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The Political Chimera: Was Bangladesh's Sheikh Hasina Regime Fascist, Authoritarian, Populist or a Mix of all Three?

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Abstract: The fall of Sheikh Hasina's long-ruling Awami League government in August 2024 has sparked the debate on whether Bangladesh's government was fascist, authoritarian, populist, or a hybrid of all three. This article re-evaluates that inquiry through a comparative and postcolonial lens. It utilises established theories of fascism and contemporary reinterpretations that examine fascism's morphological persistence in modern authoritarian populism. Simultaneously, it interacts with the extensive regime-type literature concerning populism as both ideology and style, as well as hybrid or competitive authoritarianism. This study suggests that Hasina's Bangladesh represented a fascist–authoritarian–populist amalgamation: a civilian autocracy maintained through emotional mobilisation, developmental nationalism, and digital coercion. It contextualises the Bangladeshi case within the political modernity of the global South. Also, through analyses of legal changes and co-optation of the judiciary, this paper shows the total control that the Hasina regime was able to exercise on the state institutions, which were hollowed out but still kept up in a performative capacity to keep up a 'democratic' veneer. The research concludes that the Hasina regime cannot be readily categorised within a singular typology; rather, it reflects a postcolonial form of authoritarian populism characterised by fascist characteristics.

Keywords: Sheikh Hasina; Bangladesh; fascism; authoritarianism; populism

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1 Introduction

Bangladesh's recent past presents an interesting case for comparative politics and constitutional law. Since the 1990s, following the end of General H.M. Ershad's dictatorship, the nation has oscillated between democratic potential and authoritarian regression, culminating under Sheikh Hasina's most recent long rule (2009–2024) in what many observers – comprising academics, journalists, and opposition figures – have characterised as fascism.¹ The phrase itself continues to be conceptually unclear. In Bangladesh, fascism predominantly serves as a political shorthand for public repression, although Bangladesh has a parliamentary system of government. In any case, it needs to be analysed carefully. This article, therefore, asks: Was Sheikh Hasina's government (2009–2024) fascist, authoritarian, populist, or a mix of all three?

To find the answer, the article examines the fundamental definitions of fascism. Roger Griffin's² notion of palingenetic ultranationalism situates fascism within the myth of national rebirth; Robert Paxton³ delineates its developmental phases from movement to regime; Umberto Eco's⁴ 'Ur-Fascism' and Michael Mann's⁵ *Fascists* elucidate its social and institutional framework; Jason Stanley⁶ reconceptualises it as a rhetorical and moral endeavour. However, as articulated by Finchelstein⁷ and Gentile,⁸ the ideological core of fascism endures within contemporary authoritarian populism, developing through democratic institutions rather than abolishing them. Research on comparative authoritarianism – especially by Levitsky and Way,⁹ Schedler,¹⁰ and Morgenbesser¹¹ – provides methodologies for analysing regimes that preserve electoral facades while reinforcing coercive power. The fusion of populism

1 Pieal JN, 'Fascism: Behind the Buzzword of the Day' *The Business Standard* (New Dehli, 1 November 2024) <<https://www.tbsnews.net/features/panorama/fascism-behind-buzzword-day-982076>> accessed 5 November 2025.

2 Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (Routledge 1991).

3 Paxton RO, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (Penguin 2005).

4 Umberto Eco, 'Ur-Fascism' (*The New York Review of Books*, 22 June 1995) <<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1995/06/22/ur-fascism/>> accessed 19 October 2025.

5 Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge University Press 2004).

6 Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them* (Random House 2018).

7 Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press 2019).

8 Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion* (Princeton University Press 2007).

9 Steven Levitsky and Lucan A Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (Cambridge University Press 2010).

10 Andreas Schedler, 'The Menu of Manipulation' (2002) 13(2) *Journal of Democracy* 36.

11 Lee Morgenbesser, *The Rise of Sophisticated Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge University Press 2020).

and authoritarianism has led to what Pappas¹² refers to autocratic populism,¹³ characterised by eroding checks and balances, charismatic leadership, undermining pluralism, maintaining initial electoral legitimacy, and state colonisation for patronage, blurring the normative boundaries between democracy and dictatorship. Bangladesh under Hasina occupied an uneasy position: officially civilian, electorally ritualised, yet fundamentally repressive.¹⁴

Utilising Euro-American fascism theories in the context of the global South necessitates a postcolonial analysis. Irfan Ahmad¹⁵ and Nusrat Chowdhury¹⁶ are two scholars who argue that introducing new categories may obscure the emotional, religious, and developmental dimensions of postcolonial populism. Finchelstein's¹⁷ genealogy of fascism's Latin-American afterlives and Traverso's¹⁸ examination of 'post-fascism' require contextual adaptation. This study extends earlier interventions, using Bangladesh as a context to reassess the analytical relevance of fascism.

This contribution empirically investigates the regime's three interconnected mechanisms:

1. Legitimation via civil-religious symbolism and the sacralisation of the Liberation War;¹⁹
2. Co-optation and repression through elite agreements and legalism,²⁰ and

12 Takis S Pappas, *Populism and Liberal Democracy: A Comparative and Theoretical Analysis* (Oxford University Press 2019).

13 A regime where populist governments consolidate power and shift away from liberal democracy toward autocracy.

14 Ali Riaz and Suborna Parvez, 'Anatomy of a Rigged Election in a Hybrid Regime: The Lessons from Bangladesh' (2021) 28(4) *Democratization* 801. Shahinoor Mostofa and D B Subedi, 'Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism in Bangladesh' (2020) 14(3) *Politics and Religion* 431.

15 Irfan Ahmad, *Religion as Critique: Islamic Critical Thinking from Mecca to the Marketplace* (University of North Carolina Press 2017).

16 Nusrat Chowdhury, *Paradoxes of the Popular: Crowd Politics in Bangladesh* (Stanford University Press 2019).

17 *Supra* note 10.

18 Enzo Traverso, *Post-Fascism: The Eternal Return of the Same* (Verso 2021).

19 Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (University of Chicago Press 1999). Robert N Bellah, 'Civil Religion in America' (1967) 96(1) *Daedalus* 1. Julian Kuttig and Bert Suykens, 'Mujib's Two Bodies: Memorial Populism in Bangladesh' in Berber Bevernage, Egid Mestdagh, Wilson Ramalho and Marie-Gabrielle Verbergt (eds), *Claiming the People's Past: Populist Politics of History in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge University Press 2024) 66–81 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009453615.005>> accessed 5 November 2025.

20 Milan W Svobik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge University Press 2012). Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright and Erica Frantz, *How Dictatorships Work: Power, Personalization, and Collapse* (Cambridge University Press 2018). Kim Lane Scheppelle, 'Autocratic Legalism' (2018) 85(2) *University of Chicago Law Review* 545.

3. Digital authoritarianism via surveillance and misinformation.²¹

By merging these aspects, the advances advance three discussions: Firstly, the theoretical evolution of fascism beyond its interwar European roots; Secondly, the structure of hybrid authoritarianism in postcolonial nations; and Finally, the moral and emotional reasons that kept late-stage autocracy going in Bangladesh between 2009 and 2024.

2 Theoretical Roots of Fascism

When Sheikh Hasina came to power a second time in 2009 after two years of military-backed caretaker rule, she found a political culture weary of coups and partisan violence. Her party, Awami League (AL), presented itself as the restorer of constitutional democracy and guardian of the Liberation War's secular ideals. In her early years, Hasina revived the war-crimes tribunals, expanded social-welfare programs, and enjoyed strong Western and Indian support.²² By 2011, however, the abolition of the caretaker government system, once the key guarantor of fair elections, marked the first decisive break in Bangladesh's post-1990 democratic consensus.

The elections of 2014 and 2024, both marred by opposition boycotts, intimidation, and digital surveillance, and the election of 2018, widely condemned as rigged, transformed the regime into what Levitsky and Way²³ describe as a competitive authoritarianism: formally electoral, substantively coercive. The AL's fusion of state and party, its control over media and courts, and its invocation of the 'spirit of 1971' created a civic mythology that no rival could challenge without being branded anti-independence. By the early 2020s, the government's Digital Security Act (and its successor, the Cyber Security Act) had criminalised dissent; human-rights organisations reported hundreds of arrests, disappearances, and custodial deaths.²⁴

²¹ Samantha Bradshaw and Philip N Howard, *The Global Disinformation Order: 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation* (University of Oxford Press 2019). Ronald J Deibert, *Reset: Reclaiming the Internet for Civil Society* (House of Anansi 2020). 'Bangladesh: Cyber Security Act Continues Digital Repression' (*Amnesty International*, 5 January 2024) <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/01/bangladesh-cybersecurity-act/>> accessed 19 October 2025.

²² Sachin Parashar, 'Delhi stands with Dhaka as it punishes war criminals' *Times of India* (New Delhi, 25 November 2015) <<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/delhi-stands-with-dhaka-as-it-punishes-war-criminals/articleshow/49915651.cms>> accessed 7 November 2025.

²³ *Supra* note 12.

²⁴ 'Two years since coming into force, Bangladesh's Digital Security Act continues to target human rights defenders and suppress free speech' (*Front Line Defenders*, 8 October 2020) <<https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/pt/node/6150>> accessed 7 November 2025.

Still, Hasina's authority rested not solely on repression but also on performance. GDP growth averaged over 6 %, ²⁵ infrastructure projects symbolised national pride, and international observers often viewed Bangladesh as a 'developmental success story'. This performance legitimacy, what Morgenbesser²⁶ calls sophisticated authoritarianism, allowed the AL to claim that its model of 'less democracy, more development'²⁷ was uniquely suited to South Asia's volatility.

The regime began to unravel in 2024 when high inflation, an acute balance of payment (BOP) crisis, rising food prices, youth unemployment, and frustration with police violence converged in a student-led protest movement. Weeks of demonstrations turned into a mass revolt after security forces opened fire on unarmed students. The army's refusal to back further repression fractured the elite compact; Hasina fled the country on August 5, 2024. From exile, she blamed the United States for engineering her downfall, insisting she was punished for defending national sovereignty; a narrative consistent with Paxton's notion of fascist victimhood and Stanley's epistemic inversion.

Recent studies on fascism have shifted from descriptive analogies to analytical morphology. Roger Griffin's *The Nature of Fascism*²⁸ characterises palingenetic ultranationalism – a myth of national revitalisation in reaction to perceived decline – as the ideological core of fascism. Stanley²⁹ enhances this by formulating a tripartite model that includes ideology, movement, and regime. Robert Paxton³⁰ views fascism as a process characterised by the mobilisation, seizure, and radicalisation of power. Michael Mann³¹ incorporates a sociological perspective by interpreting fascism as a consequence of violence perpetrated by paramilitary organisations and the resultant fear within the middle class. Eco's³² essay 'Ur-Fascism' distils recurring characteristics – cult of tradition, rejection of criticism, selective populism – that endure as diagnostic in comparative analysis.

25 Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Socio-economic Progress and Recent Macroeconomic Developments in Bangladesh* (Ministry of Finance, November 2022).

26 *Supra* note 14.

27 "Less Democracy, More Development": The Hasina Doctrine' (*The Quint*, 6 June 2016) <<https://www.thequint.com/news/world/less-democracy-more-development-the-hasina-doctrine>> accessed 6 November 2025.

28 *Supra* note 4.

29 Stanley G Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (University of Wisconsin Press 1995).

30 *Supra* note 6.

31 *Supra* note 8.

32 *Supra* note 7.

Gentile³³ redefines fascism as a political religion, elevating nationalism through ritual and myth. Conversely, Eatwell³⁴ and Griffin³⁵ support a cumulative fascist minimum, a flexible collection of ideological and performative traits. Finchelstein³⁶ and Traverso³⁷ assert that the lineage of fascism permeates into twenty-first-century populist authoritarianism, altering democratic institutions from within rather than dismantling them. Stanley³⁸ underscores its epistemic dimension: the manner in which it alters truth and transforms cruelty into civic virtue. This corpus provides a complete definitional framework that was missing from earlier studies of Bangladesh, where ‘fascism’ was used as a rhetorical shortcut instead of an analytical category. This article elucidates that fascism embodies not merely repression but a distinct morphology that amalgamates nationalism, mythic renewal, charismatic leadership, and moral mobilization, situated within the Griffin–Paxton–Payne lineage.

Building on Griffin’s core of palingenetic ultranationalism and Paxton’s processual view, we treat fascism here as a family of traits further illuminated by Gentile’s ‘political religion’, Eco’s recurring diagnostics, and Stanley’s account of epistemic inversion. Following Traverso and Finchelstein, we allow for contemporary post-/neo-fascist adaptations in which charismatic leadership, ritualised nationalism, and law-mediated repression advance through democratic institutions (e.g., autocratic legalism, digital coercion) rather than by abolishing them. This clarifies our usage throughout: we are not claiming a carbon copy of interwar regimes but tracing fascist morphology embedded within a hybrid authoritarian order.

3 Populism as an Ideology and Style

Populism studies link fascism and authoritarianism. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser³⁹ characterise populism as a ‘thin-centred ideology’ that contrasts a virtuous populace with a corrupt elite; Moffitt⁴⁰ underscores populism as a political style; Brubaker⁴¹

33 Supra note 11.

34 Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: History and Interpretation* (Routledge 2021).

35 Supra note 5.

36 Supra note 10.

37 Supra note 21.

38 Supra note 9.

39 Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press 2017).

40 Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford University Press 2016).

41 Rogers Brubaker, ‘Why Populism?’ (2017) 46(5) *Theory and Society* 357.

defines it as an 'appeal to the people as a nation'. These frameworks elucidate how Hasina's political party, Awami League (AL) employed 'the people' as an abstract moral construct while undermining pluralistic engagement. Her repeated assertion that 'the voice of the people must be heard'⁴² resonated with the populist rationale of authenticity while concealing elite consolidation.

Irfan Ahmad⁴³ argues that Euro-American populism theory neglects religious and postcolonial contexts, where faith, nationalism, and hopes for development constitute the essence of the 'people'. Nusrat Chowdhury's book, *Paradoxes of the Popular*,⁴⁴ demonstrates that Bangladeshi crowds are influenced by emotion and spectacle rather than ideology. These ideas help explain why the AL's populism was performative: it was a ritual of consent based on a mythical one-party formulation of the history of the Liberation War and Hasina's civil-religious aura as the 'Daughter of Democracy' (Awami League 2023).⁴⁵

4 Authoritarianism, Hybridity, and the Shape of Regimes

Since the 2000s, comparative constitutional studies have advanced the concept of hybrid regimes that combine democratic and authoritarian features. Levitsky and Way's 'Competitive Authoritarianism'⁴⁶ and Schedler's 'Menu of Manipulation'⁴⁷ discuss leaders who maintain the facade of democracy while exerting influence over the media, judiciary, and opposition. Morgenbesser⁴⁸ uses this idea to examine the 'sophisticated authoritarianism' prevalent in Southeast Asia. Riaz and Parvez⁴⁹ and

42 Sheikh Hasina, 'The Politics of Development – A Conversation with Sheikh Hasina' (*WhiteBoard Magazine*, 31 March 2024) <<https://whiteboardmagazine.com/4257/the-politics-of-development-a-conversation-with-sheikh-hasina/>> accessed 19 October 2025.

43 Irfan Ahmad, *Religion as Critique: Islamic Critical Thinking from Mecca to the Marketplace* (University of North Carolina Press 2017).

44 Nusrat Chowdhury, *Paradoxes of the Popular: Crowd Politics in Bangladesh* (Stanford University Press 2019).

45 'Is Bangladesh on a path to becoming a one-party state?' (Al Jazeera, 06 January 2024) <<https://www.aljazeera.com/program/inside-story/2024/1/6/is-bangladesh-on-a-path-to-becoming-a-one-party-state>> accessed 16 October 2025.

46 Supra note 12.

47 Supra note 13.

48 Supra note 14.

49 Ali Riaz and Suborna Parvez, 'Anatomy of a Rigged Election in a Hybrid Regime: The Lessons from Bangladesh' (2021) 28(4) *Democratization* 801.

Mostofa and Subedi⁵⁰ document the reduction of competition in Bangladesh attributed to legal repression, electoral fraud, and the co-optation of Islamist factions.

Svolik⁵¹ and Geddes et al.⁵² emphasise the durability of autocracies based on elite pacts and coercive agreements, which aptly characterise Hasina's coalition with bureaucratic, military, and business elites. Gerschewski⁵³ identifies three foundational elements of authoritarian stability – repression, co-optation, and legitimation – each manifest in the rule of Bangladesh. The dictatorship justified persecution via the Digital Security Act,⁵⁴ coopted with religious organisations like Hefazat-e-Islam,⁵⁵ and legitimised its power through developmental triumphalism.⁵⁶ The integration of fascism typology with authoritarian theory reveals a spectrum of concepts: competitive authoritarianism leads to autocratic populism, which culminates in fascist closure.

Following Levitsky and Way, 'competitive authoritarianism' denotes regimes where formal democratic institutions exist and elections are the principal route to office, yet incumbents so consistently violate the rules – through an uneven playing field, abuse of state resources, media capture, and judicial harassment – that contestation is fundamentally skewed; in contexts of low international linkage/leverage and strong ruling-party organization, such regimes are prone to endure and harden, facilitating a slide toward closure.

Finchelstein⁵⁷ outlines the transition from populist democracy to authoritarian exclusion. Pappas⁵⁸ refers to it as 'autocratic populism', denoting a charismatic leader governing on behalf of a unified populace in opposition to variety. Traverso⁵⁹ notes that contemporary 'post-fascism' advances through electoral processes rather

50 Shahinoor Mostofa and D B Subedi, 'Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism in Bangladesh' (2020) 14(3) *Politics and Religion* 431.

51 Milan W Svolic, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge University Press 2012).

52 Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright and Erica Frantz, *How Dictatorships Work: Power, Personalization, and Collapse* (Cambridge University Press 2018).

53 Johannes Gerschewski, 'The Three Pillars of Stability in Autocracies' (2013) 20(1) *Democratization* 13.

54 Ali Riaz, 'How Bangladesh's Digital Security Act Is Creating a Culture of Fear' (*Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 9 December 2021) <<https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/12/09/how-bangladesh-s-digital-security-act-is-creating-culture-of-fear-pub-85951>> accessed 19 October 2025.

55 "'Mother of Qawmi": PM Hasina Accorded Reception by Qawmi Madrasa Leaders' (*Dhaka Tribune*, 14 May 2018) <<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/education/2018/05/14/mother-of-qawmi-pm-hasina-accorded-reception-by-qawmi-madrasa-leaders>> accessed 19 October 2025.

56 Shahinoor Mostofa, 'Bangladesh: Turmoil and Transition in a Fragile Democracy' (*South Asia@LSE*, 26 February 2024) <<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2024/02/26/bangladesh-turmoil-and-transition-in-a-fragile-democracy/>> accessed 19 October 2025.

57 *Supra* note 10.

58 *Supra* note 15.

59 *Supra* note 21.

than coups. Bangladesh under Hasina exemplifies this style of procedure. The elections of 2014 and 2018 were ostensibly democratic yet fundamentally coercive.⁶⁰ After the 2006–08 crisis and a military-backed caretaker interregnum, Bangladesh held a widely regarded free and competitive election on 29 December 2008. The Awami League's 'Grand Alliance' won a landslide (≈48–49 % of votes; 230/300 seats),⁶¹ returning Sheikh Hasina to the premiership in January 2009. Independent observers (ANFREL) and IFES/ElectionGuide data treated the contest as high-turnout and credibly administered.⁶²

The absence of marked autocratization during Hasina's first premiership (1996–2001) reflects the guardrails of the nonparty caretaker system introduced by the Thirteenth Amendment (1996).⁶³ incumbents vacated office before elections, the interim administration was constitutionally time-bound, and opposition parties possessed meaningful prospects of alternation.⁶⁴ Subsequent jurisprudence and commentary describe how the caretaker model structured competition in the 1991, 1996, and 2001 elections, before its fate was sealed by the Supreme Court's 2011 judgment on the Thirteenth Amendment⁶⁵ and Parliament's Fifteenth Amendment later that year.⁶⁶

The consolidation of Hasina's power after 2009 unfolded through institutional engineering and the progressive skewing of competition. Following the Appellate Division's 2011 ruling that the caretaker provision was unconstitutional (while permitting two more caretaker-run elections), the government instead abolished the system outright via the Fifteenth Amendment, decisively tilting the playing field. The opposition's boycott yielded a hollow 5 January 2014 poll that *Journal of Democracy* aptly labelled a 'failed election'.⁶⁷ Subsequent electoral cycles combined pre-election

60 Saif Khalid and Saifur Sarker, 'Bangladesh Polls Make Mockery of Democracy: Opposition' (*Al Jazeera*, 31 December 2018) <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/31/bangladesh-election-makes-mockery-of-democracy-bnps-alamgir>> accessed 19 October 2025. Ali Riaz and Suborna Parvez, 'Anatomy of a Rigged Election in a Hybrid Regime: The Lessons from Bangladesh' (2021) 28(4) *Democratization* 801.

61 IFES/Election Guide, 'Bangladesh: 2008 General Election.' (ElectionGuide.org) <<https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/1516/>> accessed 5 November 2025.

62 ANFREL, Bangladesh Ninth National Parliament Election 2008: Observation Report, 2009.

63 Bangladesh Supreme Court (Appellate Division), Judgment on the Thirteenth Amendment ('13th Amendment Case') 2011.

64 Banglapedia, 'Caretaker Government' (n.d.) <https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Caretaker_Government> accessed 1 November 2025.

65 'Caretaker system abolished' *The Daily Star* (Bangladesh, 1 July 2011) <<https://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-192303>> accessed 7 November 2025.

66 M. E. Bari, 'The Incorporation (and Repeal) of the Non-Party Caretaker Government' (2018) SSRN working paper.

67 Ali Riaz, 'Bangladesh's Failed Election', (2014) 25(2) *Journal of Democracy*.

repression and media capture with election-day irregularities; Human Rights Watch documented systematic intimidation around the December 2018 vote,⁶⁸ and a scholarly audit by Riaz and Parvez⁶⁹ anatomised the mechanics of manipulation in a hybrid regime. The 7 January 2024 election⁷⁰ – again boycotted by the main opposition – delivered a further sweeping victory amid low turnout and international criticism.⁷¹

Parallel to institutional change, the coercive and legal apparatus was recalibrated to entrench incumbency. The Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) became emblematic of securitized governance⁷² – drawing U.S. Global Magnitsky sanctions in December 2021 – while speech-crime statutes evolved from the ICT Act to the 2018 Digital Security Act and, in 2023/24, the Cyber Security Act, which Amnesty describes as ‘repackaging’ repression.⁷³ Freedom House’s time-series captures the tightening of political rights and civil liberties over the period.⁷⁴

Crucially, power was consolidated through a ruling settlement among the party, bureaucracy, security services, and business. Political-settlements analysis (Khan)⁷⁵

68 Human Rights Watch, ‘Creating Panic’ <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/bangladesh1218_web.pdf> accessed 17 November 2025 and related 2018 election-period reports.

69 Ali Riaz and Saimum Parvez, ‘Anatomy of a Rigged Election in a Hybrid Regime: Lessons from Bangladesh’, (2021) 28(4) *Democratization*.

70 ‘Statement on termination of its mission in Bangladesh’ (*Asian Network for Free Elections*, 23 December 2018) <<https://anfre.org/anfrel-statement-on-the-termination-of-its-mission-in-bangladesh/>> accessed 17 November 2025.

71 Julhas Alsam, ‘The US and UK say Bangladesh’s elections extending Hasina’s rule were not credible’ *AP News* (New York, 8 January 2024) <<https://apnews.com/article/sheikh-hasina-bangladesh-election-boycott-d6322274909fd53e92640a4ebc9d0c2b>> accessed 17 November 2025. Hannah Ellis-Petersen, ‘Hasina wins fifth term as Bangladesh PM after opposition boycotts vote’ *The Guardian*, (Manchester, 7 January 2024) <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/jan/07/bangladeshs-prime-minister-sheikh-hasina-wins-fifth-term>> accessed 17 November 2025.

72 ‘Sanctions on perpetrators of serious human-rights abuse in Bangladesh (RAB)’, (*U.S. Department of the Treasury*, 10 December 2021) <<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0526>> accessed 17 November 2025. Ali Riaz, ‘US sanctions on Bangladesh’s RAB: what happened, what’s next?’, (*Atlantic Council*, 16 December 2021) <<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/southasiasource/us-sanctions-on-bangladeshs-rab-what-happened-whats-next/>> accessed 17 November 2025.

73 Amnesty International, ‘Repackaging Repression: The Cyber Security Act and the Continuing Lawfare against Dissent in Bangladesh’ <https://cdn.amnesty.at/media/12101/amnesty-report_repackaging-repression_the-cyber-security-act-and-the-continuing-lawfare-against-dissent_bangladesch_august-2024.pdf> accessed 17 November 2025.

74 ‘Freedom in the World 2024: Bangladesh’ (*Freedom House*) <<https://freedomhouse.org/country/bangladesh/freedom-world/2024>> accessed 17 November 2025; and ‘Freedom in the World 2025: Bangladesh’ (*Freedom House*) <<https://freedomhouse.org/country/bangladesh/freedom-world/2025>> accessed 17 November 2025.

75 Mushtaq H. Khan, ‘Political Settlements and the Governance of Growth-Enhancing Institutions’ (2013) DIIS Working Paper 01/2013.

and organizational studies (CPD–CMI)⁷⁶ illuminate how patronage, local machine-building, and party–state fusion underwrote regime durability, a diagnosis echoed by the Bertelsmann Transformation Index⁷⁷ and International Crisis Group.⁷⁸

Religious accommodation and selective co-optation widened the governing coalition's social base. Despite its secular branding, the government alternated between repression and accommodation of Islamist actors – most visibly Hefazat-e-Islam⁷⁹ – including changes to school textbooks⁸⁰ and regulatory concessions after 2013.⁸¹ Academic and policy analyses detail how such moves advanced regime legitimation while constraining pluralism.⁸² Finally, legitimation rested on a powerful development narrative – amplified by marquee infrastructure such as the Padma Bridge⁸³ and cross-border connectivity projects with India.⁸⁴ Comparative governance assessments note how delivery-driven claims of performance were mobilised to justify shrinking contestation.⁸⁵

By mid-2024, prolonged autocratization met its limit: weeks of nationwide, student-led mobilisation against quota policies and repression culminated in Hasina's departure from office⁸⁶ and the installation of a caretaker administration under

76 Rounaq Jahan, 'Political Parties in Bangladesh' (2014) CPD–CMI Working Paper 8/2014.

77 'BTI 2024: Bangladesh Country Report' (*Bertelsmann Stiftung* 2024) <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2105807/country_report_2024_BGD.pdf> accessed 17 November 2025.

78 'Beyond the Election: Overcoming Bangladesh's Political Deadlock' (*International Crisis Group*, 4 January 2024) <<https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/bangladesh/336-beyond-election-overcoming-bangladeshs-political-deadlock>> accessed 17 November 2025.

79 Smruti S. Pattanaik, 'Hefazat-e-Islami and the Politics of Islamism in Bangladesh' (2020) MP-IDSA Issue Brief <<https://www.idsa.in/system/files/issuebrief/ib-hefazat-e-islami-and-the-politics-of-islamism.pdf>>.

80 Prapti Rahman, 'Bangladesh: Textbook Changes Violate Secular Rules, Critics Charge' (*Benar News*, 17 February 2017) <<https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/bengali/textbook-changes-02172017170637.html>> accessed 23 October 2025.

81 Jasmin Lorch, 'Islamization by Secular Ruling Parties: The Case of Bangladesh', (2019) 12(2) *Politics & Religion*.

82 'The State of Conflict and Violence in Asia (Bangladesh chapter)' (*The Asian Foundation*, 2021) <https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/The_State_of_Conflict_and_Violence_in_Asia-12.29.17.pdf>.

83 *Supra* note 78.

84 'Bangladesh launches new India-assisted rail projects and thermal power unit amid opposition protests' *Associated Press* (New York, 1 November 2023) <<https://apnews.com/article/fc7013640ed734a6b63809e3cd38ef3e>> accessed 1 November 2025.

85 Saif Khalid and Saqib Sarker, 'Ten years of Sheikh Hasina: "Development minus democracy"' (*Aljazeera*, 28 December 2018) <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/28/ten-years-of-sheikh-hasina-development-minus-democracy>>.

86 Ruman Paul and Sudipto Ganguly, 'Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina resigns and flees country as protesters storm palace' (*Reuters*, 5 August 2024) <<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/bangladesh-protesters-call-march-dhaka-defiance-curfew-2024-08-05/>> accessed 12 October 2025.

Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus.⁸⁷ Subsequent UN reporting⁸⁸ estimated exceptionally high casualties from the crackdown,⁸⁹ and democracy metrics registered a modest opening under the interim authorities.⁹⁰ The regime's fusion of nationalism, developmentalism, and repression produced a 'civilian Leviathan'. Hasina's governance in Bangladesh combined populist mobilisation with technocratic oversight, akin to Erdoğan's Turkey⁹¹ and Modi's India.⁹² This exemplifies fascist morphology within electoral authoritarianism in South Asia.

The 'affective turn' in political theory helps us understand the emotional base of fascism. Gentile⁹³ and Mosse⁹⁴ elucidate the sacralisation of politics; Wodak⁹⁵ and Stanley⁹⁶ examine affective mobilisation via fear and resentment. Chowdhury⁹⁷ illustrates the indistinct boundary between political emotion and coercion in Bangladeshi protests and state rituals. Hasina's personality cult – Mother of Humanity, Daughter of Democracy – and the ritual veneration of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman⁹⁸ are examples of fascism's performative nationalism and sacralisation of politics through rituals. The AL created emotional legitimacy through public displays, digital propaganda, and state-sponsored festivals, while making dissent a crime.⁹⁹ This kind of

87 Reuters, 'Bangladesh Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus takes charge of caretaker government' (*Reuters*, 8 August 2024).

88 'Bangladesh: UN report finds brutal, systematic repression of protests, calls for justice for serious rights violations' (*OHCHR*, 12 February 2025) <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/02/bangladesh-un-report-finds-brutal-systematic-repression-protests-calls>> accessed 17 November 2025.

89 'UN rights office estimates up to 1,400 killed in crackdown on protests in Bangladesh' *Associated Press* (New York, 12 February 2025) <<https://apnews.com/article/951dc40f60d6a798eb5af5ed1d11bbad>> accessed 23 October 2025.

90 'Freedom in the World 2025: Bangladesh' (Freedom House) <<https://freedomhouse.org/country/bangladesh/freedom-world/2025>> accessed 17 November 2025.

91 Berk Esen and Şebnem Gümüşcü, 'Rising Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey' (2016) 37(9) *Third World Quarterly* 1,581.

92 Christophe Jaffrelot, *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy* (Princeton University Press 2021).

93 Supra note 11.

94 George L Mosse, *The Holy Pretence: A Study in Christianity and Reason of State from William Perkins to John Winthrop* (Oxford University Press 1996).

95 Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (Sage 2015).

96 Supra note 9.

97 Nusrat Chowdhury, *Paradoxes of the Popular: Crowd Politics in Bangladesh* (Stanford University Press 2019).

98 'Ode to the Father: Bangladesh's Political Personality Cult' (*France 24*, 4 January 2024) <<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20240104-ode-to-the-father-bangladesh-s-political-personality-cult>> accessed 19 October 2025.

99 Kamal Ahmed, 'DSA Took Away Mushtaq' *The Daily Star* (Bangladesh, 26 February 2022) <<https://www.thedailystar.net/views/opinion/news/dsa-took-away-mushtaq-2970611>> accessed 19 October 2025.

emotional governance connects Bangladesh to Gentile's idea of 'political religion' and Wedeen's¹⁰⁰ study of symbolic domination in Syria.

Classical fascism relied on propaganda and mass assemblies; Hasina's administration relied on algorithms. Studies on digital authoritarianism¹⁰¹ illustrate how governments utilize legislation and data to suppress opposition. Bangladesh's Digital Security Act (2018) and its 2023 successor, the Cyber Security Act, created a 'pervasive climate of fear.'¹⁰² 'Hundreds of journalists and academics faced legal proceedings.'¹⁰³ Scheppele¹⁰⁴ calls this mix of spying, censorship, and phony legality 'autocratic legalism'. The result is a digital infrastructure of compliance, which is a twenty-first-century version of fascism's all-encompassing goal.

5 Postcolonial Repositioning of Fascism

Research on fascism predominantly concentrates on Europe.¹⁰⁵ Finchelstein¹⁰⁶ and Traverso¹⁰⁷ urge researchers to examine its migration to the global South. Ahmad¹⁰⁸ asserts that South Asian populisms are associated with religious morals absent in Europe. The establishment of Islam as the state religion and the sanctification of the

100 Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (University of Chicago Press 1999).

101 Samantha Bradshaw and Philip N Howard, *The Global Disinformation Order: 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation* (University of Oxford Press 2019). Ronald J Deibert, *Reset: Reclaiming the Internet for Civil Society* (House of Anansi 2020). Kim Lane Scheppele, 'Autocratic Legalism' (2018) 85(2) University of Chicago Law Review 545.

102 'Bangladesh: Cyber Security Act Continues Digital Repression' (*Amnesty International*, 5 January 2024) <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/01/bangladesh-cybersecurity-act/>> accessed 19 October 2025.

103 Ali Riaz, 'How Bangladesh's Digital Security Act Is Creating a Culture of Fear' (*Carnegie Endowment of International Peace*, 9 December 2021) <<https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/12/09/how-bangladesh-s-digital-security-act-is-creating-culture-of-fear-pub-85951>> accessed 19 October 2025.

104 Kim Lane Scheppele, 'Autocratic Legalism' (2018) 85(2) University of Chicago Law Review 545.

105 Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton University Press 1996). Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (University of California Press 2020).

106 *Supra* note 10.

107 *Supra* note 21.

108 Irfan Ahmad, *Religion as Critique: Islamic Critical Thinking from Mecca to the Marketplace* (University of North Carolina Press 2017).

Liberation War in Bangladesh¹⁰⁹ produce a synthesis of civic and religious nationalism. Hasina's selective appeasement of Islamist actors¹¹⁰ exemplifies what Chatterjee¹¹¹ refers to political society: governance through patronage rather than ideology. Incorporating fascism into this postcolonial ontology circumvents 'conceptual imperialism' and illustrates how Bangladesh has contributed to the examination of comparative regime theory.

Lastly, fascism is not just a political and legal regime; it is also a moral system. Arendt¹¹² saw it as a break in the moral order, while Stanley¹¹³ sees it as epistemic corruption at its core. Under Hasina, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings¹¹⁴ which the government justifies by using the term 'crossfire,' and the suppression of truth¹¹⁵ exemplify what Stanley describes as the inversion of morality: loyalty supplants justice, and obedience supersedes truth. Unlike the barracks-based authoritarianism of Ziaur Rahman and H. M. Ershad – imposed by coups, martial-law proclamations, and plebiscitary legitimation (e.g., the 1977 and 1985 referendums) with overt military command and Islamizing constitutional change (the 1988 Eighth Amendment) – Hasina's post-2009 project was a civilian, legalistic autocratization that preserved electoral facades while disabling competition.¹¹⁶ Its hinge was constitutional– institutional engineering, above all, the 2011 Fifteenth Amendment's abolition of the non-party caretaker system, which converted elections from

109 SM Mostofa, 'Bangladesh's identity crisis: To be or not to be secular' (*The Diplomat*, 6 December 2021) <<https://thediplomat.com/2021/12/bangladeshs-identity-crisis-to-be-or-not-to-be-secular/>> accessed 19 October 2025.

110 Abrar M, 'Opportunism catching up with Bangladesh's Awami League' (*East Asia Forum*, 7 December 2023), <<https://eastasiaforum.org/2021/06/26/opportunism-catching-up-with-bangladeshs-awami-league/>> accessed 16 October 2025.

111 Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (Columbia University Press 2011).

112 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Harcourt Brace 1951).

113 *Supra* note 9.

114 Habib AZM, 'Extrajudicial Killing in Bangladesh: A Murder of Human Rights'(2015) 8(2) OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development <<http://www.ssrn.com/link/OIDA-Intl-Journal-Sustainable-Dev.html>> accessed 19 November 2025.

115 Faisal Mahmud, "'Wait Never Ends" for Families of the Forcibly Disappeared in Bangladesh'(Al Jazeera, 30 August 2023) <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/30/wait-never-ends-for-families-of-the-forcibly-disappeared-in-bangladesh>> accessed 19 October 2025.

116 Kim Lane Scheppele, 'Autocratic Legalism' (2018) 85(2) University of Chicago Law Review 545–83. Md Jahid Hossain Bhuiyan, 'The Contested Concept of Secularism and Bangladesh (2021) 69(3) American Journal of Comparative Law 399–448. Md Ziaul Haque Sheikh and Zahid Shahab Ahmed, 'Military, Authoritarianism and Islam: A Comparative Analysis of Bangladesh and Pakistan' (2020) 13(2) Politics & Religion 333–360.

uncertain contests into managed plebiscites.¹¹⁷ Coercion shifted from classic martial-law control to law-mediated repression and securitised policing – most visibly the use of ICT/DSA/CSA and the deployment of RAB – embedding fear through prosecutions, surveillance, and selective violence while maintaining civilian rule.¹¹⁸ To put simply: the earlier dictatorships centralised power through military rule by decree and overt constitutional Islamization, whereas Hasina's regime centralised power through autocratic legalism, party–state fusion, and routinised but deniable coercion under the cover of regular elections.¹¹⁹ It created a political chimera, a mix of repression, nationalism, and developmental triumphalism that kept the electoral ritual going while turning politics into a sacred order. Putting Hasina's Bangladesh in this comparative morphology not only clears up the confusion about what 'fascism' means in public discourse, but it also adds to the vocabulary we use to talk about postcolonial autocracies.

6 'A Different "Democracy"': From Competitive Procedures to a Party-State

Instead of seeing 'democracy' as a fixed term, we use a procedural-liberal standard that is common in the comparative literature: open contestation, uncertainty of outcomes, protection of civil liberties, and institutional checks on the executive.¹²⁰ Bangladesh met some of these standards from time to time, especially during the caretaker election system from 1990 to 2008. However, from 2009 to 2024, the country fell into hybrid/competitive authoritarianism, which means that elections were held without real competition and horizontal accountability was systematically hollowed out.¹²¹

117 'Caretaker system abolished' *The Daily Star* (Bangladesh, 1 July 2011) <<https://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-192303>> accessed 7 November 2025.

118 Amnesty International, 'Repackaging Repression: The Cyber Security Act and the Continuing Lawfare against Dissent in Bangladesh' <https://cdn.amnesty.at/media/12101/amnesty-report_repackaging-repression_the-cyber-security-act-and-the-continuing-lawfare-against-dissent_bangladesch_august-2024.pdf> accessed 17 November 2025. 'Sanctions on perpetrators of serious human-rights abuse in Bangladesh (RAB)', (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 10 December 2021) <<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0526>> accessed 17 November 2025.

119 Supra note 114.

120 Supra note 12, 13.

121 Ali Riaz and Suborna Parvez, 'Anatomy of a Rigged Election in a Hybrid Regime: The Lessons from Bangladesh' (2021) 28(4) *Democratization* 801. Shahinoor Mostofa and D B Subedi, 'Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism in Bangladesh' (2020) 14(3) *Politics and Religion* 431. Lee

Since 1991, Hasina has been involved in parliamentary politics, and the character of the regime has changed over time. After the 2008 landslide, the AL government got rid of the caretaker system, which is a special unelected government that facilitates elections and is supposed to stay only a short while in power until elections.¹²² Then, through legal repression (DSA/CSA), electoral manipulation (2014 boycott; 2018 irregularities), and co-opting bureaucratic and security elites, it gradually concentrated power. These are classic moves on Schedler's 'menu of manipulation'.¹²³

The Awami League (AL) called Hasina the 'Daughter of Democracy'¹²⁴ and changed the meaning of democracy to mean civilian rule and regular elections, even if they weren't competitive, because they were afraid of military dictatorship and 'anti-independence' groups.¹²⁵ This was more of a way to draw lines than a liberal claim: 'democratic' meant 'in line with the spirit of the Liberation War'. That language change, combined with security labels like 'terrorism', 'razakar', and 'anti-independence', kept the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)/Jamaat-e Islami (JI) out of the legitimate polity. This is in line with what we know about how incumbents recode rule-of-law erosion as security.¹²⁶ But on the other hand, the BNP was not more open either. The analytical point is not AL exceptionalism but AL intensification: practices that were common in the party system were made bigger and more routine under Hasina, leading to a party-state¹²⁷ that blurred the lines between party, government, and coercive apparatus much more than its competitors.

The AL's legitimacy came from making the Liberation War sacred and from Mujibur Rahman's leadership. In *Masks of Authoritarianism*,¹²⁸ Ruud writes that Mujib became the 'eternal sovereign', a civil-religious figure who held the national myth together. It was against the law to disparage Mujib or the official reading

Morgenbesser, *The Rise of Sophisticated Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge University Press 2020).

122 'Bangladesh Ends Caretaker Government Arrangement' (*BBC News*, 30 June 2011) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-13973576>> accessed 19 October 2025.

123 Supra note 13. Saif Khalid and Saifur Sarker, 'Bangladesh Polls Make Mockery of Democracy: Opposition' (*Al Jazeera*, 31 December 2018) <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/31/bangladesh-election-makes-mockery-of-democracy-bnps-alamgir>> accessed 19 October 2025.

124 'Sheikh Hasina: Daughter of Democracy and Herald of Change' (*Bangladesh Awami League*, 8 September 2023) <<https://albd.org/articles/news/31112>> accessed 19 October 2025.

125 'Quader: BNP Is main barrier to democracy, progress' (*Dhaka Tribune*, 27 March 2024) <<https://www.dhakatribune.com/politics/2022/04/28/quader-bnp-is-main-barrier-to-democracy-progress>> accessed 19 October 2025.

126 Supra note 14. Christian von Soest and Julia Grauvogel, 'How Do Authoritarian Regimes Legitimise Themselves?' (2017) 43(3) *Review of International Studies* 1.

127 Bert Suykens, 'The Bangladesh party-state' (2017) 49(4) *Critical Asian Studies* 542.

128 Arild Engelsen Ruud, *Masks of Authoritarianism: Leadership, Power, and Hegemony in Bangladesh* (Routledge 2022).

of 1971 after the DSA/CSA.¹²⁹ This provided the tale with more sacred protection.¹³⁰ This corresponds with Kuttig and Suykens¹³¹ notion of 'memorial populism', which asserts that history is employed to define the 'real people' and to suppress dissent in contemporary society.¹³²

7 Populism: a Thin-Centred Ideology, an Affective Style, and a Memorial Frame

We agree with Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's characterization of populism as a thin-centred ideology that juxtaposes a morally virtuous populace against a corrupt elite, and which can be associated with other ideologies such as nationalism, religion, and developmentalism. We also use Moffitt's idea of 'populism as style' (acting out of crisis and against elitism) and Brubaker's idea of the link between nation and people. This keeps us from looking for 'pure populism' when it's not there. Before 2009, Hasina often used 'the people' to speak out against the elite's control of the state. For example, in a WhiteBoard interview on March 31 2024, she mentioned 'voices not being heard', but the AL itself became the elite because it was the ruling party, and the people became real patriots who backed the state's memory regime. This is where memorial populism comes in: the people are those who believe the official story from 1971, and the critics are 'enemies of the Liberation War'.¹³³ Chowdhury¹³⁴ illustrates how effective spectacle, such as rallies and memorials, perpetuates this construction beyond mere programmatic ideology.

¹²⁹ Digital Security Act 2018 (Bangladesh) s 21.

¹³⁰ 'Ode to the Father: Bangladesh's Political Personality Cult' (*France24*, 4 January 2024) <<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20240104-ode-to-the-father-bangladesh-s-political-personality-cult>> accessed 19 October 2025. Arafatul M Shatil, 'What Lies Ahead for Bangladesh' (*The Diplomat*, 28 December 2023) <<https://thediplomat.com/2023/12/what-lies-ahead-for-bangladesh/>> accessed 19 October 2025.

¹³¹ Julian Kuttig and Bert Suykens, 'Memorial Populism and the Politics of the Liberation War in Bangladesh' (2024) 47(1) *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 45.

¹³² *Supra* note 4. Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (University of Chicago Press 1999).

¹³³ 'Enemies of People Taint Country's Image: PM' (*New Age*, 25 September 2021) <<https://www.newagebd.net/article/150086>> accessed 19 October 2025. 'BNP's Politics Always Goes Against Spirit of Bangladesh: Quader' (*Prothom Alo*, 28 March 2023) <<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/politics/548bjj3kku>> accessed 19 October 2025.

¹³⁴ Nusrat Chowdhury, *Paradoxes of the Popular: Crowd Politics in Bangladesh* (Stanford University Press 2019).

BNP never forgot what Mujib did, but it changed the way people thought about 1971. The war crimes tribunals mostly went after JI leaders.¹³⁵ Even though there were objections to the way the trials were run, the crimes that were committed are well-documented.¹³⁶ So, the AL's trauma politics and how it uses them must be seen as both memory work and a way to gain power. In this case, nationalism gave the main idea (Bengali/Bangladeshi fusion), and populism gave the moral grammar (pure people vs. traitorous elite/'anti-independence' foes). Nationalism gave content, and populism gave conflict and crisis performance.¹³⁷

That AL relied less on votes after 2014 does not mean that populism is not real; it just means that populism has changed from getting people to participate to getting people to justify their actions.¹³⁸ It exists alongside authoritarian legalism and developmental performance legitimization.¹³⁹ BNP's politics has also been violent and exclusionary, especially from 2001 to 2006. The difference is in the degree and institutionalisation: under Hasina, the party-state combined security, the judiciary, and the media to make exclusion normal, which made the system less competitive.¹⁴⁰

8 Authoritarianism: Using Force, Co-opting, and Making Things Seem Legitimate on a Large Scale

Things that keep things stable. Bangladesh under Hasina fits Gerschewski's three-part model:

135 After Bangladesh's independence, political narratives around 1971 shifted over time. The BNP, founded by Ziaur Rahman, often emphasized a more nationalist, army-centered account of the Liberation War, contrasting with the Awami League's Mujib-centric narrative. This reframing influenced how later generations understood the conflict and its leaders. When the Awami League revived the International Crimes Tribunal from 2010 onward, most prosecutions targeted senior Jamaat-e-Islami figures accused of collaborating with the Pakistani army during the war, reinforcing long-standing allegations against JI's wartime role.

136 'Bangladesh War Crimes Trial: Key Accused' (*BBC News*, 4 September 2016) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-20970123>> accessed 19 October 2025.

137 Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford University Press 2016). Rogers Brubaker, 'Why Populism?' (2017) 46(5) *Theory and Society* 357.

138 *Supra* note 10.

139 Johannes Gerschewski, 'The Three Pillars of Stability in Autocracies' (2013) 20(1) *Democratization* 13. Christian von Soest and Julia Grauvogel, 'How Do Authoritarian Regimes Legitimise Themselves?' (2017) 43(3) *Review of International Studies* 1.

140 *Supra* note 130.

Firstly, the idea of **'Repression'**, which was embedded by the DSA (2018) and CSA (2023), made it illegal to disagree, creating a 'climate of fear'. Charges and arrests were made against journalists, academics, and students.¹⁴¹ Mushtaq Ahmed's death in custody¹⁴² and Shahidul Alam's arrest¹⁴³ are two well-known cases.

Secondly, the government also relied on **'Co-optation'** as the systematic alignment between the cadre and the bureaucracy and deals between elites and business/security actors solidified incumbency.¹⁴⁴ At important times, both the left-leaning Shahbag Movement¹⁴⁵ and the right-wing Hefazat-e-Islam were appeased as the regime saw fit, showing that people were willing to make deals across the ideological spectrum.¹⁴⁶

Thirdly, the **'Legitimacy of the government'** comes from performance (growth, infrastructure), identity (the Liberation War, the Mujib cult), and procedures (regular but uncompetitive elections, constitutional amendments).¹⁴⁷ The phrase 'less democracy, more development' summed up the deal.¹⁴⁸

The way of ruling stayed civilian-electoral, but the content was modelled akin to Scheppele's 'autocratic legalism': using the law to punish dissent while keeping up the appearances of institutions. Bangladesh became part of the 'global disinformation order',¹⁴⁹ online, which is what Deibert says¹⁵⁰ happens when platforms and states work together. This is the new infrastructure that classical fascism did not have. By the end of the 2010s, the party-state lens¹⁵¹ best showed how the AL and the administrative-coercive core came together. The 2014 boycott and the 2018

141 Supra note 57.

142 Supra note 102.

143 Qumr Ahmed, 'Why did Bangladesh arrest Shahidul Alam?' (*Al Jazeera*, 9 August 2018) <<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2018/8/9/why-did-bangladesh-arrest-shahidul-alam>> accessed 16 October 2025.

144 Supra note 53, 54.

145 Anupam D Roy, *Not All Springs End Winter: Political Economy of Mass Youth Movements in Bangladesh Before, During and Since Shahbag* (Adarsha 2020).

146 "'Mother of Qawmi": PM Hasina Accorded Reception by Qawmi Madrasa Leaders' (*Dhaka Tribune*, 14 May 2018) <<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/education/2018/05/14/mother-of-qawmi-pm-hasina-accorded-reception-by-qawmi-madrasa-leaders>> accessed 19 October 2025.

147 Christian von Soest and Julia Grauvogel, 'How Do Authoritarian Regimes Legitimise Themselves?' (2017) 43(3) *Review of International Studies* 1. Marcus Tannenberg, Michael Wahman, Jan Teorell and Staffan I Lindberg, 'Dealing with the Autocratic Menu of Manipulation: A Framework for Conceptualizing Autocratic Politics' (2021) 28(1) *Democratization* 1.

148 Shafi M Mostofa, 'Bangladesh: Turmoil and transition in a fragile democracy' (*South Asia@LSE*, 26 February 2024) <<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2024/02/26/bangladesh-turmoil-and-transition-in-a-fragile-democracy/>> accessed 19 October 2025.

149 Samantha Bradshaw and Philip N Howard, *The Global Disinformation Order: 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation* (University of Oxford 2019).

150 Ronald J Deibert, *Reset: Reclaiming the Internet for Civil Society* (House of Anansi 2020).

151 Supra note 130.

irregularities made the outcome certain. The system had developed mature hybrid traits by 2024, similar to Turkey's competitive authoritarian turn.¹⁵² legalised repression, polarised media, and charismatic personalisation.

9 Authoritarian Consolidation Through the Judiciary

The 'judicialization of politics'¹⁵³ is not uncommon in Bangladesh, and it can be traced back to the political environment of unstable constitutionalism in early Pakistan, when the courts were frequently relied on for answers to political crises.¹⁵⁴ According to Tate and Vallinder, judicialization of politics refers generally to 'the process by which courts and judges come to make or increasingly to dominate the making of public policies that had previously been made (or, it is widely believed, ought to be made) by other governmental agencies, especially legislatures and executives'.¹⁵⁵ During the regime, what Awami League has done is the reverse i.e. the 'politicisation of judiciary'. As the Awami League regime had become increasingly authoritarian after 'landslide victories' (often through vote rigging and due to the boycott of the opposition in the elections) in general elections in 2014 and 2018, it seems more likely that the politicisation (and possibly the subjugation) of the judiciary has played a dominant role all these years.¹⁵⁶ The Awami League government could use the judiciary throughout their ruling period to benefit their political motive, as the law ministry was in charge of the power of recruitment, transfers and administrative actions against lower court judges.¹⁵⁷ As a result, the judges' decisions tended to favour the ruling political party.

152 Berk Esen and Şebnem Gümüşcü, 'Rising Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey' (2016) 37(9) *Third World Quarterly* 1,581.

153 Ran Hirschl, 'The New Constitution and the Judicialization of Pure Politics Worldwide' (2006) 75(2) *Fordham Law Review* 721.

154 Ridwanul Hoque, 'The Judicialization of Politics in Bangladesh: Pragmatism, Legitimacy, and Consequences' in Mark Tushnet and Madhav Khosla (eds), *Unstable Constitutionalism: Law and Politics in South Asia* (Cambridge University Press 2015) 261–290.

155 C N Tate and Torbjörn Vallinder (eds), *The Global Expansion of Judicial Power* (New York University Press 1995) 28.

156 Kazuki Minato (ed), *Politics and Independence of the Judiciary in Bangladesh* (IDE Research Bulletin, March 2019).

157 'Political Conflict, Extremism and Criminal Justice in Bangladesh: Asia Report No 277' (*International Crisis Group*, 11 April 2016) <<https://bangladesh.justiceaudit.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICG-Report-on-Political-Conflict-Extremism-and-Criminal-Justice-in-Bangladesh>> accessed on 05 November 2025.

From appointing judges from cohorts of lawyers with a background in partisan politics to humiliating former Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha because he refused the personal request of Hasina in July 2017 to uphold a law, which sought to give parliament the power to sack judges,¹⁵⁸ Hasina has used a deft combination of patronage and brute force to ensure the judiciary comes down to her side every time.¹⁵⁹ Some experts have expressed concern that judges were frequently appointed based on political loyalty and faced political pressure under threat of removal to align with the ruling party.¹⁶⁰ Several judges had been transferred or threatened with administrative action by law ministry officials for any perceived signs of leniency toward opposition members.¹⁶¹ The Crisis Group also observes that judges have been transferred or threatened with administrative action for granting bail to opposition activists in politically sensitive cases.¹⁶² It has been alleged that the AL government replaced the entire group of public prosecutors with members or genuine supporters of the party and has made politically motivated appointments to the Office of the Attorney General as well.¹⁶³

The encroachment of the ruling party into judicial decisions started to be highly visible in cases that involved political opposition figures. For example, in 2018, a national election year, Khaleda Zia, head of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), was convicted on corruption charges.¹⁶⁴ Given that charges against Zia had existed for a very long time, many considered the sudden and speedy disposition of this case to be indicative of a political motive.¹⁶⁵ Referring to this, the chief opposition party

158 David Bergman, 'Bangladesh: Ex-chief justice alleges he was "forced" to resign' (*Al Jazeera*, 28 September 2018) <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/9/28/bangladesh-ex-chief-justice-alleges-he-was-forced-to-resign>> accessed 6 November 2025.

159 Ekramul Haque, 'In Bangladesh, a judiciary under the government's shadow' (*Netra News*, 20 March 2024) <https://netra.news/2024/in-bangladesh-a-judiciary-under-the-governments-shadow/?utm_source=chatgpt.com> accessed 6 November 2025.

160 'After the Monsoon Revolution: A Roadmap to Lasting Security Sector Reform in Bangladesh' (*Human Rights Watch*, 27 January 2025) <<https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/01/27/after-monsoon-revolution/roadmap-lasting-security-sector-reform-bangladesh>> accessed 19 October 2025.

161 Syed Mohammad Ali, 'Bangladesh's Declining Democracy' New Lines Institute' (*New Lines Institute*, 15 September 2022) <<https://newlinesinstitute.org/political-systems/bangladeshs-declining-democracy/>> accessed 18 October 2025.

162 *Supra* note 162.

163 Farzana Nawaz, *Overview of Corruption within the Justice Sector and Law Enforcement Agencies in Bangladesh* (Transparency International Bangladesh 2012) 1–2.

164 'Bangladesh: Opposition Leader Zia in Prison a Year' (*Human Rights Watch*, 8 February 2019) <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/02/08/bangladesh-opposition-leader-zia-prison-year>> accessed 6 November 2025.

165 Saqlain Rizve, 'Can Bangladesh's Judiciary Get on the Right Track Under the Interim Government?' (*The Diplomat*, 21 November 2024) <https://thediplomat.com/2024/11/can-bangladeshs-judiciary-get-on-the-right-track-under-the-interim-government> accessed 19 October 2025.

BNP's secretary general Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir said, 'If the judiciary today becomes completely partisan, where will people go?'¹⁶⁶ The BNP leader also alleged that the government had been trying to use the judiciary to destroy the democratic character of the constitution and thus establish a one-party authoritarian dictatorship.¹⁶⁷ Although the judiciary has been freed from the influence of the executive in 2007, in reality, the executive's influence over the judiciary has severely devalued the effectiveness of the check and balance mechanism.¹⁶⁸

This pattern extended beyond the judiciary and was equally visible in the government's use of the legislature as the broader strategy to centralise authority. The AL government had used the legislature to reinforce the party's dominance by enacting laws which could be used to intimidate and silence under the Digital Security Act of 2018. Although this law was officially enacted to combat cybercrimes, the DSA has faced significant criticism from human rights groups, including Amnesty International, as its implementation appears to target individuals who express dissent against the government, even for expressing critical opinions online. Hundreds of journalists, activists, and social media users were detained under this law for posts or articles deemed 'defamatory' or 'anti-state'. Between 2018 and 2023, the DSA was used in 736 cases, with 1,300+ charges and 427 arrests (including 135 journalists).¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, Amnesty highlighted that the DSA grants law enforcement agencies broad powers to arrest individuals without a warrant and to seize electronic devices, raising serious human rights concerns.¹⁷⁰ This trend raised concerns that the judiciary was failing to uphold the freedom of expression as promised by the constitution.¹⁷¹ The judiciary's somewhat fragile actions in these instances left many questioning its true independence to act as a safeguard of citizens' constitutional rights.

Although the constitution of Bangladesh is 'rigid' in nature, amending it requires solely the political will of the government. Formally, a constitutional amendment

166 'Judiciary Now under Govt's Full Control: BNP' (New Age Bangladesh, 15 September 2023) <<https://www.newagebd.net/article/212231/judiciary-now-under-govts-full-control-bnp>> accessed 18 October 2025.

167 'Awami League wants to use state apparatus to stay in power: BNP, The Business Standard' (Dhaka, 16 April 2022) <<https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/awami-league-wants-use-state-apparatus-stay-power-bnp-404082>> accessed 19 October 2025.

168 Ali Riaz, *Bangladesh: A Political History Since Independence* (I.B. Tauris 2016).

169 ARTICLE 19, Bangladesh: Defending Free Expression and Electoral Integrity in the Digital Age (18 June 2025) <<https://www.article19.org/resources/bangladesh-defending-free-expression-and-electoral-integrity-in-the-digital-age>> accessed 19 October 2025.

170 Amnesty International, Bangladesh: End Crackdown on Freedom of Expression online (25 July 2021) <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/07/bangladesh-end-crackdown-on-freedom-of-expression-online/>> accessed 19 October 2025.

171 Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh 1972, article 39.

must be passed by a two-thirds majority of the total number of Members of Parliament.¹⁷² The procedure does not require a referendum, approval from any other state institution, or consent from a second chamber, as Bangladesh has a unicameral legislature. But in practice, when a single party dominates the Parliament, as the Awami League has done for 16 years, this 'rigid' amendment process becomes effectively easy to manipulate, as the members of Parliament cannot vote against their party or even abstain from a vote once the party has taken a position.¹⁷³ This rule makes it impossible for constitutional amendments to be contested internally, leaving no other option than to be passed by the Parliament.

The manipulation of constitutional amendments for political gain was nothing new for Bangladesh. President H.M. Ershad used the constitutional amendments to grow his powers and extend his rule.¹⁷⁴ For example, he used the seventh amendment to legitimize his regime,¹⁷⁵ and by the eighth amendment he declared Islam as the state religion to gain support and sympathy of the Islamist groups and religious people during a time of political turbulence. The same strategy was followed by the AL government soon after they came into power in 2009, through the Fifteenth Amendment (2011)¹⁷⁶ which restored secularism as one of the fundamental principles, removed the provision that allowed for a state religion, and reinforced democracy and human rights. By restoring secularism, AL positioned itself as the defender of Bangladesh's original liberation ideals, and created a political narrative as a secular, progressive party safeguarding minorities' rights; whereas the attacks on minorities during the AL regime had increased to the level where 413 attacks per year (on average) occurred on Hindu households/temples between 2013–2021.¹⁷⁷ It shows how the government was a populist one to please the majority community at the cost of the other.

In the same amendment, the government decided to abolish the caretaker system entirely by repealing Articles 58B–58E, despite the Court's suggestion for a transitional phase by temporarily retaining it for two more elections in the interest

172 Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh 197, article 142.

173 Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh 197, article 70.

174 Hassan Ahmed, 'Constitutional Malleability and Political Power: Bangladesh as a Case Study' (*The Bengal Gazette*, 1 October 2024) <<https://bengalgazette.org/2024/10/01/constitutional-malleability-and-political-power-bangladesh-as-a-case-study/>> accessed 19 November 2025.

175 Adeeba Aziz Khan, 'The Politics of Constitutional Amendments in Bangladesh: The Case of the Non-Political Caretaker Government' (2015) 9 *International Review of Law*.

176 The Constitution (Fifteenth Amendment) Act, 2011 (Act No. XIV of 2011), *Bangladesh Gazette*, 30 June 2011.

177 Ain o Salish Kendra, 'ASK: 413 attacks on Hindu households, temples per year' (*Dhaka Tribune*, 18 October 2021) <<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/315687/ask-413-attacks-on-hindu-households-temples-per>> accessed 19 October 2025.

of state and public safety.¹⁷⁸ Critics argue that the AL's real motive was to ensure electoral control by holding elections under its own administration, limiting the opposition's influence. These amendments have been strategically calculated in order to protect the continuing rule of the incumbent. By eliminating a neutral mechanism that ensured free and fair elections, the ruling party has prioritised its own dominance over democratic principles, exposing a deeper authoritarian streak in the AL government's approach to power.

10 The Shape of Fascism: what Works, what Doesn't, and Why It Matters

We conceptualise fascism as a configurational process characterised by palingenetic nationalism, sacralized politics, leader-centric mobilisation, and systematic exclusion, which may intensify during periods of crisis. The myth of rebirth through 1971, influenced by educational curricula, memorials, and the criminalisation of memory, aligned with Gentile's political religion.¹⁷⁹ The Mujib cult¹⁸⁰ and Hasina's titles made leadership sacred.¹⁸¹ Additionally, selective populism and moral dualism were employed to create a frame of the 'real people' (patriots) versus the 'enemies of the nation' (BNP/JI/critics), which aligns with Eco's characteristics¹⁸² and Stanley's moral inversion.¹⁸³

Additionally, Hasina did not get rid of parliament; she took it over. That fits better with post-fascist or fascist-adjacent morphology working within electoral shells than with totalitarian rupture.^{184,185} The regime's enemies were from within, framed by security and memory. This is a key limit case for interwar fascisms. However, Sheikh Hasina hinted at US intention to overthrow her government in

178 Adeeba Aziz Khan, 'Electoral Institutions in Bangladesh: A Study of Conflicts between the Formal and the Informal' (PhD thesis, SOAS University of London 2015) <<https://doi.org/10.25501/SOAS.00023587>>.

179 Supra note 11.

180 AE Ruud, *Masks of Authoritarianism: Leadership, Power, and Hegemony in Bangladesh* (Routledge 2022).

181 Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (University of Chicago Press 1999).

182 Supra note 7.

183 Supra note 9.

184 Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (Penguin 2005).

185 Supra note 20.

2023¹⁸⁶ and openly accused the US of regime change in Bangladesh after August 2024.¹⁸⁷ Tactical appeasement of Hefazat-e-Islam does not mean fascism; it means that a party-state is using nationalism to try to gain power. The sacral hierarchy it supports, with one leader or party as the only one who can read the nation's fate, is where it meets fascist morphology. This is what the chimera is: a mix of nationalist-memorial populism and a hybrid authoritarian core with fascist tendencies in effect, exclusion, and sacralization, but without the desire to take over and expand.

While there is no 'pure' regime type in the modern world, there are some overlaps and movements in Bangladesh along a spectrum from competitive authoritarianism to autocratic populism to partial fascism.^{188,189} It never fully turned into classical fascism, but some parts of it became part of the system, especially in memory politics and the moralization of repression.

11 Concluding Remarks

Sheikh Hasina's deposed regime (2009–2024) offers one of the most revealing cases of authoritarian durability through democratic performance in the Global South. It maintained the formal architecture of democracy – elections, a parliament, and a judiciary – while hollowing out each pillar from within through what Scheppele¹⁹⁰ calls autocratic legalism. The outcome was not classical dictatorship but a hybrid party-state, legitimised by developmental triumphalism, memory politics, and affective nationalism. In theoretical terms, Hasina's regime illustrates the fusion of three distinct but mutually reinforcing logics:

- (1) Authoritarianism as institutional control and coercion;
- (2) Populism as an affective style and moral narrative; and
- (3) Fascist morphology as symbolic sacralisation of leader and nation.

This fusion produced what we call a political chimera – a syncretic regime that was electorally procedural, discursively populist, and structurally authoritarian, while exhibiting fascist tendencies in the moralisation of power, while acting as a monster towards those the regime considered its enemies. Bangladesh's past military leaders

186 BBC Bangla, 'Hasina Blames the United States for Interfering in Bangladesh's Internal Affairs' (*BBC News Bangla*, 2023) <<https://www.bbc.com/bengali>> accessed 19 October 2025.

187 'Hasina accuses US of regime change in Bangladesh' *The Economics Times* (Mumbai, 11 August 2024) <<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/bangladesh-sheikh-hasina-iskcon-chittagong/articleshow/115409500.cms>> accessed 19 October 2025.

188 *Supra* note 9.

189 *Supra* note 14.

190 *Supra* note 107.

had to deal with a strong civil society, but Hasina's AL used co-optation and fear to break that resistance. The regime's narrative space included civil society and the media. Islamist groups like Hefazat-e-Islam sometimes got what they wanted and sometimes did not (the crackdown at Shapla Square on May 5, 2013); secular cultural elites were either absorbed or muted; and lawfare was used to stop opposition parties.^{191,192}

This is the mature party-state that Suykens¹⁹³ and Morgenbesser¹⁹⁴ talk about. It does not use military force anymore; instead, it uses moral hegemonic control and institutional mimicry. Hasina kept the appearance of parliament to keep international legitimacy, but at home, she made the election process a ritual instead of a contest.¹⁹⁵ In this regard, her political order was more stable than previous military regimes because it disguised authoritarian power as a democratic system. Hasina's government started out as a populist effort to bring about change, but it ended up as a holy autocracy. It claimed to be the only one that knew the moral truth of the country, which it called the 'spirit of the Liberation War'. Mujibur Rahman was raised to the level of divinity, and Hasina was given the titles of Mother of Humanity and Daughter of Democracy. This individualisation of virtue, alongside the criminalisation of dissent, aligns with Gentile's¹⁹⁶ notion of political religion and Paxton's¹⁹⁷ 'mobilising passions' of fascism – unity, victimhood, and moral purity.

Yet, as the literature shows, Hasina did not dissolve parliament or engage in foreign conflicts. Instead, she adapted fascism's moral framework to fit within the logic of hybrid authoritarianism. Following Griffin,¹⁹⁸ one may describe the Hasina regime as palingenetic because it was always telling the story of rebirth through the Liberation myth. However, it did not have the revolutionary break that interwar fascisms did. Traverso¹⁹⁹ called it a 'post-fascist' adaptation because it was emotional, mediated, and bureaucratic.

191 Ali Riaz, 'How Bangladesh's Digital Security Act Is Creating a Culture of Fear' (*Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 9 December 2021) <<https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/12/09/how-bangladesh-s-digital-security-act-is-creating-culture-of-fear-pub-85951>> accessed 19 October 2025.

192 'Bangladesh: Cyber Security Act Continues Digital Repression' (*Amnesty International*, 5 January 2024) <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/01/bangladesh-cybersecurity-act/>> accessed 19 October 2025.

193 *Supra* note 130.

194 *Supra* note 14.

195 *Supra* note 52.

196 *Supra* note 11.

197 *Supra* note 158.

198 *Supra* note 5.

199 *Supra* note 21.

The regime's strength came from a weak coalition of force and agreement among the elite. The 2024 student uprising showed that fear cannot be used to control people, and that the agreement fell apart. As state violence rose, with dozens of murders and enforced disappearances,^{200,201} some parts of the security and bureaucratic elite changed sides. Hasina's regime lost its moral and emotional legitimacy because of how harshly it treated its people.

Generally, a Prime Minister may remain in office after resignation until a successor PM is appointed by the election.²⁰² However, because Sheikh Hasina resigned and fled the country on 5 August 2024, the president dissolved parliament on 6 August under Article 72, creating a constitutional vacuum, as the Fifteenth Amendment (2011) had abolished the non-party caretaker provisions (formerly Arts. 58B–58D).²⁰³ This situation was unprecedented in Bangladesh's constitutional history. In response to this constitutional gap, on 9 August the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, using its advisory powers,²⁰⁴ ruled that establishing an interim cabinet led by a chief adviser to manage state affairs pending fresh elections was lawful under the extraordinary circumstances. Thus, the present interim government rests on a para-constitutional footing that the Supreme Courts have regularized by applying the *doctrine of necessity*.²⁰⁵ Although it is a controversial legal step, the Court argued that such a step was essential to prevent a complete institutional collapse.²⁰⁶ Subsequent challenges were rejected, with the High Court noting the Appellate Division's opinion that, given the absence of parliament and the prime minister's resignation, the president could constitute an interim government.²⁰⁷ Hence, the interim government

200 Faisal Mahmud, "Wait never ends" for families of the forcibly disappeared in Bangladesh' (*Al Jazeera*, 30 August 2023) <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/30/wait-never-ends-for-families-of-the-forcibly-disappeared-in-bangladesh>> accessed 19 October 2025.

201 'Secret prisoners of Dhaka' (*Netra News*, 15 August 2022) <<https://netra.news/2022/secret-prisoners-of-dhaka/>> accessed 19 October 2025.

202 Articles 57(3) and 58(4) of the Constitution of Bangladesh.

203 A Rakib & M Sultana, 'The 15th Amendment to the Constitution of Bangladesh: An Overview' (2015) 12(4) *IJAL* 26–29 <https://indianapublications.com/articles/IJAL_4%2812%29_26-29_6663e10395e991> accessed 7 November 2025.

204 Article 106 of the Constitution of Bangladesh.

205 Arafat Hosen Khan, 'Bangladesh's Constitutional Reforms: Caught Between Democratic Hopes and Authoritarian Resilience' (*ConstitutionNet*, 16 May 2025) <<https://constitutionnet.org/news/voices/bangladeshs-constitutional-reforms-caught-between-democratic-hopes-and-authoritarian>> accessed 7 November 2025.

206 *Ibid.*

207 'HC rejects petition challenging formation of interim govt' (*The Daily Star*, 13 January 2025) <<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/politics/news/hc-rejects-petition-challenging-formation-interim-govt-3798576>>.

at present is working as a bridge between the fallen regime and an elected government in its *de jure* capacity.²⁰⁸

To go back to the research question, the evidence substantiates the ensuing analytical conclusion: Sheikh Hasina's regime (2009–2024) was a hybrid authoritarian party-state, legitimised through populist performance and characterised by fascist elements. It was authoritarian in structure, relying on coercion, patronage, and elite capture;²⁰⁹ populist in discourse, constructing the 'authentic people' through memorial politics and anti-elitist affect.²¹⁰ and fascistic in affect, moralising power through sacral leadership and epistemic inversion.²¹¹

208 In international law, a *de jure* government refers to the government that is legally and formally recognized as having authority over a state, according to its constitutional or legal framework. This recognition can come from the state's own laws and institutions, as well as from other states and international bodies. Unlike a *de facto* government, it does not hold full legitimacy by the constitution.

209 Supra note 12. Supra note 13.

210 Supra note 119. Supra note 42.

211 Supra note 145. Supra note 11. Supra note 9.