

POLITICS OF POST-UPRISING REFORM IN BANGLADESH AND SRI LANKA: *Rule of Law, Institutions and Constitutional Reforms*



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ISAS-KAS Workshop

Politics of Post-Uprising Reform in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka:

Rule of Law, Institutions and Constitutional Reforms

July 2026

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Executive Summary

While these political shifts emerged from unique national contexts, underlying factors and triggers, taken together, they provide important insights into evolving democratic experiences and trajectories of 'development' in the region.

The joint workshop by the Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore and the Rule of Law Programme Asia at Konrad Adenauer Stiftung on 20 January 2026 was situated within a broader regional context where domestic politics across South Asia had witnessed a series of major political upheavals that led to the removal of the ruling governments in Sri Lanka in 2022, Bangladesh in 2024 and Nepal in 2025. While these political shifts emerged from unique national contexts, underlying factors and triggers, taken together, they provide important insights into evolving democratic experiences and trajectories of 'development' in the region.

While the scale and intensity of these uprisings have brought demands for accountability, reform and democratic consolidation to the forefront of political debate, political change represents only the beginning of a much longer and more complex process of structural and institutional change. Historical experience demonstrates that the construction or reconstruction of institution-building and state transformation following moments of rupture can take decades.

Against this backdrop, the joint workshop sought not only to examine the causes of recent uprisings but also to consider the prospects for institutional reform, democratic renewal and the reconstitution of the state in the post-uprising period through a comparative perspective in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, with occasional references to developments in Nepal. The key questions included whether current developments in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh exemplify the creation of entirely new political arrangements or the reshaping of existing institutions. The discussions also included how effectively interim and newly elected governments translate popular mandates into concrete institutional and constitutional reforms and how these reforms manifest during processes of constitutional, political and social change.

In Sri Lanka, protests initially triggered by a severe economic and debt crisis evolved into a broader challenge to political authority in 2022. The current government, led by the National People's Power (NPP), faces the dual task of navigating economic constraints while pursuing promised social and legal reforms, including addressing longstanding human rights concerns. In Bangladesh, mass protests culminated in the departure of then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, with demonstrations

initially mobilised around a controversial job reservation policy in the government sector that many perceived as reinforcing inequality and political privilege. The new government in Bangladesh, following the election in February 2026, confronts the challenge of restoring law and order that deteriorated during the interim period, implementing the reform agenda amid differing interpretations and interests among key political actors, rebuilding state capacity, reforming politicised institutions, managing foreign relations, particularly with India, and advancing democratic reforms.

These transitions remain fragile and contested even after some degree of political stabilisation has occurred with the election of the new governments. Examining these cases comparatively offers important analytical value. By considering the experiences of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka together, scholars and practitioners can better understand how different political systems respond to moments of democratic upheaval and how state-citizen relations may be reconfigured in the process. Particular attention was given to the role of institutions, constitutional reform processes and the resilience of the rule of law during periods of political change.

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The organisers of the workshop had observed that while numerous conferences and policy discussions had examined the uprisings within individual countries, there were few discussions that explored these dynamics through a comparative regional lens. The workshop, therefore, aimed to identify common themes, patterns, parallels or divergences in the trajectories of countries experiencing post-uprising political transitions. Attention was given to the role of institutions, constitutional reform processes, anti-corruption efforts and the resilience of the rule of law during periods of political change.

Finally, it was noted that questions over democracy are not confined to South Asia but have occurred in many regions of the world. Democratic politics is often challenged through the consolidation and centralisation of executive authority, the suppression of dissent and the weakening of institutional mechanisms designed to ensure checks and balances and prevent executive excesses. In several cases, political leaders who initially get elected through democratic uprisings subsequently seek to undermine the very institutions that enabled their ascent. The workshop, therefore, sought to situate developments in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka within these broader global debates on democratic resilience, institutional reform and the future of governance.

The gradual recovery and fragile stability in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are likely to be compounded by these international disruptions.

The workshop also explored the engagement and public perceptions of international institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the United Nations (UN), which have played important roles in promoting and supporting programmes on economic stabilisation, good governance and human rights. However, the future role of these institutions lacks certainty as the United States (US)-led rules-based order, liberalism and multilateralism face challenges amid the growing appeal of populism, protectionism and de-globalisation. Moreover, the ongoing war between the US, Israel and Iran that has disrupted international energy flows and supply chains has affected many countries, including those that are geographically distant from the conflict. The gradual recovery and fragile stability in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are likely to be compounded by these international disruptions.

Part I: Bangladesh

Bangladesh after the July 2024 Revolution

Navigating the Challenges of Transition: Bangladesh's Reform Experience

Bangladesh's July 2024 movement began as a quota reform protest and later transformed into a nation-wide movement seeking regime change. By 5 August 2024, the movement had broadened beyond quota reform into wider demands for political and institutional change. This aspiration had guided the activities of the interim government formed shortly thereafter, with constitutional and political reform identified as the key priorities.

Within this framework, the reform agenda sought to address core political and institutional fault lines. The objective was to reconstruct the structure of the state since significant loopholes in the Constitution had enabled the concentration of power, executive dominance and authoritarian rule.¹ Reform aimed to tackle executive excesses entrenched corruption, patronage and misuse of power.

The institutions of accountability and oversight, both constitutional and statutory, had been captured by the executive through manipulated appointment processes under the Awami League (AL). These bodies were frequently used as instruments to target political opposition.² The Anti-Corruption Commission and the Human Rights Commission were among institutions deployed for partisan purposes. Depoliticising the bureaucracy and strengthening oversight institutions, therefore, became central objectives of the reform commissions.

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Similar to the Sri Lankan experience, Bangladesh's reform process proposed the creation of a National Constitutional Commission to oversee appointments to constitutional bodies. Another key concern was related to Bangladesh's first-past-the-post electoral system. In

1 "July National Charter 2025", National Consensus Commission, p 6., <https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2025-11/Bangladesh%20July%20National%20Charter%202025%20%28English%20translation%29.pdf>.

2 Snigdhendu Bhattacharya, "Tarique Rahman on why the BNP is boycotting the Bangladesh elections", *The Diplomat*, 18 December 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/12/tarique-rahman-on-why-the-bnp-is-boycotting-the-bangladesh-elections/>.

both 2001 and 2008, overwhelming parliamentary majorities enabled governments to amend the Constitution arbitrarily, paving the way for authoritarian rule.³ Reform proposals, therefore, sought to introduce checks and balances so that even a supermajority in the Parliament could not easily change the Constitution without restraint.

The reform process unfolded through a political bargaining pathway led by the National Consensus Commission that culminated in the signing of the July Charter.⁴ Although 30 political parties and alliances were brought together to forge a political consensus, the reform process has largely been deemed as elitist, lacking inclusion and patriarchal and was not effectively communicated to the public.

Reform proposals that conflicted with its interests were often modified or dropped, making the bargain unequal and generating tensions between the political parties.

The political bargaining was also asymmetric since not all parties held equal power. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which formed the new government, enjoys structural advantages. Reform proposals that conflicted with its interests were often modified or dropped, making the bargain unequal and generating tensions between the political parties.

A new political party born out of the July 2024 uprising, the National Citizen Party (NCP), did not sign the Charter and both Jamaat-e-Islami and the NCP held reservations on whether the BNP would implement the reforms if it came to power.⁵ These parties demanded binding legal commitments, which led to an agreement on holding a referendum on the same day as the election. However, uncertainty remains over whether the referendum would be legally binding and whether the new government would implement its outcomes.

The reform pathway was not only technocratic and elite-driven but also socially exclusive. Of more than 50 members across six commissions, only five were women and no representation of religious or ethnic minorities. The process was dominated by male, Bengali Muslim elites,

3 Ali Riaz, "Bangladesh's Quiet Slide into Autocracy", *Foreign Affairs*, 29 April 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/bangladesh/2022-04-29/bangladeshs-quiet-slide-autocracy>; and Shuva Das, "Sheikh Hasina's Rule in Bangladesh: The Road to Authoritarianism", *Oxford Political Review*, 4 April 2025, <https://oxfordpoliticalreview.com/2025/04/04/sheikh-hasinas-rule-in-bangladesh-the-road-to-authoritarianism/>.

4 "Bangladesh's new government gets down to business", International Crisis Group, 23 April 2026, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/brf/asia-pacific/bangladesh/b187-bangladeshs-new-government-gets-down-business>.

5 Shafi Md Mostofa, "The July Charter: A New Beginning for Bangladesh's Democratic Future", *The Diplomat*, 27 October 2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/10/the-july-charter-a-new-beginning-for-bangladeshs-democratic-future/>.

contradicting the inclusive vision of the uprising. The post-uprising reform processes have, therefore, struggled to incorporate broader segments of society into decision-making. While students and middle-class actors were visible in the initial protests, key social groups such as workers, farmers and labourers have remained largely absent from reform discussions. Moreover, although reforms were framed as being about returning power and services to the people, many processes remained highly bureaucratic and paper-centred rather than practice-oriented or participatory. Attempts to manufacture political consensus around reform agendas, including through orchestrated consultations or referendums, were observed.

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Several institutional changes were debated during the discussions. One proposal was for an Upper House elected through proportional representation to serve as a check on constitutional amendments passed by the Lower House under the existing first-past-the-post system. This would require approval by both chambers for constitutional change. The BNP rejected proportional representation based on vote share and instead argued that Upper House members should be selected in proportion to seats held in the Lower House. This disagreement was resolved with the Consensus Commission deciding that “a total of 100 members of the Upper House shall be elected through a system of proportional representation based on the number of votes obtained in the election to the Lower House.”⁶

Proposals for appointments to constitutional bodies also faced resistance. The initial idea of a National Constitutional Council was rejected by the BNP, which argued that such appointments were executive functions. The consensus commission, therefore, replaced it with a system of search committees composed of government and opposition representatives.

Similar uncertainty surrounds the caretaker government system. Although judicial decisions mandate its return, disagreement persists over how the Chief Adviser should be selected. The method stated in the July Charter was not accepted by the BNP. While some changes were agreed upon, including term limits for the Prime Minister, opposition leadership of key parliamentary committees, limited relaxation of Article

6 “July National Charter 2025”, National Consensus Commission, p. 17. <https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2025-11/Bangladesh%20July%20National%20Charter%202025%20%28English%20translation%29.pdf>.

70 and presidential appointments to certain positions, these remained relatively minor compared to the unresolved core issues.

The July 2024 movement has often been described as a “refolution”, a revolution oriented toward reform rather than a full structural transformation.⁷ It was not ideologically driven and that enabled broad participation by diverse groups, and it was led largely by youth rather than political parties. As seen in other 21st century revolutions, including the Arab Spring and the Colour Revolutions, the movement succeeded in toppling a regime but did not dismantle the existing state apparatus. Political elites subsequently re-entered the process and assumed control of the reform agenda.

These developments enabled entrenched elites within the bureaucracy and political system to make the case against radical reform and in favour of restoring normal governance practices.

This transition produced what can be described as the “agony of transition”.⁸ Public expectations on tackling issues of corruption, state capture and weak institutions increased after the ouster of the Hasina government. The interim government was entrusted with public confidence and given the mandate to set up the foundations of state reform. However, trust in the interim government declined when it was unable to control the law and order situation, weakening its mandate to push forward reforms. At the same time, opportunistic actors entered the political space, claiming ownership of the revolution and exerting disruptive pressure. These developments enabled entrenched elites within the bureaucracy and political system to make the case against radical reform and in favour of restoring normal governance practices.

Citizen involvement peaked around 5 August 2024 when mass mobilisation across the country sought political change through Hasina’s removal from power. The interim government established six reform commissions (which later increased to 11) to reform and restructure state institutions such as the police, the judiciary and the public administration. However, citizen engagement and confidence in the reform process steadily declined due to economic instability, weak law enforcement and the consensus commission became entirely elite-driven. Political consensus weakened as the BNP wanted to convene the election prior to substantial reforms while other parties emphasised reform to gain time to consolidate their positions. The refusal of the NCP

7 BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), *State of Governance Summary Report*, Dhaka: BRAC Institute of Governance and Development, 27 January 2026. <https://bigd.bracu.ac.bd/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/SOG-summary-report-final27012026-1.pdf>.

8 Ibid.

to sign the July Charter marked the lowest point of consensus, resulting in what can be described as a manufactured agreement with limited ownership and uncertain implementation.

From Kleptocracy to Accountable Governance in Bangladesh: Aspirations and Realities

Bangladesh has presented two contrasting realities. On the one hand, the country has achieved notable socioeconomic progress since independence, particularly in comparison with other South Asian countries. Per capita income increased from US\$134 (S\$173) at independence to approximately US\$2,800 (S\$3,612), surpassing regional neighbours such as India and Pakistan in 2025.⁹ Bangladesh became the second largest exporter of ready-made garments after China and the sixth largest exporter of migrant labour globally.¹⁰ Bangladesh also performs relatively better than many countries in South Asia in indicators such as the Human Development Index, Multidimensional Poverty Index, Global Gender Parity Index and life expectancy. On the other hand, the country also performs poorly in areas of democracy and governance. Bangladesh ranks among the lowest in South Asia on the Democracy Index, Rule of Law Index, Voice and Accountability Index, Press Freedom Index and Corruption Perceptions Index in 2025.¹¹ These trends reflected a steady deterioration in democratic governance and accountability, showcasing how it transformed into a kleptocracy over the past 15 years.

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Bangladesh has experienced zero-sum politics driven by unaccountable abuse of power and corruption. Politics has operated on a winner-takes-all logic with deliberate attempts to monopolise politics and governance. The Parliament and key democratic and accountability institutions have been brought under partisan control. As a result, institutions became politically dysfunctional and served the interests of the ruling regime rather than the public.

9 “Bangladesh Sees Highest-Ever Per Capita Income of \$2,820 in FY25, BBS Provisional Data Shows”, *The Business Standard*, 27 May 2025, <https://www.tbsnews.net/economy/bangladeshs-capita-income-rises-2820-fy25-bbs-1153056>.

10 Refayet Ullah Mirdha, “Bangladesh Retains Second Largest Apparel Exporter Spot in 2024”, *The Daily Star* (Bangladesh), 8 July 2025, <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/bangladesh-retains-second-largest-apparel-exporter-spot-2024-3934636>.

11 Transparency International, “Bangladesh ranks 151st with lowest score of 23 in 13 years; A result of fallen kleptocratic and authoritarian rule that sheltered and nurtured corruption, says TIB”, *Transparency International Bangladesh*, 11 February 2025.

This led to the criminalisation of politics and the systematic violation of fundamental rights through institutional and legal processes.

Business and politics became deeply intertwined. While only 17.5 per cent of parliamentarians in the first Parliament (1973) had business as their primary occupation, this figure rose to over 65 per cent by 2024.¹² Political office became a mechanism for advancing business interests through policy capture, land grabbing, embezzlement, extortion and influence peddling. This led to the criminalisation of politics and the systematic violation of fundamental rights through institutional and legal processes.

Corruption and illicit financial flows have long been viewed as major constraints on Bangladesh's economic development. Concerns over capital flight, money laundering and the transfer of wealth to overseas financial and property markets have intensified in recent years and raised broader questions about governance, accountability and the unequal distribution of economic gains.

Corruption has also produced extreme inequality. The top 10 per cent of the population controlled 58 per cent of total wealth while the bottom 50 per cent held only 4.8 per cent in 2025.¹³ Corruption concentrates wealth among a few while depriving most of development opportunities and social mobility, thereby violating basic human rights.

Kleptocracy has also been sustained through widespread human rights violations and repression. These include enforced disappearances, deaths in custody, extrajudicial killings and suppression of civil and political rights, including the right to vote and freedom of expression. Under the AL, the Parliament became dysfunctional and electoral institutions were manipulated, depriving citizens of genuine political choice.

Repressive laws were used to intimidate civil society and the media, creating a climate of fear and surveillance. Institutions such as the judiciary, law enforcement agencies, the bureaucracy, the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Central Bank and the National Board of Revenue were politicised and became enablers of corruption and injustice. Security

12 Waliur Rahman and Shuvongkor Karmakar, "Businessmen 'Ruling Over' State Policy-Making", *Prothom Alo (English)*, 10 January 2024, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/zsn9vf83lh>.

13 "Experts: The Top 10% in Bangladesh Own Over Half the Nation's Wealth", *Dhaka Tribune*, 25 February 2025, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/business/374766/the-top-10%25-in-bangladesh-own-over-half-the>.

agencies were deployed to suppress dissent and protect kleptocratic power, imposing an atmosphere of intimidation-based governance.¹⁴

Corruption and money laundering operate within a global economy of demand and supply. Illicit financial flows from Bangladesh must also be understood within a broader transnational context in which global financial and regulatory systems facilitate the movement and integration of overseas capital into international banking, investment and property markets. This demand side of corruption makes prevention and asset recovery extremely difficult and requires international and collective responsibility and cooperation.

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Effective control of corruption requires four interventions that are interrelated: political will without fear or favour; making corruption punishable in practice; strengthening key institutions; and active citizen participation.

As mentioned earlier, the interim government established 11 reform commissions, a National Consensus Commission, white paper committees and a Disappearance Prevention Commission. The UN was invited to conduct a fact-finding mission on human rights violations, and the UN Human Rights Office was allowed to operate in Bangladesh.¹⁵ Over 100 ordinances were issued, including provisions to strengthen judicial independence, such as the creation of a separate judiciary secretariat.

Efforts were also made to pursue grand corruption cases and repatriate stolen assets. International cooperation led to the freezing of £275 million (\$473 million) in the United Kingdom. These steps represented important symbolic and legal advances in the reform agenda on asset and funds recovery.

Despite these initiatives, the interim government fell short of implementing proposals given by the reform commissions.

First, there has been resistance by some institutions, such as the bureaucracy, which benefited from existing practices. For instance,

14 Faisal Mahmud, "Sheikh Hasina: A critical misstep and the end of 15 years of ruling Bangladesh", *Al Jazeera*, 5 August 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/5/sheikh-hasina-a-critical-misstep-and-the-end-of-15-years-of-rule>.

15 "Bangladesh: Year Since Hasina Fled, Rights Challenges Abound", *Human Rights Watch*, 30 July 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/07/30/bangladesh-year-since-hasina-fled-rights-challenges-abound>.

Anti-corruption efforts cannot be separated from the broader political and governance ecosystem and meaningful reform requires alignment between public demand and political will.

reforms to the Anti-Corruption Commission faced pushback from the state, particularly from the bureaucracy. While political interference is often acknowledged, meddling by the bureaucracy also plays a decisive role, given that widespread corruption cannot take place without collusion with the bureaucracy.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the July Charter and the Commission's recommendations provide civil society with documented evidence of public demands for accountability and offer a basis for continued mobilisation and advocacy. Anti-corruption efforts cannot be separated from the broader political and governance ecosystem and meaningful reform requires alignment between public demand and political will.

Second, proposals such as the proposed Police Commission risk becoming a mechanism for rehabilitating retired police and bureaucrats rather than establishing itself as an independent watchdog.

Third, key sectors such as education and corporate governance were excluded from the reform agenda. There was no strategic plan for implementation, no risk mapping to address resistance and no mitigation strategy against entrenched interests. The reform process has been ad hoc rather than coherent and strategic.

Future outcomes will be contingent on how the new government will interpret and implement reforms in line with the July Charter, the referendum vote and international human rights recommendations.

Institutional Reform in Post-July 2024 Uprising Bangladesh: An Anthropological and Critical-Institutionalist Perspective

Institutional reform in post-July 2024 uprising Bangladesh can be understood through a social anthropological and critical institutionalist lens that asks how revolutionary gains and moral triumph are translated into practical and inclusive governance and institutional change. A central question is whether the promised "system change" is intended for all citizens or only for particular groups. There were expectations that the multiple reform commissions set up by the interim government would be citizen-centric, pro-people and not elite-driven and exclusionary. However, concerns emerged that these expectations were not met

¹⁶ Sadiqur Rahman, "Bureaucracy hinders effective ACC reforms", *NEWAGE*, 24 January 2026, <https://www.newagebd.net/post/opinion/289086/bureaucracy-hinders-effective-acc-reforms>.

and that similar patterns of exclusion had emerged where the political processes risked becoming re-politicised and elite-centric again.¹⁷

From the perspective of the anthropology of the state, legitimacy cannot be limited to formal instruments such as referendums, notifications, or legal decrees. The participation of people must be at the core of institutional reform. A process of decoupling is visible, in which legitimacy exists on paper while everyday legitimacy remains weak in practice. Attention, therefore, shifts from hidden political actors and backstage power to people's perceptions and lived experiences of reform.

The participation of people must be at the core of institutional reform.

Institutional change in Bangladesh can be examined through three interrelated dimensions: practices, patronage and perceptions. Practices refer to whether everyday practices of statecraft remain unchanged. Patronage concerns the persistence of historical power networks. Perceptions capture whether citizens can feel and recognise that reform has taken place. Within this framework, a key issue is the replacement of rule-based legitimacy with revolutionary legitimacy.

The July 2024 uprising questioned long-standing narratives of nation-building, symbolically moving from *Mukti Joddha* (Freedom Fighters) to *July Joddha* (July Fighters). New entitlements and identities emerged through naming and recognition, conferring moral authority and reshaping public perception.

There were efforts to recapture power after 5 August 2024 when new forces tried to step into the void following the retreat of the AL and its co-opted elites.¹⁸ In regional and local contexts beyond Dhaka, the creation of new power bases was widely observed, particularly among the former coordinators (*somonnoyak*). While these actors were formally given recognition as 'July fighters' or 'July revolutionaries' who contributed to the political change in the country, it also brought concerns about whether they would step into the void by forming new power networks and new forms of patronage.

17 Ishrat Hossain, "Bangladesh's Democratic Transition: Revolution and Its Discontents", *GIGA Focus Asien*, no. 4 (June 2025): German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA), <https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/publications/giga-focus/bangladesh-s-democratic-transition-revolution-and-its-discontents>.

18 Sadiqur Rahman, "Bureaucracy hinders effective ACC reforms", *NEWAGE*, 24 January 2026, <https://www.newagebd.net/post/opinion/289086/bureaucracy-hinders-effective-acc-reforms>.

Nepotism was a main issue during the July 2024 uprising. While protesters, particularly the youth, challenged old practices, the institutional reform process has appeared to reproduce similar informal arrangements. The “quota paradox” has showcased how movements that opposed institutional privilege generated entitlements in other forms. Public debate, including among supporters of the movement, questioned whether certain appointments were free and fair or selectively granted on political grounds. This raised concerns that what was being practised increasingly resembled ‘rule by law’ rather than ‘rule of law’.

Another concern has been the rise of what can be described as mob governance. The new narrative has discouraged the use of the term ‘mob’, replacing it with expressions such as ‘pressure group’, on the grounds that stronger language would delegitimise the protest movement. However, when student actors continue to influence decisions such as university leadership appointments, the boundary between popular participation and institutional authority becomes unclear.

Discussions on truth and reconciliation have since become politically sensitive, with those raising the issue being labelled as allies of the former regime.

A performative sovereignty has prevailed in the process of reforms and institution-building. This performative sovereignty is not unique to Bangladesh and has parallels in the post-protest periods in Nepal and Sri Lanka. A significant missed opportunity has been the absence of setting up a truth and reconciliation process that could have focused on addressing human rights abuses through a non-judicial intervention centred on restorative justice. This mechanism could have created a foundation for reconciliation, rebuilding social and community trust and rehabilitation.¹⁹ Early references to reconciliation focused on engagement with people rather than political parties. Yet, this approach did not translate into the creation of institutional mechanisms. Discussions on truth and reconciliation have since become politically sensitive, with those raising the issue being labelled as allies of the former regime.

However, institutional reform cannot be addressed without tackling social reform. Social healing is a necessary foundation for reform, yet reform processes have become increasingly politicised. Elite capture of the reform commissions set up by the interim government raised concerns about participation, transparency and genuineness. Citizens

¹⁹ Tamina Chowdhury, “The need for truth and reconciliation in Bangladesh”, *The Daily Star*, 24 September 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/the-need-truth-and-reconciliation-bangladesh-3710846>.

were sidelined from the process where they saw political leaders and advisors performing the act of reform through media, the Parliament and party structures. Civil society has also exhibited signs of being overtaken by majoritarian tendencies, making open discussion of undemocratic practices increasingly difficult.

Comparative experiences, particularly in India, demonstrate how majoritarian triumph can take over institutions and reshape moral authority. Bangladesh risks moving toward a similar trajectory in which populist groups assume control of institutional and political spaces. While electoral reform remained a central agenda of the interim government, major political parties publicly expressed doubts about the prospects of a free and fair election, pointing to deeper concerns about the risk of political manipulation and institutional credibility. This suggests a failure to translate the moral victory of July 2024 into a trusted institutional reform process.

This suggests a failure to translate the moral victory of July 2024 into a trusted institutional reform process.

Public trust in everyday institutions, particularly the police, further illustrates these challenges. Despite the establishment of a Police Reform Commission, both police behaviour and public perceptions changed little during the interim period. Reform has largely taken the form of formal notifications rather than transformations in everyday service delivery and institutional conduct. The police's collusion with the state through the deployment of heavy-handed measures during the uprising has resulted in a loss of legitimacy. It has transformed from a law enforcement agency into an institution symbolising brutality and repression. Incidents involving violence against primary school teachers demonstrated (in 2025) that coercive practices and institutional attitudes remain entrenched.

Trajectory of Transition in Post-2024 Bangladesh: Extra-Constitutional Transition and Contestation of Legitimacy

Bangladesh entered the post-July 2024 transition without an agreed constitutional pathway since the caretaker system was revoked in 2011. The interim government was set up through extra-electoral means, driven by popular pressure and necessity rather than constitutional design. A Supreme Court reference provided short-term legal validation under the doctrine of necessity but failed to clarify the scope, duration,

or limits on its authority, which brought uncertainty on how long it would remain in power until the election is convened.²⁰

In fragile political contexts, legitimacy must be actively produced through restraint, transparency and a clear orientation toward restoring democratic authorisation. Democratic norms require that exceptional measures remain strictly limited to necessity. While the military has exercised restraint, it continues to operate in the background while performing civilian responsibilities and cannot serve as a constitutional substitute, nor should its restraint be assumed to be permanent.

As the transition persisted for approximately 18 months, the interim government's popularity and support eroded, and the rule of law came under increasing strain. While the July 2024 uprising generated a strong popular mandate, popular mobilisation could not translate into legal validity and substitute for accountability.

A politics of unity was on display during the uprising among opposition parties, who had a common objective of ousting Hasina.

A politics of unity was on display during the uprising among opposition parties, who had a common objective of ousting Hasina. However, over time, political fragmentation deepened across parties, movements, institutions and social groups, with public opinion becoming far more divided than in mid-2024, including within the student movement itself.²¹ Weak organisational coherence narrowed the space for broad-based participation, enabling a shift toward technocratic governance, particularly through the creation and functioning of the National Consensus Commission and multiple reform commissions.

In Bangladesh, as in many other countries in South Asia, the civil service is not politically neutral and reform without political anchoring or electoral certainty evidently resulted in bureaucratic resistance. These legitimacy strains were most visible in the criminal justice system, including arbitrary arrests, politicised cases, mob violence and the use of legal processes as political signalling, disproportionately affecting marginalised groups.

²⁰ Tariq Ahmad, "Interim Government and the Constitution of Bangladesh", *In Custodia Legis* (Law Library of Congress blog), 29 August 2024, <https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2024/08/interim-government-and-the-constitution-of-bangladesh/>.

²¹ Imran Ahmed and Roshni Kapur, "A Year After Bangladesh's Uprising: Fragmented Politics and Disunity", *ISAS Insights* No. 769, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, 8 October 2025, <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/a-year-after-bangladeshs-uprising-fragmented-politics-and-disunity/>.

Judicial independence, which has a history of interference by the executive, suffered further damage through post-July 2024 leadership displacement driven by mob pressure rather than the constitutional procedure of upholding the rule of law. While corrective steps such as vetted High Court appointments and a judicial secretariat have been taken, their durability remains uncertain, particularly as the secretariat was created by ordinance that might lapse or expire post-election.²² A major unresolved structural gap is the absence of an independent prosecution service. Legitimacy was further weakened by primarily inducting members of the civil society into interim governance who did not possess adequate legal and institutional expertise, which rendered the reform exercise technocratic and politically hollow.

A major unresolved structural gap is the absence of an independent prosecution service.

Furthermore, constitutional reform was not neutral. The process determined inclusion and exclusion determined whose rights were protected. The interim period was marked by two developments: a visible right-wing and majoritarian surge in public discourse and the severe underrepresentation of women in reform and decision-making spaces, with gender equality treated as negotiable rather than foundational. Under these conditions, embarking on a full constitution-making process was likely to widen existing power asymmetries rather than serve as a democratic reset and renewal for change.

Comparative experience with Sri Lanka's trajectory on constitutional amendments to Nepal's prolonged and conflict-prone constitution-making process demonstrated the challenges of undertaking comprehensive constitutional redesign endeavours, particularly during periods of volatility. The culmination of the July Charter as a singular document with the intended roadmap for change showcased the interim government's aspiration to restructure institutional and political structures of the state. These included proposals to create a bicameral Parliament and term limits but the central problem remained sequencing reform without a restored electoral mandate. While the announced February election referendum provided a clearer horizon, the bundling of complex constitutional questions into a single binary choice, combined with state advocacy for a "yes" vote during an interim

22 Md Arifujjaman, "Separate Supreme Court Secretariat: A Welcome Step, but the Hard Work Begins Now", *The Daily Star* (Bangladesh), 11 December 2025, <https://www.thedailystar.net/ds/big-picture/news/separate-supreme-court-secretariat-welcome-step-hard-work-begins-now-4055986>.

period, raised concerns on whether the referendum was properly communicated to the public.²³

Economic Development, International Institutions and the Bangladesh Uprising

The idea that Bangladesh has been a development success was central to the AL's political legitimacy when it was in power.

The idea that Bangladesh has been a development success was central to the AL's political legitimacy when it was in power. This narrative was not entirely untrue, as Bangladesh experienced sustained growth and notable improvements in human development, leading to its anticipated graduation from the Least Developed Country status by late 2026.²⁴ However, this narrative began to lose traction by the late 2010s. Independent evaluations of performance became increasingly difficult due to contested discussions, yet there was a broad consensus that large-scale corruption deepened under the AL regime and began to threaten macro-fiscal stability toward its end.

Student protests pertaining to public sector job quotas provided the immediate trigger for the uprising, leading many observers to frame youth unemployment as its principal cause. However, available indicators suggest that aggregate youth unemployment in Bangladesh was neither exceptionally high nor deteriorating as sharply as in other South Asian countries.²⁵ This weakens the claim that unemployment alone served as an impetus for mobilisation.

The growing sense of frustration among educated youth also contributed to their grievances. Unemployment and underemployment among those with advanced education worsened more rapidly than elsewhere in the region and this was felt on the ground, although the numbers did not make it immediately clear. The deterioration in employment prospects among university-educated Bangladeshis also played a key role in shaping perceptions of decline.

23 Imran Ahmed and Muhammad Saad Ul Haque, "Bangladesh's Election and Referendum: Contesting Reform and Political Futures", *ISAS Insights*, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, 9 February 2026, <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/bangladeshs-election-and-referendum-contesting-reform-and-political-futures/>.

24 United Nations, "Bangladesh Graduation Status", *LDC Portal – International Support Measures for Least Developed Countries*, <https://www.un.org/ldcportal/content/bangladesh-graduation-status>.

25 "Unemployment, Youth Total (% of Total Labor Force Ages 15–24) (Modeled ILO Estimate) – India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka", The World Bank Group, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?locations=IN-BD-LK>.

Another major factor in the uprising, greatly neglected by the urban, middle-class educated citizen in Dhaka, was the cost-of-living crisis. While middle-class and elite commentators emphasised political rights or youth grievances, working-class protesters consistently identified rising prices, especially of food, as central to their participation. This is not unique to Bangladesh as in the last few years, a cost-of-living crisis has triggered uprisings across the world, such as in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Madagascar and Kenya.

In Bangladesh, rice prices rose sharply during this period. Rice has long been the most politically sensitive commodity in Bangladesh. Research shows that when governments fail to stabilise staple food prices or protect people from hunger, they lose legitimacy rapidly and this dynamic was clearly present during the uprising.²⁶

Data from surveys showed that, as late as 2019 and even after the COVID-19 crisis, a majority of Bangladeshis viewed economic conditions as acceptable despite political dissatisfaction.²⁷ This perception reversed sharply in 2022 with the onset of the global cost-of-living crisis, following the Ukraine-Russia war and the rapid increase in fuel prices, which heavily impacted Bangladesh's natural gas-reliant economy.²⁸ Rising prices of basic goods became the dominant concern and confidence in the direction of the economy collapsed.

The IMF's programme played a significant role in exacerbating inflationary pressures, particularly through rapid cuts to fuel subsidies that led to sharp increases in energy prices in early 2024.²⁹ Fuel costs had historically been less politically salient in Bangladesh but rising energy use meant that price hikes now directly affected transport, food prices and daily expenses. Although fuel subsidies were regressive and inefficient, their sudden removal had broad distributional effects. The IMF went ahead

Research shows that when governments fail to stabilise staple food prices or protect people from hunger, they lose legitimacy rapidly and this dynamic was clearly present during the uprising.

26 David Hulme and Naomi Hossain, "Political legitimacy and the subsistence crisis contract in Bangladesh", *The Journal of Development Studies*, 2019, <https://research.manchester.ac.uk/en/publications/political-legitimacy-and-the-subsistence-crisis-contract-in-bangl>.

27 "The state of Bangladesh's political governance, development and society: According to its citizens: A survey of the Bangladeshi people", The Asia Foundation, p. 2, https://bigd.bracu.ac.bd/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/The-State-of-Bangladeshs-Political-Governance-Development-and-Society_According-to-Its-Citizens-1.pdf.

28 Faysal Atikl, "Bangladesh Hit by Energy Crisis as Russia-Ukraine Conflict Drags On", *bdnews24.com* (Bangladesh), 29 December 2022, <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/sknc6hkyyj>

29 "Electricity and Gas Prices to Go Up in the First Week of March", *The Daily Star* (Bangladesh), 27 February 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/electricity-and-gas-prices-go-the-first-week-march-3553641>.

with these conditions even though it was cognisant that such austerity measures often trigger mass protests and violent repression. Unlike in other countries, however, the issue of the IMF's involvement was not mobilised by Bangladeshi political parties, and subsidy cuts were largely absorbed into broader public discontent rather than becoming a focal political issue.

Multilateral institutions, particularly the World Bank, continue to be viewed relatively positively by Bangladeshi elites and policymakers. Their role in macro-fiscal stability and the absence of aggressive privatisation agendas have not resulted in resentment. Moreover, these institutions within Dhaka are staffed by former high-level government officials and their networks, which facilitates cooperation while discouraging confrontation.

It remains among the most trusted institutions in Bangladesh, even after the 2024 uprising.

The Bangladeshi army's response to the uprising was connected to its self-image as a peacebuilding institution, standing with the people and reinforcing the high levels of public trust it enjoys. It remains among the most trusted institutions in Bangladesh, even after the 2024 uprising.³⁰ Participation in UN peacekeeping missions provides substantial financial and professional incentives and is contingent on maintaining an international reputation.

During the uprising, internal divisions among officers and fear of escalating violence undermined the willingness to continue a heavy-handed response to curb the protests. The army's decision to withdraw from active shooting was, therefore, decisive in ending the uprising and played a critical role in Hasina's ouster.

Bangladesh is neither small nor among the poorest countries in the world, yet it remains highly dependent on international relationships for goodwill and on aid. The country does not have a strong domestic civic force that can challenge the alignment between ruling elites and multilateral actors, and governance interventions have minimally engaged civil society. The underlying political economy, particularly capital flight and elite extraction, remains intact and is likely to persist under future regimes. Bilateral partners, including Western governments, have shown little interest in addressing their own role within this system.

30 "Bangladesh in Transition: A Citizens' Confidence Survey 2025, 10th Issue", Economic Intelligence Bangladesh, <https://intel.tbsnews.net/10th-issue/>.

In Bangladesh, shifting geopolitical alignments and defence and trade policy are important considerations. Bangladesh's growing military and economic engagements with countries such as Turkey, Pakistan and China function primarily as geopolitical signalling to diversify partnerships and to demonstrate strategic autonomy vis-à-vis India. Engagements with the US, including new trade and technology links, are less of a mutual choice and more of an asymmetrical pressure, with Bangladesh having limited leverage in these relationships.

In this context, anti-imperialism in Bangladesh is not driven by colonial grievances but takes on an anti-India character. This framing has been politically effective to mobilise certain groups, given longstanding grievances over Indian influence in Bangladeshi politics. There were prevailing sentiments regarding relations between Dhaka and New Delhi presiding over the India-AL framework, where the AL gave precedence to India's political and strategic interests over the country's national interests in exchange for legitimacy and protection.³¹ These grievances, along with misinformation and hostile discourse in Indian media and online spaces, further reinforced this asymmetric relationship, making India a focal target for popular anger that might otherwise have been directed elsewhere.

The lack of a strong left political force in Bangladesh has further constrained how economic grievances are articulated. Historically, left movements were violently repressed, with large-scale killings and suppression in the 1970s and subsequent regimes destroying their organisational capacity. Structurally, Bangladesh's position at the bottom of global value chains depends on low-wage, weakly organised labour and trade unionism, which is actively suppressed to maintain competitiveness in export-oriented industries, particularly garments. Even during periods of political unrest, repression of industrial workers continued unabated. The weakness of trade unions is also linked to the absence of robust left political parties capable of representing working-class interests. Bangladesh's dominant parties function as catch-all, centre-right formations that absorb diverse constituencies without developing distinct labour platforms. Without political sponsorship or protection, trade union leaders face abduction, disappearance and

The lack of a strong left political force in Bangladesh has further constrained how economic grievances are articulated.

31 Ratan Roy and Roshni Kapur, "Mandate for reform, battle for identity: Bangladesh after the election", *Fair Observer*, 9 March 2026, <https://www.fairobserver.com/politics/mandate-for-reform-battle-for-identity-bangladesh-after-the-election/>.

violence, reinforcing extremely low union density. Bangladesh's political trajectory is, as a result, currently on the centre-right following the sidelining of the AL and this has shaped the forms of political mobilisation that emerged during the uprising.

The Political Inequality Underlying the July 2024 Uprising

This collective pressure directly contributed to the collapse of the former regime.

The July 2024 uprising has been described as a student-led, middle-class movement focused on “bread and butter” issues, particularly meritocratic recruitment and opposition to quota-based public employment. While this interpretation is not inaccurate, it is incomplete. The uprising could not have succeeded without the decisive involvement of the urban precariat: the rickshaw pullers, the compressed natural gas (three-wheeler) drivers, urban precarious workers and the industrial proletariat. These groups formed the core mass of protesters who transformed from a dispersed ‘crowd’ into ‘the people’, creating an unprecedented force that compelled the military to stop shooting demonstrators. This collective pressure directly contributed to the collapse of the former regime.

The impoverished people, which include factory workers and the urban precariat, gave more value to their socioeconomic rights or positive liberty as opposed to negative liberty which comprises political and liberal individualistic rights. This preference insulated the authoritarian government from demands for political equality as long as it could ensure sustenance primarily through the low price of essentials.

Political inequality in Bangladesh reflects structured differences in influence, outcomes and access to political resources. Rather than equal consideration of preferences, decision-making is dominated by entrenched power holders. Political inequality operates not merely through unequal opportunities but also through systematically unequal outcomes, reinforced by skewed distributions of political resources. These resources, including networks, numbers, organisational infrastructure and coercive capacity, largely determine who can influence political outcomes.

Bangladesh's political system has been marked by autocracy, dynastic rule, oligarchy, a dominant-party system, catch-all parties, a civil society vulnerable to political capture and dysfunctional left-wing politics. Left parties, independent trade unions and civil society remain extremely

weak. Bangladesh has one of the weakest left traditions and weakest trade union movements in the region. Trade unions exist but they lack political capacity and effective articulation of power for mobilisation. That absence may explain why economic anxieties do not immediately translate into large-scale political protests.

Politics has been dominated by dynastic leadership, oligarchic capture, patron-clientelism and non-programmatic competition. These structural features prevent economic grievances from translating smoothly into political mobilisation and shape how political resources are accumulated and deployed by different social actors.

Politics has been dominated by dynastic leadership, oligarchic capture, patron-clientelism and non-programmatic competition.

The student quota movement emerged as a challenge to an entrenched political system marked by patronage over meritocracy and partisan recruitment into the civil service. The quota system, therefore, became a symbol of political inequality, rather than just an employment issue. The regime's violent suppression of the July 2024 protests triggered widespread solidarity, enabling student demands for positive liberty to evolve into a collective call for regime change. Ironically, the regime's own patronage politics, through the rapid expansion of colleges and private universities, created the very student infrastructure that ultimately challenged its rule. This massification of students produced an unintended political consequence in which students became the former regime's gravediggers when patronage networks could no longer contain their mobilisation.

The urban precariat, including hawkers, peddlers, rickshaw pullers, cab drivers, platform delivery workers and domestic help, constituted the most critical and consequential force in the uprising. For these groups, the state is an everyday presence of violence and extortion, embodied in corrupt police and ruling-party enforcers. Their daily "non-political" acts of survival in urban spaces are inherently political, as they contest state authority and urban regulation.³²

32 Mirza M Hassan, Inteemum Ahsan, Rabeena Sultana Ananna, Iffat Jahan Antara, Syeda Salina Aziz, Sohela Nazneen, Aishwarya Sanjukta Roy Proma, Sadiur Rahman, Asif Shahan and Maheen Sultan, *Rupture, Reform and Reimagining Democracy: Navigating the Agony of Transition*, BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD)", 2026, <https://bigd.bracu.ac.bd/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/SOG-summary-report-final27012026-1.pdf>.

When they witnessed the same coercive apparatus used against students, longstanding resentment translated into solidarity for mobilisation. Their sheer numbers in and around Dhaka and their willingness to confront lethal force proved decisive. This group ended up enduring the most brutalities and played a central role in compelling the military to exercise restraint in the final phase of the uprising.

These factors – resentment, organisational infrastructure and accumulated grievance – brought workers into the Long March.

Industrial workers in Bangladesh have had a history of enduring anti-labour political settlements between state and capital, against the absent and marginalised status of trade unions and left-wing politics.³³ Participation of industrial workers in the uprising was further catalysed by the former Prime Minister's public dismissal of workers' demands, including the announcement of a minimal wage increase and the suggestion that dissatisfied workers return to their villages. These factors – resentment, organisational infrastructure and accumulated grievance – brought workers into the Long March.

Following the uprising, the interim government initially enjoyed high political legitimacy, driven by broad-based approval of the regime's removal. However, its legitimacy fluctuated over time as performance in key areas diverged. While economic management retained moderate approval, failures in law enforcement, particularly regarding mob violence and political instability, undermined public confidence. These dynamics gradually increased pressure to convene an early election.

Former Chief Adviser Mohammed Yunus commanded substantial moral authority but he avoided pursuing a transformative reform agenda. As stated earlier, his governance was shaped by shifting pressures from competing political and state actors, many of them resistant to reform. Yunus's international reputation helped shield the interim government from external backlash and countered narratives that framed the uprising as Islamist-driven. The interim government thus became an equilibrium of actors who could maintain basic stability and functionality but yet were prone to hesitation and inconsistency in reform.³⁴

33 Md Mahmudul Hassan, Syeda Sharmin Aziz, Rifat Rahemin, Iftekhar Khan and Rizwanul Hoque, "The Political Economy of the Landscape of Trade Unions in Bangladesh: The Case of the RMG Sector", Working Paper, BRAC Institute of Governance and Development, 2022, <https://dspace.bracu.ac.bd:8443/xmlui/handle/10361/23766>.

34 Mirza M Hassan, Inteemum Ahsan, Rabeena Sultana Ananna, Iffat Jahan Antara, Syeda Salina Aziz, Sohela Nazneen, Aishwarya Sanjukta Roy Proma, Sadiur Rahman, Asif Shahan and Maheen Sultan, *Rupture, Reform and Reimagining Democracy: Navigating the Agony of Transition*, op. cit.

The fall of the *ancien régime* disrupted but did not dismantle core features of Bangladesh's political order, including autocracy, 'partyarchy', dynastic leadership and oligarchic influence. This persistence has occurred unevenly: the army has remained intact, the bureaucracy has undergone significant churn, the police have been partially reconstituted, and the judiciary shows tentative movement toward autonomy. However, there is little evidence that party-state dominance is being replaced by a more pluralistic polyarchic system.

Part II: Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka after the 2022 People's Struggle

Institutional Integrity, the *Aragalaya* and Prospects for Reform in Sri Lanka

Understanding the nature and complexion of the Aragalaya is essential to assessing its demands, the trajectory of institutional decline and the possibilities for system change in the post-uprising period.

The 2022 *Aragalaya* (Struggle in Sinhala and *Porattam* in Tamil) and the prospects for reform in Sri Lanka can be examined primarily from a constitutional perspective, with attention to the historical erosion of democratic governance and the role of constitutional reform as a mechanism for mitigation. Understanding the nature and complexion of the *Aragalaya* is essential to assessing its demands, the trajectory of institutional decline and the possibilities for system change in the post-uprising period.

The *Aragalaya* was a spontaneous people's uprising that emerged from simmering civic discontent and was triggered by the economic meltdown of 2022. It was largely urban, youth-based and did not have a central political command, a single political ideology, or an initial intention to capture state power. Participation cut across ethnic, religious, gender and class divides, which was particularly significant given Sri Lanka's history of divisive politics.³⁵

The *Aragalaya* arose from severe economic hardship and state failure in the provision of basic services, and its demands were fundamentally political. Citizens recognised that the crisis was fundamentally about governance. It was aimed at the entrenched political classes, not against the upper classes. The elites in this process were, therefore, those who were in power and the question was over how they governed – whether it was consultative or authoritarian.

The central call was for “system change”, which included the removal of the old political guard and particularly the removal of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.³⁶ This was not an anti-Rajapaksa uprising alone; the Rajapaksas symbolised the deeper decay of the political system. One of the demands was that all 225 Members of Parliament (MPs) resign

35 S V Hemachandra and S Sivasundaram, “Historical vistas on Sri Lanka's 2022 people's uprising”, *History Workshop Journal*, 97 (Spring 2024), 3-42.

36 Abhinav Raj, “Sri Lanka's Democratic Unrest: From Aragalaya to Uncertain Institutional Reform”, *NIICE Nepal*, 16 January 2026, <https://niice.org.np/archives/12256>.

along with the President. There was also a strong call to end divisive politics and to establish equal citizenship.

Accountable governance formed a core demand, even if protesters did not always articulate this in technical constitutional terms such as separation of powers or checks and balances. The government was expected to be accountable to the people. The need for specific constitutional reforms was articulated at times within the protests, such as the abolition of the Executive Presidency and the strengthening of rights protections, especially economic, social and cultural rights, which had in more recent history received less attention than civil and political rights in Sri Lanka. Ridding governance of corruption was central, especially given the normalisation of corruption under successive regimes and its intensification under the Rajapaksa political leadership. Deliberative democracy was also demanded by some groups in the protest site, particularly through proposals for *Jana Sabhas* (People's Forums) to allow formal consultation and public voice.

Ridding governance of corruption was central, especially given the normalisation of corruption under successive regimes and its intensification under the Rajapaksa political leadership.

From a historical perspective, the erosion of democratic governance can be clearly traced through Sri Lanka's constitutional development. Since independence, the country has been governed under three constitutions. The Soulbury Constitution (1946-47), enacted under colonial authority, interestingly and ironically embodied strong liberal democratic principles, including checks and balances, judicial independence and a depoliticised public service. Institutions such as the Judicial Service Commission and Public Service Commission were insulated from political interference and tampering with them was treated as a serious offence.

The First Republican Constitution of 1972 marked the beginning of institutional erosion. Power was centralised in the legislature, and all sovereign powers of the people were channelled through it. The Cabinet gained control over judicial and public service appointments, transfers and disciplinary action.³⁷ This politicisation had a deeply negative impact on institutional integrity, introducing open interference in judicial appointments and placing the public service under political control.

The Second Republican Constitution of 1978 was enacted to address the failures of the 1972 Constitution but in practice, it exacerbated them. It established an all-powerful Executive Presidency, concentrating authority

37 Radhika Coomaraswamy, 'The 1972 Republican Constitution in the Postcolonial Constitutional Evolution of Sri Lanka' in Asanga Welikala (ed), *Reforming Sri Lankan Presidentialism: Provenance, Problems and Prospects* (Centre for Policy Alternatives 2015) 127–132.

in a single office.³⁸ Presidential immunity and the absence of effective checks meant that despite formal constitutional guarantees, executive power dominated in practice. Ministries, permanent secretaries and departments increasingly came under direct political control. Over time, constitutional rhetoric about democracy masked a steady erosion of institutional safeguards.

Central to this approach was the establishment of a representative Constitutional Council empowered to recommend or approve appointments by the President.

Efforts to protect institutions from executive caprice focused on strengthening the democratic integrity of key bodies, including the judiciary and independent commissions such as the Election Commission, Police Commission, Public Service Commission and Human Rights Commission. Central to this approach was the establishment of a representative Constitutional Council empowered to recommend or approve appointments by the President. The Council was designed to introduce consultation and oversight into a process previously dominated by presidential discretion. It was chaired by the Speaker of the Parliament and included the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, representatives of the Parliament and eminent citizens.

A central point of contention concerned whether the Constitutional Council represented parliamentary oversight or executive oversight of the executive. While its placement within the constitutional chapter on the executive created ambiguity, its intended function was to provide a check on presidential appointments. Disputes also emerged over the numerical strength of eminent citizens versus political representatives within the Council.

The history of the Constitutional Council reflects a pattern of constitutional instrumentalism. The 17th Amendment (2001) established the Council with a majority of eminent citizens and enjoyed broad public support. The 18th Amendment (2010) abolished it and strengthened presidential powers. The 19th Amendment (2015) re-established the Council with a majority of MPs, following strong popular mobilisation. The 20th Amendment (2020) again abolished it and reinforced executive authority.³⁹ These oscillations demonstrated how constitutional reform became a political project driven by incumbent presidents seeking to shape the presidency in their own image.

38 Nelum Deepika Udagama, "The Fragmented Republic: Reflections on the 1972 Constitution of Sri Lanka", *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* 39, no. 1-2 (2014), <https://sljh.sljol.info/articles/7222/files/submission/proof/7222-1-25469-1-10-20140727.pdf>.

39 Mario Gomez, "Constitutional Struggle in Sri Lanka", *Federal Law Review* 50, no. 2 (2022): 174-191, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0067205X221100258>.

Judicial protection of institutional integrity has depended heavily on the degree of independence afforded to the courts. Through fundamental rights jurisdiction and administrative law, the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal have delivered significant judgments restraining institutional overreach. However, this role has remained contingent on appointment processes and political context. Independent commissions have also had moments of impact, particularly the Election Commission and the Human Rights Commission when they were able to function autonomously.

The *Aragalaya* revived demands for the re-establishment of the Constitutional Council. The 21st Amendment, enacted in 2022 by the interim administration, restored the Council with a majority of the MPs and brought the Procurement Commission, Audit Commission and the appointment of the Central Bank Governor within its purview.⁴⁰ In practice, however, the President actively attempted to undermine the Council's authority by challenging its decisions on key appointments.⁴¹

The current prospects for system change remain uncertain. The governing NPP coalition came to power in the first election after the *Aragalaya* and was viewed as distinct from previous political formations. However, its election manifesto did not contain a dedicated chapter on governance or system change.⁴² Principles of good governance and institutional independence appeared in scattered sections without detailed elaboration. While constitutional reform is promised, including the abolition of the Executive Presidency and stronger rights protection, commitment to institutional reform has yet to be clearly demonstrated. Earlier tensions between the Executive and the Constitutional Council, particularly over appointments such as that of the Auditor General, highlighted ongoing struggles over oversight and accountability.⁴³

Principles of good governance and institutional independence appeared in scattered sections without detailed elaboration.

40 European Commission, "The EU Special Incentive Arrangement for Sustainable Development and Good Governance (GSP+) Assessment of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka Covering the Period 2020–2022", Joint Staff Working Document, Brussels, 21 November 2023, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52023SC0366>.

41 Meera Sirinivasan, "Opposition, lawyers slam Ranil Wickremesinghe for defying Supreme Court order", *The Hindu*, 29 July 2024, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/opposition-lawyers-slam-ranil-wickremesinghe-for-defying-supreme-court-order/article68459722.ece>.

42 NPP Manifesto, "A Thriving Nation, A Beautiful Life", NPP Policies: Statements of Jathika Jana Balawegaya Policies, p. 58, at: www.npp.lk.

43 Centre for Policy Alternatives, "CPA raises concerns over delay in Auditor General appointment", *Newswire*, 13 January 2026, <https://www.newswire.lk/2026/01/13/cpa-raises-concerns-over-delay-in-auditor-general-appointment/>.

Constitutional reform efforts in Sri Lanka have largely been political projects of incumbent presidents, with only limited exceptions in the 17th and 19th Amendments. Even where constitutional guarantees of institutional integrity exist, political practice has frequently contradicted them. This reveals a gap between constitutional form and political culture, where constitutionalism functions as a veneer while deeper power arrangements revert to entrenched and primordial practices.

Entrenched political behaviour has made system change elusive. Democratising the constitution-making and reform process itself has, therefore, become essential, as most reforms have been non-consultative. The future of reform depends not only on institutions but also on continued civil society and media activism and the protection of judicial independence. There is a growing need for forms of deliberative and monitory democracy in which citizens participate directly in supervising governance through non-violent means.

Contextual Constitutionalism, Crisis Governance and Fragile Institutional Trust in Post-2022 Sri Lanka

In recent years, developments have occurred that would have seemed unthinkable even a decade ago.

Contemporary political, constitutional and institutional realities are far more complex than the analytical frameworks traditionally used to understand them. In recent years, developments have occurred that would have seemed unthinkable even a decade ago. As a result, classical constitutional models or idealised rule-of-law frameworks when applied without sensitivity to context, fail to capture lived realities in countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Increasingly, one sees the state, whether executive, legislature, or judiciary, acting “according to the book” and within formal legal justifications, yet leaving a strong sense that something is not quite right. This analysis is grounded in experience and observation rather than prescription.

Sri Lanka’s 2022 economic crisis and mass protests marked a profound rupture in the relationship between citizen and state. While initially understood as a citizen-led movement, subsequent developments have prompted discussion about the broader political dynamics that may have shaped both the *Aragalaya* and its outcomes. In small states in particular, moments of political upheaval can create openings for multiple forms of influence, both external and internal, including lobbying, elite bargaining and strategic political positioning. In this context, both former

President Ranil Wickremesinghe, whose party supported the protests and who was subsequently elected interim President and President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, whose party also expressed support for the protests and now holds office, can be seen as part of the wider political trajectory that emerged from that moment. Whether the crisis and its aftermath ultimately serve the country's long-term interests remains an open question. What is beyond dispute is that the uprising exposed deep fractures in legitimacy, accountability and public trust.

The post-2022 period can be divided into two phases: first under Wickremesinghe and then under Dissanayake. By May 2022, Sri Lanka had defaulted on its foreign debt. The consequences were severe: the state lacked foreign exchange to import essentials, including food and shortages, queues and uncertainty became everyday realities.⁴⁴ There was a real risk of total systemic collapse, with widespread fears that Sri Lanka could become another Libya, Greece, or Venezuela. Wickremesinghe managed to stabilise the economy, re-engage international partners and restore a measure of order, despite significant unpopularity, especially in the aftermath of the clearing of the main protest site by force and limited grassroots support.⁴⁵

There was a real risk of total systemic collapse, with widespread fears that Sri Lanka could become another Libya, Greece, or Venezuela.

In that context, the subsequent IMF programme represented for many policymakers the most viable path available for stabilising the economy, even as its accompanying conditions placed considerable strain on ordinary Sri Lankans already bearing the weight of the crisis. The passage of the 21st Amendment to the Constitution was a positive step during this period, re-establishing the Constitutional Council and modestly curtailing presidential power. However, Sri Lanka's experience with the 17th to the 21st Amendments demonstrates a recurring vulnerability: constitutional reform without a supportive political culture remains reversible. With a two-thirds parliamentary majority and supportive jurisprudence, these changes could be undone and that remains a real danger.

The NPP government came to power in 2024, and it is still too early to draw definitive conclusions. Nevertheless, early signals merit careful attention. On counterterrorism legislation, there is a broad consensus that Sri Lanka needs a modern legal framework. The Prevention of

44 Ayesha Perera, "Sri Lanka: Why Is the Country in an Economic Crisis?", *BBC News*, 29 March 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-61028138>.

45 Nandalal Weerasinghe, "Sri Lanka Asks Foreign Lenders for 30% Debt 'Haircut'", *Deutsche Welle*, 29 June 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/sri-lanka-asks-foreign-lenders-for-30-debt-haircut/a-66067048>.

Vaguely defined offences, expansive executive powers vested in an appointed commission, limited procedural safeguards and weak judicial review create a high risk of selective enforcement and self-censorship.

Terrorism (PTA) Act (1979) was misused by successive governments, often against political opponents and minorities and its repeal has long been demanded.⁴⁶ A draft replacement law is now under discussion. A counterterrorism law is necessary in any modern state but its political misuse must end decisively. Reform must, therefore, be assessed not only by legislative change but by safeguards, oversight and restraint in implementation. Similar concerns arise regarding the Online Safety Act, which, despite pursuing legitimate objectives such as addressing cyber fraud, child exploitation and incitement to violence, poses serious risks to freedom of expression, due process and institutional independence.⁴⁷ Vaguely defined offences, expansive executive powers vested in an appointed commission, limited procedural safeguards and weak judicial review create a high risk of selective enforcement and self-censorship. Incremental amendments are unlikely to suffice; hence, substantive reform, potentially repeal and reenactment, is required to align the law with constitutional guarantees and international obligations. This critique is not opposition to regulation but opposition to executive truth-policing.

Sri Lanka's recent experience with emergency powers illustrates recurring tensions between enforcement and rights. The official anti-drug campaign illustrates this dynamic. While the scale of narcotics and crime is undeniable and action is necessary, far-reaching detention powers, extended custody and emergency-style responses must be approached with caution. Similarly, the use of emergency regulations following Cyclone Ditwah in November 2026 raises concerns regarding proportionality, necessity and the availability of ordinary legal alternatives. Problems of politicised policing and investigations continue across administrations, especially where executive direction of criminal investigations blurs the line between political authority and investigative independence, reinforcing perceptions of disproportionate targeting of opposition actors. Proposals to establish an independent public prosecutor's office reflect recognition of conflicts inherent in the Attorney General's dual role as prosecutor and government adviser. However, without carefully designed appointment and accountability mechanisms, such an office risks becoming another instrument of political contestation, rather than a safeguard against it.

46 "Sri Lanka: False Terrorism Cases Enable Repression", Human Rights Watch, 17 July 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/07/17/sri-lanka-false-terrorism-cases-enable-repression>.

47 "Sri Lanka: Online Safety Act Major Blow to Freedom of Expression", Amnesty International, 24 January 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/01/sri-lanka-online-safety-act-major-blow-to-freedom-of-expression/>.

Sri Lanka's judiciary has retained a degree of independence, particularly at the level of the original courts. However, politically sensitive cases reveal pressure points. Prosecutions of political incumbents remain rare while opposition figures face greater exposure. Expedited proceedings in such cases are an early warning sign requiring attention. Judicial populism, which is where decisions reflect public sentiment rather than constitutional principle, becomes more pronounced during periods of volatility, even as the courts may frame this as taking judicial notice of surrounding circumstances.

Institutional reforms such as the e-courts project are welcome and long overdue but efficiency must not come at the expense of fairness. Accelerated disposal rates and high dismissal statistics raise concerns about access to justice and right to fair trial. From the perspective of the legal profession, overt political pressure has been limited, and a strong, independent Bar has acted as a shield. Nonetheless, attempts at overreach by law enforcement persist, including summoning lawyers and requesting client information, which have been resisted and challenged before the Supreme Court.

From the perspective of the legal profession, overt political pressure has been limited, and a strong, independent Bar has acted as a shield.

Public trust in Sri Lanka's institutions remains fragile and cannot be legislated into existence. It must be earned through consistency, restraint and accountability, a process that necessarily takes time. This should be distinguished from populism, particularly social media-driven populism, which can mimic public trust while undermining institutional norms.

Looking ahead, the government's commitment to a new constitution, combined with a strong ideological orientation and a parliamentary supermajority, raises concerns about process, inclusivity and representativeness in constitutional change. Persistent institutional weaknesses, such as under-resourcing of the Right to Information (RTI) Commission, early delays in appointing a permanent Auditor General, contested reconstitution of the Constitutional Council (such as the absence of an ethnic minority among the civil society representatives) and opaque criteria for judicial appointments and promotions, underscore the fragility of reform. Governance may appear to proceed largely according to formal rules, yet sustained vigilance is required to prevent the concentration of power and gradual erosion of constitutional norms.

Anti-Corruption Reforms after Sri Lanka's *Aragalaya*

Public anger was directed at political elites and, to a lesser extent, at the wider public sector.

As the protests were decentralised, protest demands illustrated both clarity on corruption and confusion on related political issues. For instance, demands for the abolition of institutions of power devolution were made by some protestors, without recognition of power devolution being a political solution for the national and ethnic question in the country. The *Aragalaya* nevertheless had a clear demand for anti-corruption. It reflected a deep-seated understanding of the problem of corruption and an urgency for the need to address it. Public anger was directed at political elites and, to a lesser extent, at the wider public sector.

In contrast to a movement led by an organised civil society, the *Aragalaya* witnessed citizens taking direct action. Protests extended beyond the streets into formal spaces such as legal institutions. This translated to Supreme Court litigation over political responsibility for the economic crisis. Judicial findings against senior political and financial officials marked an unprecedented assertion of accountability grounded in public trust doctrine.⁴⁸

The current government came into power on an anti-corruption agenda. The governing manifesto of the NPP contained many reform commitments. This is a challenging space to navigate due to the high expectations of the public and the party's limited ability to deliver on all these fronts. Underlying assumptions include an independent and functional judicial system and the state capture by businesses, the public sector and the entrenched criminal networks.

The Governance Diagnostic Assessment (GDA) was the result of sustained civil society advocacy and negotiations with the IMF.⁴⁹ The GDA set the anti-corruption agenda for the country and built on existing work on this front. This included legislation such as the Anti-Corruption Act of 2023 and the Proceeds of Crime Act of 2025; implementing systems involving asset declarations by public officials and requiring them to do

48 "Sri Lanka top court finds Rajapaksa brothers guilty of economic crisis", *Al Jazeera*, 15 November 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/15/sri-lanka-top-court-finds-rajapaksa-brothers-guilty-of-economic-crisis>.

49 "Sri Lanka: Technical Assistance Report-Governance Diagnostic Assessment", International Monetary Fund, 30 September 2023, <https://www.imf.org/en/publications/cr/issues/2023/09/29/sri-lanka-technical-assistance-report-governance-diagnostic-assessment-539804>.

so by law; and reforms concerning beneficial ownership and anti-money laundering. The IMF integrated these anti-corruption measures into its reform framework.

Civil society engagement was crucial in shaping legislation on asset declarations, beneficial ownership and procurement, and it had to fight for its role and visibility in the process. During the consultative processes, civil society actors formed a coalition, undertook consultations across the country and carried out a parallel GDA report. Civil society actors were, therefore, able to influence the IMF's GDA, which is arguably the strongest in terms of anti-corruption from among all GDAs around the world.⁵⁰

However, reform continues in an environment lacking mandatory public consultation and post-enactment judicial review of legislation. Apart from the RTI framework, citizens remain largely excluded from lawmaking. This weakens legitimacy and increases the risk that reforms remain technocratic rather than socially embedded.

Another important point here is that reform has been driven by and through law, preserving legitimacy and durability. However, in the aspirational space where laws are drawn in conformity with international standards and best practices, local contexts may be disregarded. Strong laws may become vulnerable to abuse without sufficient judicial safeguards and sustainable enforcement mechanisms.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's institutions continue to depend heavily on the initiative of individuals rather than systemic strength. Bodies such as the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption have shown increased activity, yet uncertainty remains whether most investigations and arrests, especially of political actors, will translate into convictions. Reform outcomes remain constrained by electoral timelines and political leadership capacity.

Procurement is considered a critical issue by the IMF and comprises three of the 16 recommendations it proposed to the Sri Lankan government. However, procurement reforms have visible inadequacies in terms of

Strong laws may become vulnerable to abuse without sufficient judicial safeguards and sustainable enforcement mechanisms.

50 "Civil Society Governance Diagnostic Report on Sri Lanka: An Assessment of the Anti-Corruption Landscape of Sri Lanka", 2023, https://www.tisrilanka.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/GDA_REPORT_2023.pdf.

A major contradiction lies in state policies that legitimise illicit wealth through mechanisms allowing illegally acquired income to be regularised.

substantially addressing corruption. Meanwhile, public trust remains low due to past inquiries targeting investigators and whistleblowers, discouraging evidence-sharing and weakening prosecution prospects.

A major contradiction lies in incompatible transnational financial regimes that legitimise illicit wealth through mechanisms allowing illegally acquired income to be regularised. This undermines anti-corruption advocacy, particularly among young people who perceive the state itself as facilitating corruption. The same tension applies to money laundering, which cannot be addressed without tackling both domestic governance failures and international systems that enable illicit financial flows.

Despite the reform rhetoric, policy capture continues to shape institutional behaviour. High-profile tender controversies, restricted information disclosure and limited progress on current corruption cases undermine public confidence.

The Politics of Stabilisation in Sri Lanka

In 2022, Sri Lanka was the first in South Asia to experience an economic crisis that translated into mass political protests. Similar political dynamics subsequently unfolded in Bangladesh and, more recently, in Nepal, pointing to a broader regional pattern in which economic stress, legitimacy crises and political mobilisation intersect.

Sri Lanka's post-2022 reform period can be seen through three analytical lenses. The first lens examines how international financial institutions, especially the IMF and the UN system, have engaged with Sri Lanka after sovereign default. It asks what genuinely changed in this engagement and what merely became more rigid. The second lens focuses on fiscal sovereignty, particularly the constitutional role of the Parliament in overseeing public finance. The third lens explores how Sri Lankans currently perceive international institutions amid growing scepticism toward a rules-based global order.

Sri Lanka's post-2022 trajectory is better understood as a movement from collapse to containment rather than transformation. While international institutions were essential to stabilisation, the way it unfolded narrowed the democratic space, shifted the burdens of adjustment downward to the lower rung of society and entrenched a politics of "no alternative".

The origins of Sri Lanka's crisis predate 2022 and lie in earlier structural shifts. The decisive shift occurred after 2007 when Sri Lanka's debt structure moved away from concessional and bilateral financing towards international sovereign bonds with higher coupons and shorter maturities.⁵¹ At the same time, foreign exchange reserves were actively depleted through poor dollar management rather than passively eroded, leaving the economy fragile well before the COVID-19 shock. This reframes the debates, especially on tax policy. While post-2019 tax cuts weakened fiscal space, they did not directly cause the balance-of-payments collapse that produced shortages and queues. The crisis was driven by a shortage of dollars rather than rupees, underscoring external vulnerability.

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The sovereign default of April 2022 was not only an economic rupture but also a constitutional event. The April 2022 suspension of external debt repayments was announced by a press release, with no prior parliamentary debate, explicit cabinet resolution laid before the Parliament, or gazetted financial authorisation.⁵² Under Sri Lanka's constitution, public finance lies within parliamentary authority, and sovereign default represents a generational fiscal decision shaping future taxation, pensions and access to credit.

Despite this, default was presented as inevitable rather than debated democratically. The inevitability was asserted by an assemblage of think tanks, experts from various quarters, credit trading agencies and finance companies. However, this inevitability was asserted without being demonstrated. There was no transparent public discussion on sequencing options, such as bridging finance or selective standstills, or of strategic use of remaining reserves and assets to buy time for the country.

By framing default as a technocratic necessity, democratic scrutiny was suspended at precisely the moment when it mattered most. This set the stage for the post-default reform process, where a mindset of compliance has replaced contestation in Sri Lanka.

51 Talal Rafi, "How Sovereign Debt Crises Are Becoming Geopolitical: Lessons from Sri Lanka", SAIS Review of International Affairs, 3 January 2026, <https://saisreview.sais.jhu.edu/how-sovereign-debt-crises-are-becoming-geopolitical-lessons-from-sri-lanka/>.

52 "Interim Policy Regarding the Servicing of Sri Lanka's Public Debt", Colombo: Ministry of Finance, 2022, we don't usually mention accessed date, PDF accessed 14 February 2026, <https://www.treasury.gov.lk/api/file/54a19fda-b219-4dd4-91a7-b3e74b9cd683>

The way the restructuring unfolded echoes a broader Global South pattern, where adjustment protects balance sheets at the top while socialising losses downward.

Distributional consequences emerged immediately after default. Despite repeated assurances that domestic debt would be protected, the first step taken was domestic debt restructuring. This directly affected employees' provident funds, trust funds and retirement savings. Ordinary wage earners absorbed significant losses and a percentage of future earnings tied to these savings were wiped out.⁵³ Commercial banks and well-positioned private investors were largely shielded. The way the restructuring unfolded echoes a broader Global South pattern, where adjustment protects balance sheets at the top while socialising losses downward.

The IMF stabilisation logic remains familiar, centred on front-loaded fiscal consolidation and tight monetary policy, with governance reforms designed to reassure creditors. What has changed is the pace and modality of implementation, with reforms increasingly pushed through as prior actions and structural benchmarks that turn lawmaking into a deadline-driven exercise.

This acceleration has produced a form of 'compliance governance'. The Parliament legislates under time pressure to unlock IMF disbursements and signal credibility while much of the technical drafting is done through externally supported foreign consultants and fast-tracked into local processes. Reform bandwidth has been absorbed by locking down public finance rules rather than rebuilding productive capacity while tight procurement and public financial management controls have fostered risk aversion and institutional paralysis within the state.

Opposition leaders have consistently criticised the IMF's programme and challenged its debt sustainability analysis, however once in power, this posture weakens. Across both ruling and opposition camps, the IMF's programme is now largely treated as non-negotiable, reflecting a broader erosion of the political will to contest external conditionalities and reinforcing a compliance-oriented policy mindset.

Tax policy illustrates these tensions particularly well. Since 2022, Sri Lanka has dramatically increased revenue through tax hikes, with value-added tax (VAT) rising from 8 per cent to 18 per cent in a span of one and a half years. This is often presented as proof of reform success but

⁵³ Prema-chandra Athukorala, "Sri Lanka's Debt Restructuring Challenge", East Asia Forum, 19 August 2023, <https://eastasiaforum.org/2023/08/19/sri-lankas-debt-restructuring-challenge/>.

what has emerged is not a fair tax system but a 'tax reflex': the idea that every problem can be solved by extracting more from the same base. Citizens face higher VAT, income tax and rising utility tariffs while service quality has collapsed. Hospitals malfunction, medicines run short and local services are strained. Scarce foreign exchange is still used for non-essential imports like vehicles, feeding a deeper legitimacy problem: the state becomes better at collecting, not delivering.⁵⁴

Although surface stability has returned, it remains fragile. Credit growth reflects survival borrowing rather than productive investment, driven by pawning jewellery, vehicle leasing and borrowing for consumption. The sharp rise in pawning advances alongside deflation points to demand exhaustion rather than recovery.⁵⁵ The disappearance of queues signals containment, not restored economic health and household distress persists in quieter forms, as evidenced by increased rates of pawning of gold.

There is widespread acceptance in Sri Lanka that there is no alternative to IMF engagement but this should not be read as trust. For many citizens, the IMF is viewed as an institution that prevents collapse rather than one that restores dignity. This produces compliance without ownership across government, business and society, mirroring patterns observed across much of the Global South.

Perceptions of international institutions are increasingly filtered through global geopolitics. The emphasis on legality, discipline and rules in the Global South, alongside the perceived tolerance of legal violations elsewhere, generates a credibility gap. These perceptions diverge across social groups: urban middle classes tend to view institutions as technocratic anchors, working-class households associate them with taxes and shrinking margins of survival and a politicised younger generation increasingly questions the moral authority of a global order that demands sacrifice from some while shielding others.

Perceptions of international institutions are increasingly filtered through global geopolitics.

In conclusion, international institutions have helped Sri Lanka move from free fall to containment, which is significant. However, stabilisation achieved through compression, that is, without rebuilding productive

54 "Sri Lanka Eases Vehicle Import Ban, but Can People Afford a Car?", *BBC News*, 31 January 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5y7p3vpepxo>.

55 "Gold Pawning Soars to Rs. 356 Bn: Hidden Crisis Unfolds", *The Sunday Times (Sri Lanka)*, 16 November 2025, <https://www.sundaytimes.lk/251116/business-times/gold-pawning-soars-to-rs-356-bn-hidden-crisis-unfolds-620923.html>.

There is little evidence so far to suggest that core conditionalities will be substantially altered.

capacity, democratic legitimacy, or parliamentary authority over public finance, is fragile. Sri Lanka is not a story of transformation; it is stability without resilience. Recent events like Cyclone Ditwah demonstrated that fragility. Climate-related damage compels a reconsideration of public spending cuts and fiscal conditionalities and encourages opposition calls to review the IMF agreement. There is little evidence so far to suggest that core conditionalities will be substantially altered. The prevailing perception remains that programme flexibility is tied less to domestic need than to geopolitical alignment and compliance. Unless stabilisation evolves into recovery that restores solvency, legitimacy and consent, the next crisis will arrive not as an economic shock but a political one. That moment may not be far off; it could even be this year, given the current institutional paralysis.

Sri Lanka's Democratic Institutions at a Crossroads

Sri Lanka's democratic institutions have faced heavy strain following the 2022 economic crisis, political instability and subsequent institutional reform efforts. Key areas of concern include the state of independent commissions, particularly the RTI Commission and the challenges they confront in exercising their mandates. These developments raise broader questions about the effectiveness of checks and balances on the executive branch and the issues associated with strengthening institutions to ensure democratic accountability.

Decades of civil and ethnic conflict weakened Sri Lanka's democratic institutions and eroded the rule of law. Institutions once admired for their democratic character deteriorated under prolonged emergency governance. This decline disproportionately affected ethno-religious minorities before ultimately undermining rights and protections for the majority population as well. The transformation of law from a system of popular sovereignty into a tool of political expediency accelerated institutional collapse.

This happened in many ways: prolonged conflict in Sri Lanka led to the normalisation of emergency law, exceptional measures and entrenched militarisation of governance.⁵⁶ Law and the Constitution became dictated by political expediency. This degeneration extended

⁵⁶ D Udagama, "An eager embrace: Emergency rule and authoritarianism in republican Sri Lanka", In A Welikala (ed.), *Reforming Sri Lankan presidentialism: Provenance, problems and prospects* (pp. 285–332). Centre for Policy Alternatives, Sri Lanka.

into fiscal and monetary governance, exemplified by the 2015 Central Bank bond scandal, which revealed the depth of institutional failure and mismanagement within key state bodies.⁵⁷

Moreover, since the new government took office in 2024, certain paradoxes have become more immediately relevant, such as the lack of consultation and established principles, such as the independence of institutions. As an example, staffing institutions with loyalists undermined the promise of a 'system change'.

Furthermore, the RTI Commission has faced unprecedented pressure in the post-2024 period, arguably more so than under more openly centralised governments such as that of Gotabaya. The law, enacted in 2016, incorporated civil society demands and its scope was wider than comparable laws in India and Bangladesh.

Recognising the weaknesses of the Constitutional Council, the RTI framework introduced a plural nomination process involving professional bodies such as the Bar Association of Sri Lanka and the Editors' Guild of Sri Lanka. This structure aimed to reduce political bargaining and strengthen independence. The RTI Commission also chose statutory status rather than constitutional entrenchment to avoid vulnerability to frequent constitutional amendments. The RTI is also commendable for its utilisation by the ordinary citizenry instead of urban elites. It has emerged as a tool for marginalised communities to challenge structures of power.

It has emerged as a tool for marginalised communities to challenge structures of power.

RTI cases have tended to fall under certain categories: i) Procurement decisions, corruption and fraud in government, which have been challenged over issues such as tender procedures and admission processes of children into schools; ii) Challenging and enforcing transparency at all levels, including asset declarations among political actors; and iii) Strengthening judicial oversight.

Regarding the sustainability of the information regime in Sri Lanka, certain challenges have been posed but recent resistance by civil society and public mobilisation against political appointments to public office and proposed legal amendments that weaken the law demonstrate its resilience.

57 M Mudugamuwa, "Central Bank bond scam: Spotlight refocuses on the scandal", *The Morning*, 11 June 2026, <https://www.themorning.lk/articles/QEsKMaocNYRw9Ff5qeqQ>.

Institutional Reform and the Persistence of Authoritarian Practices in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's experience with state reform demonstrates that institutional capacity does not improve quickly or fundamentally, even under governments that describe themselves as progressive. Reform efforts in Sri Lanka have repeatedly failed to identify or address the structural causes of institutional weakness. In the absence of clear reform strategies, such as sequencing, stakeholder engagement, vested interests and spoiler mitigation, reform has proceeded in an ad hoc manner, with predictable limitations and reversals.

Structural reform requires coordinated change across multiple institutions – efforts that no single entity can achieve in isolation.

Where limited progress has occurred, it has depended largely on independent and competent leadership within individual institutions rather than through systemic change. Oversight bodies such as the Human Rights Commission were able to expand monitoring and investigate violations, including torture but could not transform entrenched practices within enforcement institutions such as the police and prisons. Structural reform requires coordinated change across multiple institutions – efforts that no single entity can achieve in isolation.

Institutional reform has been further constrained by internal staffing and governance structures. Oversight bodies inherited unqualified and discriminatory staff appointed during periods of political interference. Furthermore, rigid public service protections and externally controlled hiring processes made accountability difficult. These constraints limit what even committed leadership could achieve.

Reform initiatives have frequently been shaped by executive convenience and external pressure rather than sustained political commitment. Efforts have often been undertaken to secure political advantage or respond to international demands, as seen in the abortive transitional justice process initiated in 2015. When domestic resistance emerged, reforms were abandoned, reinforcing a cycle of symbolic change without substantial transformation.

A central obstacle to reform lies in the normalisation of discrimination and inequality within institutions themselves. Decades of ethno-nationalist politics have embedded discriminatory practices into everyday institutional routines, rendering them invisible through purely legal analysis. A purely legal lens fails to capture how discrimination

operates in practice. For instance, Tamil is constitutionally recognised as an official language but this is routinely ignored. Even civil society organisations often fail to provide Tamil interpretation facilities or do not ensure that substantial Tamil perspectives are included in discussions.

Reforming the law while maintaining abusive practices is ultimately futile. The current government campaigned on repealing the PTA Act. Yet it has proposed a counterterrorism law that is more repressive than the existing law.⁵⁸ Similarly, the government promised to repeal the Online Safety Act but now uses it to suppress dissent.⁵⁹ Criminal defamation does not exist in Sri Lankan law. Nevertheless, the law remains vulnerable to abuse, which can result in the de facto reinstatement of criminal defamation. These examples highlight a persistent gap between reform rhetoric and state practice.

These examples highlight a persistent gap between reform rhetoric and state practice.

Executive authority continues to expand through ad hoc task forces and committees operating with vague mandates, minimal transparency and no parliamentary oversight. Bodies such as the Clean Sri Lanka Task Force blur institutional boundaries, encroach upon permanent state institutions, lack minority representation and deepen the militarisation of civilian governance. Following Cyclone Ditwah, additional ad hoc bodies were created with little transparency and representation.

Security sector reform remains another critical unresolved issue, as the military continues to be deployed in civilian functions.⁶⁰ As an illustration, attempts were made to appoint a serving army officer as Auditor General.⁶¹ Section 12 of the Public Security Ordinance has been invoked monthly to call out the armed forces. This does not require parliamentary approval and operates as a de facto state of emergency. The military is also involved in anti-drug operations and runs rehabilitation centres with documented abuse.⁶²

58 Kishali Pinto-Jayawardene, "What 'Brave New World' Does the NPP's Anti-Terror Law Promise?", *The Sunday Times (Sri Lanka)*, 21 December 2025, <https://www.sundaytimes.lk/251221/columns/what-brave-new-world-does-the-npps-anti-terror-law-promise-625429.html>.

59 Dimuthu Attanayake, "Sri Lanka's 'chilling' online content law lambasted as tool to silence government critics", *South China Morning Post*, 26 January 2024, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3249950/sri-lankas-chilling-online-content-law-lambasted-tool-silence-government-critics>.

60 "Sri Lanka's military continues its presence in civilian life in Tamil homeland", *Tamil Guardian*, 23 March 2022, <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankas-military-continues-its-presence-civilian-life-tamil-homeland>.

61 "CC rejects President's nominee for Auditor General for fourth time", *Asian Mirror*, 22 December 2025, <https://asianmirror.lk/news/11315/cc-rejects-presidents-nominee-for-auditor-general-for-fourth-time/>.

62 M Alphonsus and D Wijesinghe, "In Sri Lanka, the army is engaging in a new war on drugs", *New Lines Magazine*, 17 January 2025, <https://newlinesmag.com/spotlight/in-sri-lanka-the-army-is-engaging-in-a-new-war-on-drugs/>.

Furthermore, the government's relationship with civil society reflects long-standing tensions. Historically, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna labelled non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as anti-national and associated them with conspiratorial activity. Although campaign rhetoric suggested change, post-election practices signal regression. Circulars now involve the military in NGO oversight and anti-money laundering and counterterrorism financing measures are reported as being weaponised against civil society.⁶³

Informal systems and patronage sustain each other in a codependent relationship.

Patronage remains a central but under-examined obstacle to reform. Patronage flourishes when formal institutions are weak, opaque, or inaccessible. Informal systems and patronage sustain each other in a codependent relationship. Constitutional changes since 1972 politicised the public service. The MPs gained the ability to dispense jobs and contracts. This enabled ethnicised power bases and informal authority within institutions. Entrenched actors within these institutions have resisted reforms that threaten patronage networks. Oversight bodies are appointed but lack sufficient resources or legal authority.

A key reason for such institutional and political decay has been that state violence is not treated as part of a continuum and public outrage emerges only in cases of extreme violence. Wartime abuses against Tamil civilians, for instance, were widely normalised as collateral damage. This normalisation undermines support for accountability and over time, society becomes complicit in sustaining impunity. Accountability mechanisms are weakened or rendered ineffective and reform efforts falter when they are treated as technical exercises rather than deeply political processes that must confront the institutionalised legacies of conflict and discrimination.

63 "Sri Lanka's Ministry of Defence tightens control over NGOs", *Tamil Guardian*, 17 December 2024, <https://tamilguardian.com/index.php/content/sri-lankas-ministry-defence-tightens-control-over-ngos>; and A Satkunanathan, "Central Bank, NGO Secretariat and weaponisation of Financial Action Task Force", *Daily FT*, 23 December 2024, <https://www.ft.lk/columns/CentralBank-NGO-Secretariat-and-weaponisation-of-Financial-Action-Task-Force/4-770882>.

Concluding Remarks

The deliberations during the workshop raised critical concerns about the nature of post-uprising reform processes and the extent to which they remain accessible to ordinary citizens. One key point was that the reform period following mass uprisings increasingly resembles a form of political theatre that is highly technical and elite-driven. While the uprisings themselves were broad-based and participatory, the subsequent processes of constitutional and institutional reform often take place in obscure, specialised spaces that ordinary people struggle to follow or engage with. As a result, there is a risk that the public will become disengaged, particularly when reforms are framed in highly technical language that does not resonate with everyday political concerns. The emphasis on rule-changing, particularly constitutional reform, was also questioned, given that political actors have historically shown limited commitment to respecting those rules.

One key point was that the reform period following mass uprisings increasingly resembles a form of political theatre that is highly technical and elite-driven.

Challenges in Sri Lanka mirror those in Bangladesh in the context of little public consultation which is carried out during reform. That is, reform processes are being deployed via formal agreements and documents, and the consensus-building is not being negotiated with a broad social backdrop. Even on major issues like education reform and constitutional reform, key groups are not meaningfully included, undermining their legitimacy. This goes back to how to bring people back into the process, which follows mass mobilisation. There has to be genuine pluralistic participation; it cannot be only institutional. Reform commissions were designed mainly around constitutional and administrative changes for service delivery but they failed to create meaningful participation by peripheral (to power) social groups such as workers, farmers and women.

Against such a backdrop, institutions can function as mechanisms of empowerment and protection, yet they may also become sites of exclusion and inequality. The discussion also aimed to consider how leaders recognise that electoral legitimacy alone may not be sufficient to sustain their hold on power. As a result, they often seek to co-opt, neutralise or suppress institutions to prevent challenges from political elites or popular movements. This process of co-optation may involve incorporating various groups, entities and institutions into regime networks through both coercive and non-coercive means.

The role of new or previously marginal actors in these moments of systemic change was also highlighted. In many contexts, “system change” has emerged as a prominent political slogan and the discussion aimed to examine how actors positioned at the peripheries of political power are engaging with these processes and shaping the trajectories of reform. Focusing solely on the authoritarian tendencies of executives can, therefore, obscure the broader institutional landscape, including the mandates, capacities and autonomy of institutions, as well as the ways in which they may be drawn into cooperation with regimes in power. At the same time, repression can undermine political legitimacy and generate public discontent.

Repeated cycles of reform promises and failures risk deepening public disillusionment with democratic institutions.

The discussion also reflected on cycles of political hope and disappointment in democratic transitions. In many contexts, public dissatisfaction with authoritarian governance leads to the election of governments promising democratic reform. However, when those governments fail to deliver, disappointment can quickly translate into renewed support for more authoritarian alternatives. This pattern has been visible in several political transitions, where frustration with democratic governance has been exploited by political actors advocating strong leadership, nationalism or security-focused politics. Repeated cycles of reform promises and failures risk deepening public disillusionment with democratic institutions.

In this context, the role of organised civil society was highlighted as a key area that requires more work. While mass uprisings are often driven by spontaneous public mobilisation rather than organised civil society groups, there remains a need for institutions that can bridge the gap between citizens and political actors. However, civil society organisations themselves are often criticised as elitist or disconnected from grassroots constituencies, limiting their ability to play this bridging role effectively. Without credible intermediaries capable of translating public demands into political alternatives, political transitions risk being repeatedly captured by the same elite actors.

The discussion also touched on the possibilities of deliberative democracy and participatory governance. While there have been calls for mechanisms that enable greater citizen participation in decision-making, such initiatives remain weak or poorly institutionalised. Consultative practices are often minimal and key policy reforms, including those related to education or constitutional change, are frequently pursued

without broad public consultation. Although institutional mechanisms such as parliamentary committees could potentially facilitate greater engagement, their effectiveness depends on the willingness of political actors to make them meaningful and transparent.

Finally, the discussion addressed debates about political elites and political change in the aftermath of uprisings. Anti-elite sentiment has often been directed not only at socioeconomic elites but at an entrenched political class perceived as monopolising power. Even when new political actors emerge from different social backgrounds, they risk being viewed as part of the same political elite if they become entrenched in power and fail to govern in a more consultative and participatory manner. The durability of political change, therefore, depends less on the social origins of political leaders than on whether their governing practices differ from those of previous elites, particularly in terms of accountability, consultation and responsiveness to citizens.

Anti-elite sentiment has often been directed not only at socioeconomic elites but at an entrenched political class perceived as monopolising power.

Appendix 1

Workshop Programme

The Politics of Post-Uprising Reform in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka: Rule of Law, Institutions and Constitutional Reforms

20 January 2026 | Singapore

9.00am **Registration**

9.30am **Opening Remarks**

9.40am **Welcome Remark**

Session 1: Role of Institutions: Between Legitimacy and Control

Authoritarian networks of governance operate through the support and co-option of key institutions to conceal or distort the visibility of repression. By drawing institutions such as the police, judiciary and civil service into their orbit, regimes can sustain an appearance of procedural legitimacy while hollowing out the substance of accountability. The state's alignment with these bodies creates a façade of legality and institutional continuity, even as decision-making becomes increasingly centralised and opaque. This process not only masks coercion but also erodes public confidence in formal mechanisms of the rule of law and governance.

At the same time, states may suppress or incapacitate institutions that could otherwise serve as checks on executive power. By undermining judicial independence, manipulating civil service reforms, intervening in investigations or curbing anti-corruption initiatives, they weaken the very norms and structures that safeguard democratic practices. This panel will bring together speakers to examine the role of institutions in the lead-up to the uprisings in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Moreover, the panel will explore how political interference within institutions, particularly the police, judiciary and civil service, has shaped the governance trajectories of the two countries.

9.50am **Moderator Remarks**

9.55am **Institutional Reform in Post-July 2024 Uprising Bangladesh:
An Anthropological and Critical-Institutionalist Perspective**

10.10am **Institutional Integrity, the *Aragalaya* and Prospects for Reform in Sri Lanka**

10.25am **Navigating the Agony of Transition: Bangladesh's Reform Experience**

10.40am **Discussion Session**

11.20am **End of Session**

Session 2: The Politics of Anti-Corruption and the Quest for Accountability

Successful uprisings are usually accompanied by the demand to bring concrete reforms, democratic revival, make political decision-making more inclusive and transparent and reduce centralisation of powers; old patterns can be reproduced by new political actors. Some of these initiatives are also elite-driven processes. The NPP government has embarked on an anti-corruption campaign for more accountable management of public finances along with holding corrupt politicians accountable. The passage of new laws, such as the Proceeds of Crime Act and arrest of members of past governments accused of corruption reflect the NPP government's use of an accountability narrative to reinforce its popular support and political legitimacy.

The Yunus government has similarly pursued an accountability agenda through newly created commissions, the arrests and trials of accused officials and business figures and efforts to recover stolen assets. However, many of these initiatives are deeply complex, involving intricate regulations and cross-jurisdictional challenges, particularly in tracing and reclaiming wealth laundered abroad. Questions persist over the legitimacy, constitutionality and scope of authority of a transitional government whose mandate is temporary and expected to end once an elected administration assumes power.

By analysing the anti-corruption and accountability agendas pursued by both governments, this panel seeks to understand how such efforts serve political ends, shape public perceptions of legitimacy and influence the broader prospects for democratic consolidation and institutional reform in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh post-uprising. The panel will also refer to case studies from other jurisdictions and societies where governments have sought to tackle financial crimes, money laundering and corruption, the complexities and challenges involved.

11.20am **Moderator Remarks**

11.25am **From Kleptocracy to Accountable Governance: Aspirations and Realities in Bangladesh**

11.40am **Sri Lanka's Democratic Institutions at a Crossroads**

11.55am **Anti-Corruption Reform after Sri Lanka's *Aragalaya***

12.10pm **Discussion Session**

12.50pm **End of Session**

Session 3: Constitutional Reforms and the Struggle for Rights and Representation

This panel seeks to understand how constitutional change has been used to consolidate power and reshape state-society relations in South Asia. Focusing on Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, it aims to explore how constitutional amendments, especially those under the Rajapaksa and Hasina-led governments, undermined checks and balances, centralised authority and eroded democratic accountability through elite capture, patronage and the suppression of opposition.

The discussion will also consider contemporary debates over demands for a new Constitution versus piecemeal amendments in Bangladesh, the formation of the National Consensus Commission and the challenges of inclusive constitutional reform. It also examines the current discourse on constitutional reform in Sri Lanka, the NPP's efforts to initiate such a process and the factors contributing to its delay (particularly those relating to the ethnic question and religion), as well as the issues likely to be prioritised over constitutional reform. In particular, the panel hopes to examine how questions of religion, gender representation and participatory politics might redefine the relationship between citizens and the state. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for grasping how constitutional design and amendment processes can either entrench authoritarian rule or open pathways for more inclusive and accountable governance.

2.00pm	Moderator Remarks
2.05pm	Trajectory of Transition in Post-2024 Bangladesh
2.20pm	Contextual Constitutionalism, Crisis Governance and Fragile Institutional Trust in Post-2022 Sri Lanka
2.35pm	Institutional Reform and the Persistence of Authoritarian Practices in Sri Lanka
2.50pm	Discussion Session
3.30pm	End of Session

Session 4: Public Perceptions of International Institutions and Reform Agendas

As countries in South Asia like Sri Lanka and Bangladesh undergo International Monetary Fund-led economic reforms and engage with a range of international partners promoting governance and anti-corruption agendas, public scrutiny and perceptions of these institutions is important. As the United States-led liberal rules-based order and the role of multilateralism are increasing under scrutiny, the impact of externally driven policy reforms such as austerity measures are understood, negotiated and contested by local populations need to be understood.

This panel will examine how various sections of society perceive the motives and impacts of international institutions; how austerity, taxation, subsidy cuts and governance reforms are framed by political actors; and how these narratives influence democratic participation, state legitimacy and policy implementation. In addition, the panel will consider perceptions of other international institutions such as United Nations peacekeeping and how the public in countries such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, both as contributors and stakeholders, understand and assess these engagements. The discussion will also explore the broader implications for international institutions themselves: how public sentiment affects their legitimacy and what this means for the future of external engagement in South Asia.

3.50pm	Moderator Remarks
3.55pm	Economic Development, International Institutions and the Bangladesh Uprising
4.10pm	The Political Inequality Underlying the July 2024 Uprising
4.25pm	Sri Lanka and the Politics of Stabilisation
4.40pm	Discussion Session
5.20pm	Closing Remarks and the Way Forward
5.30pm	End of Workshop

Appendix 2

About the Editors

Dr Rajni Gamage is a Research Fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore. Her research interests are the politics of governance and state transformation and development and inequality in Sri Lanka. She holds a PhD in Political Science and International Relations from the School of Political Science & International Studies, University of Queensland. She was also a Visiting Researcher at the Center for South Asian Studies, Gifu Women's University, Japan (April 2025 to March 2026) and she is a Non-Resident Research Fellow at the Dacca Institute of Research and Analytics, Bangladesh (January 2026 to January 2027).

Among her publications are “Negotiating Left Politics in Sri Lanka: The NPP in Government” (Green Agenda, 2025), “Reforms in Sri Lanka: Emerging Trends in Elite Politics” (*Economic & Political Weekly*, 2023) and “Buddhist Nationalism, Authoritarian Populism and the Muslim Other in Sri Lanka” (*Islamophobia Studies Journal*, 2021).

Dr Imran Ahmed is a Research Fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore. He writes on religion, law and politics in late-colonial India and contemporary Pakistan. His current research projects focus on religion and politics, constitution-making and blasphemy laws in South Asia.

Dr Ahmed received his PhD from the University of New England. He has published in leading journals in history, politics and law, including *South Asia*, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, *Third World Quarterly*, *The Round Table*, *Griffith Law Review* and *Journal of Law, Religion and State*. He is also a co-editor of the volume, *Religion, Extremism and Violence* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

Ms Roshni Kapur is a Programme Manager at the Rule of Law Programme Asia, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS). She is also a PhD candidate at the University of Ghent, Belgium, focusing on caste and land conflicts. She focuses on human rights, constitutionalism, the rule of law and democracy at KAS. She is an editor of the volume *Sustainable Energy Transition in South Asia: Challenges and Opportunities*. She has published in leading journals on South Asia, nationalism, law and society and transitional justice including *Conflict, Security and Development*, *The Roundtable: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs and Policy Studies* and *Contemporary Southeast Asia*. She previously worked as a Research Analyst at the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS), National University of Singapore from 2018 to 2021.

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Prior to joining ISAS, Mr Faridi was a Research Associate at the Council for Strategic and Defence Research in New Delhi, where his work focused on non-traditional security in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific region. He has also worked as a researcher at Gateway House, Mumbai, India, engaging in research on green hydrogen, critical minerals supply chains and economic security.

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