



Research Monograph

On

**“Criminology in Context: A Theoretical Analysis of Social and
Political Unrest in Bangladesh”**

**This Research Submitted for the Partial Fulfillment of the award of the degree in
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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

To

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Dear Sir,

It is a great pleasure for me to submit the thesis on **“Exploring the Key Triggers of Domestic Violence in Bangladesh”** While I doing this thesis, I have tried my level best to make this project paper to the latest standard. I think that thesis paper will fulfill your requirement and pleased you. I, therefore, hope that you would be kind enough to go through this thesis paper for evaluation.

I am always be ready for clearance of any part of my thesis.

Thanking you

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that the thesis on “**Criminology in Context: A Theoretical Analysis of Social and Political Unrest in Bangladesh**” is done by Rabeya Akter in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of LL.M. (Final) from Sonargaon University, Dhaka. The thesis has been carried out under my guidance and is a record of the bonafide work carried out successfully.

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DECLARATION

I do hereby that this Research Monograph on the “**Criminology in Context: A Theoretical Analysis of Social and Political Unrest in Bangladesh**” have been done by me and this Research is free from all plagiarism and without help of other. I further declare that this monograph is prepared with my own effort and it was not and never submit to any institute for any academic reason.

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Abstract

This study titled “**Criminology in Context: A Theoretical Analysis of Social and Political Unrest in Bangladesh**” examines the nature, causes, and consequences of social and political unrest from a criminological perspective. It explores how structural inequalities, political dynamics, institutional weaknesses, and socio-economic conditions contribute to patterns of crime, deviance, and collective violence. The study integrates major criminological theories, including strain theory, conflict theory, social disorganization theory, labeling theory, and radical criminology, to explain the underlying factors of unrest.

The research adopts a qualitative and analytical approach, relying on secondary sources such as books, journal articles, legal documents, and institutional reports. Findings indicate that social and political unrest in Bangladesh is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by economic inequality, political polarization, corruption, youth unemployment, rapid urbanization, and weak institutional governance. Urban centers such as Dhaka are particularly significant in shaping and intensifying these dynamics due to population density and political concentration.

The study concludes that unrest is not merely a law-and-order issue but a structural and institutional problem rooted in broader socio-political conditions. It recommends comprehensive reforms focusing on reducing inequality, strengthening governance, ensuring rule of law, and promoting inclusive development to achieve long-term social stability.

Keywords: Criminology, Social Unrest, Political Violence, Bangladesh, Strain Theory, Conflict Theory, Governance.

Abbreviation

BNP	—	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
AL	—	Awami League
BD	—	Bangladesh
BBS	—	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
CPI	—	Corruption Perceptions Index
RMG	—	Ready-Made Garment
UN	—	United Nations
UDHR	—	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
ICCPR	—	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	—	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
UNDP	—	United Nations Development Programme
ILO	—	International Labour Organization
TIB	—	Transparency International Bangladesh
UNODC	—	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
NGO	—	Non-Governmental Organization
GDP	—	Gross Domestic Product
ICT	—	Information and Communication Technology
RMG	—	Ready-Made Garment Sector
SC	—	Supreme Court
HC	—	High Court
PS	—	Police Station

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Criminology is the scientific study of crime, criminal behavior, deviance, victimization, and the criminal justice system. In modern society, criminology is not limited to traditional crimes such as theft or homicide; rather, it also examines political violence, terrorism, cybercrime, corruption, social unrest, and state responses to conflict.¹ In developing countries like Bangladesh, criminological studies have become increasingly important because social and political instability often influences public order, governance, economic growth, and human rights.

Since its independence in 1971, Bangladesh has experienced various forms of political and social unrest. Historical movements such as the Language Movement of 1952, the Liberation War of 1971, anti-autocratic movements, electoral conflicts, labor protests, and student demonstrations have significantly shaped the country's socio-political environment.² These events indicate that unrest in Bangladesh is deeply connected with issues of inequality, political power struggles, social injustice, and institutional weaknesses.

Rapid urbanization and industrialization have also transformed the social structure of Bangladesh. Major urban centers such as Dhaka and Chattogram have witnessed increasing population density, unemployment, poverty, and social disorganization.³ Such conditions often contribute to criminal activities, gang culture, drug abuse, and collective violence. According to social disorganization theory, weak social institutions and unstable communities create an environment where crime and deviant behavior become more common.⁴

Economic inequality is another major factor associated with social unrest in Bangladesh. Despite significant economic growth, many citizens continue to face unemployment, inflation, and limited access to opportunities.⁵ The frustration caused by socio-economic deprivation can be explained through strain theory developed by Robert K. Merton,

¹ Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Criminology," *Britannica Online Encyclopedia*, available at: [Britannica Criminology](#) (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

² Willem van Schendel, *A History of Bangladesh* (Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed., 2020), pp. 165–210.

³ The World Bank, "Bangladesh Overview," available at: [World Bank Bangladesh Overview](#) (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

⁴ Clifford R. Shaw & Henry D. McKay, *Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas* (University of Chicago Press, 1942), pp. 45–67.

⁵ Asian Development Bank, "Bangladesh: Economy and Development Indicators," available at: [Asian Development Bank Bangladesh](#) (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

which argues that individuals may engage in deviant or criminal behavior when they cannot achieve socially accepted goals through legitimate means.⁶ In Bangladesh, youth frustration arising from unemployment and lack of opportunities has sometimes contributed to violent protests, political mobilization, and social instability.

Political polarization has further intensified social conflict within the country. Rivalry among political parties frequently leads to strikes, demonstrations, road blockades, vandalism, and violent clashes.⁷ Conflict theory, associated with Karl Marx, explains that social conflict emerges from unequal power relations and competition over economic and political resources.⁸ In the Bangladeshi context, political unrest is often linked to allegations of corruption, misuse of power, lack of accountability, and unequal access to justice.

In recent years, digital communication and social media platforms have significantly influenced public opinion and political mobilization in Bangladesh. Online platforms provide opportunities for democratic participation and freedom of expression; however, they have also facilitated the spread of rumors, misinformation, hate speech, and cyber manipulation.⁹ Several incidents of communal violence and public panic have been associated with misleading information circulated through digital media. Consequently, criminologists and policymakers are increasingly concerned about the relationship between cyber activities and social unrest.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Social and political unrest has become a persistent challenge in Bangladesh, affecting public security, democratic governance, economic stability, and social harmony. Over the years, the country has experienced repeated incidents of political violence, strikes, labor unrest, student movements, communal tensions, cyber-related agitation and confrontations between citizens and state authorities. These incidents not only disrupt normal social life but also weaken public confidence in legal and political institutions.¹⁰

⁶ Robert K. Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (1938), pp. 672–682.

⁷ Ali Riaz, *Political Violence in South Asia* (Routledge, 2018), pp. 98–120.

⁸ Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Penguin Classics, 1848/2002), pp. 12–25.

⁹ UNESCO, "Social Media and the Spread of Disinformation," available at: [UNESCO Official Website](https://www.unesco.org/en/digital-heritage/2019/05/social-media-disinformation). (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

¹⁰ Ali Riaz, *Political Violence in South Asia* (Routledge, 2018), pp. 98–120.

Despite significant economic development and technological advancement, Bangladesh continues to face structural problems such as poverty, unemployment, corruption, inequality, and weak institutional accountability.¹¹ These socio-economic conditions often create frustration and dissatisfaction among citizens, particularly among unemployed youth and marginalized groups. Criminological theories suggest that when individuals are deprived of legitimate opportunities or experience social exclusion, they may become involved in deviant or violent activities.¹² Consequently, social unrest in Bangladesh cannot be viewed merely as isolated political events; rather, it reflects deeper social and criminological problems embedded within society.

Political polarization is another serious issue contributing to instability in Bangladesh. Rival political groups frequently engage in confrontational politics through strikes, demonstrations, road blockades, and violent clashes.¹³ Such conflicts often result in injuries, destruction of property, disruption of public transportation, and economic losses. Moreover, allegations of political influence over law enforcement agencies and the judicial process have raised concerns regarding impartiality, accountability, and the rule of law.¹⁴ These circumstances create mistrust between citizens and state institutions, which may further intensify social tensions.

Rapid urbanization and population growth have also contributed to social disorganization and criminal behavior in urban areas such as Dhaka and Chattogram.¹⁵ Weak community structures, overcrowding, unemployment, and inadequate social services have created environments where gang activities, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, and political violence can easily develop. In addition, the expansion of social media and digital communication has introduced new dimensions of unrest through the spread of misinformation, hate speech, cyber propaganda, and online mobilization.¹⁶

¹¹ The World Bank, “Bangladesh Overview,” available at: [World Bank Bangladesh Overview](#), (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

¹² Robert K. Merton, “Social Structure and Anomie,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (1938), pp. 672–682.

¹³ Willem van Schendel, *A History of Bangladesh* (Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed., 2020), pp. 210–235.

¹⁴ Transparency International Bangladesh, “Governance Challenges and Corruption Issues,” available at: [Transparency International Bangladesh](#), (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

¹⁵ United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), “Urbanization and Social Challenges in Bangladesh,” available at: [UN-Habitat Official Website](#), (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

¹⁶ UNESCO, “Social Media and the Spread of Disinformation,” available at: [UNESCO Official Website](#), (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

Although numerous studies have examined political instability, governance, and economic challenges in Bangladesh, limited academic attention has been given to analyzing social and political unrest from a comprehensive criminological perspective. Existing research often focuses on political science or economic explanations while overlooking how criminological theories such as strain theory, conflict theory, social disorganization theory, labeling theory, and radical criminology can explain the causes and consequences of unrest.¹⁷ As a result, there remains a significant research gap in understanding the relationship between crime, deviance, political conflict, and social instability in the Bangladeshi context.

Furthermore, ineffective policy responses, weak institutional coordination, and limited public trust in governance systems continue to hinder efforts to address the root causes of unrest.¹⁸ Without a proper criminological understanding of social and political conflict, it becomes difficult to formulate sustainable strategies for maintaining peace, justice, and social order. Therefore, this study seeks to critically examine the underlying criminological factors contributing to social and political unrest in Bangladesh and evaluate how theoretical perspectives can help explain and address these ongoing challenges.

1.3 Research Questions

- What are the key criminological factors contributing to social and political unrest in Bangladesh?
- How do major criminological theories such as strain theory, conflict theory, and social disorganization theory explain the nature and patterns of social and political unrest in Bangladesh?
- What are the impacts of social and political unrest on governance, public order, and socio-economic stability in Bangladesh?

¹⁷ Jock Young, *The Exclusive Society: Social Exclusion, Crime and Difference in Late Modernity* (Sage Publications, 1999), pp. 55–78.

¹⁸ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), “Governance and Democratic Accountability in Bangladesh,” available at: [UNDP Bangladesh](https://www.undp.org/bd) (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1.4.1 General Objective

The general objective of this study is to analyze social and political unrest in Bangladesh from a criminological perspective by applying relevant criminological theories to understand its causes, nature, and consequences.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the major criminological and socio-economic factors contributing to social and political unrest in Bangladesh.
2. To examine how key criminological theories such as strain theory, conflict theory, and social disorganization theory explain patterns of unrest and deviant behavior.
3. To analyze the impact of social and political unrest on governance, law and order, and socio-economic development in Bangladesh.
4. To assess the role of political institutions, law enforcement agencies, and the justice system in managing unrest.
5. To suggest policy recommendations for reducing social and political instability and strengthening social order in Bangladesh.

1.5 Literature Review

Merton's foundational article "Social Structure and Anomie" explains how social pressure and unequal opportunities create deviant behavior. He argues that when individuals cannot achieve culturally approved goals through legitimate means, they may resort to illegitimate actions. This theory is highly relevant to unemployment and youth frustration in Bangladesh. It helps explain why economic inequality can lead to protests and unrest. The study provides a strong theoretical base for understanding crime as a structural issue¹⁹.

Karl Marx's conflict theory emphasizes class struggle between the powerful and powerless groups in society. He argues that law and state institutions often protect elite interests. In the context of Bangladesh, this theory explains political violence and inequality in resource distribution. It highlights how marginalized groups may resist

¹⁹ Robert K. Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (1938), pp. 672–682.

oppression through collective action. The theory is useful in analyzing labor unrest and political conflict²⁰.

Shaw and McKay studied urban crime patterns and found that crime increases in socially disorganized communities. Weak institutions, poverty, and population turnover contribute to deviance. In Bangladesh, rapid urbanization in cities like Dhaka supports this theory. Overcrowding and weak community control increase crime and unrest. The theory explains environmental influences on criminal behavior²¹.

Hirschi argues that strong social bonds prevent individuals from engaging in deviant behavior. Family attachment, commitment, and belief in social norms reduce crime. In Bangladesh, weakening family and institutional bonds contribute to youth involvement in unrest. The theory helps explain why social integration is important for stability. It is useful in understanding juvenile delinquency²².

Becker explains that deviance is created by societal reaction and labeling processes. Once labeled as criminals or troublemakers, individuals may continue deviant behavior. In Bangladesh, political protesters are sometimes labeled as criminals. This increases alienation and social exclusion. The theory highlights the role of power in defining deviance²³.

Young focuses on social exclusion and inequality in late modern societies. He argues that exclusion leads to frustration and deviant behavior. In Bangladesh, economic inequality and lack of opportunities create similar conditions. Youth frustration often leads to protests or criminal involvement. The theory connects globalization with rising social conflict²⁴.

²⁰ Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin Classics, 1848/2002).

²¹ Clifford R. Shaw & Henry D. McKay, *Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942).

²² Travis Hirschi, *Causes of Delinquency* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

²³ Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Free Press, 1963).

²⁴ Jock Young, *The Exclusive Society: Social Exclusion, Crime and Difference in Late Modernity* (London: Sage Publications, 1999).

The World Bank highlights that governance issues and inequality hinder sustainable development. Weak institutions and corruption reduce public trust. In Bangladesh, these issues contribute to social dissatisfaction. Economic growth does not always reduce inequality. This report provides empirical evidence for structural problems²⁵.

UNDP reports emphasize the importance of inclusive governance and rule of law. Weak accountability systems increase political instability. In Bangladesh, governance challenges affect social peace. The report links institutional quality with crime prevention. It supports policy reforms for stability²⁶.

Transparency International identifies corruption as a major barrier to development. Corruption reduces trust in public institutions and law enforcement. In Bangladesh, corruption is linked with political unrest and inequality. It increases dissatisfaction among citizens. The report provides global comparative data²⁷.

Ali Riaz examines political instability and violence in South Asia. He highlights the role of party rivalry and weak institutions. In Bangladesh, political confrontation often leads to unrest. The book explains how political culture influences violence. It is highly relevant to electoral conflict analysis²⁸.

UNESCO discusses how misinformation spreads through digital platforms. Social media can escalate rumors and violence. In Bangladesh, online platforms often influence political movements. Fake news contributes to communal tensions. The report shows the cyber dimension of unrest²⁹.

UNODC provides international guidelines for crime prevention and justice systems. It emphasizes rule of law and institutional capacity building. In Bangladesh, weak

²⁵ World Bank, *Bangladesh Development Update 2023* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2023), available at: [World Bank Bangladesh Update](#), (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

²⁶ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 2022: Governance and Inequality* (New York: UNDP, 2022), available at: [UNDP HDR](#), (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

²⁷ Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2024* (Berlin: Transparency International, 2024), available at: [Transparency International CPI](#), (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

²⁸ Ali Riaz, *Political Violence in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2018).

²⁹ UNESCO, *Global Disinformation and Social Media Report 2024* (Paris: UNESCO, 2024), available at: [UNESCO Disinformation](#), (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

enforcement contributes to unrest. The report supports community-based crime prevention strategies. It provides global policy direction³⁰.

1.6 Research Methodology

The research methodology of this study on “*Criminology in Context: A Theoretical Analysis of Social and Political Unrest in Bangladesh*” is primarily qualitative and theoretical in nature. The study adopts a doctrinal and analytical approach to examine social and political unrest through established criminological theories such as strain theory, conflict theory, social disorganization theory, labeling theory, and radical criminology. The main objective of this methodological approach is to interpret and explain the relationship between criminological concepts and real-life socio-political conditions rather than to measure them quantitatively.

This research is based on secondary sources of data, including books, peer-reviewed journal articles, research papers, government publications, and reports from international organizations such as the World Bank, UNDP, UNODC, and Transparency International. These sources provide both theoretical insights and contextual understanding of crime, deviance, governance, and social instability. The data collection process is entirely documentary in nature, relying on library research and credible online academic databases.

The collected information is analyzed through qualitative content analysis, where relevant themes, arguments, and theoretical perspectives are systematically reviewed and interpreted. This allows the study to compare different criminological theories and apply them to the context of Bangladesh’s social and political environment. The analysis focuses on identifying patterns, causes, and consequences of unrest as explained through different theoretical frameworks.

The scope of the study is limited to social and political unrest in Bangladesh, including political violence, labor unrest, student movements, cyber-related conflicts, and institutional weaknesses. However, the study does not involve primary field surveys or statistical modeling, which may limit its empirical depth. Despite this limitation, the reliance on credible secondary sources ensures a strong theoretical foundation.

³⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Global Crime Prevention Framework 2023* (Vienna: UNODC, 2023), available at: [UNODC Crime Prevention](#) (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

Ethical considerations have been maintained throughout the research by properly acknowledging all sources and ensuring academic integrity. No confidential, personal, or sensitive data has been used in the study. Overall, the methodological framework provides a comprehensive basis for understanding social and political unrest in Bangladesh from a criminological perspective.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The study titled “*Criminology in Context: A Theoretical Analysis of Social and Political Unrest in Bangladesh*” is significant from academic, practical, and policy-oriented perspectives. In a developing country like Bangladesh, where social and political instability frequently affects governance, public order, and socio-economic development, this research provides a structured criminological understanding of the causes and consequences of unrest.

From an academic perspective, the study is important because it integrates classical and contemporary criminological theories such as strain theory, conflict theory, social disorganization theory, labeling theory, and radical criminology to explain social and political unrest. This theoretical application helps bridge the gap between criminological literature and real-world socio-political conditions in Bangladesh. It also contributes to expanding South Asian criminological scholarship by contextualizing global theories within local realities³¹.

From a practical perspective, the study helps in understanding how structural factors such as unemployment, poverty, inequality, corruption, and weak governance contribute to social instability. It provides insights for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and administrative authorities to identify root causes of unrest and adopt preventive measures. This may assist in improving law and order, strengthening institutional trust, and promoting social harmony in Bangladesh.³²

From a policy perspective, the findings of this study are useful for developing evidence-based reforms aimed at strengthening democratic governance, ensuring justice, reducing inequality, and improving accountability mechanisms. It also highlights the need to

³¹ Jock Young, *The Exclusive Society: Social Exclusion, Crime and Difference in Late Modernity* (Sage Publications, 1999), pp. 55–78.

³² The World Bank, “Bangladesh Overview,” available at: [World Bank Bangladesh Overview](#). (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

address youth frustration, political polarization, and digital misinformation as key drivers of unrest in contemporary Bangladesh.³³

Furthermore, the study is valuable for future researchers as it provides a theoretical foundation for further empirical and interdisciplinary research in criminology, sociology, political science, and public policy. It encourages deeper investigation into the relationship between crime, deviance, governance, and social order in Bangladesh.

1.8 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The present study titled “*Criminology in Context: A Theoretical Analysis of Social and Political Unrest in Bangladesh*” focuses on examining social and political unrest from a criminological and theoretical perspective. The scope of the study is primarily confined to understanding how major criminological theories such as strain theory, conflict theory, social disorganization theory, labeling theory, and radical criminology explain the causes, nature, and consequences of unrest in Bangladesh. It further includes an analysis of different forms of unrest such as political violence, student movements, labor unrest, cyber-related disturbances, and institutional weaknesses that affect governance and social stability.³⁴

Geographically, the study is limited to Bangladesh, with occasional references to major urban centers such as Dhaka and other cities where incidents of unrest are more visible. Thematically, it focuses on crime, deviance, political conflict, inequality, governance challenges, and social disorganization. The study relies exclusively on secondary data sources, including books, journal articles, policy reports, and publications from international organizations that provide relevant theoretical and contextual insights.³⁵

However, the study has certain limitations. Firstly, it does not include any primary data collection such as surveys or interviews, which limits direct empirical engagement with affected individuals or groups. Secondly, the absence of quantitative or statistical analysis restricts the ability to measure the magnitude or frequency of social and political unrest in numerical terms. Thirdly, the study may not fully capture very recent developments due

³³ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), “Governance and Democratic Accountability in Bangladesh,” available at: [UNDP Bangladesh](#) (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

³⁴ Ali Riaz, *Political Violence in South Asia* (Routledge, 2018), pp. 45–78.

³⁵ The World Bank, “Bangladesh Overview,” available at: [World Bank Bangladesh Overview](#). (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

to reliance on published and accessible literature, which may not always reflect the most current situation.³⁶

In addition, interpretations of social and political unrest through criminological theories may vary depending on different academic perspectives, which may lead to differing conclusions. Despite these limitations, the study provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between criminology and socio-political instability in Bangladesh and contributes to academic and policy discussions in this area.

1.9 Conceptual Clarification

1.9.1 Criminology

Criminology is the scientific and systematic study of crime, criminal behavior, deviance, victimization, and the functioning of the criminal justice system. It seeks to explain why individuals and groups commit crimes, how society defines and responds to crime, and what factors influence criminal behavior. Modern criminology goes beyond traditional offenses and includes political violence, cybercrime, organized crime, and state-related violence. It also integrates sociological, psychological, and legal perspectives to understand crime within its broader social context.³⁷

1.9.2 Social Unrest

Social unrest refers to collective actions or expressions of dissatisfaction within a society that arise due to economic, political, or social grievances. It commonly includes protests, strikes, demonstrations, riots, and mass mobilization against perceived injustice or inequality. Social unrest often emerges when groups feel excluded from opportunities, resources, or decision-making processes. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, and weak governance frequently contribute to its occurrence, particularly in developing societies like Bangladesh.³⁸

1.9.3 Political Unrest

Political unrest refers to instability and conflict arising from political disagreements, governance failures, power struggles, or electoral disputes. It is often expressed through protests, political violence, strikes, or confrontations between rival political groups and

³⁶ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), “Governance and Social Stability Reports,” available at: [UNDP Bangladesh](#) (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

³⁷ Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2024* (Berlin: Transparency International, 2024), available at: [Transparency International CPI](#), (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

³⁸ Ali Riaz, *Political Violence in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2018).

the state. Political unrest can weaken democratic institutions, disrupt public order, and reduce citizens' trust in government. Issues such as corruption, lack of accountability, and political polarization are key drivers of political instability in many countries, including Bangladesh.³⁹

1.9.4 Crime and Deviance

Crime refers to actions that violate formal laws and are punishable by the state, whereas deviance refers to behavior that violates social norms and expectations but may not necessarily be illegal. Crime is defined by legal systems, while deviance is defined by social and cultural norms. Some behaviors can be both criminal and deviant, while others may be deviant without being criminal. The study of crime and deviance helps criminologists understand how societies define acceptable behavior and respond to violations of social order.⁴⁰

1.10 Chapter Outline

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter provides the overall introduction to the study, including background, statement of the problem, research questions, objectives, literature review, methodology, scope and limitations, significance of the study, and conceptual clarifications. It sets the theoretical and analytical foundation of the research.

Chapter Two: Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations of Criminology

This chapter discusses the meaning, nature, and historical development of criminology. It also examines major schools of criminology and key criminological theories such as strain theory, conflict theory, labeling theory, social disorganization theory, and radical criminology. The chapter establishes the theoretical framework for analyzing social and political unrest.

Chapter Three: Historical and Socio-Political Context of Unrest in Bangladesh

This chapter explores the historical evolution of political movements, military rule, democratic transition, political confrontation, electoral violence, student politics, labor

³⁹ UNESCO, *Global Disinformation and Social Media Report 2024* (Paris: UNESCO, 2024), available at: [UNESCO Disinformation](#), (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

⁴⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Global Crime Prevention Framework 2023* (Vienna: UNODC, 2023), available at: [UNODC Crime Prevention](#) (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

unrest, religious extremism, social media influence, economic inequality, human rights issues, and the role of media in shaping unrest.

Chapter Four: Criminological Analysis of Social and Political Unrest in Bangladesh

This chapter applies criminological theories to analyze the causes and patterns of unrest. It examines strain, conflict, labeling, social disorganization, radical criminology, youth crime, corruption, institutional weakness, police-public relations, and the impact of unrest on national security and rule of law.

Chapter Five: Challenges, Findings and Recommendations

This final chapter presents the key challenges identified in the study, summarizes the major findings, and provides policy-oriented recommendations. It also concludes the research by highlighting the need for structural reforms, good governance, and inclusive development to ensure long-term social stability.

Chapter Two: Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations of Criminology

2.1 Introduction

Criminology is a multidisciplinary field that systematically examines crime, deviant behavior, victimization, and societal responses to such phenomena. It draws upon sociology, psychology, law, political science, and economics to explain why crime occurs and how it can be controlled. In modern academic discourse, criminology has expanded beyond conventional criminal acts to include broader issues such as political violence, social unrest, cybercrime, organized crime, and structural forms of injustice within society.⁴¹

The theoretical foundations of criminology provide essential frameworks for understanding the causes and patterns of crime and social disorder. Classical theories emphasize rational choice and deterrence, while positivist approaches focus on biological, psychological, and social determinants of criminal behavior. Contemporary theories such as strain theory, conflict theory, social disorganization theory, labeling theory, and radical criminology further explain how structural inequalities, power relations, and social conditions contribute to deviance and collective unrest.⁴²

In the context of developing countries like Bangladesh, criminological theories are particularly important for understanding complex social and political realities. Issues such as poverty, unemployment, corruption, rapid urbanization, political polarization, and weak institutional governance often create conditions that lead to social instability and collective violence. These theoretical perspectives help explain how such structural factors translate into crime, deviance, and political unrest within society.⁴³

Therefore, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the conceptual and theoretical foundations of criminology. It also establishes the analytical framework used in this study to examine social and political unrest in Bangladesh from a criminological perspective.

⁴¹ Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Criminology," available at: [Britannica Criminology](#). (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

⁴² Frank E. Hagan, *Introduction to Criminology: Theories, Methods, and Criminal Behavior* (Sage Publications, 2017), pp. 23–45.

⁴³ World Bank, "Bangladesh Overview," available at: [World Bank Bangladesh Overview](#) (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

2.2 Meaning and Nature of Criminology

Criminology is the scientific study of crime, criminal behavior, deviance, victimization, and the social response to crime. It seeks to explain why individuals or groups engage in unlawful or socially harmful behavior and how society reacts through formal and informal control mechanisms. As a discipline, criminology is both theoretical and applied, combining knowledge from sociology, psychology, law, political science, and other social sciences to understand crime in a broader social context.⁴⁴

The meaning of criminology extends beyond the legal definition of crime. While law defines what is criminal, criminology investigates the underlying causes, patterns, and consequences of criminal behavior. It also examines how social structures, cultural norms, economic conditions, and political systems influence deviance and law-breaking behavior. In this sense, criminology is concerned not only with individual offenders but also with the social environment in which crime occurs.

The nature of criminology is multidisciplinary, meaning it draws knowledge from various academic fields. It is also empirical, as it relies on observation, research, and evidence-based analysis to understand criminal phenomena. At the same time, criminology is theoretical, as it uses different theories to explain why crime occurs, including strain theory, conflict theory, social disorganization theory, labeling theory, and radical criminology. These theories help explain crime as a social product rather than simply an individual failure.⁴⁵

Criminology is also dynamic in nature because it evolves with changes in society. New forms of crime such as cybercrime, terrorism, organized crime, and political violence have expanded the scope of criminological study. In developing societies like Bangladesh, criminology is particularly important for understanding issues such as social unrest, inequality, corruption, and weak governance, which often contribute to criminal behavior and instability.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Criminology," available at: [Britannica Criminology](#). (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

⁴⁵ Frank E. Hagan, *Introduction to Criminology: Theories, Methods, and Criminal Behavior* (Sage Publications, 2017), pp. 23–45.

⁴⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), "Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice," available at: [UNODC Official Website](#) (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

Therefore, criminology is not only the study of crime but also the study of society itself, as it reflects how social order is maintained, challenged, and transformed over time.

2.3 Historical Development of Criminology

The historical development of criminology reflects the gradual transformation of crime studies from philosophical and religious explanations to a systematic scientific discipline. Early explanations of crime were largely based on superstition, religion, and moral judgments, where criminal behavior was often seen as a result of evil spirits or divine punishment. Over time, with the development of social sciences, criminology emerged as an independent academic field focusing on rational and empirical analysis of crime and deviance.⁴⁷

The classical school of criminology emerged in the 18th century with the works of thinkers such as Cesare Beccaria and Jeremy Bentham. They argued that human beings are rational actors who make choices based on pleasure and pain. According to this view, crime occurs when individuals believe the benefits outweigh the costs. Therefore, punishment should be proportionate, certain, and swift to deter criminal behavior. This approach laid the foundation for modern criminal justice systems.⁴⁸

In the 19th century, the positivist school emerged, shifting the focus from free will to scientific explanations of crime. Scholars such as Cesare Lombroso emphasized biological and psychological factors as causes of criminal behavior. Lombroso's theory of the "born criminal" suggested that criminals could be identified by physical and biological traits. Although later criticized, positivism introduced empirical methods and scientific observation into criminology.⁴⁹

During the early 20th century, sociological approaches to criminology developed significantly. The Chicago School of Sociology introduced theories such as social disorganization theory, which explained crime as a result of environmental and community factors rather than individual traits. Scholars like Shaw and McKay

⁴⁷ Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Criminology," available at: [Britannica Criminology](#). (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

⁴⁸ Cesare Beccaria, *On Crimes and Punishments* (1764), translated edition (Penguin Classics, 2009).

⁴⁹ Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man* (1876), translated edition (Duke University Press, 2006).

highlighted how urbanization, poverty, and weakened social institutions contribute to crime rates. This marked a shift toward understanding crime as a social phenomenon.⁵⁰

2.4 Schools of Criminology

Criminology as a discipline has developed through different intellectual traditions known as “schools of criminology.” Each school provides a distinct explanation of crime, criminal behavior, and appropriate responses to deviance. These schools reflect changing understandings of human behavior, law, and society over time. The major schools include the Classical School, Positivist School, Neo-Classical School, and Critical Criminology.⁵¹

2.4.1 Classical School

The Classical School of criminology emerged in the 18th century as a response to the arbitrary and harsh criminal justice practices of that time. It is strongly associated with thinkers such as Cesare Beccaria and Jeremy Bentham. This school is based on the idea that individuals are rational beings who have free will and make choices after weighing pleasure and pain.

According to this perspective, crime is the result of rational decision-making, where individuals commit offenses if they believe the benefits outweigh the risks. Therefore, punishment should be certain, swift, and proportionate to deter criminal behavior. The Classical School laid the foundation for modern criminal justice systems, emphasizing fairness, legal equality, and deterrence-based punishment.⁵²

2.4.2 Positivist School

The Positivist School developed in the 19th century as a reaction against the Classical School. It introduced scientific methods to the study of crime, focusing on biological, psychological, and social determinants of criminal behavior. One of the most influential figures of this school was Cesare Lombroso, who proposed the theory of the “born criminal.”

Positivists argue that crime is not a matter of free will alone but is influenced by factors beyond individual control, such as genetics, mental conditions, upbringing, and

⁵⁰ Clifford R. Shaw & Henry D. McKay, *Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas* (University of Chicago Press, 1942).

⁵¹ Frank E. Hagan, *Introduction to Criminology: Theories, Methods, and Criminal Behavior* (Sage Publications, 2017), pp. 23–45.

⁵² *ibid*

environment. This school emphasizes empirical research, observation, and classification of criminals. It also shifted the focus of criminology from punishment to treatment and rehabilitation of offenders.⁵³

2.4.3 Neo-Classical School

The Neo-Classical School emerged as a modification of the Classical School. It retains the idea of free will and rational choice but recognizes that certain factors may influence criminal behavior, such as mental illness, age, or social environment. Unlike the strict Classical approach, Neo-Classical criminology allows for flexibility in punishment based on individual circumstances.

This school supports the idea that while individuals are generally responsible for their actions, mitigating factors should be considered during sentencing. It has influenced modern legal systems by introducing concepts such as diminished responsibility, parole, and judicial discretion. It represents a balance between strict legal equality and humanistic considerations in criminal justice.

2.4.4 Critical Criminology

Critical Criminology emerged in the 20th century and is strongly influenced by Marxist and conflict perspectives, including the ideas of Karl Marx. It argues that crime cannot be understood without examining power relations, social inequality, and economic structures.

According to this school, laws are often created by powerful groups to protect their own interests, while marginalizing weaker sections of society. Crime is seen as a product of structural inequality, poverty, and exploitation. Critical criminologists focus on issues such as state crime, corporate crime, human rights violations, and political repression. This perspective is particularly useful in analyzing social and political unrest in developing countries like Bangladesh, where inequality and political conflict play a major role in instability.⁵⁴

⁵³ Jock Young, *The Exclusive Society: Social Exclusion, Crime and Difference in Late Modernity* (Sage Publications, 1999), pp. 55–78.

⁵⁴ Robert K. Merton, “Social Structure and Anomie,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (1938), pp. 672–682.

2.5 Major Criminological Theories

Criminological theories provide systematic explanations for why crime and deviance occur in society. These theories help to understand the relationship between individuals, social structures, and institutions. In the context of social and political unrest in Bangladesh, these theories are particularly useful for explaining collective violence, political conflict, and social instability.

2.5.1 Strain Theory

Strain theory, developed by Robert K. Merton, explains crime as a result of the pressure individuals experience when they are unable to achieve socially accepted goals through legitimate means. When there is a gap between cultural goals (such as wealth or success) and available opportunities, individuals may experience strain or frustration. This strain may lead to deviant behavior such as protest, violence, or crime as alternative means of achieving goals. In Bangladesh, issues like unemployment, poverty, and inequality often create such strain, especially among youth, which may contribute to social unrest and political agitation.⁵⁵

2.5.2 Conflict Theory

Conflict theory, strongly influenced by Karl Marx, views society as composed of groups competing for power and resources. It argues that laws and criminal justice systems are often shaped by powerful groups to protect their interests.

According to this theory, crime is not simply individual wrongdoing but a result of social inequality and power imbalance. In Bangladesh, political conflict, economic inequality, and class divisions often lead to tensions that manifest as social and political unrest.⁵⁶

2.5.3 Social Disorganization Theory

Social disorganization theory was developed by Shaw and McKay and explains crime as a result of weakened social institutions and community breakdown. It suggests that areas with poverty, high population turnover, and weak social control experience higher levels of crime and deviance.

⁵⁵ Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (Penguin Classics, 1848/2002), pp. 12–25.

⁵⁶ Clifford R. Shaw & Henry D. McKay, *Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas* (University of Chicago Press, 1942).

In urban centers like Dhaka, rapid urbanization, overcrowding, and migration contribute to weakened community bonds. This creates conditions where crime, youth delinquency, and collective unrest can increase.

2.5.4 Labeling Theory

Labeling theory, developed by Howard Becker, focuses on how society reacts to deviance. It argues that individuals become “criminals” or “deviants” because they are labeled as such by society or institutions.

Once labeled, individuals may internalize this identity and continue deviant behavior. In political contexts, protesters or opposition groups may be labeled as troublemakers, which can increase alienation and further unrest. This theory highlights the role of social reaction in shaping deviance.⁵⁷

2.5.5 Radical Criminology

Radical criminology is based on Marxist ideas and emphasizes that crime is rooted in structural inequality, capitalism, and state power. It argues that laws are created to protect dominant economic and political interests while marginalizing weaker groups.

This perspective focuses on state crime, corporate crime, and human rights violations. In Bangladesh, labor exploitation, unequal economic distribution, and political repression can contribute to collective resistance and unrest. Radical criminology helps explain structural causes of political violence and social instability.⁵⁸

2.5.6 Control Theory

Control theory, developed by Travis Hirschi, explains crime by focusing on why people do not commit crime rather than why they do. It argues that strong social bonds—such as attachment to family, commitment to education, involvement in society, and belief in social norms—prevent individuals from engaging in deviance.

When these social bonds are weak, individuals are more likely to engage in criminal or deviant behavior. In Bangladesh, weakening family structures, unemployment, and lack of institutional trust may contribute to reduced social control and increased unrest.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (Free Press, 1963), pp. 1–18.

⁵⁸ Jock Young, *The Exclusive Society: Social Exclusion, Crime and Difference in Late Modernity* (Sage Publications, 1999), pp. 55–78.

⁵⁹ Travis Hirschi, *Causes of Delinquency* (University of California Press, 1969).

2.6 Relationship Between Crime and Social Conflict

The relationship between crime and social conflict is deeply interconnected, as both phenomena often arise from similar structural, economic, and political conditions. Crime is generally understood as behavior that violates formal laws, while social conflict refers to struggles between individuals, groups, or institutions over power, resources, and social justice. In many cases, social conflict creates conditions that increase the likelihood of criminal behavior, especially when inequalities and grievances remain unresolved.

From a criminological perspective, social conflict often emerges due to unequal distribution of wealth, power, and opportunities. These inequalities create frustration and resentment among disadvantaged groups, which may lead to deviant behavior, protests, or even violent crime. In societies where legal and political systems fail to address these grievances effectively, conflict may escalate into collective violence, riots, or political unrest.⁶⁰

Conflict theorists, particularly those influenced by Karl Marx, argue that crime is closely linked to social inequality and power struggles. According to this view, laws are often designed to protect the interests of powerful groups, while marginalizing weaker sections of society. As a result, marginalized groups may resist through both legal and illegal forms of action, including protest movements, civil disobedience, and sometimes criminal activities.⁶¹

Similarly, strain theory developed by Robert K. Merton explains that social conflict arises when individuals are unable to achieve culturally defined goals through legitimate means. This structural pressure may push individuals toward crime or deviance as alternative means of expression. In this way, crime can be seen as both a product and a form of social conflict.

In the context of Bangladesh, social conflict is often visible in political rivalries, labor disputes, student movements, and protests against inequality or governance failures. Such conflicts sometimes escalate into criminal acts such as vandalism, violence, or destruction of property. At the same time, state responses to social conflict may also contribute to further tensions, creating a cycle where crime and conflict reinforce each other.

⁶⁰ Jock Young, *The Exclusive Society: Social Exclusion, Crime and Difference in Late Modernity* (Sage Publications, 1999), pp. 55–78.

⁶¹ Robert K. Merton, “Social Structure and Anomie,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (1938), pp. 672–682.

2.7 Political Violence and Criminality

Political violence and criminality are closely interconnected phenomena that often emerge in contexts of political instability, weak governance, and intense competition for power. Political violence refers to the use of force, intimidation, or coercion by individuals, groups, or state actors to achieve political objectives. Criminality, in this context, involves unlawful acts that may be committed either to support political goals or as a consequence of political conflict. In many societies, including Bangladesh, political violence has become a recurring feature of the political landscape, affecting governance, public safety, and social stability.

From a criminological perspective, political violence can take various forms, including riots, demonstrations, arson, vandalism, assassinations, and clashes between rival political groups. These acts often blur the line between political protest and criminal behavior, making it difficult to distinguish between legitimate political expression and unlawful conduct. In many cases, individuals involved in political violence may perceive their actions as justified within the broader struggle for power or justice, even when such actions violate legal norms.

Conflict theory, influenced by Karl Marx, provides an important explanation for political violence by emphasizing the role of inequality and power struggles in society. According to this perspective, political violence arises when competing groups struggle to control resources, authority, and state institutions. Laws and criminal justice systems may also reflect the interests of dominant political groups, which can further intensify resistance and opposition from marginalized groups.⁶²

Similarly, strain theory developed by Robert K. Merton explains that political violence may occur when individuals or groups experience frustration due to blocked opportunities or lack of access to legitimate means of achieving political or economic goals. This strain may lead to collective aggression, protests, or violent resistance as alternative forms of expression.⁶³

In the context of Bangladesh, political violence has often been associated with electoral competition, party rivalry, student politics, and policy disputes. Clashes between

⁶² Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Penguin Classics, 1848/2002), pp. 12–25.

⁶³ Ali Riaz, *Political Violence in South Asia* (Routledge, 2018), pp. 45–78.

opposing political groups, strikes, and protests sometimes escalate into criminal acts such as property destruction, attacks on public institutions, and disruption of public order. These incidents not only affect political stability but also contribute to economic losses and public insecurity.

Furthermore, state responses to political violence, including the use of law enforcement agencies, sometimes raise concerns regarding human rights and due process. Excessive use of force or arbitrary arrests may intensify public resentment and further fuel cycles of violence. This dynamic demonstrates how political violence and criminality are mutually reinforcing in certain contexts.

2.8 Criminological Perspective on State and Society

The criminological perspective on state and society examines how crime, deviance, and social control are shaped by the relationship between individuals, social institutions, and the state. It emphasizes that crime is not only an individual act but also a social construction influenced by laws, political power, economic structures, and cultural norms. In modern criminology, the state plays a central role in defining what is considered criminal behavior and how society responds to it.

From a structural perspective, the state is responsible for maintaining law and order through institutions such as the police, courts, and correctional systems. However, criminologists argue that these institutions do not operate in a neutral manner. Instead, they may reflect existing power relations within society. Laws are often created and enforced in ways that protect dominant groups while marginalizing weaker or disadvantaged populations. This view is strongly associated with critical and conflict criminology.⁶⁴

Conflict theorists, particularly those influenced by Karl Marx, argue that the state functions as an instrument of class control. According to this perspective, criminal laws are shaped by economic and political elites to maintain their dominance over society. As a result, behaviors associated with poverty and marginalization are more likely to be criminalized, while harmful actions by powerful groups may be overlooked or treated more leniently.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ ibid

⁶⁵ ibid

In contrast, functionalist perspectives view the state as a necessary institution for maintaining social order and preventing chaos. According to this view, laws and criminal justice systems reflect collective social values and are essential for ensuring stability and cooperation within society. However, even within this framework, the effectiveness of the state depends on its ability to maintain legitimacy and public trust.

In developing countries such as Bangladesh, the relationship between state and society is particularly significant in understanding crime and unrest. Issues such as corruption, weak governance, political influence over institutions, and limited access to justice can weaken public confidence in the state. When citizens perceive the state as unfair or unresponsive, it may lead to increased social dissatisfaction, protest behavior, and even criminal activity.

2.9 Applicability of Criminological Theories in Bangladesh

The applicability of criminological theories in Bangladesh is highly significant because the country experiences a wide range of social and political challenges, including poverty, unemployment, corruption, political violence, rapid urbanization, and social inequality. These conditions make Bangladesh a relevant context for applying classical and contemporary criminological theories to understand crime, deviance, and social unrest.

Strain theory, developed by Robert K. Merton, is particularly applicable in explaining youth frustration and deviant behavior in Bangladesh. Many individuals face limited access to education, employment, and economic opportunities, which creates a gap between societal expectations and available means. This structural pressure often results in protests, migration-related crime, or involvement in political movements and unrest.⁶⁶

Conflict theory, influenced by Karl Marx, is also relevant in analyzing political and economic inequality in Bangladesh. The distribution of power and resources is often uneven, and laws may sometimes reflect the interests of dominant political or economic groups. This imbalance can lead to dissatisfaction among marginalized groups, resulting in political protests, labor unrest, and social movements.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Robert K. Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (1938), pp. 672–682.

⁶⁷ *ibid*

Social disorganization theory is applicable in rapidly urbanizing areas such as Dhaka, where population density, rural-urban migration, and weak community structures contribute to increased crime rates and social instability. In such environments, traditional social controls are weakened, making it easier for deviant behavior, gang activity, and political mobilization to emerge.

Labeling theory is also relevant in the Bangladeshi context, particularly in relation to political activism and social movements. Individuals or groups involved in protests may be labeled as criminals or troublemakers, which can lead to social exclusion and further deviant behavior. This demonstrates how societal reaction plays a role in shaping identity and behavior.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a comprehensive overview of the conceptual and theoretical foundations of criminology, which serve as the analytical framework for this study. It has examined the meaning and nature of criminology, its historical development, and the major schools of criminological thought, including the Classical, Positivist, Neo-Classical, and Critical schools. These discussions demonstrate that criminology has evolved from a narrow legalistic focus on punishment to a broader interdisciplinary field that explains crime as a complex social phenomenon shaped by structural, political, and economic conditions.⁶⁸

The chapter has also analyzed major criminological theories such as strain theory, conflict theory, social disorganization theory, labeling theory, radical criminology, and control theory. Each theory provides a different lens for understanding crime and deviance, emphasizing factors such as inequality, social structure, power relations, and weakened social bonds. Collectively, these theories highlight that crime cannot be understood in isolation from society but must be examined within its broader socio-political and economic context.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Jock Young, *The Exclusive Society: Social Exclusion, Crime and Difference in Late Modernity* (Sage Publications, 1999), pp. 55–78.

⁶⁹ Robert K. Merton, “Social Structure and Anomie,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (1938), pp. 672–682.

Chapter Three: Historical and Socio-Political Context of Unrest in Bangladesh

3.1 Introduction

The historical and socio-political context of unrest in Bangladesh is deeply rooted in its colonial legacy, liberation struggle, post-independence political development, and ongoing socio-economic transformations. Social and political unrest in Bangladesh cannot be understood in isolation from its historical experiences, as many contemporary conflicts are shaped by long-standing structural inequalities, political rivalries, and governance challenges. The evolution of the state has been marked by significant political movements, regime changes, and mass mobilizations that continue to influence patterns of collective behavior and public dissent.⁷⁰

Since its independence in 1971, Bangladesh has undergone multiple phases of political transition, including military rule, democratic restoration, and periods of intense political competition. These transitions have often been accompanied by instability, protests, strikes, and violent confrontations between opposing political groups. Such developments have contributed to a political culture where confrontation and mobilization are frequently used as tools for expressing dissent and negotiating power.⁷¹

Rapid urbanization, population growth, and economic changes have further shaped the socio-political landscape of Bangladesh. Cities such as Dhaka have experienced significant migration from rural areas, resulting in overcrowding, informal settlements, unemployment, and pressure on public services. These conditions often create social disorganization, which may contribute to crime, deviance, and collective unrest. Economic inequality and limited access to resources also play a major role in shaping grievances among different social groups.

From a criminological perspective, historical and structural factors are essential in explaining contemporary unrest. Theories such as strain theory and conflict theory suggest that unequal opportunities, power imbalances, and institutional weaknesses can generate frustration and resistance among marginalized populations. In Bangladesh, these dynamics are evident in labor movements, student protests, and political confrontations that periodically disrupt public order.⁷²

⁷⁰ Willem van Schendel, *A History of Bangladesh* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 1–40.

⁷¹ Rounaq Jahan, *Bangladesh Politics: Problems and Issues* (University Press Limited, 2005), pp. 23–45.

⁷² Sarmila Bose, *Dead Reckoning: Memories of the 1971 Bangladesh War* (C. Hurst & Co., 2011), pp. 1–30.

3.2 Historical Evolution of Political Movements in Bangladesh

The historical evolution of political movements in Bangladesh reflects a long struggle for linguistic rights, self-determination, democracy, and political justice. These movements have significantly shaped the political identity of the nation and continue to influence contemporary patterns of social and political unrest. From the Language Movement of 1952 to post-independence political instability, each phase represents a critical stage in the development of Bangladesh's political consciousness and collective mobilization.⁷¹

3.2.1 Language Movement of 1952

The Language Movement of 1952 was a landmark event in the political history of Bangladesh. It emerged in response to the decision of the then central government of Pakistan to impose Urdu as the sole state language, ignoring the linguistic identity of the Bengali-speaking majority. This decision triggered widespread protests, especially among students and intellectuals in Dhaka.

On 21 February 1952, police opened fire on protesting students, resulting in the deaths of several activists. This event intensified the movement and ultimately led to the recognition of Bengali as one of the state languages of Pakistan in 1956. The Language Movement not only established linguistic rights but also laid the foundation for Bengali nationalism and future political struggles.⁷³

3.2.2 Mass Uprising of 1969

The Mass Uprising of 1969 was a significant political movement against the authoritarian rule of the then Pakistani military regime. It was driven by widespread dissatisfaction over political repression, economic inequality, and lack of democratic rights. Students, workers, and political activists played a central role in organizing protests and strikes across the region.

The movement led to mass mobilization and eventually forced the resignation of military ruler Ayub Khan. It is considered a turning point in the political history of Bangladesh, as it strengthened the demand for autonomy and self-rule. The uprising also contributed directly to the momentum leading to the Liberation War of 1971.⁷⁴

⁷³ *ibid*

⁷⁴ Salahuddin Ahmed, *Bangladesh: Past and Present* (APH Publishing, 2004), pp. 120–150.

3.2.3 Liberation War of 1971

The Liberation War of 1971 is the most defining event in the history of Bangladesh. It was a nine-month-long armed struggle against the Pakistani military following political discrimination, economic exploitation, and denial of democratic rights to the Bengali population.

The conflict resulted in widespread violence, mass displacement, and significant loss of life. With support from various political and military actors, Bangladesh achieved independence in December 1971. The war remains central to national identity and continues to influence political narratives and collective memory in the country.⁷⁴

3.2.4 Post-Independence Political Instability

Following independence, Bangladesh experienced periods of significant political instability characterized by military coups, authoritarian regimes, and struggles for democratic consolidation. The early years of independence saw political turmoil, economic challenges, and institutional weaknesses.

From the mid-1970s onward, military rule dominated the political landscape for extended periods. Although democratic governance was restored in the 1990s, political polarization between major parties has continued to generate tensions, strikes, and electoral conflicts. These ongoing challenges have contributed to recurring social and political unrest in the country.⁷⁵

3.3 Military Rule and Democratic Transition

The political history of Bangladesh has been significantly shaped by periods of military rule followed by attempts at democratic transition. After independence in 1971, the country initially adopted a parliamentary system, but political instability, economic challenges, and institutional weaknesses created conditions for military intervention in governance. These shifts between military and civilian rule have had long-term effects on political culture, state institutions, and patterns of social and political unrest.⁷⁶

The first major phase of military influence began in 1975 following political turmoil and the assassination of the founding leadership. This period marked the suspension of democratic processes and the establishment of military-backed governance structures.

⁷⁵ *ibid*

⁷⁶ Rounaq Jahan, *Bangladesh Politics: Problems and Issues* (University Press Limited, 2005), pp. 45–70.

During this time, political activity was heavily controlled, opposition voices were restricted, and state authority became centralized under military leadership. Such conditions contributed to a political environment characterized by limited democratic participation and reduced civil liberties.⁷⁷

A major turning point occurred in 1990 when a mass popular uprising, led by students, political parties, and civil society organizations, resulted in the end of military-backed rule and the restoration of parliamentary democracy. This transition is considered a critical milestone in Bangladesh's political development. However, the return to democracy did not eliminate political instability; instead, it introduced a new phase of competitive party politics marked by intense rivalry between major political forces.⁷⁸

From a criminological perspective, the legacy of military rule and uneven democratic consolidation has important implications for understanding crime and deviance. Weak institutional trust, political polarization, and limited accountability can create conditions that increase social tension and collective conflict. In this sense, the transition from military rule to democracy in Bangladesh remains an ongoing and complex process rather than a completed transformation.⁷⁹

3.4 Culture of Political Confrontation

The political landscape of Bangladesh is widely characterized by a persistent culture of political confrontation. This refers to a pattern of adversarial politics where major political parties and affiliated groups frequently engage in intense rivalry, often expressed through strikes, demonstrations, blockades, and sometimes violent clashes. Instead of negotiation and compromise, political actors often rely on street mobilization and mass protest as primary tools of political expression, which significantly contributes to social and political unrest.⁸⁰

This confrontational political culture has historical roots in the post-independence period, where political instability, military interventions, and weak institutional continuity shaped a highly polarized political environment. Over time, this polarization deepened the divide between major political forces, leading to a “winner-takes-all” mentality in

⁷⁷ Willem van Schendel, *A History of Bangladesh* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 180–210.

⁷⁸ Ali Riaz, *Political Violence in South Asia* (Routledge, 2018), pp. 85–110.

⁷⁹ Salahuddin Ahmed, *Bangladesh: Past and Present* (APH Publishing, 2004), pp. 150–175.

⁸⁰ Ali Riaz, *Political Violence in South Asia* (Routledge, 2018), pp. 60–90.

electoral politics. As a result, political competition is often perceived not merely as a democratic process but as a struggle for survival and control over state power.

From a criminological perspective, this culture of confrontation can be linked to conflict theory, which argues that political and legal systems reflect struggles for power between competing groups. In such a context, laws and enforcement mechanisms may be influenced by political interests, which further intensifies distrust between rival groups and state institutions.⁸¹ This distrust often manifests in protests, vandalism, and politically motivated violence.

3.5 Electoral Violence and Political Polarization

Electoral violence and political polarization are two interrelated phenomena that significantly influence the democratic and governance landscape of Bangladesh. Electoral violence refers to any form of physical force, intimidation, coercion, or destruction of property that occurs before, during, or after elections. Political polarization, on the other hand, describes the deep division within society and political institutions where opposing groups hold sharply contrasting and often irreconcilable views. Together, these dynamics contribute to recurring instability, mistrust in electoral processes, and broader social and political unrest.⁸²

Electoral violence in Bangladesh has often been associated with intense competition between major political parties, where elections are viewed as high-stakes contests for control over state power and resources. This competition sometimes leads to clashes between rival supporters, attacks on polling centers, intimidation of voters, and destruction of electoral materials. Such incidents undermine public confidence in democratic processes and weaken the legitimacy of elected institutions.

From a criminological perspective, conflict theory provides a useful explanation for electoral violence and political polarization. According to this perspective, political systems reflect underlying struggles for power and resources, and laws may be shaped by dominant groups to maintain their control. In such a context, elections become not only democratic exercises but also arenas of intense competition where violence may be used as a strategic tool to influence outcomes.⁸³

⁸¹ Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Penguin Classics, 1848/2002), pp. 12–25.

⁸² *ibid*

⁸³ Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Penguin Classics, 1848/2002), pp. 12–25.

3.6 Student Politics and Campus Violence

Student politics and campus violence have long been significant features of the socio-political landscape of Bangladesh. Educational institutions, particularly public universities and colleges, have historically played an important role in national political movements. From the Language Movement of 1952 to the Liberation War of 1971, students have been at the forefront of political activism. However, in the post-independence period, student politics has increasingly been associated with factionalism, violence, and criminal activities, which contribute to broader patterns of social and political unrest.⁸⁴

Student organizations affiliated with major political parties often compete for control over campus resources, residential halls, and institutional influence. This competition sometimes leads to violent clashes, intimidation of students, and disruption of academic activities. As a result, campuses that should function as centers of learning are occasionally transformed into arenas of political confrontation. Such violence not only affects the educational environment but also undermines the development of democratic values among young people.

From a criminological perspective, conflict theory helps explain campus violence by highlighting how power struggles between groups can manifest in institutional settings. In this context, student politics becomes an extension of broader national political competition, where control over resources and influence is contested. Violence may emerge as a strategy to assert dominance and maintain control within the campus environment.⁸⁵

3.7 Labor Unrest and Industrial Conflict

Labor unrest and industrial conflict constitute a significant dimension of social and political instability in Bangladesh. As a rapidly developing economy with a large labor-intensive industrial sector, particularly the ready-made garment (RMG) industry, Bangladesh frequently experiences strikes, protests, wage-related disputes, and confrontations between workers, employers, and sometimes state authorities. These incidents often reflect deeper structural issues such as income inequality, poor working conditions, lack of labor rights enforcement, and economic insecurity.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (Free Press, 1963), pp. 1–18

⁸⁵ *ibid*

⁸⁶

3.8 Religious Extremism and Militancy

Religious extremism and militancy represent serious challenges to social harmony and national security in Bangladesh. These phenomena refer to the use of religious ideology to justify violence, intimidation, or illegal activities aimed at achieving political or ideological objectives. Although Bangladesh is widely recognized for its tradition of religious tolerance and cultural pluralism, it has also faced periodic incidents of extremist activities that threaten public order and social cohesion.⁸⁷

Religious extremism often develops from a combination of ideological, social, economic, and political factors. Individuals or groups may become radicalized due to feelings of marginalization, lack of education, exposure to extremist propaganda, or dissatisfaction with governance systems. In some cases, transnational extremist networks also influence local actors, contributing to the spread of militant ideology. These processes can lead to recruitment into illegal organizations and involvement in violent activities.

3.9 Social Media, Cyber Influence and Public Mobilization

The rapid expansion of digital technology and internet access has significantly transformed patterns of communication, political participation, and public mobilization in Bangladesh. Social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), and messaging applications have become powerful tools for information sharing, political expression, and collective mobilization. While these platforms enhance democratic participation and awareness, they have also contributed to the spread of misinformation, hate speech, cybercrime, and online-based political polarization.⁸⁸

Social media plays a dual role in shaping social and political unrest. On one hand, it facilitates rapid dissemination of information, enabling citizens to organize protests, express grievances, and mobilize collective action. On the other hand, it can also amplify rumors, fake news, and propaganda, which may escalate tensions and contribute to misunderstandings between different social and political groups. In some cases, online content has been linked to real-world conflicts, demonstrating the strong connection between cyberspace and physical social unrest.

⁸⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Global Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Reports*, available at: [UNODC Terrorism](#), (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

⁸⁸ Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (Polity Press, 2012).

From a criminological perspective, labeling theory is relevant in understanding cyber influence and public mobilization. Individuals or groups may be labeled online through viral content, leading to stigmatization, harassment, or social exclusion. This labeling process can intensify conflict and contribute to deviant or retaliatory behavior in both digital and physical spaces.⁸⁹

3.10 Economic Inequality and Social Frustration

Economic inequality and social frustration are key structural factors contributing to social and political unrest in Bangladesh. Economic inequality refers to the unequal distribution of income, wealth, and opportunities among different groups in society, while social frustration arises when individuals or groups perceive persistent barriers to achieving their basic needs, aspirations, or social mobility. Together, these conditions create a fertile environment for dissatisfaction, protest, and in some cases, deviant or violent behavior.⁹⁰

In Bangladesh, despite notable progress in economic growth and poverty reduction, disparities in income and access to resources remain significant. A large segment of the population continues to face challenges such as low wages, unemployment, inadequate access to quality education and healthcare, and limited upward mobility. These inequalities often generate feelings of relative deprivation, where individuals compare their living conditions with others and perceive injustice, even if absolute poverty is declining.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the historical and socio-political context of social and political unrest in Bangladesh. It demonstrates that contemporary unrest is deeply rooted in historical developments such as the Language Movement of 1952, the Mass Uprising of 1969, the Liberation War of 1971, and the subsequent phases of military rule and democratic transition. These historical events have significantly shaped the political identity, collective consciousness, and patterns of political mobilization in the country.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (Free Press, 1963), pp. 1–18.

⁹⁰ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report: Inequality Issues*, available at: [UNDP Human Development](#). (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

⁹¹ Willem van Schendel, *A History of Bangladesh* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

The chapter also highlights that political culture in Bangladesh is characterized by confrontation, polarization, and competitive power struggles, which often manifest in electoral violence, student politics, labor unrest, and public protests. These dynamics are further intensified by socio-economic inequalities, weak institutional governance, and limited trust in political and administrative systems. Urban centers like Dhaka illustrate how rapid urbanization and structural pressures contribute to both crime and collective unrest.

From a criminological perspective, this analysis confirms the relevance of major theoretical frameworks such as strain theory, conflict theory, labeling theory, and social disorganization theory in explaining social and political instability. These theories collectively show that unrest is not merely a result of individual behavior but is closely linked to broader structural, political, and economic conditions within society.⁹²

⁹² Robert K. Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (1938), pp. 672–682.

Chapter Four: Criminological Analysis of Social and Political Unrest in Bangladesh

4.1 Introduction

The criminological analysis of social and political unrest in Bangladesh focuses on understanding how crime, deviance, and collective violence are shaped by structural inequalities, political dynamics, and institutional weaknesses. Unlike earlier chapters that examined historical and socio-political contexts, this chapter applies criminological theories directly to interpret patterns of unrest, including political violence, electoral conflicts, student activism, labor disputes, and cyber-related mobilization.

In criminology, social and political unrest is often understood as a form of collective behavior that emerges when groups experience deprivation, exclusion, or perceived injustice. These conditions are frequently linked to broader structural issues such as poverty, unemployment, corruption, and unequal access to resources. In this regard, unrest is not only a political phenomenon but also a criminological concern that reflects deeper social disorganization and conflict within society.⁹³

In the context of Bangladesh, recurring episodes of unrest highlight the interaction between political competition and social grievances. Urban centers such as Dhaka often become focal points for protests, strikes, and demonstrations due to population density, political concentration, and economic inequality. These events demonstrate how structural pressures can translate into collective action, which may sometimes escalate into violence or criminal behavior⁹⁴.

4.2 Application of Strain Theory in Bangladesh

Strain theory, developed by Robert K. Merton, is highly relevant for understanding social and political unrest in Bangladesh. The theory explains that crime and deviant behavior occur when there is a gap between culturally approved goals (such as wealth, success, and social status) and the legitimate means available to achieve them. When individuals or groups are unable to achieve these goals through socially accepted channels, they experience strain, frustration, and pressure, which may lead to deviance or collective unrest.⁹⁵

⁹³ Frank E. Hagan, *Introduction to Criminology: Theories, Methods, and Criminal Behavior* (Sage Publications, 2017), pp. 23–45.

⁹⁴ Ali Riaz, *Political Violence in South Asia* (Routledge, 2018), pp. 60–110.

⁹⁵ Robert K. Merton, “Social Structure and Anomie,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (1938), pp. 672–682.

In the context of Bangladesh, this strain is often visible among unemployed youth, low-income workers, and marginalized communities who face limited access to education, employment, and economic opportunities. Although societal expectations emphasize upward mobility and success, structural barriers such as poverty, inequality, and limited job opportunities create frustration. This gap between aspiration and opportunity can contribute to protests, social dissatisfaction, and in some cases, involvement in political movements or unrest⁹⁶.

Strain theory also helps explain labor unrest in industrial sectors, particularly in the ready-made garment industry. Workers who experience low wages, poor working conditions, and lack of job security may perceive a significant imbalance between their efforts and rewards. This perceived injustice can lead to strikes, demonstrations, and collective bargaining actions, which sometimes escalate into industrial conflict.

4.3 Conflict Theory and Political Power Struggles

Conflict theory provides a powerful framework for understanding social and political unrest in Bangladesh by emphasizing the role of power, inequality, and competing interests within society. Developed from the ideas of Karl Marx, conflict theory argues that society is not based on consensus and harmony, but rather on continuous struggles between groups over resources, authority, and control of institutions.⁹⁷

In the context of Bangladesh, political power struggles are often central to understanding unrest. Competing political parties frequently engage in intense rivalry to gain control over the state, which can lead to polarization, protests, strikes, and sometimes violent confrontations. These struggles are not only ideological but also linked to access to resources, governance structures, and institutional influence.

Conflict theory also explains how laws and state institutions may reflect the interests of dominant groups. In such situations, marginalized or opposition groups may feel excluded from decision-making processes, leading to dissatisfaction and resistance. This perceived inequality in political participation can contribute to social unrest and collective action, especially in urban areas like Dhaka⁹⁸.

⁹⁶ Frank E. Hagan, *Introduction to Criminology: Theories, Methods, and Criminal Behavior* (Sage Publications, 2017), pp. 80–95.

⁹⁷
⁹⁸ Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Penguin Classics, 1848/2002), pp. 12–25.

From a criminological perspective, political protests, demonstrations, and even violent clashes can be understood as expressions of deeper structural conflict rather than isolated criminal acts. In many cases, what is legally defined as “unrest” may be perceived by participants as legitimate resistance against inequality or injustice.

4.4 Social Disorganization and Urban Violence

Social disorganization theory explains crime and violence as the outcome of weakened social institutions, breakdown of community cohesion, and rapid social change. Originally developed by Shaw and McKay, the theory argues that when neighborhoods lack strong social control, informal relationships, and effective institutions, crime and deviant behavior are more likely to emerge.⁹⁹ In such environments, collective regulation of behavior becomes weak, allowing disorder and violence to increase⁹⁹.

In the context of Bangladesh, this theory is particularly relevant to rapidly urbanizing areas where migration from rural regions to cities has created densely populated and socially fragmented communities. Urban centers such as Dhaka experience high population pressure, informal settlements, unemployment, and inadequate public services. These conditions reduce the effectiveness of traditional social controls such as family supervision, community monitoring, and neighborhood cohesion.

As a result, urban environments may become vulnerable to various forms of violence and unrest, including street crime, gang activity, political clashes, and spontaneous protests. Weak institutional presence in some areas further contributes to the inability to regulate behavior effectively, increasing the likelihood of disorder and collective instability¹⁰⁰.

Social disorganization theory also helps explain how youth involvement in violence and unrest may emerge in urban settings. When young people grow up in environments characterized by poverty, limited educational opportunities, and weak community support systems, they may be more susceptible to deviant influences or political mobilization. In some cases, political groups may also exploit these conditions to recruit supporters, further intensifying urban unrest.

⁹⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰⁰ Clifford R. Shaw & Henry D. McKay, *Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas* (University of Chicago Press, 1942).

4.5 Labeling Theory and Criminalization of Dissent

Labeling theory explains how deviance is not only defined by the nature of an act but also by the societal reaction to it. Developed by sociologists such as Howard Becker, the theory argues that individuals or groups become “deviant” when they are labeled as such by authorities or dominant social institutions. Once applied, these labels can influence identity, behavior, and future interactions with the legal and social system.¹⁰¹

In the context of Bangladesh, labeling theory is particularly relevant in understanding how dissent, protest, and political activism may sometimes be interpreted as criminal behavior. During periods of political unrest, individuals involved in demonstrations or opposition activities may be labeled as “troublemakers,” “agitators,” or even “criminals.” Such labeling can influence public perception and justify legal or coercive responses by authorities.

This process of labeling can contribute to the criminalization of dissent, where legitimate forms of political expression are treated as unlawful acts. As a result, individuals who are initially engaged in peaceful protest may become further marginalized, increasing the likelihood of continued conflict between citizens and the state. In urban centers such as Dhaka, where political activity is highly visible, such dynamics are particularly significant¹⁰².

Labeling theory also highlights the role of media and public discourse in shaping perceptions of deviance. When protests or social movements are portrayed negatively, it may reinforce stereotypes and deepen divisions within society. This can contribute to a cycle where labeled individuals are excluded from mainstream opportunities, potentially pushing them further toward deviant or oppositional behavior¹⁰³.

4.6 Radical Criminology and Structural Inequality

Radical criminology offers a critical framework for understanding crime and social and political unrest by focusing on structural inequality, economic exploitation, and power relations within society. Influenced by Marxist thought, radical criminologists argue that crime cannot be fully understood without examining the broader capitalist system and the

¹⁰¹ Robert J. Sampson, *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect* (University of Chicago Press, 2012).

¹⁰² Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (Free Press, 1963).

¹⁰³ Edwin M. Lemert, *Social Pathology* (McGraw-Hill, 1951).

unequal distribution of wealth and power that shapes social relations.¹⁰⁴ In this perspective, laws and criminal justice systems are seen as tools that may reflect and protect dominant economic and political interests¹⁰⁴.

In the context of Bangladesh, structural inequality plays a significant role in shaping patterns of unrest. Economic disparities, limited access to quality education and healthcare, and unequal opportunities for social mobility contribute to frustration among marginalized populations. These structural conditions often generate grievances that may manifest as protests, labor strikes, or other forms of collective action. In some cases, state responses to such actions may further intensify tensions between authorities and citizens.

Radical criminology also highlights how certain forms of harm caused by powerful groups may be under-criminalized or overlooked. For example, issues such as unsafe working conditions, environmental degradation, or economic exploitation may not always receive the same legal attention as street-level crimes, despite their significant social impact. This imbalance reflects the unequal application of law in relation to power structures.

4.7 Youth Crime and Political Manipulation

Youth crime and political manipulation represent an important dimension of social and political unrest in Bangladesh. Young people constitute a large proportion of the population, and their energy, aspirations, and frustrations significantly influence patterns of collective behavior. While youth can be a powerful force for positive social change, they are also vulnerable to involvement in crime and political violence when exposed to structural inequalities, unemployment, and political exploitation.¹⁰⁵

In many cases, youth involvement in crime or unrest is linked to socio-economic conditions such as lack of employment opportunities, limited access to quality education, and weak institutional support. These conditions may create frustration and feelings of exclusion, making young individuals more susceptible to engaging in deviant behavior or being recruited into politically motivated groups. Political actors may sometimes exploit this vulnerability by mobilizing youth for demonstrations, confrontations, or violent activities.

¹⁰⁴ Jock Young, *The Exclusive Society: Social Exclusion, Crime and Difference in Late Modernity* (Sage Publications, 1999).

¹⁰⁵ Richard Quinney, *The Social Reality of Crime* (Little, Brown, 1970).

From a criminological perspective, strain theory helps explain how blocked opportunities and unmet aspirations contribute to youth frustration and deviance. When legitimate pathways to success are perceived as inaccessible, some young people may turn to alternative means, including participation in political violence or criminal activities.¹⁰⁶

Labeling theory also plays a significant role in understanding youth crime. Once young individuals are labeled as “criminals,” “agitators,” or “gang members,” they may face social exclusion, reduced opportunities, and increased surveillance. This labeling process can reinforce deviant identities and limit reintegration into mainstream society, thereby increasing the likelihood of continued involvement in crime or political unrest¹⁰⁷.

4.8 Corruption and Institutional Weakness

Corruption and institutional weakness are central structural factors contributing to social and political unrest in Bangladesh. Corruption refers to the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, while institutional weakness indicates the inability of state institutions—such as law enforcement agencies, judiciary, and administrative bodies—to function effectively, transparently, and independently. Together, these issues undermine public trust, weaken governance, and create conditions that may lead to crime, deviance, and collective unrest.¹⁰⁸

In Bangladesh, corruption can be observed in various sectors, including public administration, law enforcement, political institutions, and service delivery systems. When citizens perceive that access to justice, employment, or public services is influenced by bribery, favoritism, or political connections, it creates dissatisfaction and resentment. This perception of inequality before the law often contributes to a lack of trust in state institutions and may encourage informal or alternative forms of justice-seeking behavior.

Institutional weakness further exacerbates these problems. When legal and administrative institutions are unable to enforce laws consistently or ensure accountability, social order becomes fragile. Weak governance structures may also fail to effectively address

¹⁰⁶ William J. Chambliss & Robert B. Seidman, *Law, Order, and Power* (Addison-Wesley, 1971).

¹⁰⁷ Jock Young, *The Exclusive Society: Social Exclusion, Crime and Difference in Late Modernity* (Sage Publications, 1999).

¹⁰⁸ Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index Report*, available at: [Transparency International CPI](https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi) (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

grievances, leading to frustration among citizens. In some cases, this frustration may manifest as protests, strikes, or broader political unrest¹⁰⁹.

From a criminological perspective, conflict theory provides a useful explanation for corruption and institutional weakness. It suggests that institutions often reflect the interests of powerful groups, which may result in unequal application of laws and selective enforcement. This imbalance can deepen social divisions and contribute to resistance from marginalized populations.¹¹⁰

Strain theory also helps explain how corruption contributes to deviant behavior. When individuals perceive that legitimate pathways to success are blocked due to corrupt practices, they may experience frustration and adopt alternative strategies, including illegal or informal means of achieving goals. This dynamic can further weaken institutional legitimacy.

In urban centers such as Dhaka, the effects of corruption and institutional weakness are particularly visible due to high population density and increased demand for public services. Inefficiencies in service delivery, bureaucratic delays, and unequal access to resources often intensify public dissatisfaction and contribute to social tensions.

4.9 Police-Public Relations During Political Conflict

Police–public relations during political conflict play a crucial role in shaping patterns of social order, legitimacy, and unrest. The police are the primary state institution responsible for maintaining law and order, preventing crime, and managing public gatherings. However, during periods of political tension, their role often becomes complex and controversial, as they are required to balance enforcement of law with protection of citizens’ rights to protest and assembly.¹¹¹

In Bangladesh, interactions between police and the public during political unrest have often been influenced by political polarization and competing interests. During demonstrations, strikes, or electoral conflicts, police may be deployed to control crowds and maintain order. However, perceptions of excessive force, selective enforcement, or

¹⁰⁹ Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Penguin Classics, 1848/2002).

¹¹⁰ Robert K. Merton, “Social Structure and Anomie,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (1938), pp. 672–682.

¹¹¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Handbook on Maintaining Public Order*, available at: [UNODC Public Order](#). (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

political bias can sometimes lead to mistrust between law enforcement agencies and segments of the public. This mistrust may further escalate tensions and contribute to cycles of protest and confrontation.

From a criminological perspective, conflict theory provides an important explanation of police–public relations. It suggests that law enforcement agencies may, in certain contexts, reflect broader power structures within society. As a result, marginalized or opposition groups may perceive policing practices as unequal or biased, which can intensify grievances and resistance. This perception can weaken the legitimacy of law enforcement institutions and reduce public cooperation¹¹².

Labeling theory also helps explain how police interactions may contribute to the criminalization of dissent. When protesters or political activists are labeled as “troublemakers” or “rioters,” it may influence how they are treated by authorities and how they are perceived by society. Such labeling can escalate conflict and reduce opportunities for peaceful resolution.

In urban areas such as Dhaka, police–public relations are particularly significant due to frequent political gatherings, high population density, and rapid mobilization through social and digital media. Effective communication, proportional use of force, and community policing strategies are essential for maintaining trust and preventing escalation of conflict.

4.10 Impact of Unrest on National Security and Rule of Law

Social and political unrest has significant implications for national security and the rule of law in Bangladesh. National security refers to the protection of a state’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, and public safety, while the rule of law ensures that all individuals and institutions are subject to and accountable under established legal frameworks. When unrest becomes frequent or widespread, it can challenge both state stability and legal order.¹¹³

In Bangladesh, recurring incidents of political violence, protests, strikes, and demonstrations can place considerable pressure on security institutions. Such events may disrupt public services, hinder economic activity, and create challenges for law

¹¹² Jock Young, *The Exclusive Society: Social Exclusion, Crime and Difference in Late Modernity* (Sage Publications, 1999).

¹¹³ Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (Free Press, 1963).

enforcement agencies in maintaining order. In some cases, prolonged unrest may also contribute to insecurity among citizens, reducing confidence in the state's ability to ensure stability and protection¹¹⁴.

From a criminological perspective, conflict theory explains that unrest often emerges from underlying power struggles and structural inequalities. When certain groups perceive that political or economic systems are unfair, they may engage in collective action that challenges existing authority structures. While such actions may be viewed as legitimate political expression by participants, they can also be interpreted as threats to public order by the state.

4.11 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed criminological analysis of social and political unrest in Bangladesh by applying major theoretical frameworks such as strain theory, conflict theory, social disorganization theory, labeling theory, and radical criminology. It demonstrates that unrest is not merely a series of isolated events but a structurally rooted phenomenon shaped by economic inequality, political competition, institutional weaknesses, and social fragmentation.

The analysis shows that strain and frustration arising from limited opportunities, unemployment, and unequal access to resources significantly contribute to deviant behavior and collective protest. Similarly, conflict theory explains how power struggles and structural inequality generate political tension and resistance, while labeling processes can further intensify exclusion and reinforce cycles of deviance. Social disorganization is particularly evident in urban centers such as Dhaka, where rapid urbanization and weak community control contribute to instability¹¹⁵.

Overall, the findings of this chapter highlight that social and political unrest in Bangladesh is deeply interconnected with broader socio-economic and political structures. These dynamics influence patterns of crime, protest, and institutional response, ultimately affecting national stability and governance.

¹¹⁴ Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era* (ECPR Press, 2007).

¹¹⁵ Robert K. Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (1938), pp. 672–682.

Chapter Five: Challenges, Findings and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the concluding analytical framework of the study on social and political unrest in Bangladesh by focusing on the major challenges, key findings, and policy-oriented recommendations. Building on the theoretical and contextual discussions in the preceding chapters, this section synthesizes how structural inequalities, political competition, institutional weaknesses, and socio-economic disparities collectively contribute to crime, deviance, and patterns of collective unrest.¹¹⁶

The analysis throughout this study demonstrates that unrest in Bangladesh is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by interconnected political, economic, and social factors. Issues such as political polarization, corruption, unemployment, weak governance, and uneven access to justice often interact to produce conditions conducive to protests, strikes, violence, and other forms of collective action. Urban centers such as Dhaka frequently become focal points of these dynamics due to their concentration of population, political institutions, and economic activity¹¹⁷.

From a criminological standpoint, this study emphasizes that social and political unrest cannot be understood solely through a legalistic lens. Instead, it must be analyzed through broader theoretical frameworks such as strain theory, conflict theory, labeling theory, and social disorganization theory, all of which highlight the structural roots of deviance and collective behavior. These perspectives collectively demonstrate that unrest is deeply embedded in the socio-political structure of society rather than being merely the result of individual actions.

Therefore, this chapter aims to outline the key challenges identified in the study, summarize the major findings, and present practical recommendations for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and relevant stakeholders to address the underlying causes of social and political instability in Bangladesh.

¹¹⁶ ibid

¹¹⁷ Ali Riaz, *Political Violence in South Asia* (Routledge, 2018), pp. 60–110.

5.2 Findings:

1. The study finds that social and political unrest in Bangladesh is fundamentally rooted in structural inequalities such as unequal access to education, employment, and justice. These inequalities generate persistent frustration among marginalized groups, particularly youth and low-income populations. Over time, such grievances often manifest in protests, strikes, and collective unrest when institutional responses are insufficient.¹¹⁸
2. Political polarization is identified as a major driver of instability. The adversarial nature of party politics reduces trust, weakens democratic dialogue, and increases confrontational behavior. This environment frequently contributes to demonstrations, clashes, and politically motivated violence.¹¹⁹
3. Economic inequality is another significant factor contributing to social frustration. Despite economic growth, disparities in income distribution and social mobility remain evident. These inequalities intensify perceptions of injustice and fuel dissatisfaction with governance structures.¹²⁰
4. Institutional weakness, particularly in governance and law enforcement, plays a crucial role in sustaining unrest. Weak accountability, bureaucratic inefficiency, and perceptions of corruption reduce public trust in the state. This often encourages alternative forms of protest and resistance.¹²¹
5. Rapid urbanization in Dhaka has contributed to social disorganization. Overcrowding, informal settlements, and inadequate public services weaken traditional social controls. As a result, urban areas experience higher levels of disorder and collective unrest.¹²²
6. Youth participation is a central feature of political unrest in Bangladesh. Young people are frequently mobilized in student politics, protests, and demonstrations. Unemployment and limited opportunities make them more vulnerable to political manipulation.¹²³

¹¹⁸ Frank E. Hagan, *Introduction to Criminology: Theories, Methods, and Criminal Behavior* (Sage Publications, 2017).

¹¹⁹ Ali Riaz, *Political Violence in South Asia* (Routledge, 2018).

¹²⁰ Robert K. Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (1938), pp. 672–682.

¹²¹ Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index Report*, available at: [Transparency International CPI](https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi) (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

¹²² Jock Young, *The Exclusive Society* (Sage Publications, 1999).

¹²³ International Labour Organization (ILO), *Bangladesh Decent Work Reports*, available at: [ILO Bangladesh](https://www.ilo.org/publications) (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

7. Labor unrest, particularly in the garment industry, is strongly linked to poor working conditions and wage disputes. Workers often engage in strikes and protests to demand fair treatment and better conditions. These disputes sometimes escalate into wider industrial conflict.¹²⁴
8. Social media and digital platforms significantly influence patterns of unrest. While they facilitate communication and mobilization, they also contribute to misinformation and polarization. This dual role can intensify and accelerate collective actions.
9. The labeling and stigmatization of protesters contribute to the escalation of conflict. Individuals involved in dissent are sometimes labeled as criminals or disruptors. This labeling process can deepen divisions and reinforce cycles of unrest.
10. Corruption is identified as a major obstacle to good governance. Perceived unfairness in public service delivery reduces institutional legitimacy. This often leads to dissatisfaction and protest behavior among citizens.¹²⁵
11. Social disorganization in urban settings contributes to rising crime and unrest. Weak community cohesion and insufficient institutional presence reduce informal social control. This creates an environment conducive to deviant behavior and collective disorder.
12. Historical and political legacies continue to shape contemporary unrest. Past movements and political transitions have created a culture of mobilization and confrontation. These historical patterns continue to influence present-day political behavior.¹²⁶
13. Human rights concerns are closely linked to public dissatisfaction. Perceived violations or unequal protection of rights weaken trust in institutions. This may result in increased civic protest and resistance movements.¹²⁷
14. Media plays a dual role in shaping public perception of unrest. While it increases awareness and transparency, sensational reporting can amplify tensions. This may escalate localized conflicts into broader social unrest.

¹²⁴ Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope* (Polity Press, 2012).

¹²⁵ Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders* (Free Press, 1963).

¹²⁶ Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Penguin Classics, 1848/2002).

¹²⁷ Willem van Schendel, *A History of Bangladesh* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

5.3 Recommendations:

1. The study recommends strengthening socio-economic development policies in Bangladesh to reduce structural inequalities. Equal access to education, employment, and healthcare should be prioritized to minimize frustration among marginalized groups. Inclusive development can significantly reduce the likelihood of protests and social unrest.¹²⁸
2. Political dialogue and democratic tolerance should be promoted to reduce polarization. Political parties should adopt a culture of negotiation and compromise rather than confrontation. Strengthening democratic norms can help reduce politically motivated violence and instability.
3. Anti-corruption measures should be reinforced through stronger institutional accountability and transparency mechanisms. Independent oversight bodies and digital governance systems can help reduce corruption in public service delivery. This will improve public trust in state institutions.¹²⁹
4. Youth empowerment programs should be expanded to reduce political manipulation of young people. Skill development, employment opportunities, and civic education can help channel youth energy toward productive activities. This will reduce their vulnerability to political exploitation.¹³⁰
5. Labor rights should be strengthened, particularly in the industrial and garment sectors. Fair wages, safe working conditions, and effective dispute resolution mechanisms should be ensured. This can reduce labor unrest and industrial conflict.¹³¹
6. Responsible media practices should be encouraged to minimize misinformation and sensationalism. Ethical journalism and fact-checking mechanisms can help reduce the spread of rumors during periods of unrest. Media literacy programs should also be introduced.

¹²⁸ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report*, available at: [UNDP Human Development](#). (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

¹²⁹ Ali Riaz, *Political Violence in South Asia* (Routledge, 2018).

¹³⁰ Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index*, available at: [Transparency International CPI](#). (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

¹³¹ Jock Young, *The Exclusive Society* (Sage Publications, 1999).

7. Legal protections for freedom of expression and peaceful protest should be ensured. At the same time, law enforcement agencies must avoid excessive use of force. Balanced enforcement of law and rights is essential for maintaining public trust.¹³²
8. Community policing strategies should be strengthened to improve police–public relations. Building trust between citizens and law enforcement can reduce tensions during political conflict. Training in human rights-based policing is recommended.
9. Educational institutions should be depoliticized to reduce campus violence. Academic environments must be protected from excessive political influence. This will help create a safer and more productive learning environment.¹³³
10. Digital governance and cyber regulation frameworks should be improved to address online misinformation and cyber influence. At the same time, digital rights should be protected to ensure freedom of expression. A balanced approach is necessary.
11. Social welfare programs should be expanded to support vulnerable populations. Targeted assistance for low-income groups can reduce economic pressure and social frustration. This may help prevent deviant and violent behavior.
12. Strengthening judicial independence and efficiency is essential for improving rule of law. Faster and fairer legal processes can enhance public confidence in justice institutions. This can reduce reliance on informal conflict resolution mechanisms.¹³⁴
13. Civic education and awareness programs should be introduced to promote peaceful political participation. Citizens should be encouraged to resolve grievances through democratic and legal channels. This will contribute to long-term political stability.

¹³² International Labour Organization (ILO), *Bangladesh Decent Work Reports*, available at: ILO Bangladesh, (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

¹³³ Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (Routledge, 2002).

¹³⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Community Policing Guidelines*, available at: [UNODC Community Policing](#), (Last visited: May 17, 2026).

Conclusion

This study examined social and political unrest in Bangladesh through a criminological lens, integrating historical, theoretical, and empirical perspectives. The analysis demonstrates that unrest is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by structural inequalities, political polarization, institutional weaknesses, and socio-economic disparities. Rather than being isolated or spontaneous events, incidents of unrest are deeply embedded in long-term socio-political processes and governance challenges.

The application of criminological theories such as strain theory, conflict theory, social disorganization theory, labeling theory, and radical criminology has shown that both individual and collective forms of deviance are strongly influenced by broader structural conditions. These theories collectively highlight that crime and unrest often emerge where there is unequal access to opportunities, weak institutional control, and perceived injustice within society.¹³⁵

The study further finds that urban centers such as Dhaka play a central role in shaping patterns of unrest due to rapid urbanization, population pressure, economic inequality, and political concentration. These conditions intensify social tensions and create environments where protests, strikes, and collective actions are more likely to occur¹³⁶.

Overall, the research concludes that addressing social and political unrest in Bangladesh requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond law enforcement. Sustainable solutions must focus on reducing inequality, strengthening democratic institutions, ensuring good governance, protecting human rights, and promoting inclusive socio-economic development. Only through coordinated efforts involving the state, civil society, and political actors can long-term social stability and justice be achieved¹³⁷.

¹³⁵ Frank E. Hagan, *Introduction to Criminology: Theories, Methods, and Criminal Behavior* (Sage Publications, 2017).

¹³⁶ Ali Riaz, *Political Violence in South Asia* (Routledge, 2018).

¹³⁷ Robert K. Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (1938), pp. 672–682.

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