawn from interviews with participants

who have direct or indirect experience with the case in question. This approach ensures a multi-source triangulation, which enhances the robustness and validity of the findings.

Ethical Considerations in Case Studies

Case study research involves analyzing real-life situations and may involve sensitive data, particularly regarding the roles of political parties, foreign governments, or international organizations. As such, ethical considerations include ensuring that the data does not compromise the privacy or integrity of the individuals or organizations involved. When using case studies that contain potentially sensitive information, efforts will be made to anonymize sources or use pseudonyms for individuals and countries, as appropriate. Additionally, participants contributing to case studies will be asked for their informed consent.²⁹

Document Analysis

Document analysis is an essential technique for collecting data in qualitative research, especially when studying political events and processes that are well-documented. This method involves the systematic examination of both primary and secondary written materials that are relevant to the research topic. In this study, document analysis will be used to explore the historical and contemporary context of external interference in Bangladesh's politics, as well as to gather supplementary data from official reports, policy documents, and media sources.

Rationale for Document Analysis

Document analysis allows researchers to collect and analyze data from existing sources that reflect the viewpoints of both external actors and domestic political figures. By studying official documents and reports from international organizations, government ministries, and political parties, researchers can uncover the policies, agreements, and strategies that guide external interference in Bangladesh's political processes. Document analysis is particularly useful in this study because much of the external influence in Bangladesh's politics, such as foreign aid conditionalities, election monitoring reports, and diplomatic exchanges, is documented in publicly available materials.

²⁹ Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, *A Guide to Research Methodology: An Overview of Research Problems, Tasks and Methods* (London, UK: CRC Press, 2019), 71-72

Implementation of Document Analysis

The following types of documents will be analyzed as part of this study:

- Government Documents: Laws, regulations, and policy statements that reveal the government's stance on external interference and the country's response to foreign aid, electoral monitoring, or foreign policy.
- Reports from International Organizations: Annual reports, policy documents, and country assessments from organizations like the World Bank, United Nations, European Union, and International Monetary Fund that shed light on external actors' influence in Bangladesh's governance.
- Media Sources: Newspaper articles, op-eds, and news reports that discuss instances of external interference, political interventions, and foreign influence on Bangladesh's politics.

Each document will be systematically reviewed and coded for themes, patterns, and key insights that relate to the research questions. The analysis will be contextual, considering both the content and the context in which the documents were produced. This will allow for a deeper understanding of how external actors shape political discourse and action within Bangladesh.

Ethical Considerations in Document Analysis

While document analysis generally poses fewer ethical concerns compared to interviews or case studies, there are still important considerations. These include ensuring that all sources used are properly cited and that sensitive information is handled in a responsible manner. When analyzing publicly available documents, special care will be taken to ensure that individuals or organizations are not misrepresented or exposed to undue scrutiny.

5.12 Ethical Considerations and Limitations of the Study

Conducting research, particularly in sensitive areas such as political interference, requires careful consideration of ethical principles and an awareness of the limitations that may affect the study. Ethical considerations ensure the protection of participants' rights, the integrity of the research process, and the validity of the findings. Similarly, acknowledging the limitations of the study helps to clarify the boundaries within which the research is conducted and the scope of the conclusions drawn.

This section outlines the ethical considerations that will guide the research methodology for this study, focusing on the protection of participants, the confidentiality of sensitive data, and the transparency of the research process. It will also discuss the potential limitations of the study and the steps taken to mitigate these challenges.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues are paramount when conducting qualitative research, especially in political studies where data can be sensitive and participants' identities may be exposed to significant risk. As the research focuses on the role of external interference in Bangladesh's political landscape, the study involves human participants through interviews and document analysis. Thus, ethical principles must be carefully adhered to in all stages of the research process.

Informed Consent

Informed consent is one of the most important ethical principles in social research. All participants involved in the study will be fully informed of the nature and purpose of the research before any data is collected. This ensures that participants voluntarily agree to participate with an understanding of what the research entails, how their data will be used, and any potential risks involved.

- **Purpose and Scope:** Participants will be informed about the aim of the study, the research questions, and how their input will contribute to answering those questions.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Participants will be informed that their involvement is entirely voluntary, and they have the right to withdraw from the study at any point without facing any negative consequences. This will be clearly communicated to all interviewees and participants in the case studies.
- **Right to Refuse:** Participants will be made aware that they can refuse to answer any questions they feel uncomfortable with. The interview structure will be flexible to respect the participant's boundaries.

The informed consent process will be documented through signed consent forms. For interviews conducted via electronic means (e.g., video calls or phone interviews), consent will be obtained verbally, and participants will be sent an email that includes a detailed consent form that outlines the information discussed. This form will also provide the participants with the opportunity to ask questions about the research process and address any concerns they may have.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity are essential to protecting participants and ensuring that they feel safe sharing sensitive information. Political topics are inherently sensitive, and participants may be hesitant to share their insights if they fear potential retribution or exposure. Therefore, the following measures will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of the data:

- **Anonymizing Participants:** All interview data will be anonymized, meaning that personal identifiers such as names, job titles, and institutional affiliations will be

removed or substituted with pseudonyms in the final report. Participants will also be given the option to review and approve their transcripts to ensure that no unintended or identifying information is included.

- **Data Storage and Security:** All recorded interviews, notes, and transcriptions will be stored securely, both digitally and physically. Digital data will be encrypted, and access will be restricted to authorized personnel (i.e., the researcher). Paper documents will be stored in a locked, secure location.
- **Discretion with Sensitive Data:** Data that could potentially reveal sensitive information or put individuals at risk will not be published. In cases where data is highly sensitive (e.g., revealing private political discussions or personal views on political interference), the researcher will err on the side of caution by excluding it from the final report or using redactions.

Avoiding Harm and Maintaining Integrity

Ethical research seeks to avoid harm to participants. In politically sensitive areas such as this, the research process should ensure that participants are not put in a position where their safety, reputation, or well-being could be compromised. The study's focus on Bangladesh, a country with a complex political and international landscape, raises the potential for unintended consequences if sensitive information were to be misused.

The following steps will help minimize risks:

- **No Coercion or Manipulation:** Participants will not be coerced or manipulated into providing information. They will always be free to decline participation or to refuse any questions they feel uncomfortable answering.
- **Sensitive Data:** The researcher will be sensitive to any information that might cause reputational damage or harm to political actors, organizations, or institutions in Bangladesh or abroad. Such data will be excluded from the final analysis if it could lead to personal, institutional, or political harm.
- **Maintaining Research Integrity:** The researcher will uphold the principles of academic integrity, avoiding any form of bias, misrepresentation, or fabrication of data. The final report will reflect the data as accurately as possible, adhering to ethical norms in scholarly research.

Transparency and Accountability

Transparency and accountability are fundamental ethical principles in social research. Throughout the research process, the study will maintain transparency with participants, collaborators, and readers. This includes the following:

- **Disclosure of Funding and Conflicts of Interest:** If any funding has been received for the research, it will be disclosed in the final report. Any potential conflicts of interest (e.g., personal or professional relationships with participants) will also be transparently acknowledged.
- **Reporting Findings:** The researcher will ensure that findings are reported honestly and without distortion. Any limitations or biases that may have influenced the data collection or interpretation will be acknowledged and discussed.³⁰

Limitations of the Study

No research is without limitations. Understanding and acknowledging these limitations is crucial for presenting the findings within a realistic context. The study's limitations include issues related to sample size, generalizability, bias, data access, and the complexity of the political landscape.

Access to Participants

Accessing key political figures, government officials, and international diplomats can be challenging, especially in a politically sensitive environment like Bangladesh. There may be reluctance among high-ranking individuals to participate in interviews due to concerns over political repercussions or security issues. As a result:

- **Limited Access:** The sample of interviewees may be restricted to a smaller group of participants who are willing to share their experiences. This could limit the breadth of perspectives and reduce the diversity of viewpoints represented.
- **Non-Response Bias:** Non-responses from key political figures or reluctance to participate in interviews might introduce bias into the study's findings. To mitigate this, the researcher will aim to interview a wide range of stakeholders to capture different perspectives, such as scholars, journalists, and civil society representatives.

Generalizability of Findings

Given that the study focuses on Bangladesh's political landscape, the findings may not be directly applicable to other countries or regions. Political interference is shaped by specific national contexts, and the particular historical, cultural, and geopolitical factors in Bangladesh may not be present elsewhere. As such, the conclusions drawn from this study may be more relevant to those studying South Asian politics or similar developing countries rather than being universally applicable.

³⁰ R. B. Gupta, *Social Science Research Methodology: Concepts and Processes* (New Delhi, India: Today & Tomorrow's Printers and Publishers, 2019), 81-82

Data Reliability and Validity

Data collected through interviews may be influenced by participants' personal biases, selective memory, or reluctance to disclose certain information. This is especially true when discussing sensitive political issues. Despite efforts to create an open and trusting interview environment, there is the potential for participants to withhold or distort information based on personal or political motivations.

To address these concerns, the researcher will triangulate interview data with case studies and document analysis, which will provide alternative sources of information to validate the findings. Additionally, participant validation (member checking) will be used, wherein participants can review the transcripts of their interviews to ensure that the data is accurately represented.

Potential Bias in Document Analysis

Document analysis, while valuable for providing secondary data, also comes with its own set of limitations. Official documents from government or international organizations may reflect particular biases or present a skewed view of political events. For example, diplomatic reports might omit or downplay instances of external interference to maintain positive international relations.

To counteract this limitation, the study will utilize a broad range of documents, including reports from different sources (e.g., government, international organizations, independent research institutes, and media outlets), to triangulate data and mitigate potential bias.

Political Sensitivity

Finally, the politically sensitive nature of the topic may pose challenges in terms of securing reliable data. Given the ongoing political tensions in Bangladesh, discussing foreign influence may elicit defensive or evasive responses from political figures. This could lead to gaps in data or a lack of candidness from participants, especially those directly involved in political decisions.

To address this, the study will be sensitive to the socio-political climate, ensuring that the research questions are framed diplomatically and that participants are reassured about the confidentiality of their responses.

Ethical considerations and limitations are inherent in all research processes. By adhering to ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality, and transparency, the researcher ensures the protection of participants and the integrity of the study. Furthermore,

acknowledging the limitations of the research allows for a more balanced and realistic interpretation of the findings. Despite the challenges posed by limited access to participants and the complexities of political analysis, the mixed-methods approach employed in this study—combining interviews, case studies, and document analysis—ensures that the research will provide valuable insights into the role of external interference in Bangladesh’s political landscape.

5.13 Physical Location of Research

The physical location of this research refers to the geographical and institutional settings where data was collected, participants were engaged, and relevant sources were accessed. For a study on *foreign government interference in Bangladesh politics*, the primary physical location is: Bangladesh

1. Dhaka (Capital City) – Primary Research Hub

- **Why Dhaka?**
As the political, administrative, and diplomatic center of Bangladesh, Dhaka was the primary location for field research.
- **Key activities conducted here:**
 - Interviews with political analysts, journalists, academics, and NGO representatives.
 - Visits to public libraries, research institutions, and newspaper archives.
 - Observations of relevant political events or discussions.

2. Academic and Institutional Settings

- **University Campuses (e.g., University of Dhaka, North South University):**
Academic staff and political science researchers contributed expert opinions.
- **Think Tanks and NGOs (e.g., Centre for Policy Dialogue, Transparency International Bangladesh):**
Provided insights into foreign influence on governance and policy.
- **Media Houses and Journalist Forums:**
Engaged for perspectives on foreign influence in political narratives and media discourse.

International Context (Indirect/Secondary)

Although fieldwork was conducted in Bangladesh, foreign governments (e.g., the U.S., India, China, etc.) were analyzed through:

- Public statements from embassies based in Dhaka.
- Reports from international news agencies and think tanks.

- Diplomatic cables or official documents available in the public domain.

Note on Remote Access

Some data (e.g., international news coverage, online reports, and academic publications) were accessed remotely through:

- Online databases
- Government and NGO websites
- Virtual interviews (if required due to access or confidentiality)

The research was primarily conducted within **Bangladesh**, focusing on key urban and institutional settings relevant to political discourse and international relations. The capital city, **Dhaka**, served as the central hub due to its concentration of government institutions, foreign embassies, political stakeholders, think tanks, media outlets, and academic institutions.

Key Research Locations in Bangladesh

Location	Purpose of Visit
Dhaka (Capital City)	Central location for interviews, data collection, and access to political institutions and embassies.
University of Dhaka	Engaged with political science faculty for expert interviews and literature.
North South University	Sourced academic insights and accessed relevant political science research.
Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)	Obtained policy briefs and expert opinions on foreign influence and governance.
Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB)	Gained insights into foreign aid, anti-corruption efforts, and political integrity.
Daily Star & Prothom Alo offices	Interviewed journalists and analyzed political coverage related to foreign involvement.

Remote and Online Sources

In addition to fieldwork within Bangladesh, the study used remote methods to access data from international actors:

- **Embassy websites and press releases** (e.g., U.S., India, China)
- **International news outlets** (e.g., BBC, Al Jazeera, Reuters)
- **Think tank publications** (e.g., Brookings Institution, Carnegie Endowment)

- **Online academic databases** (e.g., JSTOR, Google Scholar)

This chapter described the research methodology used to explore foreign government interference in Bangladesh politics. By adopting a qualitative, exploratory approach with robust ethical practices and rigorous analysis, the study aims to uncover nuanced insights into how external actors shape domestic political dynamics.

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CHAPTER: 6
Historical Context
of
Bangladesh's Political Landscape

6.1 Preamble

Before going to the next chapter, which is the Findings of this Research, we must need to know deeply the Historical context of Bangladesh.

Emerging trends in political interference reflect the evolving nature of global and regional power dynamics. From the rise of digital tools and soft power strategies to the impact of climate change and hybrid tactics, these developments present new challenges and opportunities for nations like Bangladesh. Future research and policy efforts must prioritize understanding these trends and developing adaptive strategies to safeguard national sovereignty while fostering constructive international engagement. By addressing these emerging issues, Bangladesh can position itself to navigate the complexities of external influence in an increasingly interconnected world.

Historical Context of Bangladesh's Political Landscape

Bangladesh's political history is deeply intertwined with external interference, from its liberation struggle in 1971 to its contemporary governance challenges. Understanding the historical context is crucial to analyzing the patterns and impacts of external involvement.

6.2 Liberation War and the Role of External Actors

The 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh was a monumental event not only in the nation's history but also in the broader geopolitical context of the Cold War. The role of external actors—particularly India, the United States, China, and the Soviet Union—was pivotal in shaping the course of the conflict. Their interventions were driven by a mix of strategic, ideological, and humanitarian motivations, and their involvement had lasting implications for Bangladesh's emergence as an independent state. This section delves into the roles of these external actors and their influence on the outcome of the Liberation War.³¹

Before we go deep into history of the liberation war of Bangladesh, we need to highlight the background of Agartala Conspiracy Case.

The Agartala Conspiracy Case (1968)

The Agartala Conspiracy Case was a major political case filed by the Pakistan government in 1968 against Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and several Bengali civil and military officials. The government of Pakistan accused them of conspiring with India to separate East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) from Pakistan.

³¹ Sarmila Bose, *Dead Reckoning: Memories of the 1971 Bangladesh War* (London, United Kingdom: C. Hurst & Co., 2011), 54-55

The case was officially titled the State vs. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Others.

Background

During the 1960s, tensions between West Pakistan and East Pakistan were very high because:

- Economic inequality between the two regions
- Political domination of West Pakistan
- Bengali demands for autonomy

In 1966, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman announced the Six-Point Movement, demanding greater autonomy for East Pakistan. The military regime of Ayub Khan saw this as a threat to Pakistan's unity.

The Conspiracy Allegation

In January 1968, the Pakistan government charged 35 people, including:

- Sheikh Mujibur Rahman
- Bengali military officers
- Civil servants

They were accused of:

- Secretly meeting Indian officials in Agartala, a city in the Indian state of Tripura
- Planning an armed uprising in East Pakistan
- Seeking Indian military assistance to create an independent Bangladesh

Because the alleged meetings were said to have occurred in Agartala, the case became known as the Agartala Conspiracy Case.

Trial

The accused were tried in a special tribunal in Dhaka Cantonment. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was presented as the main conspirator.

The Pakistani government hoped the trial would:

- Discredit Mujib politically
- Crush the autonomy movement in East Pakistan

However, the opposite happened.

Public Reaction

The case triggered massive protests across East Pakistan.

Students, workers, and political activists launched a nationwide movement known as the 1969 Mass Uprising in East Pakistan.

People believed the case was politically motivated and intended to silence Mujib.

Protesters demanded:

- Withdrawal of the case
- Release of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

Withdrawal of the Case

Facing intense public pressure, the government withdrew the case in February 1969.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and all accused were released.

Soon after his release, Mujib was given the title “Bangabandhu” (Friend of Bengal) at a public rally in Dhaka.

Debate About Mujib’s Actual Involvement

Historians and political analysts have debated whether the conspiracy was real.

View 1: Pakistan Government’s Claim

The Pakistani regime claimed:

- Mujib secretly planned independence
- He sought Indian support for a revolt

View 2: Many Historians’ View

Many historians believe:

- The case was fabricated or exaggerated by the Ayub Khan government
- It was meant to suppress the Bengali autonomy movement

However, some later sources suggest that Bengali officers and politicians were indeed discussing independence, though the exact role of Mujib remains debated.

Historical Importance

The Agartala Conspiracy Case became a turning point in the history of Bangladesh because it:

- Made Sheikh Mujibur Rahman the symbol of Bengali nationalism
- Triggered the 1969 mass uprising
- Weakened the regime of Ayub Khan
- Paved the way for the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971

In short:

The Agartala Conspiracy Case was an attempt by the Pakistani government to accuse Sheikh Mujibur Rahman of plotting secession with India. Instead of weakening him, it made him the undisputed leader of the Bengali independence movement. The Prelude to the Liberation War.

The political and cultural estrangement between East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and West Pakistan had been building for decades, fueled by economic disparity, political disenfranchisement, and cultural marginalization of Bengalis. Tensions reached a boiling point in December 1970 when the Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, won a sweeping victory in Pakistan's national elections. However, the refusal of the ruling authorities in West Pakistan, led by President Yahya Khan, to transfer power to Mujib triggered widespread unrest in East Pakistan. In March 1971, the Pakistani military launched Operation Searchlight, a brutal crackdown on the civilian population of East Pakistan, which escalated into a full-scale war for independence. From this moment, the involvement of external actors became increasingly important in determining the war's outcome.

India's Strategic Interests and Military Intervention

India's involvement in the Liberation War was decisive in the creation of Bangladesh. Geopolitically, India had a strong interest in the breakup of Pakistan, as it saw the conflict as an opportunity to weaken its neighbor and reduce Pakistan's influence in the region. The Indian government, led by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, was also deeply concerned about the humanitarian crisis caused by the Pakistani military's actions in East Pakistan. The refugee crisis, with millions fleeing to India to escape the violence, put immense pressure on India's resources and infrastructure.

India's initial response was diplomatic and humanitarian. The Indian government provided covert support to the Mukti Bahini, the Bengali liberation army, by supplying arms, training, and logistical support. India's involvement in the conflict deepened as it became clear that the Pakistani military was unwilling to negotiate or stop the violence. By December 1971, India had fully committed to military intervention. The Indian Army launched a coordinated assault alongside the Mukti Bahini, targeting Pakistani military positions in East Pakistan.

The intervention was decisive, leading to the defeat of the Pakistani military. On December 16, 1971, Pakistan's Eastern Command surrendered to the joint Indian and Mukti Bahini forces, and Bangladesh was formally recognized as an independent state. India's military involvement in the Liberation War, was not just a response to the immediate conflict but

also a part of a larger regional strategy aimed at weakening Pakistan and asserting India's dominance in South Asia.³²

The United States' Support for Pakistan

In contrast to India's support for Bangladesh's independence, the United States, under President Richard Nixon, maintained a strong alliance with Pakistan during the Liberation War. This relationship was largely motivated by Cold War geopolitics, as Pakistan had been a key ally of the United States in the region, particularly in the context of the Cold War and the global struggle against Soviet influence. Nixon's administration was keen to maintain Pakistan as a counterbalance to India's growing influence, which was seen as aligned with the Soviet Union (Hassan et al., 2019).

Despite widespread reports of atrocities committed by the Pakistani military in East Pakistan, the United States continued to support Pakistan diplomatically and militarily. U.S. officials, including Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, sought to shield Pakistan from international condemnation and prevent any significant change in the regional balance of power. The U.S. administration's stance was controversial and widely criticized, particularly as the human rights situation in East Pakistan worsened.

According to Raghavan (2013), the United States' support for Pakistan during the Liberation War was driven by the strategic importance of its alliance with Pakistan, which had been solidified during the Cold War through the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). Even as the Pakistani military's actions in East Pakistan became more violent and repressive, the U.S. government maintained its position, largely due to Cold War priorities, ignoring calls for a more balanced approach to the conflict.

China's Diplomatic Support for Pakistan

China's role in the Liberation War was less direct than India's or the United States' but still significant. As a close ally of Pakistan, China provided diplomatic and political support throughout the conflict. This support was grounded in a broader strategic alliance between China and Pakistan, which was forged in the context of China's rivalry with India and its desire to counter India's influence in the region.

³² Gary J. Bass, *The Blood of Telegram: Nixon, Kissinger, and a Forgotten Genocide* (New York, United States: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 295-299

China's support for Pakistan during the war included using its veto power in the United Nations Security Council to block resolutions condemning Pakistan's actions in East Pakistan. While China did not provide military assistance to Pakistan during the conflict, its diplomatic backing was crucial in ensuring that Pakistan did not face international isolation. Raghavan (2013) notes that China's support for Pakistan was part of a larger effort to maintain its strategic partnership with Pakistan and counter India's growing influence.

The Soviet Union's Support for India

The Soviet Union played a critical role in supporting India during the Liberation War. As a key Cold War adversary of the United States and China, the Soviet Union sought to counterbalance U.S. and Chinese influence in South Asia. In August 1971, the Soviet Union and India signed the Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation, which formalized Soviet support for India in the event of conflict with Pakistan. This treaty played a significant role in India's decision to escalate its military involvement in the Liberation War.

The Soviet Union provided India with military supplies, intelligence, and logistical support during the war. The Soviet government also provided diplomatic backing for India in international forums, ensuring that India could act without fear of significant opposition from the United States or China. Raghavan (2013) emphasizes that the Soviet Union's support for India was a key factor in India's success during the conflict, as it provided India with the political and military leverage needed to defeat Pakistan decisively.

The Impact of External Actors on the Liberation War

The involvement of external actors in the 1971 Liberation War had a profound impact on the outcome of the conflict. India's direct military intervention was the decisive factor in the defeat of the Pakistani military and the eventual creation of Bangladesh as an independent nation. India's support, combined with the efforts of the Mukti Bahini, significantly weakened the Pakistani position in East Pakistan, leading to the surrender of Pakistani forces.

The United States and China, by contrast, played a role in prolonging the conflict. U.S. support for Pakistan and China's diplomatic backing ensured that Pakistan could continue its military operations in East Pakistan despite growing international criticism. The Soviet Union's support for India, on the other hand, helped ensure that India had the diplomatic cover it needed to intervene militarily.

The Liberation War of Bangladesh was not just a local struggle for independence but also a geopolitical battleground where the interests of global powers collided. The involvement of

India, the United States, China, and the Soviet Union shaped the course of the war and ultimately determined its outcome. India's military intervention, bolstered by Soviet support, was the key factor in the creation of Bangladesh. In contrast, the U.S. and China's support for Pakistan prolonged the conflict and intensified the humanitarian crisis. The role of external actors in the Liberation War highlights the complex intersection of national sovereignty, Cold War geopolitics, and humanitarian concerns.³³

6.3 Post-Independence Political Developments

The early years of Bangladesh's independence were marked by political instability and economic challenges. The assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975 led to a series of military coups and authoritarian regimes. These events deeply influenced the country's political landscape and its relationship with external actors, especially in terms of foreign aid and diplomatic alliances, which often played a role in shaping domestic policies.

Military Rule: Ziaur Rahman and Hussain Muhammad Ershad

Following the tragic assassination of Sheikh Mujib, Ziaur Rahman, a former military leader and the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Bangladesh Army, took control of the country. Zia's rise to power occurred amidst political chaos, and his military regime quickly consolidated power. His leadership, which began in 1977, lasted until his assassination in 1981. Zia's regime was marked by authoritarian policies, but he managed to secure political legitimacy by promoting nationalism and establishing the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) as a political force.

Ziaur Rahman's government relied heavily on foreign aid and diplomatic relationships, particularly with the United States and other Western powers. This external support was crucial for his government, as it helped stabilize the economy and solidify the regime's control. In return, Zia's government implemented policies that aligned with the interests of these external actors, including economic reforms and the opening of the country to foreign investments.

Hussain Muhammad Ershad, another military leader, took power in 1982 through a coup d'état after Zia's assassination. Ershad's regime was also characterized by the consolidation of power in the hands of the military and the establishment of a presidential system that gave him considerable control over the political process. Throughout his tenure, Ershad sought legitimacy through foreign aid and international recognition, particularly from Western

³³ Archer K. Blood, *The Cruel Birth of Bangladesh: Memoirs of an American Diplomat* (Dhaka, Bangladesh: University Press Limited (UPL), 2002), 52-53

countries and neighboring states. However, his rule was increasingly challenged by political opposition, and in 1990, after a popular uprising, Ershad was forced to resign, marking the end of military rule in Bangladesh.³⁴

Restoration of Democracy

The restoration of democracy in Bangladesh in 1991 was a significant turning point in the country's political history. The return to democratic governance followed a period of intense political and social upheaval. In the general elections of 1991, Khaleda Zia's BNP won a majority, and she became the first woman to serve as Prime Minister of Bangladesh. This period marked a shift towards civilian rule and greater political engagement with international organizations, particularly in the areas of electoral reforms, human rights, and governance.

International actors, such as the United Nations, the United States, and various Western powers, played a significant role in supporting Bangladesh's democratic transition. These actors not only provided diplomatic backing but also offered aid packages conditioned on democratic reforms and the promotion of human rights. This external influence shaped the political environment in Bangladesh, as both domestic parties and leaders had to navigate the expectations of international actors in order to secure political legitimacy and foreign assistance.

In addition to the assistance provided by international organizations, there was also significant involvement by international bodies such as the European Union in overseeing electoral processes. These external actors contributed to the modernization of the electoral system, ensuring greater transparency and reducing instances of electoral fraud.

Despite the positive strides made during the early years of democracy, the political scene remained volatile, with constant power struggles between the two dominant political parties—the BNP and the Awami League (AL). Political violence, corruption, and economic mismanagement persisted, and the political rivalry between the AL, led by Sheikh Hasina, and the BNP, led by Khaleda Zia, continued to fuel instability. The two parties alternated in power, and the competition for influence often resulted in national gridlock.

The Role of External Actors in Post-Independence Politics

Throughout the post-independence period, external actors have consistently played an influential role in shaping Bangladesh's political landscape. These actors, including

³⁴ Lawrence Ziring, *Bangladesh from Mujib to Ershad: An Interpretive Study* (Dhaka, Bangladesh: University Press, 1992), 78-79

neighboring India, Western powers, and international organizations, have provided critical support in various forms—diplomatic, economic, and military aid—that has significantly impacted Bangladesh’s governance.

Foreign aid has been one of the most prominent tools through which external actors have influenced domestic politics. The regimes of both Ziaur Rahman and Hussain Muhammad Ershad heavily depended on foreign assistance, which often came with political strings attached. This aid, particularly from the United States and Western countries, shaped domestic policies and helped maintain political stability in the face of internal challenges. In return for aid, these regimes were expected to implement policies that aligned with the strategic interests of their donors, which often meant following neoliberal economic policies and maintaining a favorable stance in foreign relations.³⁵

International organizations, such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), also exerted considerable influence in shaping Bangladesh’s political trajectory. These organizations provided financial aid and assistance for development programs but also imposed conditions that demanded economic and political reforms. While these reforms were sometimes beneficial and sometimes not; in terms of economic development, they mostly conflicted with the country’s sovereignty and political autonomy.

Scholars such as Ahmed (2004) have analyzed the intricate relationship between Bangladesh’s domestic political dynamics and the external influence exerted by international actors. Ahmed emphasizes the delicate balance that Bangladeshi political leaders had to strike between pursuing domestic political agendas and responding to the demands of foreign governments and organizations. According to Ahmed, external interference often played a dual role in both stabilizing and destabilizing the political environment, as it helped to support democratic institutions but also occasionally exacerbated political divisions.

India, as Bangladesh's largest neighbor and a key regional power, has had both positive and negative impacts on the country’s politics. During the period of military rule, India played a supportive role in promoting democracy in Bangladesh, but it also pursued its own strategic interests in the region. The relationship between Bangladesh and India during the post-independence era has often been characterized by both cooperation and rivalry, particularly concerning issues such as border security, trade, and water sharing.

³⁵ Mohammad Mizanur Rahman, *Foreign Aid and Bangladesh: Donor Relations and Realpolitik* (London , UK: Routledge, 2025), 31-32

Challenges to Political Stability

Despite the restoration of democracy in 1991, Bangladesh's political environment remained fragile, and political instability continued to plague the country. The alternating rule of the BNP and the Awami League, combined with an entrenched culture of political rivalry, led to a volatile political landscape. These parties, although both committed to democratic governance, frequently engaged in violent confrontations, including strikes, street protests, and violent clashes between their supporters. The personal animosity between the two party leaders—Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina—further exacerbated the political tensions.

The role of external actors in managing these domestic conflicts has often been limited. While international organizations played a supportive role in promoting democratic processes, they struggled to mediate the political disputes between the Awami League and the BNP. Foreign interventions were often perceived by domestic political leaders as biased or self-serving, especially when external actors pressured the government on issues such as human rights or electoral transparency.

In addition, Bangladesh's political leaders had to navigate a complex regional context. The geopolitical competition between India and China in South Asia added an additional layer of complexity to the political environment. Bangladesh, as a strategically located country, was often the subject of external influences as both India and China sought to expand their influence in the region. This geopolitical rivalry sometimes manifested itself in Bangladesh's domestic politics, with each party aligning with one of the regional powers depending on the political situation.

In conclusion, the post-independence political developments in Bangladesh have been heavily influenced by external actors, both regional and global. From the early years of instability following the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to the military regimes of Ziaur Rahman and Hussain Muhammad Ershad, foreign aid and diplomatic alliances have played a crucial role in shaping the country's political trajectory. The return to democracy in 1991, while a significant achievement, did not eliminate the challenges posed by political rivalry, corruption, and economic mismanagement. External actors, through their support and influence, have contributed both to the stabilization and destabilization of Bangladesh's political landscape, creating a complex interplay between domestic and international factors.

6.4 Contemporary Political Landscape

Bangladesh's current political environment is characterized by intense rivalry between the two dominant political parties: the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). This rivalry has created a polarized political climate, where both parties

engage in frequent conflicts, protests, and strikes, further exacerbating instability. The competition for political power between these parties has had significant implications for the political stability of the country, as well as for the role and influence of external actors. External actors continue to influence this political landscape through various channels, including election monitoring, economic assistance, and geopolitical rivalries. These external interventions have a profound impact on both the domestic political dynamics and Bangladesh's sovereignty, making the relationship between Bangladesh and external powers a critical factor in understanding the current state of its political environment.

Election Monitoring and External Influence

One of the most significant ways external actors influence Bangladesh's politics is through election monitoring. International organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), and various foreign governments have played an important role in monitoring the country's elections, especially since the 1990s. These actors often work to ensure the transparency and fairness of elections, providing support for electoral reforms and capacity-building for Bangladesh's Election Commission.

However, election monitoring has also been a source of tension between political parties and external actors. Both the Awami League and the BNP have, at different times, accused international monitors of bias. The Awami League, for example, has criticized the involvement of international organizations when they have expressed concerns over alleged irregularities or fraud in elections. Similarly, the BNP has sometimes dismissed the involvement of foreign observers when they perceive their electoral prospects to be undermined by international scrutiny. In addition, international bodies often impose political conditionalities as part of their electoral monitoring efforts, which further complicates the political process.

While the presence of external actors in electoral processes can help to enhance credibility, it has also led to tensions over issues such as sovereignty and the legitimacy of foreign involvement in Bangladesh's internal political affairs. Despite these challenges, election monitoring remains a key mechanism through which external actors influence Bangladesh's political system.³⁶

Economic Assistance and Conditionalities

Foreign economic assistance has played an important role in shaping Bangladesh's political landscape, particularly through the imposition of conditionalities attached to foreign aid.

³⁶ Jaglul Alam, *Emergence of Bangladesh and Big-Power Role in 1971* (New Delhi, India: Indian Press and Publication, 2021), 58-59

Over the years, international organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and bilateral donors like the United States and the United Kingdom have provided financial support to Bangladesh. However, much of this aid is conditioned upon the implementation of specific political and economic reforms.

For instance, neoliberal reforms, including privatization, deregulation, and market-oriented policies, have often been a prerequisite for receiving aid. These conditionalities, while promoting economic growth, have also sparked debates about the sovereignty of Bangladesh in formulating its own economic policies. Some critics argue that these foreign-imposed reforms have led to an erosion of Bangladesh's political autonomy, as the government is forced to prioritize the interests of external donors over the needs and aspirations of its own population.

In addition to these economic reforms, Bangladesh's domestic politics have also been shaped by foreign investments that come with their own set of conditions. External investments, particularly from China and Western nations, have often sought to influence Bangladesh's policy decisions in areas such as trade, infrastructure, and economic development. In this context, Bangladesh finds itself balancing multiple external interests while attempting to maintain a degree of political independence.

Geopolitical Rivalries and Bangladesh's Strategic Position

The geopolitical rivalries between regional and global powers have also played a significant role in shaping Bangladesh's political environment. Bangladesh occupies a strategic position in South Asia, bordered by India, Myanmar, and the Bay of Bengal, making it an important player in regional and global politics.

India, as Bangladesh's largest neighbor, has long had a substantial influence on its political and economic landscape. The relationship between Bangladesh and India has been characterized by both cooperation and tension. India has often supported Bangladesh's development through economic aid, trade agreements, and diplomatic assistance, particularly in the areas of border security, water sharing, and regional stability. However, issues such as the Teesta River water dispute, the presence of Rohingya refugees, and border security concerns have at times strained relations.³⁷

On the other hand, China has emerged as a significant external actor with competing interests in Bangladesh. China's growing investment in Bangladesh's infrastructure,

³⁷ Imtiaz Hussain, *South Asia in Global Power Rivalry: Inside-out Appraisals from Bangladesh* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 45-46

particularly through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has further complicated Bangladesh's geopolitical situation. As Bangladesh seeks to balance its relations with India and China, the country has found itself caught in a complex geopolitical rivalry. China's economic engagement has been beneficial in terms of infrastructure development, but it has also led to concerns about dependency on China, particularly in terms of debt and economic control.

Western countries, particularly the United States and European Union, have also sought to maintain influence over Bangladesh, primarily through trade relations, development aid, and diplomatic engagement. Western powers have often criticized Bangladesh's political parties for their handling of human rights issues, particularly concerning the treatment of opposition parties, freedom of speech, and labor rights. In some instances, the West has used economic sanctions or diplomatic pressure to influence Bangladesh's domestic policies, especially on issues of democracy, human rights, and governance.

As these geopolitical rivalries intensify, Bangladesh's political landscape is increasingly shaped by external actors vying for influence. The competition between India, China, and the West often forces Bangladesh to make strategic political decisions that align with the interests of one actor, potentially alienating others. This dynamic places significant pressure on Bangladesh's sovereignty, as the country navigates the challenges posed by competing external powers.³⁸

Sovereignty and Political Stability in the Face of External Influence

Studies by Sobhan (2018) have highlighted the challenges posed by these external influences, particularly in the context of maintaining Bangladesh's sovereignty and political stability. Sobhan argues that Bangladesh's political leaders must navigate the competing interests of external actors while safeguarding the country's independence. As Bangladesh continues to be a key player in the geopolitics of South Asia, its political leaders face increasing pressure from both domestic and international actors to maintain a delicate balance between responding to external pressures and pursuing domestic priorities.

The AL and the BNP, as the primary political forces in Bangladesh, often take contrasting positions on foreign relations. While the AL has traditionally maintained close ties with India and Western countries, the BNP has sought to strengthen relations with China and other regional powers. This political rivalry, coupled with external interference, has created a complex political environment in which domestic political parties are forced to align

³⁸ Nian Peng & Sujit Kumar Datta, *The Dragon and the Bengal Tiger: Five Decades of China-Bangladesh Ties* (Singapore City, Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2025), 45-46

themselves with global powers to secure political and economic gains. However, this dynamic has also contributed to political instability, as foreign involvement sometimes exacerbates tensions between domestic political factions.

6.5 Conclusion:

In conclusion, Bangladesh's contemporary political landscape is heavily influenced by external actors through various channels such as election monitoring, economic assistance, and geopolitical rivalries. These external influences have significant implications for the country's sovereignty and political stability. While external actors play a role in supporting democratic processes and economic development, their involvement has also led to tensions within the domestic political environment. As Bangladesh continues to navigate these challenges, maintaining a balance between external influence and political autonomy will remain a critical issue for the country's future.

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CHAPTER: 7

Findings

And

Discussion

7.1 Preamble

This chapter will present and analyze the findings based on the data collected, especially the core findings of the research on the interference of foreign powers in Bangladesh's political landscape. Drawing from a combination of media analyses, government documents, leaked communications, and expert commentary, the findings offer a detailed look at how external actors have attempted to influence the country's domestic political affairs—particularly during periods of electoral transition and civil unrest.

The chapter categorizes foreign interference into four main domains: (1) disinformation and digital propaganda, (2) involvement through international NGOs and diplomatic channels, (3) influence operations by neighboring countries, and (4) the perception of foreign engagement among local actors.

Each section synthesizes evidence gathered from credible sources and aims to clarify the extent, mechanisms, and consequences of such involvement.

The findings reveal a complex interplay between global strategic interests and local political dynamics, suggesting that Bangladesh's sovereignty and democratic processes are increasingly subject to external pressures. While some forms of foreign engagement—such as election monitoring and advocacy for democratic reform—are framed as constructive, others have raised serious concerns about manipulation, ideological imposition, and soft power dominance.

7.2 Detailed Examination of External Actors (Countries, Organizations)

The role of external actors in Bangladesh's political landscape has been substantial, particularly since the country gained independence in 1971. These external actors have come in various forms: foreign governments, international organizations, and multinational corporations. Their involvement in Bangladesh's domestic affairs has shaped key political decisions, economic policies, and even governance structures. This section delves into the various countries and international organizations that have exerted influence on Bangladesh, analyzing their objectives, methods of engagement, and impact on the nation's political and economic trajectories.³⁹

7.3 External Actors: Key Countries

The influence of external actors on Bangladesh's political, economic, and social systems has been profound since its independence in 1971. External actors, such as neighboring

³⁹ Srinath Raghavan, 1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh (London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2013), 78-79

countries, global powers, and emerging economic players, have played key roles in shaping the country's governance, policy decisions, and strategic alliances. Among these actors, countries like India, the United States, China, and others have been pivotal in influencing Bangladesh's political trajectory, with their involvement spanning from post-independence support to shaping economic policies and strategic alliances in contemporary times.

This section provides an in-depth analysis of the roles of these key countries, focusing on their strategic objectives, methods of engagement, and the impact of their interference in Bangladesh's domestic affairs. By examining their actions and influence, we can understand how foreign nations have played a significant part in the shaping of Bangladesh's internal political landscape.

7.3.1 India's Role in Bangladesh

India, Bangladesh's immediate neighbor and a major regional power, has been an essential external actor in shaping Bangladesh's political and economic development. India's influence on Bangladesh can be understood in multiple dimensions, ranging from historical ties to security concerns, economic cooperation, and cultural connections. The two countries share a rich history and a complex relationship, with India playing a decisive role during Bangladesh's liberation in 1971.⁴⁰

Historical and Strategic Context

India's involvement in Bangladesh's independence movement in 1971 was a critical turning point in both nations' histories. The Indian military intervention, coupled with diplomatic support, helped Bangladesh gain independence from Pakistan. Since then, India has been seen both as a friend and a challenger, depending on the context of their relations. India's strategic interests in Bangladesh have focused on maintaining regional stability, preventing security threats from insurgent groups in India's northeastern states, and safeguarding its geopolitical interests in South Asia.

Geopolitical and Security Concerns

India's primary concern in Bangladesh has been its strategic location. Situated in the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh shares borders with India on three sides, which means that developments in Bangladesh directly impact India's national security. In particular, India views Bangladesh's stability as crucial for securing its northeastern states, many of which share cultural and ethnic ties with Bangladesh. For India, a destabilized Bangladesh could

⁴⁰ Chandrashekhar Dasgupta, *India and the Bangladesh Liberation War* (New Delhi, India: Juggernaut Publication, 2021), 66-67

result in cross-border insurgencies, illegal migration, and challenges to its own territorial integrity.

India's role in Bangladesh's security has, therefore, been multifaceted. It has maintained military and intelligence cooperation with Bangladesh to combat terrorism, prevent insurgencies, and ensure regional security. At the same time, India is cautious about keeping its influence in Bangladesh without appearing to dominate the smaller nation, as this could provoke nationalist sentiments in Bangladesh.

Economic Ties and Trade Relations

India is one of Bangladesh's largest trading partners, and the economic ties between the two countries are vital for both. India has been a major exporter of goods, including industrial products, textiles, and machinery, while Bangladesh exports primarily textiles, garments, and agricultural products to India. Trade relations between the two countries have been mutually beneficial, but they have also been a source of tension at times. Trade imbalances, border tariffs, and issues related to non-tariff barriers have led to periodic disputes.

The Indian government has been actively involved in financing several key infrastructure projects in Bangladesh, especially in the energy, transportation, and telecommunications sectors. India has also sought to leverage its economic power by making Bangladesh more dependent on its economy, using both bilateral trade agreements and regional arrangements to achieve this goal.

Additionally, India has extended substantial financial and technical support to Bangladesh's development programs, especially in sectors like education, health, and agriculture. While these aids have been crucial for Bangladesh's growth, critics argue that India has strategically positioned itself as a major donor to ensure its influence in Bangladesh's political landscape.

Water Disputes and Border Issues

One of the long-standing issues between India and Bangladesh has been water sharing, particularly with regard to the Teesta River, which flows through both countries. India's plans for large-scale water diversion projects have caused tensions in Bangladesh, which depends on the Teesta for irrigation and agriculture. Despite attempts to reach an agreement on water-sharing, India's reluctance to finalize an agreement has been a point of contention.

In addition to water issues, the management of the shared border remains a challenge, with concerns over illegal immigration, border security, and cross-border trade. Despite bilateral

agreements to resolve these issues, tensions over border demarcation and security continue to surface, occasionally leading to diplomatic strain.

Role in Bangladesh's Political Affairs

India has played an active role in shaping Bangladesh's political affairs, particularly in its post-independence development and democracy-building processes. During the military regimes of General Ziaur Rahman and Hussain Muhammad Ershad in the 1970s and 1980s, India maintained cautious engagement, as these governments were characterized by authoritarian rule. However, India continued to support the democratic opposition, particularly the Awami League, which had close historical ties with India due to its role in the 1971 liberation war.⁴¹

In the 1990s, when Bangladesh transitioned back to democracy, India strengthened its ties with the Awami League government, providing diplomatic support and advocating for the restoration of democratic norms and human rights in Bangladesh. India has also been involved in brokering peace during periods of political instability, although it has often been criticized for its biased support for certain political factions in Bangladesh.

After liberation, India has always oppressed Bangladesh as a neighbor:

The statement “After liberation, India has always oppressed Bangladesh as a neighbor” is a political interpretation. Some people and political groups in Bangladesh believe this, while others strongly disagree. To understand the statement properly, it is important to look at both the criticisms of India–Bangladesh relations and the counterarguments.

1. Historical Context After Independence (1971)

During the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, India played a major role in supporting the independence of Bangladesh against Pakistan.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi supported the Mukti Bahini, provided military assistance, and later signed agreements with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Because of this history, India and Bangladesh were initially seen as very close allies.

However, over the decades several issues created tension and mistrust, leading some Bangladeshis to argue that India acts like a dominant or oppressive neighbor.

⁴¹ S. R. Chakravarti, *Bangladesh Under Mujib, Zia, and Ershad: Dilemma of a New Nation* (New Delhi, India: Har-Anand Publications, 1995), 52-53

Major Issues Often Cited by Critics

1. Water Sharing Disputes:

One of the biggest complaints is about river water control.

Farakka Barrage

The Farakka Barrage built by India in 1975 on the Ganges River diverted water toward Kolkata port.

Critics in Bangladesh argue that this caused:

- Reduced water flow in Bangladesh during the dry season
- Agricultural problems
- Environmental damage in southwest Bangladesh

Teesta Water Dispute

Another long-standing conflict is over the Teesta River. Bangladesh claims India withdraws too much water upstream.

A water-sharing agreement has been discussed for years but has not been finalized.

Critics say this shows India prioritizes its own interests over Bangladesh.

2. Border Killings:

The border between the two countries is about 4,096 km, one of the longest land borders in the world.

Bangladesh often accuses India's Border Security Force (BSF) of killing Bangladeshi civilians near the border.

Many of the victims are suspected of:

- Smuggling
- Illegal crossing

Human rights organizations say these killings are excessive and have created resentment in Bangladesh.

India argues the shootings occur while preventing illegal activities or trafficking.

3. Trade Imbalance

Bangladesh imports far more goods from India than it exports.

Example:

- Bangladesh imports food, machinery, and consumer goods from India.
- Bangladeshi exports to India are smaller.

Critics say this creates economic dependency.

India argues that it has given Bangladesh duty-free access to many products to improve trade.

4. Transit and Regional Influence

India often seeks transit routes through Bangladesh to connect its northeastern states.

Some Bangladeshi critics argue this benefits India more than Bangladesh.

Supporters say transit also helps Bangladesh through:

- Infrastructure investment
- Regional trade growth.

Why the “Oppression” Narrative Exists

The perception comes from several factors:

1. Power imbalance — India is much larger politically, economically, and militarily.
2. Nationalist politics inside Bangladesh.
3. Historical mistrust after 1975 when relations worsened following Mujib’s assassination.
4. Ongoing disputes over water, border security, and trade.

The claim that India has always oppressed Bangladesh is not universally accepted.

- Critics point to water disputes, border killings, and economic imbalance as evidence of unequal relations.
- Others argue that India and Bangladesh have had both cooperation and conflict, typical of relationships between neighboring countries.

The Felani Killing at the India–Bangladesh Border (2011)

The Felani killing is one of the most widely discussed and controversial border incidents between Bangladesh and India.

It happened on January 7, 2011, when a 15-year-old Bangladeshi girl named Felani Khatun was shot by India’s Border Security Force (BSF) while crossing the border.

What Happened?

Felani lived with her family in New Delhi, where her father worked as a laborer. They had originally come from Kurigram District in northern Bangladesh.

In early 2011:

- Felani and her father decided to return to Bangladesh.

- To avoid immigration issues, they tried to cross the border illegally near Cooch Behar, a district in the Indian state of West Bengal.

During the crossing:

1. Felani attempted to climb the barbed-wire border fence.
2. A BSF border guard fired a shot.
3. The bullet struck Felani, killing her instantly.

Her body remained hanging on the barbed wire fence for several hours before it was removed.

The Photo That Shocked the World

A photograph showing Felani's body dangling from the fence circulated widely in newspapers and social media.

The image caused:

- Public outrage in Bangladesh
- Strong criticism from human rights organizations
- Diplomatic concern between the two countries

Many Bangladeshis saw the incident as an example of excessive force by border guards.

Legal Proceedings

India later conducted a trial against the BSF soldier accused of the shooting.

Key developments:

- A BSF court tried the border guard.
- In 2013, the soldier was acquitted, meaning he was found not guilty.
- Bangladesh and human rights groups criticized the verdict.

The case was later reviewed again, but the outcome still did not lead to a conviction.

Human Rights Reactions

Organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International condemned the killing.

They argued that:

- Border guards should not use lethal force against unarmed civilians.
- Many deaths occur along the India–Bangladesh border due to smuggling and illegal crossing disputes.

Why the Incident Became Symbolic?

The Felani killing became a symbol of border tensions because:

- The victim was a minor (15 years old).
- The photograph was extremely disturbing.
- It highlighted long-standing concerns about civilian deaths at the border.

Each year, activists in Bangladesh commemorate Felani Day and call for justice.

In short:

The Felani killing refers to the 2011 shooting of 15-year-old Felani Khatun by the Indian Border Security Force while she was crossing the India–Bangladesh border. The shocking image of her body hanging on the border fence sparked international criticism and remains a powerful symbol of border violence.

7.3.2 The United States and Bangladesh

The United States has had a complex relationship with Bangladesh since its independence, characterized by both cooperation and tension. Initially, the U.S. government had limited engagement with Bangladesh due to its alignment with the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War. However, with the global strategic shifts in the post-Cold War era, the U.S. expanded its presence and influence in Bangladesh.

Foreign Aid and Economic Influence

Foreign aid has been a significant aspect of U.S.-Bangladesh relations. The U.S. is one of the largest donors to Bangladesh, contributing substantial financial support for development programs in areas such as education, health, disaster relief, and governance. U.S. aid to Bangladesh is often conditioned on reforms and improvements in democratic governance, human rights, and political stability. In recent years, however, there has been criticism that U.S. aid to Bangladesh has been used as a tool for political leverage, with the U.S. attempting to influence the country's political and economic policies in favor of its broader regional interests.

U.S. influence has been particularly evident in the context of Bangladesh's economic reforms. The U.S. has pushed for market-oriented reforms, including trade liberalization and privatization, which have shaped the country's economic trajectory. However, critics argue that these reforms have often benefitted multinational corporations and foreign investors, leaving local industries at a disadvantage.

Promotion of Democratic Governance

One of the most significant areas of U.S. involvement in Bangladesh has been its efforts to promote democratic governance. The U.S. government has consistently emphasized the importance of free and fair elections, political pluralism, and human rights. U.S. support for civil society and the media has been instrumental in strengthening democratic institutions in Bangladesh.

However, U.S. support for Bangladesh's political system has not always been without controversy. The U.S. has at times been accused of interfering in Bangladesh's internal political matters, particularly in relation to the political rivalry between the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). U.S. diplomatic efforts have often favored certain political factions over others, creating friction within Bangladesh's political landscape.

Security and Counterterrorism Cooperation

The U.S. has also been involved in Bangladesh's security sector, particularly in the areas of counterterrorism and regional security. Bangladesh's strategic location in South Asia, coupled with its proximity to the volatile regions of Myanmar and India, has made it an important partner for the U.S. in its fight against terrorism and extremism. The U.S. has provided military assistance and training to Bangladesh's armed forces, which has been instrumental in enhancing the country's counterterrorism capabilities.

While security cooperation between the U.S. and Bangladesh has grown, the political instability in Bangladesh has sometimes hindered deeper military and diplomatic ties. U.S. concerns over human rights violations and political violence, particularly during elections, have also strained the relationship at times.

Diplomatic and Political Challenges

U.S.-Bangladesh relations have not been without challenges. The U.S. has frequently expressed concerns over Bangladesh's human rights record, particularly regarding political violence, freedom of speech, and the treatment of minority groups. The U.S. has also criticized the government's handling of opposition parties and civil society activists, which has at times led to diplomatic tensions.

Despite these challenges, the U.S. remains a key player in Bangladesh's foreign policy, providing economic assistance, diplomatic support, and security cooperation.⁴²

⁴²Gregory P. Davis, *Bangladesh: Conditions, Issues and U.S. Relations* (New York, United States: Nova Science Publishers, 1987), 56-57

7.3.3 China's Influence in Bangladesh

China has emerged as one of Bangladesh's most important external actors in recent years, particularly with the increasing importance of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the growing influence of China in South Asia. While Bangladesh has historically had strong ties with India and the United States, China's rise as a global power has shifted the geopolitical landscape, and Bangladesh has increasingly turned to China for economic cooperation and strategic support.

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

One of the primary ways that China has increased its influence in Bangladesh is through the Belt and Road Initiative, a global infrastructure and development project launched by China in 2013. Through the BRI, China has invested heavily in infrastructure projects in Bangladesh, including the construction of roads, railways, bridges, and ports. These investments are seen as part of China's broader strategy to expand its economic influence in South Asia and secure key trade routes.

The most significant project under the BRI is the construction of the deep-sea port at Payra, which will enhance Bangladesh's trade connectivity with China and other countries in the region. In addition, China has provided loans and financial aid for large-scale infrastructure projects in Bangladesh, strengthening its economic presence and increasing its leverage in the country.

Economic and Trade Relations

China has become one of Bangladesh's largest trading partners, with bilateral trade volumes increasing rapidly in recent years. Bangladesh exports textiles, garments, and agricultural products to China, while importing industrial goods, machinery, and electronics from China. As Bangladesh's economy grows, China's economic presence in the country continues to expand, making it a vital trading partner.

Despite these growing economic ties, concerns over Bangladesh's increasing reliance on Chinese loans and investments have surfaced. Critics argue that China's financial assistance often comes with high interest rates, leading to growing debt dependency and potential long-term economic risks for Bangladesh.⁴³

⁴³Md. Nazrul Islam & Akbar Hussain, *Bangladesh-China Connectivity: History, Trade and Diplomacy, and Society* (Singapore City, Singapore: Springer, 2025), 230-231

Geopolitical Implications

China's growing influence in Bangladesh has had significant geopolitical implications. As India and the U.S. view China's expansion in South Asia as a strategic challenge, Bangladesh's deepening ties with China have raised concerns. India, in particular, sees China's presence in Bangladesh as a threat to its own regional dominance, especially in the context of its competition with China for influence in South Asia.

China's approach to Bangladesh has been less interventionist compared to India and the U.S., as it seeks to foster economic cooperation without engaging directly in Bangladesh's domestic political affairs. However, its economic influence is shaping Bangladesh's foreign policy and could have long-term consequences for the country's relations with other regional powers.

The involvement of external actors such as India, the United States, and China in Bangladesh's political and economic landscape has been crucial in shaping the country's trajectory since its independence. While India's role has been marked by both historical ties and strategic interests, the U.S. has focused on promoting democracy and regional security, and China's growing influence through infrastructure investment and the Belt and Road Initiative is reshaping Bangladesh's economic future.

Each of these countries has used different methods to engage with Bangladesh, ranging from military support and strategic alliances to economic cooperation and diplomatic pressure. While Bangladesh has benefited from these relationships in terms of economic growth and political stability, the country's sovereignty has at times been compromised as it navigates the complex web of external influences. The challenge for Bangladesh lies in balancing these external pressures while safeguarding its own national interests and political autonomy.

7.4 External Actors: International Organizations

International organizations have played a significant role in influencing Bangladesh's political, economic, and social landscapes since its independence in 1971. These organizations, both regional and global, have shaped Bangladesh's governance structures, policy decisions, and overall development trajectory. They have provided critical financial aid, facilitated diplomatic dialogues, promoted human rights, and helped Bangladesh navigate challenges such as poverty, environmental sustainability, and security concerns.

This section examines the roles of key international organizations, including the United Nations (UN), the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Asian

Development Bank (ADB), and the European Union (EU), in Bangladesh's development. Each of these organizations has significantly impacted Bangladesh's policies, providing financial support, technical expertise, and influencing the country's political and economic governance.⁴⁴

7.4.1 The United Nations (UN) and Bangladesh

The United Nations (UN) has had a significant role in Bangladesh's post-independence development, focusing on peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and development programs. As a member of the UN since 1974, Bangladesh has been an active participant in the organization's initiatives, particularly in the fields of human rights, peace, and development.

Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Assistance

Bangladesh has long been a contributor to UN peacekeeping missions, with over 150,000 Bangladeshi personnel having served in various peacekeeping operations across the globe. This involvement has been pivotal for Bangladesh, positioning the country as a key player in international peacekeeping. Furthermore, Bangladesh's role in UN peacekeeping is seen as a means of projecting the country's soft power and gaining international recognition.

In terms of humanitarian assistance, the UN has been instrumental in responding to the needs of vulnerable populations in Bangladesh. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been active in Bangladesh, providing support for poverty alleviation, gender equality, and sustainable development. The UN's emphasis on human rights and social development has helped Bangladesh navigate the challenges of poverty and inequality, pushing the country to implement social protection programs.

Sustainable Development and the UN Agenda

Bangladesh has aligned its development policies with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly focusing on poverty reduction, gender equality, clean water, and climate action. The UN has supported Bangladesh's efforts to achieve these goals by providing technical assistance, funding, and policy advice.

One of the key challenges Bangladesh faces is climate change, given its vulnerability to natural disasters such as floods, cyclones, and rising sea levels. The UN has been a crucial partner in helping Bangladesh develop climate-resilient infrastructure and adapt to environmental challenges. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) has collaborated with

⁴⁴ Naomi Hossain, *The Aid Lab: Understanding Bangladesh's Surprising Success* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017), 231-232

the government to implement policies and initiatives aimed at reducing the environmental impact of Bangladesh's industrialization and urbanization.

Democracy and Governance

The UN's involvement in promoting democratic governance and human rights in Bangladesh has been a topic of concern in recent years. The organization has raised alarms about political violence, press freedom, and the treatment of opposition parties in Bangladesh. While the UN has advocated for political reforms and respect for human rights, it has faced challenges in influencing Bangladesh's political leadership.

Despite these challenges, the UN's role in advocating for peace, human rights, and democracy has helped Bangladesh strengthen its international standing, allowing it to engage with global institutions and participate in multilateral negotiations.

7.4.2 The World Bank (WB) and Bangladesh

The World Bank (WB) has been a key player in Bangladesh's economic development since its independence. The Bank's focus has been on poverty alleviation, infrastructure development, education, health, and environmental sustainability. Bangladesh is one of the largest recipients of World Bank assistance, and the country has implemented numerous WB-funded projects that have shaped its economic policies.

Economic Development and Poverty Reduction

The World Bank's primary engagement with Bangladesh has centered on reducing poverty and fostering economic growth. Through its financial support, the Bank has helped Bangladesh implement reforms aimed at improving economic governance, fostering private sector development, and enhancing the country's industrial and agricultural output. The Bank has played an instrumental role in Bangladesh's transformation into a major global exporter of textiles and garments, helping to create millions of jobs and raise millions of people out of poverty.

In addition to economic support, the World Bank has provided technical assistance in the form of capacity building, policy advice, and institutional strengthening, enabling Bangladesh to improve its governance structures and enhance public sector management.

Social Development and Infrastructure Projects

The World Bank has funded a variety of large-scale infrastructure projects in Bangladesh, particularly in the areas of transportation, energy, and water resources. Such infrastructure

initiatives have not only contributed to Bangladesh's economic development but have also facilitated greater regional connectivity and trade.

Furthermore, the World Bank has been involved in Bangladesh's education and healthcare sectors. It has provided funding for primary and secondary education, technical and vocational training, and public health programs, particularly in maternal and child health. These initiatives have been instrumental in improving literacy rates, reducing infant mortality, and improving overall public health outcomes.

Debt and Fiscal Reforms

While the World Bank has been crucial in supporting Bangladesh's development, critics argue that the Bank's lending practices have often led to an over-reliance on foreign debt. The Bank's conditionalities, which include structural adjustment programs and fiscal reforms, have often been criticized for placing undue pressure on Bangladesh's economy. Issues such as austerity measures, cuts to social welfare, and increased privatization of public services have led to concerns about the long-term sustainability of Bangladesh's development model.

Despite these concerns, the World Bank continues to play a central role in Bangladesh's economic development, providing both financial resources and strategic guidance for the country's growth.

7.4.3 The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Bangladesh

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has also played a key role in Bangladesh's economic management, particularly in the areas of fiscal stability, monetary policy, and macroeconomic reforms. The IMF provides Bangladesh with financial assistance in times of economic crisis and offers advice on how to stabilize the economy, control inflation, and manage debt.

Macroeconomic Stability and Structural Adjustment

The IMF's relationship with Bangladesh has often been framed in terms of its financial support during times of economic instability. Bangladesh has received several IMF loans and financial assistance packages, especially during periods of external economic shocks or fiscal crises. In exchange for this financial aid, the IMF typically imposes conditions related to fiscal discipline, monetary reforms, and trade liberalization.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ K. M. Matin, Bangladesh and the IMF: An Exploratory Study (Dhaka, Bangladesh: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), 1986), 92-93

IMF-driven structural adjustment programs have been instrumental in helping Bangladesh manage its macroeconomic imbalances, but they have also been criticized for prioritizing market liberalization and austerity measures over social welfare concerns. For example, the IMF's demand for fiscal austerity and subsidy cuts has led to public unrest at times, particularly in relation to fuel price hikes and reduced subsidies for food and energy.

Policy Guidance and Reforms

In addition to financial assistance, the IMF has provided policy advice on areas such as public finance management, exchange rate policy, and tax reform. The IMF has pushed for reforms aimed at improving Bangladesh's fiscal policy, reducing inflation, and ensuring the stability of the national currency, the taka.

Despite Bangladesh's impressive economic growth over the last two decades, the country continues to face challenges such as a widening fiscal deficit, inflationary pressures, and a large informal economy. The IMF's role in providing policy guidance remains significant in addressing these challenges, although its recommendations are not always well-received by the government or the public.

Bangladesh's Engagement with the IMF

Bangladesh's engagement with the IMF is indicative of the complex relationship that many developing countries have with the global financial system. While the IMF's financial support has been crucial during periods of crisis, its emphasis on market-driven reforms has raised concerns about the long-term impact on social welfare and inequality. The challenge for Bangladesh lies in balancing the need for fiscal discipline and economic stability with the desire for inclusive and sustainable development.

7.4.4 The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Bangladesh

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has been another key player in Bangladesh's development, focusing on infrastructure development, poverty alleviation, and regional cooperation. The ADB has provided significant financial assistance to Bangladesh, particularly in sectors such as transportation, energy, and education.

Infrastructure and Regional Connectivity

ADB's most significant contributions to Bangladesh have been in the areas of infrastructure development. The bank has funded key projects such as the construction of roads, bridges, and power plants, which have been essential for driving economic growth and improving regional connectivity. ADB has also provided support for rural development, which has

been critical in reducing poverty and improving the quality of life in Bangladesh's rural areas.⁴⁶

Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change

In addition to infrastructure development, ADB has supported Bangladesh's efforts to mitigate the impact of climate change. The bank has funded projects related to disaster management, flood control, and renewable energy, helping Bangladesh adapt to environmental challenges such as flooding, cyclones, and rising sea levels.

Social Development and Gender Equality

ADB has also been involved in promoting social development in Bangladesh, particularly in the areas of education, healthcare, and gender equality. The bank has supported initiatives to improve education outcomes for girls and women, as well as programs aimed at enhancing access to basic health services for marginalized communities.

7.4.5 The European Union (EU) and Bangladesh

The European Union (EU) has been an important partner for Bangladesh, particularly in trade, development aid, and human rights advocacy. The EU is one of Bangladesh's largest trading partners and has supported the country through both bilateral aid and multilateral programs.

Trade Relations and the GSP+ Scheme

One of the key areas of cooperation between the EU and Bangladesh has been trade. Bangladesh exports a significant portion of its goods to the EU, particularly textiles and garments. The EU's Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP+) allows Bangladesh to export goods to the European market duty-free, providing a crucial boost to the country's export-driven economy.

Human Rights and Democracy Promotion

The EU has been an active advocate for human rights and democratic governance in Bangladesh. The EU's diplomatic initiatives focus on promoting democracy, press freedom, and respect for human rights. The EU has frequently raised concerns about political violence, electoral irregularities, and the treatment of minorities in Bangladesh, calling for reforms and greater accountability.

⁴⁶ Jurgen R. Grote & Roland Vaubel, *The Asian Development Bank and the Emergence of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank: New Dynamics for Development Finance?* (London, UK: Routledge, 2021), 45-46

The EU also provides funding for various human rights and civil society initiatives in Bangladesh, supporting NGOs and grassroots organizations working to promote democratic values and human rights.

7.5 External Actors in Bangladesh Politics: At a glance

The influence of external actors in Bangladesh's political, economic, and social development is significant and multifaceted. These actors, which include foreign countries, international organizations, and multilateral institutions, have played crucial roles in shaping the trajectory of Bangladesh's governance and policies since its independence in 1971. Understanding the roles and impacts of these external entities is critical to grasp the complex dynamics that govern Bangladesh's international relations and domestic policy formulation.

External actors, such as major global powers and regional actors, have shaped Bangladesh's political landscape through diplomatic relations, trade agreements, foreign aid, and strategic alliances. International organizations, including the United Nations (UN), World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), Asian Development Bank (ADB), and European Union (EU), have also had a profound influence on Bangladesh's economic and social development, especially in areas such as poverty alleviation, infrastructure development, and human rights advocacy.

7.5.1 External Actors: Key Countries

Several countries have played pivotal roles in Bangladesh's development through their diplomatic, economic, and political engagements. These include regional powers like India and China, as well as Western nations such as the United States and the United Kingdom.

- India has been Bangladesh's closest regional ally and an influential neighbor. The historical ties between the two countries, rooted in the shared struggle for independence during the Bangladesh Liberation War, have fostered strong diplomatic and economic relations. India's support for Bangladesh's independence in 1971, coupled with their strategic partnership, has established a deep political connection. Trade relations between the two countries are robust, with India being one of Bangladesh's largest trading partners. Additionally, India's involvement in Bangladesh's security affairs and the shared concerns regarding border security, terrorism, and regional stability have made India a key player in Bangladesh's international relations.
- China, on the other hand, has emerged as a significant external actor, especially in the last two decades. China's economic influence in Bangladesh is substantial, with Beijing investing in large-scale infrastructure projects such as the construction of roads, railways, and energy facilities. The China-Bangladesh economic relationship has grown rapidly, with China becoming a crucial partner in Bangladesh's development.

Additionally, China's geopolitical strategy of expanding its influence in South Asia through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has made Bangladesh an important ally in its quest for regional dominance.

- The United States has also maintained a long-standing relationship with Bangladesh, particularly in the realms of trade, defense cooperation, and humanitarian aid. As a key donor of foreign assistance, the U.S. has supported Bangladesh's economic development, democracy-building efforts, and social sector initiatives. However, the U.S. has also raised concerns about human rights, press freedom, and political stability in Bangladesh, and has urged the government to take steps to address these issues.
- The United Kingdom has had a strong diplomatic relationship with Bangladesh, grounded in historical ties as a former colony of the British Empire. The UK has been a significant donor of aid, particularly in the areas of health, education, and disaster response. It has also played a role in facilitating Bangladesh's trade relations with Europe and has advocated for political and human rights reforms.⁴⁷

7.5.2 External Actors: International Organizations

International organizations have been vital in shaping Bangladesh's development policies, providing the financial support, technical expertise, and diplomatic platforms necessary for its economic and social progress. Key organizations include the United Nations (UN), the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the European Union (EU).

- The United Nations (UN) has had a long-standing presence in Bangladesh, supporting its development goals and facilitating peacekeeping missions. The UN's agencies, such as the UNDP, UNICEF, and WHO, have played key roles in areas like poverty reduction, education, healthcare, and disaster management. The UN's advocacy for human rights and democracy has also influenced Bangladesh's domestic policies, pushing the government to uphold international human rights standards and respect for democratic norms.
- The World Bank (WB) has been one of Bangladesh's most important development partners, providing financial resources for large-scale infrastructure projects, poverty alleviation programs, and social development initiatives. The World Bank has supported Bangladesh's efforts to improve its education system, health sector, and rural development. It has also facilitated the country's efforts to enhance economic governance, particularly in the areas of public financial management, tax reforms, and governance structures. However, the Bank's conditionalities, including austerity

⁴⁷ Srinath Raghavan, 1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh (Cambridge, UK: Harvard University Press, 2013), 78-79

measures and fiscal reforms, have often been criticized for placing undue strain on Bangladesh's social welfare programs.

- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has been a crucial actor in ensuring Bangladesh's macroeconomic stability, offering guidance and financial support during times of economic crises. The IMF has provided policy advice on managing inflation, fiscal discipline, and trade liberalization. However, the IMF's conditionalities, including budgetary constraints and market-oriented reforms, have at times led to tensions between the organization and the Bangladeshi government, particularly concerning the impact on public services and social welfare.
- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has been an important partner in funding infrastructure projects in Bangladesh, with a particular focus on energy, transportation, and rural development. The ADB has been instrumental in supporting Bangladesh's efforts to mitigate climate change and manage its natural resources. The bank's technical assistance has also been crucial in promoting sustainable development practices and enhancing the country's environmental resilience.
- The European Union (EU) has been a key partner in Bangladesh's economic and social development. The EU is one of Bangladesh's largest trading partners, particularly in the textile and garment sectors. The EU's Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP) allows Bangladesh to export goods to European markets duty-free, providing a significant boost to its export-driven economy. The EU has also supported Bangladesh in the areas of human rights, governance, and democratic reforms, advocating for improved political processes and greater accountability from the government.

7.6 Conclusion

International organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the IMF, the Asian Development Bank, and the European Union have been instrumental in shaping Bangladesh's development trajectory. These organizations have provided critical financial support, technical expertise, and policy guidance to Bangladesh, enabling the country to achieve significant economic growth and improve living standards for millions of people. However, their involvement has not been without challenges. Bangladesh's reliance on external assistance, the conditionalities attached to financial aid, and the sometimes contradictory nature of the organizations' priorities have raised concerns about the impact on the country's sovereignty and long-term development.

As Bangladesh continues to navigate the complexities of globalization and international cooperation, it must balance the need for external support with the need to maintain its sovereignty and address the aspirations of its people. The role of international organizations

will continue to be pivotal, but the challenge for Bangladesh will be to ensure that its engagement with these organizations aligns with its national interests and sustainable development goals.

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CHAPTER: 8
The Interplay
Between
External Actors and Bangladesh's Political
Landscape

8.1 Preamble

The involvement of external actors in Bangladesh's governance and policy-making processes is both complex and multifaceted. External influence in Bangladesh can be seen in various forms, including foreign aid, trade relations, diplomatic engagements, and military assistance. The interplay between these actors and Bangladesh's political landscape has had a profound impact on its governance structures and policy decisions.

While external actors have played a pivotal role in Bangladesh's development, their influence has not been without challenges. The dependency on foreign aid, coupled with the conditionalities attached to financial support, has led to concerns about Bangladesh's sovereignty and independence. Moreover, the competing interests of different foreign powers have sometimes placed Bangladesh in a difficult position, especially when geopolitical rivalries, such as those between India and China, intersect with the country's domestic policies.

Despite these challenges, external actors continue to shape Bangladesh's trajectory, both through financial and diplomatic engagements and through advocacy for human rights, democracy, and sustainable development. As Bangladesh continues to navigate its path toward greater economic growth and political stability, the role of external actors will remain central in determining the country's future direction.

In conclusion, external actors—both individual countries and international organizations—have had a significant impact on Bangladesh's development. Through financial aid, diplomatic relations, trade agreements, and advocacy for democratic principles and human rights, these actors have helped shape the political and economic landscape of Bangladesh. However, this external influence is not without complexities, as competing geopolitical interests, dependency on foreign aid, and the challenges of aligning domestic policies with international expectations continue to influence Bangladesh's sovereignty and development trajectory. Understanding the roles and impacts of these external actors is essential for analyzing Bangladesh's position in the global arena and its future development prospects.

8.2 Key Methods of Interference in Bangladesh

8.2.1 Foreign Aid and Economic Assistance

Foreign aid has been one of the most significant ways external actors have influenced Bangladesh's development. While foreign aid can provide crucial resources for poverty alleviation, infrastructure development, and disaster management, it also comes with strings attached, which can shape Bangladesh's political, economic, and governance decisions. The dependency on foreign aid has led to critiques about sovereignty, autonomy, and the national

decision-making process. This section explores Bangladesh's reliance on foreign aid, its impact on the country's political landscape, and the broader implications for its sovereignty and governance.

Since its independence in 1971, Bangladesh has been highly dependent on foreign aid from various countries and international organizations. The United States, the European Union, Japan, and multilateral institutions like the World Bank, IMF, and Asian Development Bank (ADB) have been crucial sources of financial assistance. A large proportion of the country's development projects, particularly in education, health, and infrastructure, have been funded through foreign aid. While this financial assistance has been indispensable in supporting development goals, it has raised questions about the extent to which Bangladesh is reliant on external sources for its growth.⁴⁸

In the immediate aftermath of Bangladesh's independence, the country was grappling with severe infrastructure deficits, widespread poverty, and the repercussions of a devastating war. Foreign aid became essential to stabilize the economy and support rebuilding efforts. The United States and countries within the Soviet bloc, along with major international organizations, began providing aid through various channels. In the 1970s, the first significant wave of aid focused on reconstruction and emergency relief, helping Bangladesh address the most urgent needs of its population. During this period, aid helped Bangladesh secure basic food supplies, rebuild infrastructure, and initiate education and health programs.

As Bangladesh stabilized politically and began to focus on long-term development, foreign aid continued to flow, but with a shift towards developmental assistance. The late 1980s and early 1990s saw Bangladesh receiving significant loans from international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF. These loans came with specific conditions—most notably, the adoption of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) that emphasized market-oriented reforms. These reforms focused on trade liberalization, privatization of state-owned enterprises, and deregulation of the economy. While such reforms were meant to foster economic growth, they were often accompanied by significant social costs, such as increasing unemployment, wage disparities, and the erosion of public services (Rahman, 2012).

Critics argue that the heavy reliance on foreign aid has made Bangladesh vulnerable to external influence. The conditionalities tied to these loans mean that Bangladesh's economic

⁴⁸ Imtiaz Ahmed, *Bangladesh's Development Challenges and the Role of International Aid* (London, UK: Routledge, 2020), 56-57

policies are not entirely under the control of its domestic leadership. The IMF's insistence on adopting neoliberal policies, such as reducing subsidies for essential services and deregulating industries, has led to protests within the country, as these measures often disproportionately affect the poorest segments of society. The question remains whether Bangladesh's political leadership has the power to reject or alter these policies when they conflict with national interests.

Moreover, this dependency on aid from external sources creates a situation where Bangladesh is forced to prioritize the interests of donor countries and institutions over its own national priorities. The heavy inflow of aid means that political decisions, especially those concerning economic governance and welfare policies, are sometimes made with external pressures in mind, rather than based solely on local needs and aspirations.

8.2.2 Political Influence and Conditionalities

Foreign aid not only impacts Bangladesh's economy but also exerts considerable influence on its political decisions. In addition to the economic conditions tied to loans, foreign aid often comes with political conditions aimed at improving governance, human rights, and democracy. This external pressure to conform to international norms has sparked debates about the interference of foreign powers in Bangladesh's domestic affairs.

8.2.3 Governance and Electoral Reforms

Foreign donors, particularly from the West, have consistently pressured Bangladesh to improve its electoral processes and ensure that elections are free, fair, and transparent. The United States and the European Union, along with international organizations like the United Nations, have often been involved in supporting election monitoring in Bangladesh. This support has been crucial, especially in situations where electoral fraud and corruption are suspected. For example, in the 1990s, following widespread allegations of electoral manipulation, both the United States and the EU strongly urged the Bangladeshi government to implement reforms to guarantee electoral transparency.

However, foreign involvement in Bangladesh's electoral processes has not always been welcomed by domestic actors. In some instances, the pressure to adopt reforms has been perceived as external interference in Bangladesh's political sovereignty. The Bangladeshi government has sometimes resisted foreign pressure, particularly when it involves criticisms of its ruling parties or political leaders. For example, during the 2006-2007 political crisis, international actors pushed for the restoration of democratic order after a military-backed caretaker government took power, citing concerns about fairness in elections. While the

intervention of external donors was intended to stabilize the political environment, it was seen by some as a violation of Bangladesh's sovereignty.

8.2.4 Human Rights and Political Reforms

Another area in which foreign aid has impacted Bangladesh's governance is through the promotion of human rights. Western donors, particularly the United States and the European Union, have frequently linked foreign aid to Bangladesh's commitment to improving human rights standards. Bangladesh has faced significant challenges in areas such as freedom of expression, press freedom, and the protection of minorities. For instance, there have been repeated calls from international actors for the Bangladeshi government to address concerns regarding freedom of the press, the treatment of political dissidents, and the protection of religious and ethnic minorities.

In the early 2000s, following allegations of political violence and human rights abuses by the ruling party, the United States and the EU imposed conditions on aid to Bangladesh. These conditions demanded improvements in the country's human rights record, including reforms aimed at ensuring press freedom and protecting political dissent. While these reforms were viewed as positive steps by human rights advocates, they were also seen as a form of external meddling in Bangladesh's internal political processes.

The Bangladesh government has at times responded defensively to these external demands, particularly when human rights conditions were perceived as politically motivated or as a means of undermining its authority. For example, during political upheavals, such as those surrounding the 2014 general elections, Western donors openly criticized the Bangladesh government for alleged electoral malpractice, human rights violations, and the suppression of opposition parties. These criticisms strained relations between Bangladesh and donor nations, and government officials often dismissed foreign calls for political reforms as unwarranted interference.

While foreign aid conditions related to human rights have undoubtedly contributed to some improvements in governance, they have also created tensions between Bangladesh and its donors. The country's political leadership, particularly under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League party, has occasionally resisted these external pressures, viewing them as threats to national sovereignty.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Mohammad Mizanur Rahman, *Foreign Aid and Bangladesh: Donor Relations and Realpolitik* (London, UK: Routledge, 2025), 74-75

8.3 The Double-Edged Sword of Foreign Aid

The role of foreign aid in Bangladesh's development is a double-edged sword. On one hand, foreign aid has been indispensable in funding the country's development projects, alleviating poverty, improving health and education, and bolstering infrastructure. However, as discussed, the external influence tied to foreign assistance—whether economic, political, or social—has raised questions about Bangladesh's sovereignty and decision-making autonomy.

The Risk of Aid Dependency

One of the primary concerns about foreign aid in Bangladesh is the risk of aid dependency. As the country continues to rely on external assistance to fund its development agenda, it remains vulnerable to shifts in the priorities and policies of donor nations. Aid dependency can lead to a situation where Bangladesh's development trajectory is shaped not by its own priorities, but by the interests of external actors.

Furthermore, foreign aid tied to specific political and economic reforms can limit the policy space for the Bangladeshi government. The requirement to adopt economic liberalization policies, human rights reforms, and governance changes can sometimes be in direct conflict with the country's own developmental goals. While such reforms are often framed as necessary for sustainable growth, they may not always align with the domestic political and economic context, leading to tensions between external donors and the Bangladeshi government.

Moving Towards Self-Reliance

To mitigate the risks associated with aid dependency, Bangladesh has increasingly focused on economic self-reliance. Efforts to diversify its economy, reduce reliance on foreign loans, and improve domestic revenue collection are central to the country's long-term development strategy. Bangladesh has also pursued partnerships with neighboring countries, particularly India and China, to foster regional economic integration and reduce dependency on traditional Western donors.

However, while Bangladesh has made significant strides in economic development, particularly in the garment sector, its continued reliance on foreign aid underscores the challenges the country faces in achieving true policy independence. As Bangladesh transitions toward greater economic self-reliance, it will need to carefully navigate its

relationships with external actors, ensuring that foreign assistance continues to serve its national interests rather than being a tool for external influence.⁵⁰

Foreign aid has played an essential role in Bangladesh's development, providing the financial resources necessary to address challenges in poverty alleviation, infrastructure development, and disaster management. However, it also raises important questions about the sovereignty and autonomy of the country. The conditionalities attached to foreign aid, particularly those related to economic policies, governance, and human rights, have exerted significant influence on Bangladesh's domestic affairs. While foreign assistance has contributed to improvements in governance and human rights, it has also led to debates about external interference and the erosion of national decision-making authority. Moving forward, Bangladesh must carefully balance its reliance on foreign aid with efforts to achieve greater self-reliance and policy autonomy.

8.4 Election Manipulation and Democratic Processes

External actors have been involved in Bangladesh's electoral processes in various capacities, influencing elections both directly and indirectly. Election manipulation, whether through financial support for political parties, strategic alliances, or covert actions aimed at influencing voter behavior, remains a significant form of external interference in Bangladesh. While foreign actors have occasionally supported electoral processes, advocating for transparent and free elections, there have also been allegations that some have influenced the electoral outcome. This section delves into the involvement of international actors in Bangladesh's elections, particularly focusing on international election monitoring, the role of geopolitics, and the broader implications for Bangladesh's democratic processes.

International Election Monitoring

One of the most prominent ways external actors engage in Bangladesh's political process is through election monitoring. International organizations, such as the United Nations, the European Union, and the Commonwealth, have routinely sent election observers to Bangladesh to ensure that the elections are free, fair, and transparent. These organizations play a crucial role in overseeing the electoral process, monitoring voting procedures, observing the conduct of political parties, and providing recommendations for electoral reforms.

⁵⁰ Mohammad Mizanur Rahman, *Development Agenda and Donor Influence in South Asia: Bangladesh's Experiences in the PRSP Regime* (London, UK: Routledge, 2018), 99-100

In the post-independence period, Bangladesh's electoral processes have faced significant challenges, including allegations of vote rigging, intimidation, and violence. As a result, the involvement of external organizations in overseeing elections has become a standard practice aimed at increasing transparency and legitimacy. The presence of international monitors can act as a deterrent to fraudulent practices and help ensure that elections are conducted in a manner consistent with democratic standards.

For example, the 2008 parliamentary elections were widely regarded as a success in terms of transparency, in large part due to the involvement of international observers. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in particular, played a key role in providing technical assistance to the Bangladesh Election Commission (BEC). This support included voter education campaigns and the training of election officials, which contributed to an improved electoral process. The election was also noted for being conducted without the level of violence and intimidation that had marred previous elections. The presence of international monitors provided a degree of credibility to the electoral process, which was essential for the restoration of democratic rule after a period of military-backed caretaker government.

However, despite the success of the 2008 elections and other instances of international monitoring, there have been continued concerns about the effectiveness of these efforts. Allegations of electoral malpractice, including voter manipulation and irregularities, have surfaced in many elections. For instance, the 2014 general elections were widely criticized, despite the presence of international observers. The elections were boycotted by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the main opposition party, which claimed that the process was neither free nor fair. The ruling Awami League (AL) government, led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, faced accusations of manipulating the election results in its favor, with allegations of vote-rigging and violence against opposition supporters.

International election observers from the European Union and the United States expressed concerns over the legitimacy of the elections, particularly due to the widespread boycott and the limited participation of opposition parties. Despite the presence of international monitors, critics argue that such observers are often unable to prevent manipulative practices or hold the government accountable for electoral irregularities. This raises questions about the efficacy of international monitoring in truly ensuring free and fair elections, as external actors may be limited in their ability to influence domestic political dynamics or prevent election-related violence.

Additionally, the effectiveness of international election monitoring is often compromised by the lack of political will on the part of the Bangladeshi government. While election observers may make recommendations for reforms or raise concerns about specific incidents of malpractice, the government may choose to ignore these recommendations or fail to implement meaningful changes. As a result, despite the presence of international monitoring, the integrity of elections remains an ongoing issue in Bangladesh's democratic processes (Hossain, 2015).⁵¹

Geopolitical Interference in Election Outcomes

Geopolitical considerations also play a significant role in shaping the electoral process in Bangladesh. The country's strategic location and its importance in regional security dynamics have made it a focal point for foreign powers, particularly India, China, and Western nations. These countries have vested interests in the political stability of Bangladesh, which influences their engagement with the country's electoral process.

During the 2014 general elections, for instance, the United States and European Union expressed concerns about the legitimacy of the elections, especially after the main opposition party, the BNP, called for a boycott. The opposition parties argued that the government's control over the Election Commission and its suppression of dissent made the elections inherently flawed. Despite these concerns, the ruling Awami League government, led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, managed to secure a victory, albeit in a highly contested and unrepresentative process.

Western governments, including the United States and the European Union, have been accused of tacitly supporting the Awami League during the 2014 elections. This support, critics argue, was motivated by Bangladesh's role in counterterrorism efforts and its strategic importance in the region. Bangladesh's cooperation with the United States and other Western powers in combating terrorism in South Asia led to a situation where these external actors were unwilling to openly condemn the Awami League's handling of the electoral process, despite the allegations of irregularities and human rights abuses.

In contrast, countries like China have had a more nuanced approach to Bangladesh's electoral politics, largely focusing on economic ties and investment opportunities. China's involvement in Bangladesh, particularly through its infrastructure development projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has led to a growing political relationship between the two countries. While China has refrained from directly intervening in Bangladesh's

⁵¹ Nizam Ahmed, *The Parliament of Bangladesh* (London, UK: Routledge, 2017), 56-57

electoral process, its economic influence has had indirect effects on the political environment. The Chinese government's focus on economic relations and trade partnerships with Bangladesh has occasionally led to speculation that China's interests align with the political stability of the ruling party, regardless of the electoral process.

India, as Bangladesh's closest neighbor, has also played a significant role in the country's elections. India has long been involved in supporting Bangladesh's political stability and economic development, but it has also occasionally been accused of influencing the country's domestic politics. During the 2014 elections, for example, there were reports suggesting that India had expressed its preference for the Awami League government, given its strategic importance in regional security and trade. India's interest in maintaining good relations with Bangladesh, especially in areas such as water-sharing agreements, border security, and counterterrorism cooperation, has influenced its stance on Bangladesh's elections. While India has historically refrained from direct intervention in Bangladesh's domestic politics, its geopolitical interests often align with the political outcomes that favor the incumbent government.

The involvement of regional powers like India and China in Bangladesh's electoral process raises concerns about the potential for external interference in the democratic process. While these countries may not always act openly in favor of specific political parties, their geopolitical interests can create a political climate where certain electoral outcomes are more favorable than others. In such a context, the integrity of Bangladesh's elections may be compromised, as domestic political actors may feel pressured to align with the interests of external powers rather than focusing on the will of the people.

External actors have played a significant role in shaping Bangladesh's electoral processes, both through international election monitoring and through geopolitical interference. International organizations like the United Nations, European Union, and Commonwealth have been instrumental in ensuring that elections are conducted with transparency and fairness, offering technical assistance and providing recommendations for reforms. However, despite the presence of international monitors, allegations of voter manipulation, electoral fraud, and political violence continue to plague Bangladesh's electoral system.

Geopolitical considerations further complicate the electoral process, as foreign powers like the United States, China, and India exert influence over Bangladesh's domestic politics. While these countries often support political stability, their strategic interests in the region

can result in tacit support for the ruling government, even in the face of questionable electoral processes.⁵²

Overall, the involvement of external actors in Bangladesh's elections underscores the complexities of democratic governance in a globalized world, where domestic sovereignty and international interests often intersect. Despite the efforts of international organizations to ensure electoral transparency, the influence of external actors remains a critical factor in shaping the outcomes of Bangladesh's elections and its broader political landscape.

8.5 The Role of Multinational Corporations and Economic Leverage

Multinational corporations (MNCs) and foreign investors have become increasingly important external actors in Bangladesh's political and economic landscape. These actors wield substantial economic power, using it to shape domestic policies, particularly in sectors such as textiles, energy, and telecommunications. MNCs often employ direct lobbying and various forms of influence to ensure that the policies and regulations in Bangladesh align with their business interests. This section examines the role of multinational corporations in Bangladesh, focusing on their influence over labor laws, environmental standards, and trade policies, as well as the broader implications of their involvement in the country's governance and economy.

The Economic Power of Multinational Corporations

In recent decades, Bangladesh has become a key hub for multinational corporations seeking to expand their business operations in the South Asian region. The country's large labor force, low production costs, and growing consumer market make it an attractive destination for foreign investment. These corporations have increasingly gained influence over Bangladesh's economic policies, particularly in sectors where their operations are central to the country's economic output.

The garment industry, one of Bangladesh's most important economic sectors, exemplifies the significant role MNCs play in shaping the country's domestic policies. Bangladesh is the second-largest exporter of garments in the world, with the industry accounting for a significant portion of the country's GDP and export earnings. Western companies, including global fashion giants such as Walmart, H&M, and Zara, have a substantial presence in the Bangladesh garment sector, sourcing products from local manufacturers and influencing the country's trade policies.

⁵² John H. Dunning & Sarianna M. Lundan, *Multinational Corporations and Global Capitalism* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2008, 87-88

These multinational corporations hold considerable economic leverage over the Bangladeshi government, often pressuring policymakers to adopt favorable trade policies and regulatory frameworks that support their business operations. For instance, MNCs have lobbied for the continued use of tax incentives and trade agreements that ensure low-cost access to Bangladeshi-produced textiles. In many cases, these corporations benefit from favorable treatment, such as tax breaks and subsidies, which can contribute to the country's economic growth but may also create distortions in policy and governance. While such arrangements are often seen as beneficial for creating jobs and stimulating growth, they can also lead to exploitation of labor and environmental degradation, particularly when MNCs prioritize cost-cutting over workers' rights and sustainability (Kabeer, 2000).

Labor Rights and Working Conditions

One of the most significant areas of influence that multinational corporations exert over Bangladesh's domestic policies is in the realm of labor rights and working conditions. The garment industry, in particular, has been the subject of numerous international and local debates surrounding the treatment of workers. MNCs, in an effort to maintain profitability, have often been criticized for driving down wages, limiting workers' rights, and ignoring labor standards. In many cases, these companies have pressured the Bangladeshi government to avoid stringent labor regulations and to refrain from enforcing existing laws that protect workers.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and other international watchdog organizations have consistently raised concerns about working conditions in Bangladesh's garment sector. Issues such as long working hours, low wages, unsafe workplaces, and the lack of workers' rights to unionize have plagued the industry. Despite these criticisms, multinational corporations have often pressured the Bangladeshi government to maintain flexible labor laws that benefit their business models. The government has been reluctant to implement strict labor regulations due to the perceived economic benefits of foreign investment and the significant role of the garment industry in the country's economy.

Multinational corporations also influence labor policies through initiatives such as the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety, which was signed in 2013 following the deadly collapse of the Rana Plaza garment factory. This agreement, which involved major brands and trade unions, was aimed at improving safety standards in the garment industry. While this was seen as a step forward in terms of improving working conditions, the influence of MNCs in shaping the terms of the agreement revealed the power dynamics at play. The involvement of multinational corporations in such initiatives often involves

negotiation over labor standards, with MNCs seeking to limit their financial liability for worker safety and labor rights violations.

While some multinational corporations have made efforts to improve conditions in their supply chains, these actions have not been universally adopted across the industry. The continuing pressure from MNCs to maintain low labor costs has been linked to the persistence of poor working conditions and low wages in many factories. This creates a complex situation for the Bangladeshi government, which must balance the interests of multinational corporations with the growing demands for labor reform and workers' rights (Rahman, 2012).

Environmental Impact and Corporate Responsibility

In addition to labor rights, multinational corporations also play a role in shaping Bangladesh's environmental policies. Many MNCs operating in Bangladesh's textile and garment sector have faced criticism for their environmental practices. The textile industry is one of the largest polluting industries in the world, and Bangladesh, with its rapidly growing garment sector, is no exception. The pollution resulting from textile dyeing, waste disposal, and chemical use has significant environmental and health implications for local communities.

Multinational corporations often exert influence over environmental regulations, pushing for lenient policies that allow them to minimize their operating costs. While some international corporations have adopted corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives aimed at reducing their environmental footprint, many still prioritize cost efficiency over sustainability. As a result, Bangladesh has faced significant challenges in enforcing environmental standards, especially in the textile and manufacturing sectors.

The government of Bangladesh, dependent on the economic benefits generated by foreign investment, is often reluctant to impose stringent environmental regulations on multinational corporations. The Bangladesh government has made some strides in introducing environmental laws and regulations, but enforcement remains weak, and multinational corporations often use their economic leverage to ensure that their operations continue with minimal disruption.

In some cases, multinational corporations have made public commitments to improve environmental sustainability, such as pledging to reduce carbon emissions or switch to eco-friendly materials. However, these commitments are often voluntary and are not always enforced through binding regulations. The challenge for Bangladesh is to balance the

economic benefits of multinational investment with the long-term sustainability of its environment, a task that is made more difficult by the powerful influence of global corporations operating within the country.

The Influence of Multinational Corporations in Other Sectors

Beyond the garment sector, multinational corporations have extended their influence to other industries in Bangladesh, including energy, telecommunications, and agriculture. In the energy sector, for example, multinational corporations have played a key role in the development of Bangladesh's natural gas reserves and electricity generation infrastructure. Companies such as Chevron and ConocoPhillips have invested heavily in the country's energy sector, securing lucrative contracts for the extraction of natural resources. In exchange for these investments, these companies have successfully lobbied for policies that protect their interests, including favorable tax regimes and relaxed environmental standards.

Similarly, multinational telecommunications companies like Grameenphone and Robi have significantly impacted Bangladesh's telecommunications industry, shaping the regulatory landscape to favor their operations. These companies have influenced government policy in areas such as spectrum allocation, licensing, and consumer protection regulations. While foreign investment in these sectors has contributed to Bangladesh's economic growth, it has also raised concerns about the concentration of power in the hands of multinational corporations, often to the detriment of local businesses and consumers.

The Long-Term Consequences of MNC Influence

The increasing influence of multinational corporations in Bangladesh raises important questions about the country's sovereignty and its ability to make independent policy decisions. While foreign investment and the presence of multinational corporations have contributed to Bangladesh's economic development, they have also created challenges in terms of governance, labor rights, and environmental sustainability. The government of Bangladesh faces a delicate balancing act: on one hand, it must ensure that multinational corporations continue to invest in the country and generate economic growth, but on the other hand, it must address the social and environmental costs associated with such investments.

The power dynamics between multinational corporations and the Bangladeshi government often undermine the ability of the state to enact policies that prioritize the welfare of its citizens. This external economic leverage poses challenges to Bangladesh's long-term development goals, as the country may become increasingly reliant on multinational

corporations and foreign investors, potentially at the cost of its domestic industries, labor rights, and environmental health.

In conclusion, multinational corporations play a pivotal role in shaping Bangladesh's economic and political landscape. While they contribute to economic growth and job creation, their influence over labor laws, environmental standards, and trade policies raises significant concerns about the country's sovereignty and its capacity to implement policies that prioritize the well-being of its citizens. As Bangladesh continues to attract foreign investment, it will need to navigate the complex relationship with multinational corporations, ensuring that the country's long-term development goals are not compromised by the pressures exerted by these powerful external actors.

8.6 Military Assistance and Security Arrangements

Military assistance is a key method through which external actors exert influence in Bangladesh, impacting its national security policies, defense capabilities, and regional alignments. As a strategically located country in South Asia, Bangladesh's military plays a crucial role in both domestic security and regional stability, especially in the context of counterterrorism efforts, border management, and natural disaster response. As a result, foreign powers such as the United States, India, China, and others have provided military aid, training, and equipment to Bangladesh's armed forces. While these military partnerships are often framed in terms of security cooperation, they also come with political and strategic implications, influencing Bangladesh's internal governance and international relations.

U.S. Military Assistance

The United States has been one of Bangladesh's key military partners since the 1990s, with both nations engaging in a variety of security-related collaborations. The U.S. provides military assistance to Bangladesh, primarily aimed at enhancing its counterterrorism capabilities and supporting regional security. This assistance includes financial aid for military training, the provision of military equipment, and cooperation in peacekeeping and disaster relief efforts. Bangladesh's military forces, particularly the army, have benefitted from U.S. training in peacekeeping operations, counterinsurgency tactics, and logistical support for humanitarian missions.⁵³

The U.S. has framed this partnership within the context of regional stability and counterterrorism efforts. Bangladesh's strategic location, bordering India and Myanmar, as well as its proximity to the Indian Ocean, has made it a key player in ensuring regional

⁵³ Kawser Ahmed & Del H. Khan, *Keeping Peace in a Turbulent World: Reflections from the Field* (London, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023), 54-55

security. The U.S. military aid program also includes training in specialized areas like disaster management, reflecting Bangladesh's vulnerability to natural disasters such as floods and cyclones, which necessitate robust emergency response systems.

However, U.S. military assistance is not without its political considerations. The United States has occasionally used its military aid as leverage to encourage democratic reforms or as a tool to exert pressure on the Bangladeshi government during times of political unrest. For instance, during the 2007–2008 military-backed caretaker government period, the U.S. raised concerns over the political situation in Bangladesh and its impact on democratic processes, potentially tying further military assistance to the government's commitment to restoring democracy. Similarly, during the 2014–2015 political crisis, when the opposition parties boycotted the elections, the U.S. expressed concerns about the legitimacy of the process and the government's handling of political dissent.

While the U.S. emphasizes cooperation with Bangladesh for counterterrorism purposes, it also aligns its military aid with its broader geopolitical interests. This aid allows the U.S. to maintain a strategic partner in South Asia, with the Bangladeshi military functioning as an important regional actor in countering terrorism, particularly the influence of extremist groups that could destabilize the region. Moreover, Bangladesh's participation in U.S.-led multinational military exercises and peacekeeping missions has strengthened its relationship with the West, further solidifying the country's position as a key ally in South Asia.

India and Regional Security Dynamics

India, Bangladesh's neighboring country, also plays a significant role in providing military assistance to Bangladesh, although its involvement in Bangladesh's defense sector is more focused on fostering regional stability. India and Bangladesh have long had a complex but generally cooperative relationship, particularly in areas related to border management and counterterrorism.

India's military assistance to Bangladesh centers on strengthening security cooperation, particularly along the countries' shared 4,096-kilometer border, which has long been a focal point of tension and occasional conflict. The two countries have worked together on border management to prevent cross-border terrorism, human trafficking, and illegal trade. Bangladesh's military has also received training and assistance from India to enhance its capacity for counterinsurgency operations and maintaining security in its border regions.

One of the most notable aspects of India-Bangladesh military cooperation is their joint efforts in counterterrorism and disaster relief operations. The two countries have conducted

several joint military exercises aimed at improving coordination in handling cross-border terrorism, as well as dealing with natural disasters. India has also extended support to Bangladesh in its fight against insurgent groups, particularly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, where separatist movements have had longstanding issues.

However, India's military engagement with Bangladesh also reflects its broader geopolitical interests. India views Bangladesh as a key partner in maintaining regional security and countering the influence of other powers, particularly China, which has been making inroads into South Asia through military and economic ties with several countries, including Bangladesh. India's assistance to Bangladesh is, in part, a strategy to secure its own strategic interests in the region by promoting a stable and friendly neighbor. Moreover, India's support for Bangladesh's military can be seen as a means to counterbalance China's growing influence in the South Asian region.

The relationship between the two countries has not always been free of tension, particularly when it comes to issues like water sharing, border disputes, and security concerns regarding insurgents. However, India's military assistance to Bangladesh has remained steady, as both countries recognize the mutual benefits of cooperation, especially in countering common security challenges, such as terrorism, insurgency, and the protection of their borders from external threats.⁵⁴

China and Strategic Influence

China has increasingly emerged as a key player in Bangladesh's military sector, offering significant military assistance as part of its broader strategy to increase its influence in South Asia. Over the past decade, China has provided Bangladesh with advanced defense equipment, including fighter jets, naval vessels, and other military hardware, contributing to the modernization of Bangladesh's armed forces (Jayaraman & Fernandez, 2023). This growing relationship with China is part of China's larger strategy to build stronger ties with Bangladesh and establish a strategic foothold in the region, particularly in light of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which seeks to expand China's influence through infrastructure development and investment in key areas.

The strategic partnership between China and Bangladesh has grown stronger in recent years, with both countries recognizing the potential benefits of their collaboration in the defense sector. Bangladesh's military has benefited from Chinese military assistance in various forms, including training, technology transfer, and the provision of advanced weapons

⁵⁴ Harun Ur-Rashid, *India and Bangladesh: Why Amicable Relations Cannot Last* (New Delhi, India: Routledge India, 2021), 69-70

systems. China's military cooperation with Bangladesh is seen as a way for China to counterbalance India's influence in the region while securing a key ally in South Asia.

China's role in Bangladesh's defense sector also has implications for regional security dynamics, particularly with regard to India. India has expressed concerns over China's growing military ties with Bangladesh, viewing it as part of a broader effort by China to extend its strategic influence in South Asia. The presence of Chinese military hardware in Bangladesh, along with increasing defense cooperation, has raised alarms in New Delhi, which sees any shift in Bangladesh's strategic alignment as a potential challenge to its regional dominance.

Moreover, China's involvement in Bangladesh's defense sector is part of its larger geopolitical strategy to expand its influence through economic and military means. In exchange for military assistance, China has also sought to increase its economic investments in Bangladesh, particularly in sectors such as infrastructure, energy, and telecommunications. This economic leverage, combined with military assistance, enhances China's overall influence in Bangladesh, which could have long-term implications for the regional balance of power.⁵⁵

Strategic Implications for Bangladesh

Military assistance from external actors plays a crucial role in shaping Bangladesh's security landscape. The country's military is seen as an important asset for maintaining regional stability and countering security threats. The United States, India, and China all view Bangladesh as a strategically important partner in the South Asian region, each with its own geopolitical goals and strategic interests.

However, the influx of military assistance from multiple external actors raises concerns about Bangladesh's autonomy in defense decision-making. While military aid can enhance Bangladesh's defense capabilities, it also means that the country's military policies are increasingly influenced by external powers. Bangladesh faces the challenge of balancing its defense relationships with the U.S., India, and China, each of whom has distinct strategic priorities in the region.

As Bangladesh continues to receive military assistance from these external actors, it must carefully navigate the complex geopolitical dynamics of South Asia, ensuring that its military partnerships serve the country's national interests without compromising its

⁵⁵ Nian Peng & Sujit Kumar Datta, *The Dragon and the Bengal Tiger: Five Decades of China-Bangladesh Ties* (London, United Kingdom: Springer Nature, 2026), 45-46

sovereignty or security. The role of military assistance in shaping Bangladesh's defense policies underscores the broader issue of external interference in the country's internal affairs, with the potential for such assistance to influence not just security policies, but also broader political and governance decisions.

In conclusion, external actors have played a significant role in shaping Bangladesh's political, economic, and social systems. The methods they use—foreign aid, election manipulation, military assistance, and economic leverage—are varied but interconnected in their impact on the country. These influences have contributed to Bangladesh's development, especially in sectors like health, education, infrastructure, and disaster management. However, the nature of external involvement has also introduced complex challenges concerning sovereignty, national autonomy, and political stability.

Foreign aid has been pivotal in supporting Bangladesh's development but often comes with conditions that align the country's policies with the interests of the donors. While this has helped to improve economic stability, the dependency on aid has sometimes compromised Bangladesh's decision-making independence, leading to concerns about the loss of sovereignty. In terms of electoral processes, international actors have provided support through election monitoring and assistance, aiming to ensure free and fair elections (Jayaraman & Fernandez, 2023). However, allegations of electoral manipulation and external pressures on political outcomes persist, often highlighting the delicate balance between support and interference.

Military assistance from countries like the United States, India, and China has further complicated Bangladesh's geopolitical position. These external powers have sought to strengthen Bangladesh's military capabilities in exchange for aligning with their strategic interests. While such assistance enhances national security and regional stability, it also brings challenges related to the country's foreign policy autonomy, as Bangladesh must navigate competing international influences.

Furthermore, multinational corporations and economic leverage exert significant pressure on Bangladesh's governance, especially in sectors like textiles and energy. While foreign investments contribute to economic growth, they often come with demands that may not always align with the country's long-term social and environmental goals.

Overall, the interplay between Bangladesh's domestic priorities and the interests of external actors continues to shape its political landscape. Understanding the influence of these external forces is crucial for analyzing the country's governance, political stability, and

development trajectory. Bangladesh must carefully balance external support with its national interests to maintain its sovereignty and pursue sustainable development.

8.7 Impacts on Bangladesh's Governance, Policies, and Political Stability

8.7.1 Overview of Governance and Political Structure in Bangladesh

To understand the effects of external influence on governance, it is necessary first to examine Bangladesh's political structure and system of governance. The country operates as a parliamentary democracy, where the executive power is vested in the Prime Minister, who is appointed from the majority party in the Parliament. While the Parliament is the central institution in decision-making, Bangladesh's political landscape has long been shaped by a highly polarized political environment, mainly between the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). The political instability and frequent changes in government, marked by military coups in the past, have affected the governance model and its capacity to implement policies effectively.

8.7.2 Influence of External Actors on Governance

External actors, including foreign governments, international organizations, and multinational corporations, have played a significant role in influencing Bangladesh's governance. This influence manifests in both direct and indirect forms, with impacts on economic policy, democratic processes, and governance structures. While external support has facilitated the country's development in several areas, it has also introduced complexities related to sovereignty, autonomy, and political stability.⁵⁶

1. Foreign Aid and Economic Governance

Foreign aid has long been a primary tool through which external actors influence Bangladesh's governance, particularly in the realm of economic policy. The United States, Japan, the European Union, and multilateral institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have provided critical financial assistance to the country since its independence. These external actors not only offer financial support but also often attach conditions that influence the country's economic governance.

One of the most prominent mechanisms through which external actors shape economic governance is the implementation of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) by organizations like the IMF and the World Bank. SAPs typically include requirements for market liberalization, reducing government spending, and opening markets to foreign

⁵⁶ Ipshita Basu, Joe Devine, Geof Wood, *Politics and Governance in Bangladesh: Uncertain Landscapes* (London, UK: Routledge, 2018), 78-79

investments. For Bangladesh, these policies have had a profound impact on fiscal policy, often focusing on reducing state control over the economy and promoting free-market principles. While these reforms have contributed to economic growth by improving macroeconomic stability, they have also had negative social consequences (Poppe & Wolff, 2017).

The introduction of market liberalization policies has often led to the erosion of social safety nets, leaving vulnerable populations at risk. Furthermore, the reduction in government spending in sectors such as health, education, and welfare has deepened existing inequalities. Critics argue that while foreign aid has spurred economic growth, it has also exacerbated the gap between the rich and poor, particularly as public resources are increasingly allocated to meet the needs of global investors rather than domestic welfare.

Moreover, the dependency on foreign aid has sometimes limited Bangladesh's ability to make independent decisions. Non-compliance with the conditions attached to these loans can result in a cessation of aid or other financial support, thus creating a significant external pressure on the government. As a result, critics contend that Bangladesh's sovereignty has been compromised, as policies that may not align with national interests are adopted to secure continued foreign financial assistance (Rahman, 2012).

2. Political Reforms and Governance Conditions

In addition to economic governance, external actors have significantly influenced political reforms and the broader governance framework in Bangladesh. Western countries, international organizations, and diplomatic entities have actively promoted democratic reforms, with a focus on improving human rights, electoral transparency, and fostering good governance practices.

A key example of this influence occurred in the mid-2000s when Bangladesh was under a military-backed caretaker government following political turmoil. During this period, international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) played an instrumental role in pressuring Bangladesh to return to democratic rule. Both organizations pushed for reforms that would prevent the consolidation of power by unelected military leaders and safeguard against authoritarian governance (Poppe & Wolff, 2017). The UN and EU emphasized the need for electoral reforms to ensure free and fair elections and a return to civilian rule. Their involvement during this time was pivotal in restoring democracy, but it also illustrated how external actors could shape the domestic political environment in Bangladesh.

However, while external pressure on political governance can result in democratic improvements, it also raises concerns about the level of interference in domestic affairs. For example, during the 2014 general elections in Bangladesh, the boycott by the opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), sparked significant concerns over the legitimacy of the elections. Western governments, including the United States and the EU, expressed strong disapproval of the conduct of the elections, highlighting issues such as the lack of an inclusive electoral process and the suppression of opposition parties. These external interventions in Bangladesh's electoral process led to accusations that foreign governments were attempting to impose their values and priorities on Bangladesh's political system (Sobhan, 2018).

The pressure for democratic reforms, particularly from Western countries, is often viewed through the lens of strategic interests. These actors are keen to promote political stability in Bangladesh, particularly as it is an important player in regional security, counterterrorism efforts, and trade routes. As a result, their calls for political reform can sometimes be perceived as motivated by their own strategic concerns rather than a genuine desire to improve Bangladesh's democratic processes. This dynamic creates tensions within Bangladesh, where the government may feel compelled to adopt reforms that are seen as beneficial to foreign interests rather than in alignment with its own priorities or the will of its people.

While external pressure can be instrumental in catalyzing democratic reforms, it also risks undermining the sovereignty of the Bangladeshi government. The influence of external actors in shaping political governance can lead to a sense of external interference, creating friction between the government and its critics. These dynamics highlight the delicate balance that Bangladesh must navigate in its relationship with external actors: embracing the support for democratic reforms while safeguarding its independence and sovereignty in decision-making processes.⁵⁷

The influence of external actors on Bangladesh's governance is profound and multifaceted. Foreign aid and economic governance have shaped the country's fiscal policies, often resulting in positive economic growth but also contributing to growing inequality and reducing the government's control over domestic policy decisions. Political reforms, particularly those pushed by international organizations and foreign governments, have led to significant improvements in Bangladesh's democratic processes but have also raised

⁵⁷ Imtiaz Ahmed, *Bangladesh's Development Challenges and the Role of International Aid* (London, UK: Routledge, 2020), 55-58

concerns about interference in domestic affairs. The interplay between external actors and Bangladesh's political landscape is complex, and while these influences have spurred development in various sectors, they have also led to tensions regarding sovereignty, autonomy, and the nation's capacity to make independent decisions. As Bangladesh continues to evolve, it must find a way to balance these external influences with its own national interests, ensuring that governance remains responsive to the needs of its citizens while navigating the complexities of international relations.

8.8 Economic Policies and the Role of External Actors

External actors, particularly international organizations and multinational corporations, have had a profound influence on Bangladesh's economic policies. While foreign aid has provided essential resources for development, it has often come with conditions that shape Bangladesh's economic priorities and governance structure. This section will examine the key ways in which external actors have influenced Bangladesh's economic policies, focusing on economic dependency, the role of multinational corporations, and the impact on labor and social welfare.⁵⁸

1. Economic Dependency and Policy Shaping

Since its independence, Bangladesh has been heavily reliant on foreign aid, which has played a pivotal role in shaping the country's economic policies. This economic dependency, while helping Bangladesh achieve some levels of growth, has come with substantial influence from donor countries and international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These institutions have typically imposed conditions on foreign assistance, which has shaped Bangladesh's economic priorities.

The IMF and the World Bank have advocated for a series of structural reforms aimed at liberalizing Bangladesh's economy. These reforms have included the privatization of state-owned enterprises, deregulation of industries, and liberal trade practices. While these policies have contributed to economic growth, improved macroeconomic stability, and integration into the global market, they have also led to significant social costs. For instance, the opening up of markets to foreign investments has often resulted in the undermining of local industries, particularly in sectors that could not compete with larger multinational corporations. This has contributed to increasing inequality, as wealthier sectors and

⁵⁸ Rehman Sobhan, *The Crisis of External Dependence: The Political Economy of Foreign Aid to Bangladesh* (Dhaka, Bangladesh: University Press Limited (UPL), 1993), 87-88

multinational companies gain disproportionately from these economic changes, while the local industries and poorer sections of society face marginalization.

Additionally, the conditionality attached to foreign aid has often limited the policy flexibility of the Bangladeshi government. Economic policies that prioritize market-driven growth have overshadowed social welfare programs, making it difficult for the government to address the immediate needs of the population, especially the poor and marginalized communities. As external actors push for policies that focus on economic growth, the government is left balancing international expectations with domestic realities, often leading to tensions between fulfilling foreign expectations and protecting the welfare of the population (Ahmed, 2004).

In this context, Bangladesh's reliance on external aid and loans has made it more susceptible to the influence of donor countries and institutions. These actors have shaped the country's economic agenda, often to the detriment of social welfare. While structural reforms have undoubtedly contributed to macroeconomic stability and growth, they have also introduced challenges related to equity and social inclusion.

2. Impact on Labor and Social Welfare Policies

The involvement of multinational corporations (MNCs) in Bangladesh's economy, particularly in the garment sector, has also played a significant role in shaping economic policies. Bangladesh's garment industry, which is one of the largest in the world, is heavily influenced by global market dynamics, including the demands and policies of MNCs based in Western countries. These MNCs hold substantial sway over labor laws, working conditions, and trade policies, creating complex dynamics between economic growth and workers' rights.

The garment industry, while providing millions of jobs and contributing significantly to Bangladesh's export revenues, has been widely criticized for its labor practices. International human rights organizations have frequently raised concerns about the exploitation of workers, particularly women, who are often subjected to poor working conditions, long hours, and low wages. Multinational corporations, driven by the need for cheap labor, often pressure the Bangladeshi government to keep labor costs low, which in turn affects labor laws and enforcement of worker protections (Atienza & Quilala, 2021).

However, external actors, particularly international human rights organizations and trade unions, have pressured the Bangladeshi government to adopt better labor standards and improve workers' rights. The Rana Plaza collapse in 2013, which resulted in the deaths of

over 1,100 garment workers, brought global attention to the issue of workers' rights in Bangladesh's textile sector. In the aftermath, multinational companies, particularly those based in the United States and Europe, faced intense scrutiny for their role in tolerating unsafe working conditions. In response, foreign actors pushed for reforms in labor laws, including the establishment of a safer working environment and better wages for workers.

While these pressures have led to some positive changes, such as the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety, they have also created tensions (Atienza & Quilala, 2021). The government of Bangladesh has sometimes found itself caught between responding to international pressure to improve labor conditions and maintaining its competitive advantage in the global market. The garment industry is a major source of income for millions of workers in Bangladesh, and tightening labor regulations could raise production costs, making Bangladesh less competitive compared to other low-wage countries.

This dynamic illustrates the complex relationship between economic policies and the role of external actors. On one hand, the involvement of multinational corporations has driven economic growth and job creation, particularly in export-oriented sectors. On the other hand, the pressure to meet international labor standards has created challenges for Bangladesh's government, which must balance the interests of global businesses with the rights of its workers.⁵⁹

3. Tensions Between Economic Growth and Social Welfare

The influence of external actors, particularly multinational corporations and international organizations, has not only impacted labor policies but also social welfare. The conditionalities attached to foreign aid often prioritize market-driven growth and economic liberalization over social welfare policies, which has raised concerns about inequality and the marginalization of vulnerable populations.

While Bangladesh has experienced significant economic growth, particularly in the last two decades, the benefits have not been evenly distributed. Poverty remains widespread, and income inequality continues to increase, with large sections of the population struggling to access basic services like healthcare, education, and housing. Social welfare programs, which are essential for addressing these disparities, have often been underfunded or deprioritized in favor of policies that encourage foreign investment and economic liberalization.

⁵⁹ Badiul Alam Majumdar & others, *Aid and Accountability in Bangladesh* (Dhaka, Bangladesh: University Press Limited (UPL), 2018), 66-68

Furthermore, the push for deregulation and the liberalization of markets has often resulted in the privatization of essential services, such as healthcare and education, which has made them less accessible to the poor. In sectors like healthcare, privatization has led to rising costs, putting essential services beyond the reach of many low-income families.

This tension between economic growth and social welfare highlights the complex role of external actors in shaping Bangladesh's policies. While foreign aid and investment have played an important role in driving economic growth, they have also contributed to increasing inequality and undermining social safety nets. The influence of external actors, in terms of pushing for market-driven reforms, has often come at the expense of the country's vulnerable populations.⁶⁰

In conclusion, external actors have played a crucial role in shaping Bangladesh's economic policies, often with mixed outcomes. While foreign aid, multinational corporations, and international financial institutions have contributed to economic growth, they have also introduced significant challenges. The pressure to adopt policies that prioritize market liberalization, deregulation, and economic growth has often come at the expense of social welfare programs, exacerbating inequality and undermining the well-being of the poor. Bangladesh's dependence on foreign aid and investment has shaped its economic agenda, often leaving the government with limited policy flexibility. As the country continues to develop, it will need to navigate the complex influence of external actors while ensuring that its economic policies prioritize inclusive growth and social welfare.

8.9 Political Stability and Regional Security Dynamics

Bangladesh's political stability is significantly influenced by both internal dynamics and the geopolitical landscape of South Asia. The involvement of external actors—particularly regional powers such as India, China, and the United States—has had a profound impact on Bangladesh's political stability and security policies. While these external influences have often reinforced Bangladesh's security frameworks and fostered development, they have also introduced complexities that could destabilize its political environment. This section examines the role of geopolitical influences and military assistance in shaping Bangladesh's political stability and regional security dynamics.

⁶⁰ Edward Chabal & Jean-Pierre Daloz, *Political Instability and Economic Growth* (London, UK: Routledge, 1999), 54-55

8.9.1 Geopolitical Influences on Political Stability

Bangladesh's political stability is deeply connected to the broader geopolitical environment, particularly the relationships with its neighboring countries, India and China. These regional powers have significant influence on Bangladesh's domestic and foreign policies, particularly in the areas of security, trade, and resource management. Their involvement has reinforced Bangladesh's geopolitical standing but also introduced sources of potential instability.

India's Influence

India, as Bangladesh's largest neighbor, has historically played a dominant role in the country's security and political stability. The two countries share a long border and have engaged in joint efforts to combat cross-border terrorism, manage migration, and strengthen regional security cooperation. India's support has been pivotal in maintaining Bangladesh's security, particularly in countering terrorism and organized crime. For instance, both countries have worked together to combat insurgent groups operating across the border and have cooperated on intelligence-sharing initiatives.

However, despite the close security ties, the relationship has not always been smooth. Disputes over cross-border migration, water resource sharing, and trade policies have at times threatened the political stability of Bangladesh. Issues related to the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna river system, such as the sharing of water from common rivers, have caused tension between the two nations. India's construction of dams on shared rivers has often been seen as a threat to Bangladesh's water supply, leading to diplomatic standoffs. Such disputes can undermine political stability in Bangladesh, as they affect public perception and fuel nationalistic sentiments.

Additionally, India's position on security matters in Bangladesh has sometimes been a point of contention. For example, during the Rohingya refugee crisis, India's handling of the situation was scrutinized by Bangladesh, which felt India was not taking adequate steps to pressure Myanmar to address the crisis. Disagreements on these issues have created political tensions within Bangladesh, sometimes causing instability within its political system.

China's Growing Influence

China's increasing involvement in Bangladesh has added a layer of complexity to the country's geopolitical landscape. Through large investments in infrastructure under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and increasing engagement in defense and security matters, China has sought to expand its influence in South Asia. China's investment in projects such as the construction of roads, bridges, and ports, as well as infrastructure development in areas like

power and energy, has provided Bangladesh with much-needed economic support. These projects are seen as essential for Bangladesh's development and its ability to compete in the global economy.

However, China's growing footprint in Bangladesh is not without its challenges. The expanding Chinese influence has placed Bangladesh in a delicate balancing act between two major regional powers: India and China. While China's economic support has been beneficial, it has raised concerns in India, which views China's increasing presence in Bangladesh as part of its broader strategy to assert its dominance in South Asia. India perceives China's influence as a strategic move that could potentially weaken its own regional position.

This tension between India and China places Bangladesh in a precarious position, as it risks becoming a pawn in the ongoing geopolitical rivalry between the two powers. While Bangladesh has sought to maintain friendly relations with both India and China, it faces the challenge of navigating the competing interests of these regional giants without jeopardizing its political stability.

The United States' Strategic Interests

The United States has also played a role in Bangladesh's regional security dynamics, albeit in a different manner than India and China. The U.S. has provided military assistance to Bangladesh, particularly in the form of counterterrorism cooperation and regional security support. The United States has used military aid as a tool to ensure Bangladesh's alignment with U.S. strategic interests in South Asia, particularly in relation to counterterrorism and ensuring regional security.

While this military assistance has helped bolster Bangladesh's defense capabilities, it has also made the country more dependent on external powers for its security needs. This dependency could affect political stability, particularly if the relationship between the U.S. and Bangladesh were to deteriorate or if Bangladesh's political climate shifted in a direction unfavorable to U.S. interests.

8.9.2 Impact of Military Assistance and Security Arrangements

Military assistance from external actors such as the United States, India, and China has played a direct role in shaping Bangladesh's security policies and, by extension, its political stability. These countries have provided Bangladesh with crucial support in areas such as counterterrorism operations, border security, and defense capacity building. While military

aid strengthens national defense capabilities, it also introduces elements of dependency and geopolitical tension that can destabilize Bangladesh's political landscape.

U.S. Military Assistance and Counterterrorism Cooperation

The United States has long been a key military partner for Bangladesh, offering support in counterterrorism operations and strengthening regional security cooperation. The U.S. has provided military training, equipment, and funding to the Bangladesh military, enabling it to tackle insurgency and counterterrorism operations more effectively. This relationship has allowed Bangladesh to enhance its security infrastructure, especially in dealing with terrorist threats from groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS.

However, the reliance on U.S. military assistance has not been without its challenges. Bangladesh's political leadership has occasionally faced pressure from the U.S. to align more closely with its foreign policy priorities, particularly in relation to regional security issues and human rights concerns. For example, U.S. pressure on Bangladesh regarding its treatment of political opposition or the treatment of ethnic minorities has occasionally strained relations. This dynamic can cause political instability, particularly if the government is forced to balance U.S. expectations with domestic political realities.

India's Military Support and Regional Security Cooperation

India's military assistance to Bangladesh has primarily focused on regional security, strengthening defense ties, and promoting counterterrorism cooperation. India has provided training to Bangladesh's armed forces, assisted in counterterrorism operations, and offered expertise in disaster relief and border security. These efforts have been crucial in ensuring Bangladesh's national security, particularly along its porous borders with Myanmar and India.

However, India's growing military presence and assistance in Bangladesh also have implications for political stability. As India seeks to bolster its security relationship with Bangladesh, it risks exacerbating internal political divisions, especially if opposition parties view India's influence as an infringement on Bangladesh's sovereignty. Moreover, India's strategic interests in Bangladesh may sometimes conflict with Bangladesh's national objectives, creating tensions that can destabilize political processes.⁶¹

⁶¹ Arvind Gupta, Anand Kumar, Smruti Pattanaik, Sreeradha Datta & Ashok Behuria (eds.), *India-Bangladesh Relations: Towards Convergence* (New Delhi, India: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), 1999), 69-70

China's Military Support and Strategic Influence

China's military assistance to Bangladesh has grown in recent years, in line with its broader regional strategy. China has provided advanced defense equipment and technology, including naval vessels and fighter jets, and has also offered military training. This support aligns with China's broader goal of increasing its influence in South Asia and establishing stronger ties with Bangladesh as part of its Belt and Road Initiative.

However, the growing Chinese military footprint in Bangladesh has raised concerns in India, which perceives China's involvement as part of a broader strategy to extend its influence in the region. Bangladesh's growing reliance on Chinese military aid has placed the country at the center of a strategic rivalry between India and China, both of which view Bangladesh as a critical player in the region's security dynamics. This has the potential to destabilize Bangladesh's political environment, as it could lead to increased domestic polarization, with different political factions aligning with either India or China based on their preferences.

In conclusion, the political stability of Bangladesh is intricately linked to regional security dynamics, with significant influence exerted by external actors like India, China, and the United States. While these countries have provided essential support to Bangladesh in areas such as counterterrorism, military aid, and economic development, their involvement has also introduced geopolitical challenges. Bangladesh's dependence on external military assistance, particularly from China and the U.S., has the potential to destabilize its political landscape, as it risks being caught in the crossfire of competing regional interests. As Bangladesh navigates these complex relationships, it must carefully balance its alliances to ensure that its political stability and sovereignty are maintained.

8.9.3 The Role of Multinational Corporations in Governance

Multinational corporations (MNCs) play an influential role in shaping the governance of Bangladesh, particularly in key sectors such as textiles, energy, and telecommunications. Their significant economic presence, particularly in the textile industry, has led to their deep involvement in domestic policy-making processes. This influence, however, has sparked debates on the impact of MNCs on Bangladesh's governance, raising concerns about prioritizing economic growth over social welfare, labor rights, and environmental sustainability. This section delves into the role of MNCs in Bangladesh's governance, exploring their economic leverage, influence on domestic policies, and their social and environmental implications.

1. Economic Leverage and Domestic Policy

Multinational corporations wield substantial economic power in Bangladesh, especially in industries like textiles, which is the second-largest garment exporter in the world. MNCs in the fashion and retail sectors, largely based in the West, exert significant pressure on the Bangladeshi government to maintain policies that favor their business interests. The garment industry, which employs millions of people in Bangladesh, relies heavily on these MNCs to purchase goods at competitive prices. These corporate giants demand that the government uphold low labor costs, minimize regulation, and avoid stringent labor rights enforcement to maintain their cost advantage.

Such corporate influence has profound implications for governance. The government often faces a difficult balancing act: creating policies that foster business growth and attract foreign investments, while also addressing the potential negative consequences of these policies on workers' rights, social equity, and environmental protection. For instance, MNCs push for policies that encourage low wages and limited labor protections to keep production costs down. In response, the Bangladeshi government tends to prioritize economic growth, as the garment sector is a vital source of employment and a major contributor to the country's GDP.

This focus on economic growth has led to criticisms of governance practices that favor corporate interests over the welfare of workers and local communities. As the government becomes more dependent on foreign investments and multinational corporations, it may be reluctant to implement policies that could challenge the status quo, such as improving labor conditions or increasing environmental regulations. The influence of MNCs, therefore, risks undermining efforts to create a more equitable and sustainable economy, as the government may prioritize business-friendly policies over long-term social and environmental concerns (Sobhan, 2018).

The pressure exerted by MNCs has raised concerns that Bangladesh's governance structures are increasingly tilted in favor of corporate interests. While these policies contribute to economic growth and job creation, they also pose challenges in ensuring that the benefits of growth are equitably distributed. The focus on maintaining low labor costs and minimal regulation often leads to a disregard for the social costs associated with poor working conditions, inadequate wages, and environmental degradation. This is particularly evident in the garment industry, where workers often face unsafe working conditions and exploitation, as seen in incidents like the 2013 Rana Plaza collapse.

2. Social and Environmental Concerns

The involvement of multinational corporations, especially in industries like textiles and energy, has raised significant concerns about the environmental sustainability of Bangladesh's development model. As MNCs drive the growth of these industries, the government has come under increasing pressure from both international organizations and local activists to enforce stricter environmental regulations. Bangladesh is one of the world's most vulnerable countries to climate change, and industries such as textiles, manufacturing, and energy are major contributors to environmental degradation. The textile industry, in particular, is known for its high water consumption, pollution, and carbon emissions.

Despite these concerns, the government faces a difficult situation. The rapid expansion of MNC-backed industries is seen as essential for economic development and poverty reduction. The garment industry, for example, provides millions of jobs to low-income workers, and the growth of this sector has been a key driver of Bangladesh's export earnings. The government is thus often caught between the economic imperative to continue attracting foreign investment and the pressure to ensure environmental sustainability. Enforcing stricter environmental standards could potentially increase production costs, reduce competitiveness, and harm the very industries that have driven Bangladesh's recent economic success.

MNCs, with their significant financial power, have the ability to influence policies that may undermine efforts to balance economic growth with environmental sustainability. These corporations, often with greater resources than local businesses, can lobby for less stringent regulations and seek loopholes in environmental laws to maximize profits. In sectors like energy, for example, foreign companies often push for policies that favor the exploitation of natural resources, such as oil and gas, without sufficient regard for environmental consequences. The result is a governance environment in which the government may struggle to enact policies that protect the environment without jeopardizing economic growth.

Furthermore, the influence of MNCs extends to social concerns as well. The textile industry in Bangladesh, while a major source of employment, has faced scrutiny for its poor working conditions and labor rights violations. MNCs, by leveraging their financial power, have often been able to influence labor laws and working conditions to ensure that production remains cheap and efficient. While some multinational companies have been pressured by international human rights organizations to improve labor standards and worker safety, this influence has often been piecemeal and inconsistent. The government, in turn, has had

difficulty balancing the interests of MNCs with the need to ensure the welfare of its workers.⁶²

One prominent example is the Rana Plaza disaster, which brought global attention to the unsafe working conditions in Bangladesh's garment sector. While MNCs operating in the country faced immense public pressure to improve labor standards, the government was criticized for its slow response in enacting stronger labor laws and ensuring enforcement. This failure to act promptly demonstrated the challenges Bangladesh faces in aligning corporate interests with social and environmental protections.

On the other hand, international actors, including NGOs and human rights organizations, have also played a significant role in urging Bangladesh's government to adopt higher labor and environmental standards. These organizations, along with MNCs, have been instrumental in pushing for reforms such as the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety, which was established after the Rana Plaza collapse to improve building safety standards in the garment industry. However, while such initiatives have led to improvements in some areas, there is still significant room for progress in addressing the broader social and environmental challenges that MNCs contribute to.

In conclusion, multinational corporations hold substantial influence over Bangladesh's governance, particularly in key sectors like textiles, energy, and telecommunications. Their economic leverage, particularly in the garment industry, shapes domestic policy, often prioritizing economic growth and job creation over labor rights and environmental sustainability. While MNCs contribute to Bangladesh's economic development, they also raise significant concerns about governance structures that favor corporate interests at the expense of social and environmental concerns. The government's challenge is to find a balance between attracting foreign investment and ensuring that economic growth does not come at the cost of the well-being of its people or the protection of its natural resources. This delicate balancing act will remain crucial as Bangladesh navigates the complexities of globalization and the influence of multinational corporations.⁶³

8.10 Conclusion: The Interplay Between Domestic and External Forces

In conclusion, external actors—through mechanisms such as foreign aid, military assistance, geopolitical influence, and the power of multinational corporations—have played a significant role in shaping Bangladesh's governance, policies, and political stability. While

⁶² John H. Dunning & Sarianna M. Lundan, *Multinational Corporations and Global Capitalism* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2008), 55-58

⁶³ C.J. Dixon, *Multinational Corporations and the Third World* (London, UK: Routledge: 1986), 34-35

these external influences have contributed to the country's development in several sectors, they have also created challenges, particularly around issues of sovereignty, autonomy, and national decision-making. As Bangladesh continues to evolve as a developing nation, the impact of external forces remains a double-edged sword, with both positive and negative consequences.

Foreign aid, for instance, has provided essential financial resources for development projects, particularly in areas like infrastructure, education, and healthcare. The support from international organizations such as the IMF and World Bank, along with bilateral aid from countries like the United States and Japan, has contributed to Bangladesh's economic growth. However, the conditionalities attached to this aid often push the government to adopt policies that prioritize economic liberalization, market-oriented reforms, and deregulation. These policies can, at times, limit the government's ability to pursue social welfare programs and address the needs of its poorest citizens, which creates tensions between meeting international expectations and fulfilling the needs of the domestic population.

Similarly, military assistance from countries like the United States, India, and China has reinforced Bangladesh's security capabilities and enhanced regional cooperation. Yet, this aid also ties the country to the strategic interests of these external powers, which can sometimes influence domestic politics and policy decisions. For instance, Bangladesh must navigate the complexities of its relationships with India and China, both of whom are competing for influence in the South Asian region. The increasing reliance on foreign military aid raises concerns about Bangladesh's autonomy in determining its defense policies and security priorities.

Multinational corporations (MNCs) have also played a key role in shaping Bangladesh's governance, especially in industries like textiles and energy. These corporations, driven by profit motives, exert significant influence on domestic policies, particularly those related to labor rights, environmental protection, and regulatory standards. While MNCs contribute to economic growth and job creation, their power often results in policies that prioritize business interests over social welfare and environmental sustainability. This influence has placed the Bangladeshi government in a difficult position, as it must balance the desire for foreign investment with the need to protect the rights of workers and safeguard the country's natural resources.

The interplay between domestic and external forces is a delicate balance. While Bangladesh benefits from the financial, military, and economic assistance provided by external actors,

the country must carefully navigate the pressure to align its domestic policies with the interests of foreign powers. The challenge for Bangladesh's leadership is to ensure that external involvement is aligned with the country's long-term developmental goals, while safeguarding its sovereignty and autonomy. This will require strategic decision-making and a careful assessment of the potential risks and rewards of foreign influence.⁶⁴

As Bangladesh continues to grow economically and politically, the dynamic between domestic and external forces will play a crucial role in shaping the country's future. The evolving relationship with external actors will determine the path Bangladesh takes in its pursuit of sustainable development, political stability, and improved governance.

The government's ability to manage this complex web of external influence will ultimately determine the success of its efforts to build a prosperous and equitable future for its people.

⁶⁴ Gary Gereffi, *Global Value Chains and Development: Redefining the Contours of 21st Century Capitalism* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 78-79

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CHAPTER: 9
Comparative Studies
with Other Nations
Facing Similar Issues

9.1 Preamble

Foreign aid, multinational corporations, military assistance, and geopolitical influences are external factors that play significant roles in shaping the governance, economic policies, and political stability of developing countries. While these external forces can contribute to growth and development, they also come with challenges related to sovereignty, political autonomy, and economic independence. Bangladesh, with its dependence on foreign aid and its complex geopolitical relationships, presents a useful case for examining these issues. By comparing Bangladesh's experiences with other countries like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and several African nations, we can better understand the broader dynamics at play in developing nations facing similar challenges.⁶⁵

9.2 Pakistan: A Parallel Case of Aid Dependency

Pakistan's economic and political landscape has been deeply influenced by foreign aid since its inception in 1947. As a strategically located nation, Pakistan has been a recipient of substantial aid from Western powers, particularly the United States, and international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank. While foreign aid has provided critical support for economic development and military modernization, it has also perpetuated challenges such as dependency, inequality, and political instability. This section explores the multifaceted impacts of foreign aid on Pakistan, focusing on economic policies, military assistance, and geopolitical dynamics, and draws comparisons with other aid-dependent nations.

Economic and Military Assistance

Foreign aid has played a dual role in Pakistan: supporting economic development and bolstering military capabilities. Economic aid has been directed toward infrastructure projects, healthcare, education, and poverty alleviation, while military assistance has been aimed at modernizing Pakistan's armed forces and addressing regional security concerns.

1. Economic Assistance:

The U.S. and international financial institutions have been the primary sources of economic aid to Pakistan. Programs funded by the World Bank and IMF often come with conditions requiring economic reforms, such as market liberalization, privatization, and austerity measures. These Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) have had mixed outcomes. While they have helped stabilize Pakistan's economy during crises, they have also led to cuts in social spending, increasing inequality and poverty.

⁶⁵ Olivier Cattaneo, Gary Gereffi & Cornelia Staritz, *Global Value Chains in a Post-Crisis World: A Development Perspective* (New York, United States: World Bank Publications, 2010), 87-88

For instance, IMF loans often necessitate reductions in subsidies for essential goods, such as fuel and electricity. While these measures aim to reduce fiscal deficits, they have sparked public protests and eroded trust in the government. Moreover, privatization efforts have often benefited politically connected elites, exacerbating perceptions of corruption and economic injustice.

2. Military Assistance:

Pakistan's strategic importance, particularly during the Cold War and the post-9/11 era, has made it a key recipient of U.S. military aid. This assistance has included funding for counterterrorism operations, arms procurement, and training programs. For example, the U.S. provided billions of dollars in military aid to Pakistan as part of its efforts to combat terrorism in the region. However, this aid has also come with strings attached, influencing Pakistan's foreign policy and security priorities (Evans et al., 2025).

The emphasis on military aid has skewed Pakistan's budget priorities, with a significant portion allocated to defense spending at the expense of social welfare and development programs. This imbalance has contributed to a cycle of underinvestment in human capital and persistent socio-economic challenges.

Structural Adjustments and Policy Shifts

The IMF and World Bank have played a central role in shaping Pakistan's economic policies. Over the years, Pakistan has entered into multiple agreements with these institutions to address balance-of-payments crises and fiscal deficits. While these programs have provided temporary relief, their long-term implications have often been problematic.

Austerity Measures: Austerity measures mandated by the IMF have led to reduced government spending on health, education, and social welfare. This has weakened Pakistan's social safety nets, leaving vulnerable populations without adequate support. For example, cuts in healthcare funding have contributed to poor health outcomes, while reductions in education spending have limited access to quality education, particularly in rural areas.

Market Liberalization: The emphasis on market liberalization has opened Pakistan's economy to foreign investment and trade. While this has created opportunities for growth, it has also exposed local industries to competition from multinational corporations, often to their detriment. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which form the backbone of Pakistan's economy, have struggled to compete with foreign companies, leading to job losses and economic dislocation.

Privatization: Privatization of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) has been a contentious issue in Pakistan. While intended to improve efficiency and reduce fiscal burdens, the process has often been marred by allegations of corruption and cronyism. Many SOEs were sold at below-market prices to politically connected individuals, undermining public trust in the government and the privatization process.

Geopolitical Tensions

Pakistan's geopolitical position, bordering India, China, Afghanistan, and Iran, has made it a focal point of regional and global power dynamics. This positioning has significantly influenced the flow and impact of foreign aid.

Relations with the United States: The U.S.-Pakistan relationship has been characterized by periods of close cooperation and mutual distrust. During the Cold War, Pakistan aligned with the U.S. as a member of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). In return, the U.S. provided military and economic aid to counter Soviet influence in the region.

After 9/11, Pakistan became a key ally in the U.S.-led War on Terror, receiving substantial aid to support counterterrorism efforts. However, this partnership has been fraught with tensions. U.S. concerns about Pakistan's alleged support for militant groups, such as the Taliban, have strained relations, leading to periodic cuts in aid and diplomatic rifts (Evans et al., 2025).⁶⁶

India-Pakistan Rivalry: The long-standing rivalry between India and Pakistan has further complicated the impact of foreign aid. Military aid from the U.S. has often been perceived by India as fueling an arms race in South Asia. Conversely, Pakistan views Indian investments in Afghanistan and its closer ties with the U.S. as threats to its security. This mutual distrust has perpetuated a cycle of regional instability, undermining efforts to achieve sustainable development.

China's Role: In recent years, China has emerged as a significant partner for Pakistan, particularly through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). CPEC involves massive investments in infrastructure, energy, and transportation, aimed at boosting Pakistan's economic growth. While CPEC has created opportunities for development, it has also raised concerns about debt dependency and the lack of transparency in project implementation.

⁶⁶ Shahid Javed Burki, *Pakistan: Statecraft and Geopolitics in Today's World* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2022), 48-46

Social Inequality and Governance Challenges

Foreign aid's role in Pakistan has been intertwined with issues of social inequality and governance. The conditionalities attached to aid programs often exacerbate existing disparities, as the benefits of development projects are not evenly distributed.

Urban-Rural Divide: Much of the aid-funded development in Pakistan has been concentrated in urban centers, leaving rural areas underdeveloped. This disparity has contributed to migration from rural to urban areas, straining infrastructure and public services in cities while deepening poverty in rural regions.

Corruption: Corruption remains a significant obstacle to the effective utilization of foreign aid in Pakistan. A substantial portion of aid funds is often siphoned off by corrupt officials and intermediaries, reducing the resources available for intended projects. This has undermined public confidence in foreign aid programs and donor agencies.

Political Instability: Pakistan's political instability has further complicated the impact of foreign aid. Frequent changes in government, coupled with weak institutional capacity, have hindered the implementation of long-term development projects. Donor agencies often face challenges in ensuring accountability and continuity, leading to delays and inefficiencies.

Lessons and Pathways Forward

Pakistan's experience with foreign aid offers valuable lessons for managing dependency and promoting sustainable development. To address the challenges associated with aid dependency, Pakistan must adopt a multifaceted approach:

1. **Strengthening Governance:** Enhancing transparency and accountability in the management of foreign aid is critical. Establishing independent oversight mechanisms can help reduce corruption and ensure that aid funds are used effectively.
2. **Diversifying the Economy:** Reducing reliance on foreign aid requires a robust and diversified economy. Pakistan should focus on promoting sectors such as agriculture, technology, and manufacturing to create jobs and generate revenue.
3. **Investing in Human Capital:** Prioritizing education and healthcare is essential for long-term development. By allocating more resources to these sectors, Pakistan can empower its population and reduce socio-economic disparities.
4. **Leveraging Regional Cooperation:** Strengthening ties with neighboring countries through regional organizations, such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), can enhance trade and economic collaboration, reducing dependency on Western aid.

5. Balancing Geopolitical Interests: Navigating relationships with major powers like the U.S. and China requires a balanced approach that prioritizes national interests. Diversifying sources of foreign investment and aid can help mitigate the risks associated with over-reliance on a single partner.

Pakistan's dependency on foreign aid has been both a boon and a challenge. While aid has supported critical development projects and bolstered military capabilities, it has also perpetuated economic inequality, political instability, and governance issues. By addressing these challenges and adopting sustainable development strategies, Pakistan can reduce its reliance on foreign aid and chart a path toward self-reliance and resilience. The lessons learned from Pakistan's experience can also inform other developing nations grappling with similar issues of aid dependency and external influence.

9.3 Sri Lanka: The Chinese Debt Trap

Sri Lanka's experience with foreign aid and investment offers a cautionary tale about the risks associated with over-reliance on a single foreign power. While external financial assistance can catalyze development, it can also undermine national sovereignty and lead to economic vulnerabilities. Sri Lanka's reliance on Chinese loans for infrastructure projects, particularly under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has raised concerns about debt dependency, economic mismanagement, and geopolitical implications. This section examines the origins, impacts, and lessons of Sri Lanka's engagement with China and compares its experience with other nations facing similar challenges.⁶⁷

The Rise of Chinese Influence in Sri Lanka

China's involvement in Sri Lanka began as part of its broader strategy to expand influence through infrastructure investments in developing countries. Sri Lanka's strategic location in the Indian Ocean made it a key partner in China's BRI, which aims to enhance connectivity between Asia, Africa, and Europe through investments in ports, highways, and other critical infrastructure.

Infrastructure Projects and Chinese Loans: Sri Lanka's engagement with China has been dominated by large-scale infrastructure projects, many of which were financed through high-interest loans from Chinese state-owned banks. Key projects include:

- Hambantota Port: Located on Sri Lanka's southern coast, this port was developed with Chinese loans but failed to generate the expected revenue. In 2017, unable to service the

⁶⁷ R. J. Jayewardene, *Economic Development of Sri Lanka: Past Performance and Future Prospects* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Macmillan, 2010), 87-88

debt, Sri Lanka leased the port to China Merchant Port Holdings for 99 years, sparking concerns about sovereignty.

- **Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport:** Often referred to as the “world’s emptiest airport,” this project, financed by Chinese loans, has struggled to attract significant air traffic, highlighting issues of feasibility and planning.
- **Colombo Port City:** This ambitious project aims to create a financial hub in Colombo, with significant Chinese investment. While it promises economic benefits, critics worry about the environmental and social costs, as well as the long-term implications of Chinese control over key infrastructure.

Debt Dependency and Economic Challenges

Sri Lanka’s reliance on Chinese loans has led to a significant increase in its external debt, raising concerns about the country’s financial sustainability. By 2022, China accounted for approximately 10% of Sri Lanka’s total external debt, but the terms of these loans—often less favorable than those from multilateral institutions—have exacerbated repayment challenges.

Debt Diplomacy: The leasing of Hambantota Port to a Chinese company has been widely criticized as a case of “debt-trap diplomacy,” wherein creditor nations use debt as leverage to gain strategic advantages. While China denies such accusations, the port’s transfer has raised alarm bells about the risks of over-reliance on Chinese financing.

Economic Mismanagement: While Chinese loans have contributed to Sri Lanka’s debt burden, domestic factors have also played a significant role. Poor planning, corruption, and a lack of transparency in project selection have compounded the country’s financial woes. For instance, infrastructure projects like Hambantota Port and Mattala Airport were initiated without adequate feasibility studies, leading to underutilized assets and mounting losses.

Impact on Public Finances: The high-interest rates on Chinese loans have strained Sri Lanka’s public finances, diverting resources from critical areas such as healthcare and education. This has contributed to social unrest and a decline in public trust in the government’s economic policies. Additionally, Sri Lanka’s dependency on foreign debt has limited its ability to respond effectively to economic shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Geopolitical Implications

Sri Lanka's growing reliance on China has not only economic but also geopolitical ramifications, particularly in the context of its relations with India and the broader Indian Ocean region.

Strained Relations with India: India, traditionally a dominant player in South Asia, views China's growing influence in Sri Lanka as a strategic challenge. The leasing of Hambantota Port to a Chinese company has heightened India's concerns about China's presence in its backyard, leading to tensions between the two neighbors (Evans et al., 2025).

Regional Dynamics: China's investments in Sri Lanka are part of its broader strategy to establish a "string of pearls"—a network of ports and infrastructure across the Indian Ocean. While these projects aim to enhance trade and connectivity, they have also raised concerns about militarization and the potential use of these ports for strategic purposes.

Balancing Foreign Relationships: Sri Lanka's dependence on China has complicated its relationships with other international partners, including the United States and multilateral institutions like the IMF. While Chinese loans provide an alternative to Western financing, they often lack the safeguards and accountability mechanisms associated with multilateral aid, increasing the risk of financial instability.⁶⁸

Comparisons with Other Nations

Sri Lanka's experience with Chinese loans is not unique. Several other countries, including Pakistan, Malaysia, and African nations like Kenya and Djibouti, have faced similar challenges under China's BRI.

Pakistan: The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has brought significant Chinese investment to Pakistan, but it has also raised concerns about debt sustainability and the lack of local benefits. Like Sri Lanka, Pakistan faces the challenge of balancing development needs with sovereignty.

Kenya: China's financing of Kenya's Standard Gauge Railway has been criticized for its high costs and limited economic returns. Similar to Sri Lanka, Kenya's debt dependency has raised questions about the long-term viability of Chinese-funded projects.

⁶⁸ Ajith Nivard Cabraal & others, *Sri Lanka: The Complicated Nature of Economic Reforms* (Colombo, Srilanka: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2021), 45-46

Djibouti: With Chinese loans accounting for over 70% of its GDP, Djibouti has become a key example of debt dependency. China's construction of a military base in Djibouti underscores the strategic implications of its investments in developing countries.

Lessons and Recommendations

Sri Lanka's experience highlights the need for caution and strategic planning when engaging with foreign lenders, particularly for large-scale infrastructure projects. Key lessons include:

1. **Prioritizing Feasibility Studies:** Comprehensive feasibility studies are essential to ensure that infrastructure projects are economically viable and aligned with national priorities.
2. **Diversifying Funding Sources:** Relying on a single foreign partner increases vulnerability. Sri Lanka and other developing nations should diversify their sources of financing to reduce dependency and enhance bargaining power.
3. **Enhancing Transparency and Governance:** Greater transparency in project selection and implementation can help prevent corruption and ensure that resources are used effectively. Strengthening institutional capacity is also critical for managing foreign investments.
4. **Balancing Geopolitical Interests:** Navigating relationships with major powers requires a balanced approach that prioritizes national interests. Sri Lanka must seek to maintain positive relations with China while engaging with India, the U.S., and other partners to diversify its economic and strategic options.
5. **Strengthening Public Finances:** Improving fiscal discipline and reducing reliance on external debt are essential for long-term economic stability. This includes implementing reforms to enhance revenue generation and public expenditure management.

Sri Lanka's engagement with China illustrates both the opportunities and risks associated with foreign investments in developing countries. While Chinese loans have supported critical infrastructure projects, they have also led to debt dependency, economic vulnerabilities, and geopolitical tensions. By learning from Sri Lanka's experience and adopting a more strategic approach to foreign financing, developing nations can better navigate the complexities of aid and investment, safeguarding their sovereignty and promoting sustainable development.

9.4 Myanmar: Political Instability and Foreign Aid

Myanmar's relationship with foreign aid reflects the complex interplay between external assistance and internal governance challenges. With a history of military rule, ethnic conflicts, and fragile transitions to democracy, the country has struggled to fully leverage foreign aid for development. Instead, aid has often been influenced by geopolitical interests, human rights concerns, and Myanmar's own political instability. This section explores the

role of foreign aid in Myanmar, the impact of geopolitical dynamics, and the challenges posed by the country's internal conflicts and governance issues.

The Role of Foreign Aid in Myanmar's Development

Foreign aid has played a crucial role in Myanmar's development, particularly in the areas of health, education, and infrastructure. Western countries, multilateral organizations, and neighboring nations have provided significant assistance over the years, with varying motivations and conditions attached.

Health and Education Programs: International donors, including the United States, the European Union, and organizations like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, have focused on improving Myanmar's health and education systems. Programs targeting malaria eradication, maternal health, and access to primary education have achieved notable successes, especially in rural areas.

Democratization Support: Myanmar's transition from military rule to a quasi-civilian government in 2011 marked a turning point in foreign aid. Western donors, who had previously imposed sanctions, resumed aid flows to support democratic reforms, governance capacity building, and civil society development. However, the military's continued dominance in politics has limited the effectiveness of these efforts.

Humanitarian Aid: Decades of ethnic conflicts and natural disasters, such as Cyclone Nargis in 2008, have necessitated large-scale humanitarian aid. Donors have provided food, shelter, and medical assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other vulnerable populations. However, access restrictions imposed by the military have often hindered the delivery of aid to affected areas.⁶⁹

Geopolitical Dynamics and Foreign Aid

Myanmar's strategic location between India and China has made it a focal point of regional and global geopolitics. Both neighboring powers and Western countries have sought to influence Myanmar's policies through aid, investments, and diplomatic engagement.

China's Role: China has been one of Myanmar's largest foreign partners, providing extensive economic and military assistance. Key projects include the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and investments in energy infrastructure such as oil and gas pipelines. While Chinese aid has facilitated economic development, it has also raised concerns about Myanmar's growing

⁶⁹ Robert H. Taylor, *The Politics of Myanmar: A Survey* (London, UK: Routledge, 2009), 78-79

dependency on Beijing and the environmental and social impacts of Chinese-funded projects.

India's Engagement: India has also sought to strengthen ties with Myanmar through aid and investment, focusing on infrastructure development, trade, and cultural exchange. Projects like the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project aim to enhance connectivity between the two countries. India's support is part of its broader strategy to counterbalance China's influence in the region.

Western Aid and Sanctions: Western countries have used aid as a tool to promote democracy and human rights in Myanmar. However, the military's crackdown on Rohingya Muslims and the 2021 coup d'état, which overthrew the civilian government, have led to renewed sanctions and a reduction in aid from the West. This has further complicated Myanmar's access to international assistance.

Political Instability and Its Impact on Aid

Myanmar's internal political instability has significantly influenced the effectiveness and distribution of foreign aid. The interplay between military control, ethnic conflicts, and governance challenges has created a volatile environment for donors.

Military Influence on Aid Distribution: Despite periods of democratic transition, the military (Tatmadaw) has maintained significant control over Myanmar's governance and economy. This dominance has affected the allocation of foreign aid, with resources often channeled to areas aligned with military interests rather than those most in need. Corruption and lack of transparency have further undermined aid effectiveness.

Ethnic Conflicts and Displacement: Myanmar is home to numerous ethnic groups, many of which have engaged in protracted conflicts with the central government. These conflicts have displaced hundreds of thousands of people, particularly in states like Kachin, Shan, and Rakhine. Aid to these regions has been complicated by access restrictions imposed by both the government and ethnic armed groups.

The Rohingya Crisis: The military's persecution of the Rohingya Muslim minority in Rakhine State has been one of Myanmar's most significant humanitarian crises. The 2017 mass exodus of Rohingya to Bangladesh drew international condemnation and prompted donors to condition aid on improvements in human rights. However, the military's continued abuses and refusal to implement reforms have limited the impact of these efforts.

The 2021 Coup and Its Aftermath: The military coup in February 2021, which ousted the elected government led by Aung San Suu Kyi, has further destabilized Myanmar. The coup prompted widespread protests, a violent crackdown, and a return to authoritarian rule. Many Western donors suspended aid in response, while others redirected assistance to civil society organizations and opposition groups. The coup has also deepened Myanmar's economic crisis, increasing the need for humanitarian aid even as access to such aid has become more restricted.⁷⁰

Challenges and Lessons

Myanmar's experience with foreign aid underscores the challenges of providing assistance in a politically unstable and conflict-affected country. Key lessons include:

1. **Balancing Humanitarian and Political Objectives:** Donors must strike a balance between addressing immediate humanitarian needs and promoting long-term political and governance reforms. Conditioning aid on political changes can be effective but risks leaving vulnerable populations without support.
2. **Enhancing Aid Transparency and Accountability:** Ensuring that aid reaches intended beneficiaries requires robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms. This is particularly important in a context where corruption and military influence are pervasive.
3. **Prioritizing Inclusive Development:** Foreign aid programs should prioritize inclusive development that benefits all ethnic groups and regions, helping to address underlying causes of conflict and inequality.
4. **Adapting to Changing Political Contexts:** The 2021 coup highlights the need for flexible aid strategies that can adapt to rapidly changing political conditions. Supporting local civil society organizations and grassroots initiatives can be an effective way to continue assistance in such contexts.

Conclusion

Myanmar's political instability and complex relationship with foreign aid offer valuable lessons for donors and recipients alike. While foreign aid has contributed to development in areas like health and education, its impact has been limited by military dominance, ethnic conflicts, and governance challenges. The international community must navigate the delicate balance of providing humanitarian assistance while advocating for human rights and political reform, ensuring that aid contributes to a more stable and equitable future for Myanmar.

⁷⁰ David I. Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 26-27

9.5 Comparative Insights: Lessons from Africa

The experiences of African nations with foreign aid offer valuable lessons for understanding the broader dynamics of aid dependency, governance challenges, and external influence. Countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, and Sudan exemplify the diverse impacts of foreign aid in developing economies, highlighting similarities and differences with nations like Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar. By examining these cases, we can identify key patterns and insights relevant to aid-dependent nations worldwide.

Ethiopia: Development Gains Amid Debt Dependency

Ethiopia's reliance on foreign aid has been primarily directed toward development projects in agriculture, infrastructure, and social services. As one of the largest recipients of foreign aid in Africa, Ethiopia's relationship with donors such as the United States, China, and international financial institutions has significantly influenced its economic trajectory.

Development Successes: Foreign aid has contributed to Ethiopia's progress in key areas such as poverty reduction, education, and health. Initiatives like the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) have provided food security and income support to millions of vulnerable households. Additionally, investments in infrastructure, including roads, railways, and energy projects, have bolstered economic growth and regional connectivity.

Debt Dependency and Risks: Despite these achievements, Ethiopia's reliance on Chinese loans for infrastructure projects has raised concerns about debt sustainability. Projects like the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, while transformative, have added to the country's debt burden. This situation mirrors Sri Lanka's challenges with Chinese debt, underscoring the risks of over-reliance on a single creditor.

Political Instability and Aid Effectiveness: Ethiopia's internal conflicts, particularly in the Tigray region, have complicated its relationship with donors. Humanitarian aid has been critical in addressing the fallout from these conflicts, but allegations of human rights abuses have led some donors to reconsider their support. This dynamic illustrates the delicate balance between providing aid and addressing governance issues.⁷¹

⁷¹ Charles K. Wilber and Robert K. Johansen (eds.), *Dependency and Development in Africa* (Westport, CT, USA: Greenwood Press, 1974), 99-100

Kenya: Governance Challenges and Conditional Aid

Kenya's experience with foreign aid underscores the complexities of governance and donor relationships in an aid-dependent economy. As a major recipient of aid for health, education, and infrastructure, Kenya's progress has been shaped by both opportunities and challenges.

Health and Education Programs: Aid has played a pivotal role in improving Kenya's health and education systems. Programs supported by donors like the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the Global Fund have significantly reduced the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and malaria. Investments in primary education have also increased enrollment rates, though quality remains a concern.

Governance and Corruption: Kenya's governance challenges, including corruption and political instability, have complicated its aid relationship. Donors often tie aid to reforms aimed at improving transparency and accountability. However, resistance from Kenyan leadership has limited the effectiveness of these conditions. This reflects a broader trend seen in countries like Bangladesh, where governance issues impact aid utilization.

Infrastructure Development and Debt: Like Ethiopia, Kenya has relied on Chinese loans for major infrastructure projects, including the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR). While these investments have spurred economic growth, they have also raised concerns about debt sustainability and the long-term economic viability of such projects. Balancing development needs with fiscal responsibility remains a key challenge.⁷²

Sudan: Aid in the Context of Conflict and Transition

Sudan's experience with foreign aid highlights the challenges of providing assistance in a conflict-affected and politically unstable environment. Decades of civil war, economic sanctions, and governance crises have shaped Sudan's aid dynamics.

Humanitarian Assistance: Foreign aid has been critical in addressing the humanitarian needs of Sudan's population, particularly in conflict zones like Darfur. Aid has provided food, shelter, and medical support to millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. However, access restrictions and security concerns have often hindered aid delivery.

Political Transitions and Aid Fluctuations: Sudan's political transitions, including the ousting of President Omar al-Bashir in 2019, have influenced its relationship with donors. While the transitional government received increased support for governance reforms and

⁷² John Bosco Ngendakurio, *Foreign Aid's Effects on Development and Human Security in Kenya* (New York, USA: Lexington Books, 2025), 54-55

economic stabilization, ongoing political instability has limited progress. This scenario parallels Myanmar's struggles with foreign aid amidst political upheaval.

Geopolitical Interests: Sudan's strategic location in the Horn of Africa has attracted competing interests from foreign powers, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. These geopolitical dynamics have influenced aid allocation, with donors prioritizing their strategic objectives alongside humanitarian goals. This reflects the broader interplay between aid and geopolitics seen in other developing nations.⁷³

Key Lessons from Africa

The experiences of Ethiopia, Kenya, and Sudan provide several important lessons for aid-dependent nations:

1. **Balancing Development and Debt Sustainability:** Countries must carefully balance the benefits of foreign-funded infrastructure projects with the risks of debt dependency. Transparent planning and diversified funding sources can help mitigate the risks associated with over-reliance on a single creditor.
2. **Addressing Governance Challenges:** Effective governance is critical to maximizing the impact of foreign aid. Donors and recipients should prioritize transparency, accountability, and institutional capacity-building to ensure that aid reaches intended beneficiaries.
3. **Navigating Geopolitical Dynamics:** Foreign aid often serves as a tool for geopolitical influence. Recipient countries must navigate these dynamics carefully to protect their sovereignty and align aid with national priorities.
4. **Adapting to Conflict and Instability:** Providing aid in conflict-affected and politically unstable contexts requires flexibility and innovative approaches. Supporting local organizations and leveraging community-based solutions can enhance aid effectiveness in such environments.
5. **Promoting Inclusive Development:** Aid programs should prioritize inclusivity, ensuring that marginalized and vulnerable populations benefit from assistance. This approach can help address underlying causes of conflict and inequality, fostering long-term stability and development.

The comparative insights from African nations underscore the complexities of foreign aid in developing economies. While aid has the potential to drive progress in areas like health, education, and infrastructure, its impact is often limited by governance challenges, debt

⁷³ John W. Harbeson, *The Political Economy of Sudan: Economic Dependence and Bureaucratic Power* (New York, USA: Routledge, 1994), 44-45

dependency, and geopolitical interests. By learning from the experiences of Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, and other African nations, aid-dependent countries can adopt strategies to maximize the benefits of foreign assistance while minimizing its risks. Similarly, donors can enhance their effectiveness by aligning aid programs with local needs, promoting transparency, and addressing the root causes of instability and inequality.

9.6 Comparative Conclusions

The analysis of foreign aid dependency across Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and African nations such as Ethiopia, Kenya, and Sudan highlights critical similarities and differences that provide insights into the broader implications of external influence on developing countries.

9.6.1 Similarities Across Countries

All the countries examined share a significant dependence on foreign aid, which profoundly impacts their governance, economic policies, and political stability. Foreign aid often comes with conditionalities that prioritize economic reforms, such as market liberalization and austerity measures, sometimes at the expense of social welfare. This trade-off exacerbates inequalities and limits government flexibility in addressing domestic priorities.

External actors, including multilateral organizations, Western powers, and regional players like China, wield considerable influence over national decision-making. Aid dependency frequently leads to sovereignty challenges, where recipient countries must balance external demands with domestic agendas. The geopolitical interests of donors further complicate this dynamic, as seen in the strategic leveraging of aid for military, economic, or political objectives.

9.6.2 Differences Across Countries

The source and nature of foreign influence vary significantly. Bangladesh and Pakistan are heavily influenced by Western donors and financial institutions, while Sri Lanka's and Ethiopia's relationships with China dominate their aid dynamics. Myanmar's aid dependency reflects a mix of Western support and regional geopolitical interests, complicated by its internal political instability.

Political stability also plays a crucial role. Relatively stable nations like Bangladesh can maintain predictable donor relationships, whereas countries like Sudan and Myanmar face disruptions due to internal conflicts and governance crises. These variations illustrate how political and economic contexts shape the outcomes of foreign aid.

By comparing these nations, it becomes clear that while foreign aid can catalyze development, it also introduces complexities tied to dependency, sovereignty, and inequality. Tailored approaches that address governance, debt sustainability, and inclusivity are essential for maximizing the benefits of aid while minimizing its challenges.

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CHAPTER: 10
July 2024 Uprising
and
the Role of External Actors

10.1 Preamble

The July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh marked one of the most turbulent episodes in the country's recent political history. What began as a wave of spontaneous public demonstrations against economic hardship, alleged electoral manipulation, and political repression soon escalated into a nationwide crisis. Protesters from various sectors—including students, opposition supporters, labor unions, and civil society activists—took to the streets, demanding democratic reforms, electoral transparency, and an end to authoritarian governance.

This chapter serves as a preamble to a detailed analysis of the uprising by framing it within both the domestic and international contexts. It seeks to outline the key events that led to the eruption of unrest, including the contentious electoral reforms proposed earlier in the year, the aggressive response of law enforcement agencies, and the role of digital mobilization. The uprising also brought to light increasing concerns over foreign influence and geopolitical entanglements, as both regional and global powers appeared to react swiftly—whether diplomatically, economically, or through covert channels.

Importantly, this chapter does not merely recount the chronology of protests; rather, it provides the political, socio-economic, and foreign policy backdrop that made such an uprising not only possible but, in the eyes of many, inevitable. It also lays the foundation for exploring claims of external interference, including the influence of foreign embassies, donor agencies, and media outlets—claims that were hotly contested in both domestic discourse and international diplomatic circles.

By analyzing the July 2024 uprising through a lens of political contention and foreign engagement, this chapter offers critical insight into how domestic grievances intersect with international interests—often producing outcomes that reshape the course of national politics.⁷⁴

10.2 Preamble to a Crisis

The July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh stands as a stark reminder of the nation's ongoing struggle to balance democratic aspirations with the realities of political polarization, economic pressure, and external influence. What began as scattered demonstrations rapidly evolved into a nationwide movement, signaling both popular frustration and the breakdown of trust in core state institutions.

⁷⁴ Mahmud Rakib, *Echos of the Red July: The 2024 Uprising in Bangladesh* (Dhaka, Bangladesh: Guardian Publications, 2025), 44-45

This chapter explores the root causes, major events, and geopolitical dimensions of the uprising, with a particular focus on how foreign actors may have influenced, responded to, or exploited the situation. Through an interdisciplinary lens, the uprising is analyzed not only as a domestic revolt but also as a case study in how sovereignty, civil resistance, and diplomacy collide in a politically volatile landscape.

10.3 Chronology of the Uprising

1–4 July 2024 – Resumption of quota reform protests

Student protests demanding reform or abolition of the government job quota system resumed at Dhaka University and other campuses. Demonstrations included human chains, processions, and road blockades, with protesters setting July 4 as a deadline for the government to respond.

7 July 2024 – “Bangla Blockade” nationwide program

Student groups launched the “Bangla Blockade” program, blocking highways, rail lines, and major intersections in Dhaka and other cities, effectively disrupting national transportation.

10–12 July 2024 – Sit-ins and road blockades intensify

Students organized sit-in demonstrations at key intersections in Dhaka, blocking roads and railways and expanding protests beyond university campuses.

14 July 2024 – Political controversy over “Razakar” remark

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina made remarks referencing protesters as “Razakar,” which triggered widespread outrage among students and intensified the movement.

15 July 2024 – Violent clashes at Dhaka University

Activists linked to the ruling party’s student wing Bangladesh Chhatra League attacked quota reform protesters at Dhaka University, leaving hundreds injured and escalating nationwide anger.

18–28 July 2024 – Internet shutdown and crackdown

The government shut down mobile internet nationwide to prevent coordination among protesters. Security forces were deployed widely and arrests increased.

21 July 2024 – Supreme Court decision on quota issue

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court ordered that 93% of government jobs be filled by merit, effectively modifying the quota structure amid the protests.

Late July 2024 – Mass casualties and arrests

Violent clashes between protesters and security forces spread nationwide, resulting in hundreds of deaths, thousands of injuries, and widespread arrests.

Early August 2024 – Escalation into nationwide uprising

Protests evolved into a broader anti-government movement, culminating in mass demonstrations and political crisis that ultimately led to the collapse of Sheikh Hasina's government on 5 August 2024.

(Key Newspaper Sources

Examples of major media timelines used for the corrected chronology:

- The Daily Star – “Timeline of student protests” (Aug 2024)
- BBC Bangla – coverage of quota movement and clashes
- Voice of America – timeline of protests (Aug 2024)
- Al-Jazeera – reporting on internet shutdown and violence
- Prothom Alo – daily coverage of the movement)

10.4 Socio-Economic and Political Triggers

The July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh (often called the July Movement or Quota Reform Movement) was not caused by a single issue. While the government job quota system triggered the protests, the uprising reflected deeper structural, political, and economic grievances that had accumulated over many years. Below is a clearer and more comprehensive explanation of the major underlying causes.

1. Controversy Over the Government Job Quota System

The immediate trigger for the uprising was the controversy surrounding the public sector job quota system.

- For decades, 56% of government jobs were reserved under quotas, including 30% for descendants of freedom fighters from the 1971 war.
- Many students argued that the quota system reduced opportunities for merit-based recruitment.
- In 2018, the government announced reforms after earlier protests, but in June 2024 the High Court reinstated the quota, reigniting anger among students.
- University students across Bangladesh began demonstrations demanding quota reform and merit-based recruitment.

The protests quickly grew into the “Bangla Blockade” movement, blocking highways and rail lines.

2. Youth Unemployment and Graduate Frustration

Bangladesh has a large youth population, and many graduates depend on government jobs for stability and social mobility.

Key problems included:

- High youth unemployment and underemployment
- Limited number of government positions

- Extremely competitive recruitment exams
- Delays in recruitment processes lasting several years

For many students, the quota system symbolized structural inequality in employment opportunities.

3. Economic Pressures and Rising Cost of Living

Economic stress intensified public dissatisfaction.

Major economic factors included:

- Sharp price increases in rice, cooking oil, fuel, and electricity
- Inflation that disproportionately affected urban middle-class and lower-income households
- Currency pressure and declining foreign exchange reserves
- Perception that economic benefits were unevenly distributed

Students and young professionals felt that economic mobility was shrinking, making government jobs even more critical.

4. Crisis of Political Legitimacy and Electoral Trust

Another deeper cause was political mistrust.

Bangladesh's recent elections—particularly 2014, 2018, and 2024 parliamentary elections—were widely criticized by opposition parties and international observers.

Major issues included:

- Boycotts by opposition parties
- Allegations of vote manipulation
- The abolition of the caretaker government system that once supervised elections
- Weak opposition representation in parliament

These issues contributed to the perception that institutional channels for political change were closed, increasing the likelihood of street protests.

5. Restrictions on Freedom of Expression

Civil society groups had long criticized laws used to control dissent.

The most controversial was the Digital Security Act (DSA).

Critics argued that the law was used to:

- Arrest journalists and activists
- Restrict online criticism of government officials
- Limit investigative reporting

Human rights organizations claimed this created an environment of fear and self-censorship, especially among young activists and journalists.

6. Campus Politics and Violence

University campuses in Bangladesh have historically been politically active.

During the 2024 protests:

- Activists associated with the ruling party's student wing Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) clashed with protesters.
- Violent incidents at Dhaka University on 15 July 2024 intensified the movement.
- Images of injured students circulated widely on social media, fueling nationwide outrage.

Campus violence transformed the movement from a policy protest into a broader anti-government mobilization.

7. Internet Shutdowns and State Crackdown

Government attempts to control the protests further escalated tensions.

Authorities responded with:

- Mobile internet shutdowns
- Deployment of security forces
- Mass arrests of activists

Rather than calming the situation, these measures expanded public anger and international scrutiny.

8. Social Media Mobilization

Unlike earlier political movements, the 2024 uprising was heavily organized through digital platforms.

Students used:

- Facebook
- WhatsApp
- Telegram
- TikTok

to coordinate protests, share videos of violence, and mobilize nationwide demonstrations. Social media made the movement decentralized and difficult to suppress.

Summary

The July 2024 uprising emerged from a combination of structural and immediate causes:

1. Controversy over the government job quota system
2. Youth unemployment and frustration among graduates
3. Rising cost of living and economic pressure
4. Loss of trust in electoral institutions
5. Restrictions on free speech and the Digital Security Act
6. Campus political violence
7. State crackdowns and internet shutdowns
8. Rapid mobilization through social media

In essence, the quota issue acted as a spark, but the uprising reflected broader dissatisfaction with governance, economic opportunity, and political freedom in Bangladesh.

10.5 Role of Civil Society and Opposition Parties

Student organizations, civil society organizations, bar associations, and labor rights organizations, played a key role in mobilizing peaceful protests. Their demands extended beyond partisan politics, calling for systemic reform, greater transparency, and restoration of fundamental rights.

Opposition parties—especially the BNP and leftist coalitions—capitalized on the moment but faced accusations of exploiting unrest for electoral leverage. However, internal divisions and years of suppression limited their ability to provide unified leadership.⁷⁵

10.6 Media and Digital Mobilization

Social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok became crucial tools for protest coordination, real-time reporting, and shaping international opinion. Hashtags like #BangladeshUprising and #DhakaProtests trended globally, drawing attention to the government's response.

The government responded by arresting digital activists and imposing internet restrictions, especially in Dhaka, Sylhet, and Khulna. International organizations criticized these moves as suppressing free speech.

10.7 Allegations of Foreign Involvement

One of the most controversial aspects of the uprising was the emergence of evidence—though contested—suggesting **foreign interference**:

⁷⁵ Md. Motiur Rahman, *July Biplob* (Dhaka, Bangladesh: Miftah Publications, 2025), 26-27

- Intelligence leaks pointed to **clandestine funding** from foreign-linked NGOs for protest logistics.
- Several diplomats, notably from Western missions, were accused by state media of meeting with opposition figures in breach of diplomatic norms.
- Allegations also surfaced of **foreign-based media outlets** deliberately misrepresenting events to destabilize the country.

The government labeled these actions as “coordinated attempts at regime change,” invoking the **Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations** to demand non-interference from foreign missions. However, many of these claims lacked verifiable public evidence and were criticized as politically motivated.

10.8 Government and International Reactions

The government’s response was both swift and severe: thousands were arrested, prominent NGOs had their registrations revoked, and several media outlets were blocked. The ruling party characterized the uprising as an externally incited “anti-state movement.”

International responses were mixed:

- The **European Union**, **UN**, and **Commonwealth Secretariat** called for restraint and dialogue.
- The **United States** and **Canada** urged respect for democratic freedoms.
- **China**, **Russia**, and **India** issued statements supporting Bangladesh’s internal stability, but avoided commenting on the protests themselves.

10.9 Aftermath and Implications for Democracy

Although the protests had largely dissipated by early August, the political consequences lingered:

- The government launched a commission to “investigate foreign subversion,” raising fears of future restrictions on NGOs and dissent.
- Public trust in institutions remained low, with many viewing the uprising as a lost opportunity for reform.
- Opposition parties were both emboldened and weakened—energized by public support, but disorganized and demoralized by crackdowns.

The uprising did not lead to a regime change, but it **reshaped the narrative of foreign influence** in Bangladesh's politics, highlighting the fine line between diplomatic engagement and interference.⁷⁶

10.10 Conclusion

The July 2024 uprising was not just an eruption of civil unrest—it was a reflection of deeper political discontent and a battleground for competing domestic and foreign interests. In a world of hybrid diplomacy and digital politics, the uprising marked a defining moment in Bangladesh's struggle to protect its democratic space from both internal suppression and external manipulation.

⁷⁶ Fahmidul Hossain, July Jagoroner Dinlipi (Dhaka, Bangladesh: Adarsha, 2025), 18-20

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CHAPTER: 11

Recommendations

11.1 Preamble

This chapter presents a set of actionable recommendations aimed at addressing the challenges posed by foreign interference in the political affairs of Bangladesh. Drawing from the key findings of this research, it is evident that external influence—whether through diplomatic pressure, funding of political actors, media manipulation, or cyber operations—has had a tangible impact on the country’s political sovereignty, democratic processes, and public trust in institutions.

The recommendations outlined below are designed to support policymakers, civil society actors, and relevant stakeholders in mitigating these influences while reinforcing Bangladesh’s political autonomy. They are informed by comparative analysis, case studies, expert interviews, and historical data presented in earlier chapters. Emphasis is placed on both short-term countermeasures and long-term institutional reforms that collectively aim to safeguard the integrity of Bangladesh's political system.

1. Policy Reform and Institutional Strengthening

1.1. Establish a National Committee on Political Sovereignty

Create a multi-stakeholder oversight body under the Parliament to monitor and assess potential foreign influence in domestic political activities. This committee should include representatives from the Election Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, intelligence agencies, and civil society.

1.2. Enhance Election Commission Independence

Strengthen the legal and operational autonomy of the Bangladesh Election Commission to prevent external interference through electoral manipulation or funding of political campaigns by foreign actors.

1.3. Develop a National Strategy on Foreign Influence

Formulate a comprehensive national strategy to identify, assess, and counter foreign influence operations, aligned with democratic values and human rights standards.

2. Legal Safeguards and Transparency Mechanisms

2.1. Enact Foreign Influence Transparency Laws

Pass legislation requiring full disclosure of foreign funding received by political parties, media outlets, NGOs, and think tanks. This law should impose penalties for non-compliance and mandate regular audits.

2.2. Tighten Regulations on Political Financing

Amend existing political finance laws to explicitly prohibit foreign contributions, both direct and indirect, with clear enforcement mechanisms and transparent reporting requirements.

2.3. Establish Legal Frameworks for Cybersecurity

Introduce legal measures to criminalize foreign-sponsored cyber operations targeting political processes, including election interference, disinformation campaigns, and data breaches.

3. Media Literacy and Information Security

3.1. Launch Media Literacy Campaigns

Implement nationwide educational campaigns to improve public resilience against foreign-sponsored misinformation and disinformation, especially around election periods.

3.2. Monitor and Counter Disinformation Networks

Strengthen the capability of national cybersecurity units to identify and dismantle foreign-operated networks that spread false or politically manipulative content via social media.

3.3. Regulate Social Media Platforms

Engage with global tech companies to ensure compliance with Bangladeshi laws regarding political advertising transparency and foreign-sponsored content moderation.

4. Diplomatic Engagement and Regional Cooperation

4.1. Promote Bilateral Non-Interference Agreements

Pursue diplomatic agreements with regional and global powers to uphold the principle of non-interference in domestic political affairs, reaffirming Bangladesh's sovereignty.

4.2. Strengthen Regional Intelligence Sharing

Collaborate with regional allies such as SAARC and BIMSTEC members to share intelligence on foreign influence operations and build collective cyber-defense capabilities.

4.3. Engage International Institutions

Work with the UN, Commonwealth, and international electoral bodies to strengthen institutional norms that discourage foreign political interference globally.

5. Civil Society and Academic Engagement

5.1. Support Independent Research

Encourage academic institutions and policy think tanks to conduct ongoing research on foreign influence, its methods, and its long-term implications for democratic governance in Bangladesh.

5.2. Empower Civil Society Oversight

Provide legal and financial support to watchdog organizations that monitor foreign interference, ensuring they can operate independently and without fear of reprisal.

11.2 Policy Measures for Bangladesh to Counter External Interference

Bangladesh's dependence on foreign aid and its geopolitical significance make it vulnerable to external interference. To safeguard its sovereignty and ensure sustainable development, Bangladesh must adopt robust policy measures. These measures should address economic, political, and social dimensions, prioritizing national interests while fostering productive international relationships. Below are comprehensive recommendations for countering external interference in Bangladesh.

11.2.1 Diversification of Aid Sources

One of the key strategies for reducing external influence is to diversify the sources of foreign aid and investment. Currently, Bangladesh relies heavily on aid from Western powers, multilateral institutions like the IMF and World Bank, and regional powers such as India and China. Over-reliance on a few donors leaves the country susceptible to conditionalities that may undermine its sovereignty.

Recommendations:

- Expand partnerships with emerging economies, including countries in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Africa.
- Strengthen ties with alternative multilateral organizations, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the BRICS New Development Bank.
- Develop bilateral agreements with smaller nations that offer equitable terms of cooperation.

11.2.2 Enhancing Domestic Revenue Mobilization

Reducing dependency on foreign aid requires Bangladesh to strengthen its capacity for domestic resource mobilization. By increasing tax revenue and reducing leakages in public finances, the government can reduce its reliance on external funding.

Recommendations:

- Reform the tax system to widen the tax base and ensure greater compliance, particularly among wealthy individuals and corporations.
- Combat corruption and inefficiencies in tax collection through digitalization and better enforcement mechanisms.
- Promote public-private partnerships (PPPs) for infrastructure and development projects to leverage domestic resources.
- Encourage remittance flows by creating incentives for the Bangladeshi diaspora to invest in the country's development.

11.2.3 Strategic Management of Foreign Debt

Bangladesh's external debt poses risks to its financial stability and sovereignty. Proper debt management is essential to prevent situations similar to Sri Lanka's debt trap.

Recommendations:

- Conduct comprehensive cost-benefit analyses before accepting foreign loans, ensuring that projects are economically viable and socially beneficial.
- Prioritize concessional loans from multilateral organizations over commercial loans with higher interest rates.
- Strengthen debt-monitoring frameworks to track repayment schedules and mitigate risks of default.
- Negotiate favorable terms for debt restructuring if repayment challenges arise.

11.2.4 Strengthening Regulatory Frameworks for Foreign Investments

Foreign direct investment (FDI) is a critical driver of economic growth but can also lead to external interference if not properly regulated. Bangladesh must create a transparent and robust regulatory framework to safeguard its interests while attracting foreign investment.

Recommendations:

- Establish clear guidelines for foreign investors, ensuring that investments align with national priorities and do not exploit labor or environmental standards.
- Require technology transfer and skill development as part of investment agreements to build domestic capacity.
- Monitor and evaluate the impact of foreign investments, ensuring compliance with local laws and sustainability goals.
- Limit foreign ownership in strategic sectors, such as telecommunications, energy, and infrastructure, to maintain national control over critical assets.

11.2.5 Enhancing Sovereign Capabilities in Policy-Making

External actors often influence domestic policy-making through aid conditionalities and technical assistance programs. Bangladesh must build its capacity to independently design and implement policies that reflect national priorities.

Recommendations:

- Invest in capacity-building programs for civil servants and policymakers to reduce reliance on external expertise.
- Promote homegrown solutions by funding research and innovation in universities and think tanks.
- Encourage public participation in policy formulation to ensure policies address grassroots concerns and are less susceptible to external pressures.

11.2.6 Strengthening Institutional Governance

Weak institutions make countries more vulnerable to external interference. By improving governance structures, Bangladesh can enhance transparency, accountability, and resilience against undue influence.

Recommendations:

- Strengthen anti-corruption institutions, such as the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), to prevent misuse of foreign aid and investments.
- Promote judicial independence to ensure fair adjudication of disputes involving foreign entities.
- Implement electoral reforms to ensure free and fair elections, reducing the risk of external actors influencing political outcomes.
- Foster a culture of meritocracy within government institutions to improve efficiency and reduce susceptibility to external manipulation.

11.2.7 Bolstering National Security and Geopolitical Strategy

Bangladesh's geopolitical location makes it a key player in South Asia, attracting interest from regional and global powers. To counter external interference, the country must adopt a proactive approach to national security and foreign policy.

Recommendations:

- Develop a comprehensive national security strategy that addresses traditional and non-traditional threats, including cyber security and economic espionage.
- Enhance military capabilities through strategic partnerships and investments in defense technologies.

- Pursue a balanced foreign policy that maintains cordial relations with major powers while avoiding entanglement in their rivalries.
- Strengthen regional cooperation through platforms like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).

11.2.8 Promoting Economic Self-Reliance

Economic self-reliance is a cornerstone of sovereignty. By diversifying its economy and reducing dependence on foreign aid and imports, Bangladesh can enhance its resilience against external pressures.

Recommendations:

- Invest in high-value industries such as technology, pharmaceuticals, and renewable energy to diversify the export base.
- Support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) through access to credit, training, and market linkages.
- Develop local supply chains to reduce dependence on imported goods and services.
- Promote agricultural self-sufficiency through investments in modern farming techniques and rural development programs.

11.2.9 Strengthening Civil Society and Media

An informed and engaged civil society is essential for countering external interference. Independent media and active civil society organizations (CSOs) can hold both domestic and foreign actors accountable.

Recommendations:

- Protect press freedom and ensure journalists have the resources and safety to investigate issues related to foreign aid and influence.
- Support CSOs working on transparency, governance, and development issues by providing funding and capacity-building opportunities.
- Promote civic education programs that raise awareness about the implications of foreign aid and external interference.
- Encourage public debates and discussions on foreign policy and national priorities to foster a well-informed citizenry.

11.2.10 Leveraging Regional and International Alliances

Collaborating with like-minded nations and regional organizations can help Bangladesh build collective resilience against external interference.

Recommendations:

- Strengthen alliances with countries facing similar challenges, such as Nepal, Bhutan, and Maldives, to exchange best practices and coordinate responses.
- Advocate for reforms in international financial institutions to ensure fairer treatment of developing nations.
- Participate actively in global forums like the United Nations and G20 to influence international policies that impact aid-dependent countries.
- Utilize diaspora networks to advocate for Bangladesh's interests globally and counter negative narratives.

To counter external interference effectively, Bangladesh must adopt a multi-faceted approach that addresses economic, political, and social dimensions. By diversifying aid sources, strengthening governance, and promoting self-reliance, the country can reduce its vulnerability to external pressures. Simultaneously, fostering regional cooperation and leveraging international alliances will enable Bangladesh to assert its sovereignty while engaging constructively with the global community. These policy measures provide a roadmap for achieving sustainable development and safeguarding national interests in an increasingly interconnected world.

11.3 Strengthening Domestic Governance and Regional Cooperation

Bangladesh faces significant challenges in ensuring sustainable development and safeguarding its sovereignty in the face of external influences. Strengthening domestic governance and fostering regional cooperation are essential strategies for addressing these challenges. This section outlines comprehensive measures that can help Bangladesh enhance its governance structures and build stronger regional partnerships to promote resilience and autonomy.

11.3.1 Enhancing Institutional Transparency and Accountability

Strong institutions form the backbone of good governance. By promoting transparency and accountability, Bangladesh can reduce corruption and misuse of resources, ensuring that domestic and foreign investments are utilized effectively.

Recommendations:

- Implement robust audit systems across all government departments, focusing on the efficient utilization of public funds and foreign aid.
- Strengthen anti-corruption bodies like the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) by providing them with adequate resources and independence from political interference.

- Introduce e-governance initiatives to streamline government processes, enhance service delivery, and reduce opportunities for corruption.
- Enact comprehensive whistleblower protection laws to encourage the reporting of malpractices and ensure safety for those exposing corruption.

11.3.2. Electoral and Political Reforms

A robust democratic system minimizes the risk of external interference in political processes. Electoral and political reforms can strengthen Bangladesh's democracy and build public trust in its institutions.

Recommendations:

- Establish an independent and well-resourced electoral commission to ensure free, fair, and transparent elections.
- Enforce strict regulations on political party financing, particularly to prevent foreign funding of campaigns and candidates.
- Promote transparency in political party operations by requiring detailed financial disclosures.
- Encourage inclusive political participation by implementing affirmative action policies for underrepresented groups, including women and minorities.

11.3.3 Decentralizing Governance

Decentralized governance empowers local governments, making them more responsive to the needs of communities. It also reduces the concentration of power, thereby enhancing accountability and reducing the risk of external manipulation.

Recommendations:

- Allocate greater financial resources to local government bodies to enable them to undertake development projects effectively.
- Provide capacity-building programs for local officials to improve their administrative and governance skills.
- Encourage participatory governance by involving local communities in decision-making processes through town hall meetings and citizen advisory boards.
- Develop mechanisms for regular monitoring and evaluation of local government performance.

11.3.4 Strengthening Rule of Law

A strong legal framework is essential for upholding justice and protecting national interests. Bangladesh must enhance its legal infrastructure to ensure fairness and resilience against external pressures.

Recommendations:

- Ensure judicial independence by reducing political interference in the appointment and functioning of judges.
- Establish specialized courts or tribunals to handle cases related to corruption, foreign investments, and international agreements.
- Strengthen the enforcement of laws related to labor rights, environmental protection, and corporate governance.
- Promote legal literacy programs to empower citizens to understand and assert their rights.

11.3.5 Enhancing Civil Society and Media Engagement

An active civil society and independent media play crucial roles in promoting transparency and holding both domestic and foreign actors accountable.

Recommendations:

- Protect press freedom by enacting laws that safeguard journalists from harassment and undue influence.
- Encourage investigative journalism to uncover corruption and malpractice in governance and foreign dealings.
- Support civil society organizations (CSOs) working on governance, human rights, and development issues by providing funding and capacity-building opportunities.
- Launch civic education campaigns to raise public awareness about governance and foreign policy issues.

11.3.6 Promoting Regional Trade and Economic Cooperation

Regional cooperation offers opportunities for economic growth and collective resilience against external pressures. Bangladesh must strengthen its ties with neighboring countries to create a more integrated and self-reliant region.

Recommendations:

- Actively participate in regional trade agreements, such as those under the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).
- Reduce tariffs and non-tariff barriers to facilitate intra-regional trade.

11.3.7 Leveraging Multilateral Platforms for Regional Advocacy

Bangladesh can use its membership in regional and international organizations to advocate for collective regional interests and counter external interference.

Recommendations:

- Advocate for the revitalization of SAARC as a platform for regional dialogue and cooperation.
- Engage actively with BIMSTEC to promote economic and security cooperation in the Bay of Bengal region (Quadir, 2024).
- Collaborate with international organizations, such as the United Nations and World Trade Organization, to address issues affecting South Asia.
- Use regional platforms to push for equitable reforms in global financial institutions, ensuring fair treatment for developing nations.

Strengthening domestic governance and fostering regional cooperation are pivotal strategies for Bangladesh to enhance its sovereignty and resilience. By improving institutional transparency, decentralizing governance, promoting regional trade, and building strong security frameworks, Bangladesh can address its internal challenges while contributing to a more integrated and self-reliant South Asia. These measures not only reduce vulnerability to external interference but also pave the way for sustainable development and regional harmony.

11.4 Recommendations for Reducing Negative Influence of External Actors in Bangladesh Politics

External actors, including foreign governments, international organizations, and multinational corporations, have played a significant role in shaping Bangladesh's political landscape. While foreign assistance and diplomatic relations can be beneficial, excessive interference can undermine sovereignty, distort democratic processes, and exacerbate existing political and social issues (Maguchu & Ghazi, 2022). This section outlines recommendations for reducing the negative influence of external actors in Bangladesh's politics.

11.4.1 Strengthening Domestic Political Institutions

One of the most effective ways to reduce external interference is by fortifying Bangladesh's own political institutions. A well-functioning and independent government, judiciary, and

electoral system are essential in ensuring that the country's political decisions are made in the best interests of its citizens, rather than being influenced by foreign powers.

Suggestions:

- Reform the electoral system: Enhancing the transparency and fairness of the electoral process can help prevent external actors from influencing electoral outcomes. Reforms could include measures like improved voter registration systems, independent election monitoring bodies, and stronger mechanisms for contesting election fraud.
- Enhance judicial independence: Ensuring that the judiciary is free from political or foreign pressure will allow the country to safeguard its legal frameworks and resolve political disputes fairly. This includes providing training for judges and ensuring judicial processes remain impartial and transparent.

11.4.2 Promoting Regional Diplomacy and Cooperation

While external actors may seek to influence Bangladesh's internal politics, strengthening regional cooperation with neighboring countries and regional organizations can help balance external pressures. By fostering stronger diplomatic ties within South Asia, Bangladesh can reduce reliance on any one external actor, thus minimizing undue influence.

Suggestions:

- Strengthen South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC): Bangladesh can play an active role in SAARC, encouraging regional collaboration on economic, political, and security issues. A united South Asia is less vulnerable to external interference, as regional solutions can be found for shared problems.
- Promote bilateral diplomacy: Bangladesh should work to strengthen bilateral ties with neighboring countries, particularly India, China, and Myanmar. But it needs to ensure that Bangladesh is treated with equal importance like them in that forum. These relationships should be based on mutual respect and non-interference in internal political affairs. Engaging in proactive diplomatic efforts can ensure that Bangladesh's interests are well-represented and protected on the global stage (Lewis & Hossain, 2022).

11.4.3 Diversifying Foreign Relations

To avoid becoming overly dependent on any one external actor, Bangladesh should diversify its foreign relations and strategic alliances. A balanced foreign policy will allow Bangladesh to navigate competing interests and reduce the risk of political manipulation by any one foreign power.

Suggestions:

- Pursue multilateral engagements: Bangladesh should prioritize participation in multilateral organizations like the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Multilateral platforms provide opportunities for Bangladesh to engage with a wide range of countries, reducing the influence of any single nation or bloc.
- Economic diversification: By diversifying trade partnerships and securing investments from a broad range of countries, Bangladesh can reduce the leverage that any one foreign actor may have over its economic policies. This also includes promoting local industries and exports to strengthen the domestic economy (Maguchu & Ghazi, 2022).

11.4.4 Enhancing Civil Society and Media Independence

A robust civil society and independent media are crucial for holding both external and domestic actors accountable. Strengthening these sectors will help ensure that Bangladesh's political decisions reflect the will of the people and not the interests of foreign entities.

Suggestions:

- Support civil society organizations (CSOs): Bangladesh should promote the development of strong, independent CSOs that can advocate for democratic principles, human rights, and political transparency. These organizations play a vital role in resisting external pressure and maintaining a democratic balance.
- Ensure media independence: The media should be free from both domestic political control and foreign influence. This includes protecting journalists from harassment, ensuring the safety of independent news outlets, and promoting investigative journalism that holds all political actors accountable (Abiddin et al., 2022).

11.4.5 Regulating Foreign Investment and Aid

Foreign aid and investment, while beneficial for economic development, can also be a source of external interference if not properly managed. It is essential that Bangladesh maintains control over how foreign funds are used and ensures that these resources do not dictate domestic policies.

Suggestions:

- Establish clear guidelines for foreign aid: Bangladesh should set up transparent and accountable systems for managing foreign aid. This includes ensuring that foreign aid is directed toward projects that benefit the public interest rather than being used to promote the political agenda of external actors.

- Strengthen investment regulations: Bangladesh must ensure that foreign investments do not undermine national interests or exploit its natural resources. This includes enforcing regulations that prioritize sustainable development, fair labor practices, and the protection of Bangladesh's environment and workers.

11.4.6 Promoting National Unity and Political Stability

A politically stable Bangladesh is less vulnerable to external manipulation. By addressing internal political fragmentation and fostering national unity, Bangladesh can make it more difficult for external actors to exploit political divisions.

Suggestions:

- Foster inclusive governance: Bangladesh should work toward a more inclusive political system where all parties, including opposition voices, have a stake in decision-making. Ensuring that all segments of society are represented in government will help strengthen democratic institutions and reduce the potential for external actors to capitalize on political divisions (Abiddin et al., 2022).
- Address political violence: Reducing political violence and ensuring the rule of law are essential for maintaining internal stability. Strong law enforcement and transparent legal processes can help prevent external actors from exploiting political unrest or instability for their own benefit.

11.4.7 Strengthening Public Awareness and Education

A well-informed populace is crucial for reducing the influence of external actors. By investing in education and public awareness campaigns, Bangladesh can ensure that its citizens are aware of the risks of external interference and can resist political manipulation.

Suggestions:

- Education on national sovereignty: Schools and universities should promote a strong understanding of Bangladesh's history, sovereignty, and political system. This will help cultivate a sense of national pride and awareness of the importance of resisting external influence.
- Public awareness campaigns: Government agencies and civil society organizations should work together to raise public awareness about the potential dangers of foreign interference. This could include educating the public on issues like foreign-funded political campaigns, media manipulation, and economic exploitation.

11.5 Conclusion

The research undertaken in this study provides a comprehensive examination of the nature, mechanisms, and implications of foreign interference in the political landscape of

Bangladesh. As a strategically significant South Asian nation with a vibrant but vulnerable democratic system, Bangladesh has increasingly found itself at the crossroads of competing geopolitical interests. This study has demonstrated that foreign interference—whether overt or covert—has had tangible effects on the country's political stability, electoral processes, public discourse, and institutional trust.

A key finding of this research is that foreign actors engage in interference through a range of tactics, including financial influence, diplomatic pressure, media manipulation, cyber operations, and support for political factions. These interventions often exploit institutional weaknesses, such as opaque campaign financing laws, under-resourced regulatory bodies, and a politically polarized media environment. While some foreign engagement is constructive and legitimate, others serve strategic interests that may undermine Bangladesh's sovereignty and democratic development.

The research has also identified the challenges posed by the digital information environment, where social media platforms have become tools for disinformation campaigns and foreign-sponsored narratives. The absence of robust legal and regulatory frameworks to monitor and counter such interference has further complicated the response to these evolving threats.

Furthermore, this study reveals that the impact of foreign interference is not uniform across political regimes or electoral cycles. Its effects are magnified in times of political transition, weak governance, and institutional fragility. The politicization of foreign influence narratives also risks deepening domestic divisions and eroding trust in democratic institutions.

In response to these findings, the preceding chapter provided a set of policy recommendations aimed at reducing vulnerability to foreign interference while enhancing political transparency, institutional resilience, and public awareness. These include reforms in legal frameworks, strengthening of democratic institutions, strategic communication, and greater international and regional cooperation.

Ultimately, defending Bangladesh's political sovereignty requires a multi-stakeholder approach that involves not only the government but also civil society, media, academia, and the international community. Political actors must prioritize national interests over partisan gain, and institutions must be empowered to operate independently and transparently.

While this research has provided valuable insights, it also opens avenues for further study. Future research could explore the long-term social and political impacts of foreign interference, the role of diaspora communities, and the effectiveness of counter-interference strategies in similar democracies. Given the rapidly changing nature of geopolitical dynamics and digital technology, continuous scholarly attention is essential.

In conclusion, foreign interference in Bangladesh politics is a pressing challenge, but it is not insurmountable. With informed policymaking, robust democratic practices, and national unity, Bangladesh can protect its political autonomy and continue to progress as a sovereign and democratic state.

CHAPTER: 12

Appendixes

Appendix 1

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Appendix 2

Questionnaire for General People

Title: Investigating the Nature and Impact of Foreign Interference in Bangladesh Politics

Purpose: This questionnaire is part of a research project aimed at understanding the extent, mechanisms, and consequences of foreign influence in the political affairs of Bangladesh. Your responses will be used solely for academic purposes and kept strictly confidential.

Section A: Demographic Information

1. Age: _____
2. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other
3. Occupation: _____
4. Level of Education:
☐ Undergraduate ☐ Graduate ☐ Postgraduate ☐ Other
5. Area of Expertise (if applicable): _____

Section B: Perceptions of Foreign Interference

6. In your opinion, do foreign countries interfere in Bangladesh's political affairs?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
7. Which countries do you believe are most actively involved in influencing Bangladeshi politics?
 (Select all that apply)
☐ India ☐ China ☐ United States ☐ Saudi Arabia ☐ UK ☐ Others (please specify): _____
8. In which areas do you think this foreign influence is most visible?
☐ Elections
☐ Media and disinformation
☐ Political party funding
☐ Civil society/NGO funding
☐ Trade and foreign aid pressure
☐ Cyber operations
☐ Other (please specify): _____
9. On a scale of 1 to 5, how serious a threat do you believe foreign interference is to Bangladesh's democracy?
☐ 1 (Not a threat) ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (Very serious threat)

Section C: Forms and Impact of Interference

10. Have you personally observed or experienced any evidence of foreign involvement in political processes (e.g., during elections, party formation, media narratives)?
☐ Yes ☐ No
 If yes, please describe briefly: _____
11. Do you believe foreign funding plays a role in shaping the political agenda of certain parties or movements in Bangladesh?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure

12. How would you rate the awareness of the general public about foreign political interference?
☐ Very aware ☐ Somewhat aware ☐ Not aware at all
13. Do you believe the government takes sufficient measures to prevent or monitor foreign political influence?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Partially
14. What are the long-term consequences of unchecked foreign interference in domestic politics?
 (Open-ended)
-

Section D: Recommendations and Solutions

15. What steps should the Bangladeshi government take to reduce or monitor foreign interference in politics?
 (Open-ended)
-
16. Should there be laws limiting foreign donations to political parties or media organizations?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
17. Would you support greater public transparency regarding foreign funding received by political actors or civil society groups?
☐ Yes ☐ No
18. In your opinion, what role should international organizations (e.g., UN, Commonwealth, SAARC) play in discouraging foreign political interference?
 (Open-ended)
-

Closing

Thank you for your valuable input. If you are willing to be contacted for follow-up questions or interviews, please leave your name and email (optional):

Name: _____

Email: _____

Questionnaire for Diplomats

Title: Assessing Foreign Influence in the Political Landscape of Bangladesh

Purpose: This questionnaire seeks the insights of diplomatic professionals regarding the presence, forms, and consequences of foreign interference in Bangladesh's political processes. Responses will remain confidential and used strictly for academic research purposes.

Section A: Respondent Information (Confidential)

Country of diplomatic representation: _____

Current position/title: _____

Years of diplomatic service in Bangladesh (or related portfolio):

☐ Less than 2 years ☐ 2–5 years ☐ More than 5 years

Have you served in other South Asian countries before?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please specify: _____

Section B: Observations on Foreign Interference

In your view, does Bangladesh experience interference in its domestic politics from foreign powers?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Prefer not to say

What forms of foreign involvement do you consider most common in Bangladesh? (Check all that apply)

☐ Political party support or funding

☐ Strategic bilateral aid tied to political outcomes

☐ Influence through media or think tanks

☐ Intelligence or cyber operations

☐ Election-related involvement

☐ Diplomatic pressure

☐ Other (please specify): _____

How would you characterize the nature of most foreign involvement in Bangladesh's political domain?

☐ Cooperative and supportive

☐ Competitive and strategic

☐ Interfering and destabilizing

☐ Context-dependent

Do you believe foreign political influence in Bangladesh has increased in the past decade?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Remained constant ☐ Decreased

What regional or global trends contribute to the presence of foreign political influence in Bangladesh? (Open-ended)

Section C: Diplomatic Practice and Norms

In your professional opinion, where is the line between legitimate diplomatic engagement and political interference?

(Open-ended)

How does your mission ensure it respects Bangladesh's sovereignty while promoting your home country's strategic interests?

(Open-ended)

Has your mission encountered any concerns or accusations regarding interference in local political matters?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Prefer not to say

If yes, how were these addressed?

Section D: Legal and Institutional Safeguards

Are existing Bangladeshi laws and institutions effective in managing or deterring foreign interference in politics?

☐ Highly effective ☐ Moderately effective ☐ Ineffective ☐ Unsure

How would you assess the role of the Election Commission, media regulators, and civil society in preserving political sovereignty?

(Open-ended)

In your view, should there be international guidelines or regional agreements (e.g., SAARC framework) to curb foreign political interference in South Asia?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

Please elaborate:

Section E: Final Thoughts

What are the long-term implications of unchecked foreign interference in Bangladesh's political system?

(Open-ended)

What best practices from other countries could Bangladesh consider to mitigate undue external influence?

(Open-ended)

Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview or consultation?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please provide contact information (optional):

Name: _____

Email: _____

Thank You

We appreciate your time and insights. Your contributions are critical to ensuring a nuanced and informed analysis of foreign influence in South Asia.

Questionnaire for Political Party Leaders

Title: Exploring Foreign Influence in Bangladeshi Politics

Purpose: This survey is part of an academic research project aimed at understanding the nature and impact of foreign interference in Bangladesh's political processes. Your responses will remain confidential and are vital for ensuring a balanced and informed analysis.

Section A: Respondent Profile (Confidential)

Name (optional): _____

Political party affiliation: _____

Position in the party:

☐ Central leadership ☐ Member of Parliament ☐ Regional leader ☐ Youth/affiliate wing
☐ Other: _____

Years of political experience:

☐ Less than 5 ☐ 5–10 ☐ 11–20 ☐ More than 20

Have you ever served in government (national or local)?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Section B: Views on Foreign Influence

Do you believe foreign governments or actors interfere in Bangladesh's political affairs?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

If yes, in what ways do you believe such interference occurs? (Select all that apply)

☐ Direct contact with political parties
☐ Funding of political parties or campaigns
☐ Diplomatic pressure during elections
☐ Influence through NGOs or media
☐ Social media/cyber campaigns
☐ Other (please specify): _____

Which countries or regions are most often perceived to exert political influence in Bangladesh? (Open-ended)

Has your party ever experienced foreign attempts to influence its internal affairs, policies, or election strategy?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Prefer not to say

If yes, please describe briefly:

On a scale of 1 to 5, how serious a problem do you consider foreign political interference in Bangladesh?

☐ 1 (Not serious) ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (Very serious)

Section C: Laws, Oversight & Transparency

Are the existing laws in Bangladesh sufficient to prevent foreign interference in politics?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

Should there be stricter rules on foreign funding to political parties, NGOs, and media houses?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Already sufficient ☐ Not sure

Do you believe the Election Commission and other national bodies are effective in ensuring political neutrality and independence from foreign pressure?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Partially ☐ No opinion

Would your party support mandatory public disclosure of all foreign funding or partnerships related to political activities?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Depends on the context

Section D: Safeguards and Solutions

What steps should the government take to safeguard Bangladesh's political sovereignty?
(Open-ended)

What role should political parties play in resisting foreign interference? (Open-ended)

Should South Asian countries (e.g., through SAARC or BIMSTEC) collaborate to set mutual standards against foreign interference in each other's politics?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

Would you support establishing a cross-party parliamentary body to monitor and respond to foreign political influence?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Needs further discussion

Section E: Final Thoughts

What are the long-term risks to democracy if foreign interference is left unaddressed?
(Open-ended)

Any additional comments, concerns, or recommendations you would like to share?
(Open-ended)

Thank You

Your insights are invaluable. This questionnaire is part of an effort to promote informed, evidence-based policy on preserving Bangladesh's democratic integrity and political sovereignty.

Questionnaire for Journalists

Title: Media Perspectives on Foreign Interference in Bangladesh Politics

Purpose: This questionnaire is part of an academic research project aiming to assess the role and perception of foreign interference in the political affairs of Bangladesh, especially through the lens of media professionals. Your responses will remain confidential and used solely for research purposes.

Section A: Respondent Profile (Confidential)

Name (optional): _____

Media affiliation (print, TV, online): _____

Role:

☐ Reporter ☐ Editor ☐ Analyst ☐ Investigative Journalist ☐ Other: _____

Years of experience in journalism:

☐ Less than 5 ☐ 5–10 ☐ 11–20 ☐ More than 20

Have you covered politics or foreign affairs as part of your beat?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Section B: Perceptions of Foreign Influence

In your professional view, is there foreign interference in Bangladesh's political landscape?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

What forms of foreign influence have you observed in the political domain? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Foreign funding to political parties
- ☐ Strategic narratives in local media
- ☐ Use of foreign-affiliated NGOs for political messaging
- ☐ Cyber campaigns / digital propaganda
- ☐ Diplomatic pressure on political decisions
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

Which countries or regions are often seen as influencing Bangladeshi politics? (Open-ended)

How often do you encounter foreign-sponsored or politically motivated content in your media space?

☐ Frequently ☐ Occasionally ☐ Rarely ☐ Never ☐ Not sure

Do journalists in Bangladesh feel pressured—directly or indirectly—by foreign entities or interests?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Prefer not to say

If yes, can you elaborate?

Section C: Media Environment & Responsibility

On a scale of 1 to 5, how vulnerable do you think Bangladeshi media is to foreign influence?

☐ 1 (Not vulnerable) ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (Highly vulnerable)

Are there sufficient safeguards to prevent foreign funding or influence in the media sector?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

Should there be clearer transparency rules regarding foreign ownership, sponsorship, or partnerships in the media industry?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Maybe

Do you believe the government is doing enough to monitor or regulate foreign interference in the media?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

How important is media literacy in combating foreign disinformation or propaganda in Bangladesh?

☐ Extremely important ☐ Somewhat important ☐ Not important

Section D: Recommendations & Reflections

What steps should be taken to reduce foreign influence in Bangladesh's political reporting and media environment? (Open-ended)

What role should journalists and media organizations play in identifying or countering foreign political interference?

(Open-ended)

Do you support creating an independent national watchdog to monitor foreign influence in media and politics?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Needs more discussion

Would cross-border cooperation between South Asian media professionals help tackle shared interference risks?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

Any additional comments, insights, or experiences you'd like to share?

(Open-ended)

Thank You

Your professional insight is crucial to understanding the intersection of media, politics, and foreign influence in Bangladesh. Your time and expertise are deeply appreciated.

Questionnaire for Political Analysts

Title: Assessing the Impact and Dynamics of Foreign Interference in Bangladesh Politics

Purpose: This questionnaire is part of a research study aimed at understanding the extent, methods, and consequences of foreign interference in Bangladesh's political affairs. Your expert insights will contribute to a more informed and balanced analysis. Responses will remain confidential and used solely for academic purposes.

Section A: Respondent Profile (Confidential)

Name (optional): _____

Affiliation (university, think tank, NGO, freelance, etc.):

Area(s) of expertise:

☐ Political science ☐ International relations ☐ Security studies
☐ Public policy ☐ Media & communication ☐ Other: _____

Years of experience in political analysis:

☐ 0–5 ☐ 6–10 ☐ 11–20 ☐ More than 20

Have you published or commented on topics related to foreign influence or Bangladesh's political landscape?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please briefly describe: _____

Section B: Understanding Foreign Interference

In your analysis, does foreign interference significantly impact Bangladesh's political dynamics?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ To some extent

What forms of foreign interference are most prevalent in Bangladesh? (Select all that apply)

☐ Financial support to political parties or candidates
☐ Influence through bilateral aid or trade deals
☐ Foreign-backed civil society or NGOs
☐ Cyber or digital interference (e.g., bots, disinformation)
☐ Media manipulation or sponsored narratives
☐ Intelligence/diplomatic pressure
☐ Other: _____

Which foreign actors or countries are most involved in influencing Bangladesh's political affairs, directly or indirectly?

(Open-ended)

Has foreign interference increased, decreased, or remained stable over the last decade?

☐ Increased ☐ Decreased ☐ Remained stable ☐ Not sure

Please explain: _____

How does foreign interference typically align with domestic political cycles (e.g., elections, crises, regime change)?
(Open-ended)

Section C: Institutional and Legal Context

Are Bangladesh's current legal and institutional frameworks sufficient to deter or detect foreign political interference?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Partially ☐ Not sure

Please elaborate: _____

How would you assess the role of the following institutions in addressing foreign interference?

(Rate each: 1 = Ineffective, 5 = Very Effective)

Election Commission: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Ministry of Foreign Affairs: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Intelligence Agencies: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Regulatory bodies (media, NGOs): ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

What are the main challenges in identifying and preventing covert foreign influence in Bangladesh?

(Open-ended)

Section D: Policy and Regional Outlook

Should Bangladesh adopt stricter laws on foreign donations and influence over political and media institutions?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Depends on implementation ☐ Not sure

What role can civil society and academia play in resisting or exposing foreign interference?
(Open-ended)

Would regional collaboration (e.g., through SAARC or BIMSTEC) help mitigate foreign interference in South Asian politics?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Potentially, if structured properly

Please elaborate: _____

Can you suggest any global best practices Bangladesh could adopt to protect its political sovereignty?

(Open-ended)

Section E: Final Reflections

What are the long-term risks of unchecked foreign interference in a developing democracy like Bangladesh?

(Open-ended)

Any key policy recommendations you would offer to government, media, or political parties on this issue?

(Open-ended)

Would you be open to participating in a follow-up interview or sharing published work related to this topic?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please provide your email (optional): _____

Thank You

Your expertise is vital to understanding this complex and evolving issue. We appreciate your time and thoughtful responses.

Appendix 3

Vienna Convention: A Brief Look

The Vienna Convention refers to several key international treaties adopted under the auspices of the United Nations in Vienna, Austria, which form the legal framework governing diplomatic and consular relations between states. The most well-known among them are:

1. Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961)

This is the core treaty that codifies the rules of diplomatic law. It outlines how diplomatic missions function and the privileges and immunities granted to diplomats to ensure they can perform their duties effectively.

Key Provisions:

- Diplomatic Immunity: Diplomats cannot be prosecuted or sued under the host country's laws.
- Inviolability of Diplomatic Premises: Embassies and diplomatic residences cannot be entered by the host country without permission.
- Freedom of Communication: Diplomats can communicate freely with their home country.
- Persona Non Grata: A host country can declare any diplomat unwelcome and expel them without providing a reason.

Purpose:

To ensure that diplomats can carry out their functions without fear of coercion or harassment by the host state.

2. Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (1963)

This complements the 1961 Convention and defines the framework for consular relations between independent states.

Key Provisions:

- Rights and functions of consular officers (e.g., protecting citizens, issuing visas).
- Consular immunity (less extensive than diplomatic immunity).
- Notification rights (e.g., right to contact one's consulate upon arrest).

3. Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (1969)

This is a separate and equally important treaty that governs how international treaties are created, interpreted, amended, and terminated.

Key Provisions:

- Treaty-making process: Signature, ratification, entry into force.
- Interpretation rules: Treaties must be interpreted in good faith according to the ordinary meaning of their terms.
- Invalidity of treaties: Includes coercion, fraud, or conflict with peremptory norms (*jus cogens*).
- Termination or suspension: Conditions under which a treaty can be ended.

Relevance to Foreign Interference:

The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961) is especially relevant in the context of foreign interference in domestic politics, such as in Bangladesh. While diplomats are protected under international law, they are also expected not to interfere in the internal

affairs of the host state (Article 41). Violations of this can lead to a diplomat being declared *persona non grata*.

Appendix 4

List of the Institutions and Personnel who were selected for the Interviews

1. Government and Regulatory Bodies

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 - Senior officials or spokespersons
 - Election Commission of Bangladesh
 - Election Commissioners or Assistant Commissioners
 - Ministry of Home Affairs
 - Officials dealing with national security or political affairs
 - Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC)
 - Cybersecurity or media monitoring experts
-

2. Security and Intelligence Agencies

- Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) (*if access is permitted*)
 - National Security Intelligence (NSI)
 - Former officials or analysts
 - Bangladesh Police Special Branch
 - Intelligence or political affairs officers
-

3. Political Parties

Interview representatives from major parties and smaller or emerging ones for balanced views:

- Bangladesh Awami League
 - Central leaders or political spokespersons
 - Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)
 - Senior officials, advisors, or communications personnel
 - Jatiya Party, Leftist Alliances, or Emerging political parties
 - Youth wings or foreign affairs units
-

4. Academic and Research Institutions

- University of Dhaka – Department of Political Science / International Relations
- BRAC University – School of Law and Public Policy
- Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS)
- Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)
- South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM)

Interview:

- Professors, policy researchers, foreign policy experts, and election analysts
-

5. Diplomatic Missions

(For views on diplomacy vs. interference)

- Embassy of the United States in Bangladesh
- Indian High Commission in Dhaka
- Embassy of China
- Delegation of the European Union
- Embassy of the Russian Federation
- UNDP Bangladesh – for electoral support program perspectives

Interview:

- Political affairs officers, public diplomacy heads, or press attachés
-

6. Media and Journalism

- Daily Star, Prothom Alo, Dhaka Tribune, Channel 24, BBC Bangla
- Bangladesh Editors' Council or Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB)

Interview:

- Senior political journalists, editors, investigative reporters, media watchdogs
-

7. Civil Society and NGOs

- Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB)
- Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK)
- SHUJAN (Citizens for Good Governance)
- Election Working Group (EWG)

Interview:

- Election observers, legal advocates, anti-corruption activists
-

8. Technology and Cybersecurity Experts

- Digital Security Agency
- Private cybersecurity firms (e.g., e-CAB members)
- Academics from ICT departments of major universities

Interview:

- Experts on digital disinformation, cyber interference, and election hacking risks