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Political Transparency as a Catalyst for Sustainable Development and Peace: The Case of Bangladesh

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Article info	Abstract
Received: 10 August, 2026 Accepted: 12 September, 2026 Published: 22 September, 2026 Available in online: 30 September 2026 *Corresponding author:  labu_du@yahoo.com 	Political transparency refers to the openness, accessibility, and reliability of information concerning public decisions, institutions, policies, and the use of public resources. It is closely connected with accountability because information becomes politically meaningful when citizens, legislatures, courts, journalists, and civil society can use it to scrutinize public authority. This article examines the relationship between political transparency, sustainable development, and peace in Bangladesh through a qualitative analysis of legislation, international governance indicators, institutional reports, and established academic literature. The analysis focuses particularly on the Right to Information Act, 2009; institutional accountability; corruption control; electoral and political governance; media freedom; digital government; and citizen participation. The evidence indicates that transparency can support development by improving the conditions for accountable institutions, more informed participation, and more effective monitoring of public resources. It can also contribute to peace by reducing uncertainty, improving the legitimacy of public institutions, and creating non-violent channels through which citizens can challenge decisions and demand accountability. At the same time, transparency by itself does not automatically produce accountability. As Fox (2007) emphasizes, information may remain ineffective when citizens lack the institutional power or capacity to act on it. The article therefore argues that Bangladesh needs an integrated transparency framework combining access to information, institutional independence, effective oversight, media freedom, digital accessibility, civic capacity, and credible enforcement. Such reforms are relevant not only to democratic governance but also to Sustainable Development Goal 16, which links peaceful and inclusive societies with effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions. Keywords: political transparency, good governance, sustainable development, peace, accountability and right to information.

Introduction

Political transparency is an important component of accountable governance. In a transparent political system, citizens can obtain meaningful information about public decisions, institutional responsibilities, government programmes, expenditures, and the reasons underlying important policy choices. Transparency therefore creates conditions under which public authority can be observed and questioned. Research on democracy and transparency shows that political regimes differ in the extent to which policy-relevant information is made available, and that democratic incentives can encourage greater transparency (Hollyer et al., 2011). At the same time, transparency should not be

treated as synonymous with accountability. Information can be disclosed without producing consequences for misconduct, especially when oversight institutions are weak or citizens cannot effectively use the information (Fox, 2007).

For Bangladesh, the Right to Information Act, 2009 is an important legal foundation. The Act expressly connects citizens' right to information with transparency, accountability, reduced corruption, and good governance. It therefore provides a legal basis for treating access to public information as a governance issue rather than merely an administrative service. The law is supported by information-disclosure and information-management rules and regulations, although implementation remains dependent on

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institutional capacity, public awareness, record management, and compliance by public authorities.

The wider governance environment also matters. The World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators measure six dimensions of governance: voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption (Kaufmann & Kraay, 2024). These dimensions are useful for situating transparency within a broader institutional framework. Similarly, Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index provides a comparative indicator of perceived public-sector corruption. In the 2024 CPI, Bangladesh received a score of 23 out of 100 and ranked 151st among 180 countries (Transparency International, 2025). Such indicators should be interpreted cautiously: they do not by themselves prove the causes of governance problems, but they provide useful comparative evidence about institutional perceptions.

This article therefore asks how political transparency can contribute to sustainable development and peace in Bangladesh, what institutional barriers limit its effectiveness, and what reforms could strengthen the connection between transparency, accountability, development, and peace.

Objectives of the Study

The principal objective is to examine the role of political transparency in promoting sustainable development and peace in Bangladesh. The specific objectives are to: (a) clarify the concept of political transparency and its relationship with accountability; (b) examine the legal and institutional foundations of transparency in Bangladesh; (c) assess how transparency relates to development, corruption control, public trust, and peace; (d) identify major institutional and political barriers; and (e) propose practical measures for strengthening transparent and accountable governance.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative, documentary research design. It relies on primary legal and institutional documents, international datasets and reports, peer-reviewed academic publications, and authoritative institutional sources. Particular attention is given to the Right to Information Act, 2009; the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators; Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index; United Nations reports on sustainable development and digital government; and peer-reviewed literature on transparency, institutions, governance, and accountability. The study does not claim to present original survey or interview data. Accordingly, conclusions are analytical and interpretive rather than estimates of causal effects based on a new field dataset.

The use of secondary evidence is appropriate for developing a conceptual and policy-oriented assessment, but it also imposes limitations. Governance indicators are perception-based and subject to measurement uncertainty, while institutional reports may emphasize particular dimensions of governance. Media and advocacy reports can provide valuable evidence but should be evaluated critically. The article consequently prioritizes legal texts, academic publications, and official institutional sources wherever possible.

Literature Review

Transparency and Accountability

Fox (2007) provides an important conceptual distinction between transparency and accountability. Transparency may be clear or opaque, and the availability of information does not necessarily create accountability. For transparency to generate accountability, information must be sufficiently accessible and usable, and

institutional actors must have the authority and capacity to respond. This distinction is especially relevant to Bangladesh because the existence of a legal right to information does not, by itself, guarantee effective public oversight.

Hollyer et al. (2011) demonstrate that transparency is analytically distinct from democracy while also finding a relationship between democratic institutions and the availability of policy-relevant information. Their work supports the proposition that political transparency should be examined as an institutional practice rather than simply as a rhetorical feature of democracy.

Grindle (2004) similarly cautions against governance reform agendas that demand that every institutional problem be solved simultaneously. Her concept of "good enough governance" emphasizes prioritization, sequencing, feasibility, and context. For Bangladesh, this suggests that transparency reforms should focus on strategically important institutions and processes where improved information can generate practical accountability.

Institutions and Development

Institutional quality is central to development. North (1990) explains institutions as the rules and constraints that structure human interaction and argues that institutional arrangements shape long-run economic performance. Rodrik, Subramanian, and Trebbi (2004) provide cross-country evidence emphasizing the importance of institutional quality for differences in economic performance. These arguments are relevant to political transparency because information disclosure, oversight, and accountability operate through institutional rules and organizations. Fukuyama (2013) also emphasizes state capacity and bureaucratic autonomy when assessing government quality. This is important because transparency requires administrative capacity: governments must create and maintain records, publish reliable information, respond to requests, and operate systems that citizens can actually use. Thus, transparency is partly a question of political commitment and partly a question of institutional capacity.

Transparency, Corruption, and Citizen Access

Evidence from developed democracies indicates that access to public information can contribute to transparency and the control of corruption when supported by effective institutional mechanisms. In the United States, Cordis and Warren (2014) examined the effects of state-level Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) laws on public corruption and found that strengthening access-to-information provisions was associated with changes in corruption convictions and reductions in corrupt behavior among state and local officials. The effects were particularly pronounced where FOIA provisions imposed stronger responsibilities on public officials to comply with information requests. More recent evidence from the United States also shows that government agencies may strategically delay or reject Freedom of Information requests, particularly in settings where corruption risks are higher, demonstrating that the effectiveness of information rights depends partly on institutional compliance and political incentives (Fisman et al., 2026).

The experience of the United Kingdom provides a complementary perspective. Worthey (2010), examining the impact of the UK Freedom of Information Act 2000, found that FOI contributed to greater transparency and accountability in central government, although its effects on public understanding, political participation, government decision-making, and trust were more limited. This suggests that access to information should not be regarded as an automatic solution to corruption; rather, its effectiveness depends on whether citizens, journalists, civil society organizations, and oversight institutions can use disclosed information to demand explanations and initiate appropriate accountability processes.

The relationship between information and corruption should therefore be interpreted carefully. Transparency is most effective when information is timely, comprehensible, sufficiently detailed, and accessible to ordinary citizens, and when independent institutions possess the authority and capacity to investigate irregularities and impose appropriate sanctions. Comparative research similarly indicates that the anti-corruption effects of FOI and open-government data are conditional on broader institutional factors, including media freedom, judicial independence, political competition, and the quality of democratic institutions (Žuffová, 2020). Thus, a disclosure system that merely publishes large quantities of complex or inaccessible information may create formal transparency without meaningful accountability. For Bangladesh, the implication is that the effectiveness of the Right to Information framework depends not only on citizens' legal entitlement to information but also on the quality, accessibility, responsiveness, and enforcement mechanisms surrounding that right.

Transparency and Peace

Peacebuilding literature emphasizes the importance of institutions, relationships, inclusion, justice, and legitimate mechanisms for addressing grievances. Lederach (1997) argues for long-term peacebuilding that addresses relationships and social structures rather than focusing only on immediate settlement. In this framework, transparent institutions can help create legitimate non-violent channels for expressing grievances and resolving disputes. Transparency should therefore be viewed as one component of a broader peacebuilding architecture rather than as a stand-alone solution.

Iqbal and Starr (2008) show, in a different context, how political instability and conflict can have wider regional consequences. Their findings do not establish a Bangladesh-specific causal relationship between transparency and peace, but they support the broader proposition that institutional weakness and political instability have consequences extending beyond individual disputes. For Bangladesh, transparent and credible institutions can help reduce uncertainty around public decisions and strengthen peaceful political participation.

Political Transparency in Bangladesh

Legal Foundation: Right to Information

The Right to Information Act, 2009 is one of the central legal instruments for transparency in Bangladesh. The Act states that ensuring the right to information can increase transparency and accountability, reduce corruption, and establish good governance. It also provides a statutory framework for citizens to request information from relevant authorities. The legal framework therefore places information access within the broader constitutional and governance objective of empowering citizens. The significance of the RTI framework extends beyond individual information requests. Proactive disclosure, proper record management, designated information officers, appeal mechanisms, and institutional compliance can collectively improve the information environment in which public institutions operate. However, legal rights become effective only when citizens know about them, public agencies comply with them, records are properly maintained, and remedies are available when information is improperly withheld.

Governance and Institutional Quality

The World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) provide a useful comparative framework for examining governance in Bangladesh. The WGI measures six dimensions of governance: voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence

or terrorism, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption. The indicators are constructed from multiple data sources, including household and firm surveys and expert assessments. Because the indicators reflect perceptions of governance quality and include measurement uncertainty, they should be interpreted as estimates rather than definitive judgments of government performance. The World Bank also emphasizes that the WGI is useful for broad cross-country comparisons but is not sufficiently detailed, on its own, to identify the specific institutional reforms required in an individual country (Kaufmann & Kraay, 2024; World Bank, 2026).

The institutional dimension is particularly important when examining the relationship between transparency and accountability. The availability of public information does not automatically ensure that public officials will answer for their decisions or that misconduct will result in corrective action. Fox (2007) distinguishes between transparency and accountability and argues that the effectiveness of transparency depends on the institutional and political conditions under which information is disclosed and used. Therefore, Bangladesh needs not only accessible and reliable public information but also effective oversight institutions, sound administrative record-keeping, opportunities for public scrutiny, and mechanisms for investigation and corrective action. These elements can help transform the disclosure of information into meaningful accountability.

Corruption and Public Accountability

Corruption is closely related to transparency because opaque decision-making can make it more difficult for citizens and oversight institutions to detect misuse of public authority. Bangladesh's score of 23/100 and rank of 151/180 in the 2024 CPI indicate a serious perceived corruption challenge (Transparency International, 2025). The CPI is a perception index and should not be interpreted as a direct measurement of every form of corruption. Nevertheless, its findings reinforce the importance of strengthening integrity systems, procurement transparency, oversight, and enforcement.

Transparency should therefore be integrated into anti-corruption policy. Public procurement, political finance, administrative decisions, public expenditure, and regulatory processes are areas where accessible information can help external and internal oversight. Yet disclosure must be combined with credible investigation and sanction; otherwise, transparency may expose problems without resolving them.

Media Freedom and Civil Society

A functioning media environment is important because journalists and civil society organizations can transform technical government information into information that ordinary citizens can understand and debate. McMillan and Zoido (2004), studying Peru, found evidence that the media could operate as a particularly powerful check on political power. The case is not directly transferable to Bangladesh, but it illustrates why independent information intermediaries matter to accountability.

Concerns about restrictions on journalists and critics in Bangladesh have also been documented by Human Rights Watch. Its 2023 assessment described the use of the Digital Security Act against journalists and warned that restrictions on freedom of expression undermine conditions for open political debate (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Such evidence is relevant to transparency because access to information is less effective when independent actors cannot safely investigate, interpret, and disseminate information.

Political Transparency and Sustainable Development

Sustainable development requires institutions capable of implementing policies, allocating resources fairly, and responding

to changing social and economic needs. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals place particular emphasis on peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice, and effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions under SDG 16. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024 emphasizes that global progress is being hindered by conflict, geopolitical tensions, climate pressures, and other structural challenges (United Nations, 2024a). These challenges reinforce the importance of institutional resilience.

Transparency can support sustainable development in at least four ways. First, it can improve the monitoring of public resources. Second, it can support informed citizen participation. Third, it can reduce opportunities for hidden favoritism and misuse of authority. Fourth, it can improve confidence in public institutions when decisions and performance are understandable and reviewable. These effects are not automatic, but they provide a strong institutional rationale for transparency reforms.

The relationship between institutions and development is supported by the broader institutional literature. North (1990) emphasizes the long-term importance of institutional structures, while Rodrik et al. (2004) find that institutional quality is strongly associated with development outcomes. Transparency should therefore be treated as part of the institutional environment that supports development rather than as an isolated administrative practice.

Political Transparency as a Foundation for Peace

Peace is not simply the absence of physical violence; it also involves legitimate institutions, justice, social trust, and peaceful mechanisms for managing disagreement. Political transparency can contribute to these conditions by reducing uncertainty about public decisions and creating opportunities for citizens to scrutinize authority. When people have credible information and lawful channels for participation, political grievances have greater opportunities to be expressed through institutional rather than violent means.

Transparency can also strengthen the legitimacy of elections and public institutions. However, the relationship is conditional. If information is manipulated, selectively released, or disconnected from effective remedies, transparency may fail to reduce mistrust. Fox's (2007) distinction between information that is merely disclosed and information that enables accountability is therefore central to a peace-oriented transparency strategy.

From a peacebuilding perspective, transparent institutions can contribute to conflict prevention in three ways: by making rules and decisions more predictable; by reducing opportunities for hidden exclusion and arbitrary treatment; and by enabling citizens and organizations to raise grievances through recognized procedures. These functions are particularly important where political competition is intense and trust in institutions is fragile.

Digital Governance and Transparency

Digital government can expand access to public information and services, but digitization should not be confused with transparency. A digital system is transparent only when relevant information is accessible, accurate, understandable, and accompanied by meaningful accountability. The United Nations E-Government Survey 2024 identifies digital transformation as an important dimension of contemporary public administration and sustainable development (United Nations, 2024b).

For Bangladesh, digital transparency can include online publication of budgets and procurement information, accessible government datasets, digital RTI applications, public service tracking, and searchable administrative information. These tools should be designed with attention to rural communities, persons with

disabilities, language accessibility, digital literacy, privacy, and cybersecurity. Otherwise, digitalization may reproduce existing inequalities rather than reduce them.

Comparative Lessons

International evidence suggests that transparency works best when embedded in wider institutional systems. India provides a relevant regional example because its right-to-information framework has been studied empirically; Peisakhin and Pinto (2010) found that information access could improve access to public services and reduce reliance on bribery. The lesson for Bangladesh is not to copy another country mechanically but to examine which institutional mechanisms allow information rights to become usable forms of accountability.

The Nordic experience is often associated with strong traditions of openness and institutional accountability, but comparative lessons should be adapted to Bangladesh's own constitutional, administrative, and political context. Grindle's (2004) emphasis on feasible sequencing is especially relevant: Bangladesh may gain more from strengthening a limited number of high-impact transparency mechanisms than from adopting an excessively broad reform agenda that cannot be implemented effectively.

Major Challenges

Several challenges limit the effectiveness of political transparency in Bangladesh. First, legal rights may not be fully realized without administrative compliance and public awareness. Second, institutional weakness can prevent disclosed information from producing consequences. Third, corruption and patronage can create incentives for secrecy. Fourth, restrictions on independent journalism can limit the public use of information. Fifth, digital inequality can exclude citizens from online transparency systems. Sixth, political polarization can reduce agreement over institutional reforms.

A further challenge is methodological: claims about transparency and peace should not be presented as simple causal relationships without appropriate evidence. Governance indicators are useful but cannot demonstrate that a particular transparency reform directly caused a particular development or peace outcome. Future research should therefore combine document analysis with interviews, surveys, case studies, and where possible quantitative designs capable of testing specific causal mechanisms.

Opportunities for Strengthening Political Transparency

The first priority should be effective implementation of the Right to Information Act. This requires public awareness, competent designated officers, systematic record management, timely responses, effective appeals, and proactive disclosure of high-value public information.

Second, oversight institutions should have sufficient independence, professional capacity, and resources to investigate and respond to information revealed through transparency mechanisms. Transparency without enforcement risks becoming symbolic.

Third, Bangladesh should expand open and accessible digital government. Public budgets, procurement, service standards, project information, and performance data should be published in formats that ordinary citizens, journalists, researchers, and civil society organizations can use.

Fourth, media freedom and civic space should be protected because transparency depends on independent actors capable of investigating and communicating public information. The right to information is more valuable when citizens and journalists can safely use it.

Fifth, parliamentary and local-government oversight should be strengthened. Legislative committees, local deliberative forums, public hearings, citizen charters, and participatory budgeting can create channels through which disclosed information becomes public accountability.

Sixth, civic education should be expanded. Citizens need to know not only that they have a right to information but also how to request information, assess evidence, participate in public decision-making, and use lawful complaint and oversight mechanisms.

Findings

The analysis leads to five principal findings. First, political transparency is an institutional process rather than merely the publication of information. Second, transparency is most effective when connected to accountability, oversight, and enforcement. Third, the RTI framework provides Bangladesh with an important legal foundation, but implementation and institutional capacity determine its practical value. Fourth, transparency can support sustainable development by improving monitoring, participation, and institutional quality, although it cannot substitute for broader economic and administrative reforms. Fifth, transparency can contribute to peace by strengthening legitimate, non-violent channels for participation and grievance management, but the relationship is conditional on institutional credibility and inclusion.

Recommendations

- ✓ Strengthen implementation of the Right to Information Act through public awareness, proactive disclosure, record-management systems, trained information officers, and effective appeals.
- ✓ Publish high-value government information in accessible and machine-readable formats, including budgets, procurement, major projects, service standards, and institutional performance information.
- ✓ Strengthen the independence, capacity, and professional integrity of oversight institutions so that transparency can produce accountability.
- ✓ Protect the ability of journalists, researchers, and civil society organizations to investigate and communicate matters of public interest in accordance with law and human rights standards.
- ✓ Expand inclusive digital-government services while addressing digital literacy, rural access, disability access, language accessibility, privacy, and cybersecurity.
- ✓ Improve parliamentary and local-government oversight through public hearings, committee scrutiny, citizen participation, and transparent reporting of decisions.
- ✓ Introduce sustained civic education on political participation, access to information, public accountability, and peaceful grievance resolution.
- ✓ Develop future Bangladesh-focused empirical research that tests the relationship between transparency, public trust, corruption control, development outcomes, and political violence using surveys, interviews, case studies, and longitudinal data.

Limitations

This article is based primarily on documentary and secondary evidence and does not present an original national survey or representative field dataset. The study therefore cannot estimate the causal effect of political transparency on development or peace. International governance indicators are perception-based and should be interpreted as comparative estimates rather than definitive measures. In addition, political and legal conditions can change rapidly. Future research should update the evidence and

incorporate primary data from citizens, public officials, journalists, civil society organizations, and other relevant stakeholders.

Conclusion

Political transparency is an important institutional condition for sustainable development and peace in Bangladesh. It enables citizens and oversight institutions to see how public authority is exercised, but information alone is insufficient. The central policy challenge is to connect information with accountability, participation, institutional capacity, and credible enforcement. Bangladesh already possesses an important legal foundation through the Right to Information Act, 2009, and it has opportunities to deepen transparency through digital government, stronger oversight, civic education, and protection of independent information intermediaries.

The broader literature supports a cautious but positive conclusion. Institutions shape development, information can strengthen accountability, and inclusive peacebuilding requires legitimate mechanisms for managing grievances. At the same time, transparency must be designed and implemented in ways that make information usable and consequential. For Bangladesh, the goal should therefore be a practical transparency system in which citizens can obtain reliable information, understand public decisions, participate in governance, and seek remedies when institutions fail. Such a system can contribute to stronger institutions, more inclusive development, and a more durable culture of peaceful political participation.

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