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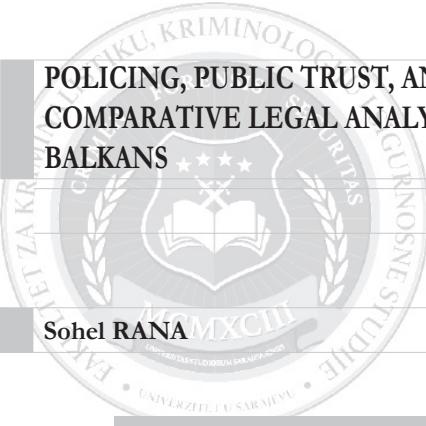# POLICING, PUBLIC TRUST, AND DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY: A COMPARATIVE LEGAL ANALYSIS OF BANGLADESH AND THE WESTERN BALKANS

Sohel RANA

Abstract

This research article compares the legal systems of Bangladesh with selected Western Balkan nations in terms of police accountability and public confidence. The study examines the scientific subject of transitional democracies' challenges to democratise law enforcement, which are hampered by institutionalised authoritarian legacies, legislative flaws, and ineffective monitoring institutions. The analysis employs qualitative, doctrinal, and comparative research methods to investigate linked issues such as police legislation, abuse of authority, community-based policing, and democratic accountability. The research contends that, while both areas face structural and political impediments to law enforcement reform, Western Balkan governments, influenced by EU integration demands, have made more substantial achievements in institutionalising democratic supervision systems. The objective is to propose legislative and policy-driven reform plans that strengthen police legitimacy and democratic governance. This study is unique in that it includes cross-regional comparison studies, which are uncommon in the policing research. The scope of work includes substantial legal paperwork, institutional frameworks, and policy creation. The findings have significant cognitive value for both academic discourse and field practice, particularly in transforming policing institutions in transitional cultures.

Keywords: Community Policing, Comparative Legal Analysis, Democratic Policing, Police Accountability, Public Trust

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1. INTRODUCTION

Public trust in law enforcement agencies is an essential component of democratic government and the rule of law. When the public sees the police to be legitimate, accountable, and transparent, there is more compliance with the law, improved collaboration, and the preservation of social order. Policing in post-transition societies emerging from authoritarian regimes, conflict, or colonial legacies is frequently a source of heated debate, and historical patterns of political control, corrupt practices, and misconduct continue to undermine public trust (Uddin, 2022; Patwary & Banarjee, 2025). Bangladesh and numerous Western Balkan nations, most notably Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and North Macedonia, are instructive instances of policing methods that remain shaped by such historical trajectories despite ongoing reform measures.

The Police Act of 1861 of Bangladesh continues to affect both legislative power and institutional architecture in Bangladeshi police. Despite successive reform efforts, civil society complaints and recent empirical research show that long-standing issues persist: political interference, a fragile independent complaints system, excessive force, and limited civil society involvement in oversight (Ahmed & Kader, 2023; Sarker et al., 2025). Community policing programs are being adopted; however, research shows that they generally follow a formalistic approach and are mostly police-driven, with little community engagement (Bhaduri, 2024; Biswas, 2023). Reports also show widespread public distrust: a recent poll found that approximately 38% of respondents had been harassed, and 31% had admitted to paying bribes in order to obtain police services, despite widespread assumptions of corrupt practices (Dhaka University Department of Development Studies, as cited in The Daily Star, 2025).

Western Balkan nations exhibit both substantial disparities and commonalities. Under pressure from EU membership and international human rights regimes, nations such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia have adopted formal law amendments to improve supervision measures, including parliamentary scrutiny, ombudsman offices, judicial review, and civilian complaint systems (OECD, 2024). However, there are still significant implementation gaps. Political meddling, splintered institutional systems (particularly in Bosnia), a lack of resources, and a lack of civil society participation all impede true democratic accountability (Tunyan & Goetz, 2024). The public's trust is low due to frequent instances of police abuse of authority and unequal execution of legal protections.

In this context, this article combines police, public trust, and democratic accountability through a comparative legal examination of Bangladesh and a few Western Balkan republics. The work is research and scientific in nature, conceptual in its understanding of legitimacy, supervision, and community policing, and methodological in its use of doctrinal and comparative legal analysis supported by contemporary empirical findings.

This academic concern is on how post-transition democracies' legal and institutional frameworks have failed, particularly in transforming procedural improvements into efficient public oversight and confidence. According to recent reliable research and surveys, the inconsistency between policing practices and statutory measures in both regions is a cause for worry (Ahmed & Kader, 2023; Patwary & Banarjee, 2025; Tunyan & Goetz, 2024).

The arguments made are summed up as follows: first, despite the perception that the legislative reform and supervision frameworks of Western Balkan countries are more advanced, they nevertheless have serious execution flaws that make it difficult to build strong public trust.

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Second, political meddling, lingering colonial legal norms, and inadequate civilian supervision in Bangladesh all contribute to the persistence of institutional policing accountability. Third, despite the potential advantages of community policing, its impact on public trust will also rely on the degree of sincerity of community engagement, institutional autonomy, and underlying legislation.

It aims to distinguish between institutional and legislative reform measures that might support democratic accountability and police legitimacy in places like Bangladesh and the Western Balkans. The research aims to produce comparative insights that might help academic researchers, civic society, policymakers, and reformists create efficient oversight structures and community-oriented policing frameworks.

Its originality is that it is a cross-regional examination contrasting South Asia (Bangladesh) and Southeast Europe (Western Balkans) in recent (2021-2025) institutional and law-driven developments. No study compares them in terms of public confidence, supervision structures, and police accountability, especially when combining empirical reporting from recent years with doctrinal legal analysis.

The research incorporates a number of elements, including constitutional provisions, law enforcement policies, oversight legislation, documented incidences of wrongdoing, community policing tactics, current public opinion, and poll data from Bangladesh and certain Western Balkan countries. The time frame mostly spans 2021–2025 in order to account for both public opinion and previous developments.

Cognitive contribution to science lies in enriching the literature of comparative criminology and criminal justice; that is, better understanding how law, culture, institutional design, and external influence (e.g., EU accession) affect police accountability. In transformative democracies, the results are arranged at the practice level to support community policing, enhance oversight institutions, support legal change, and restore public trust in police institutions.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study applies a qualitative, doctrinal, and comparative legal research methodology to examine the dynamics of police, public confidence, and democratic accountability in Bangladesh and select Western Balkan nations. Doctrinal legal analysis requires carefully considering and interpreting legal resources such as constitutions, police legislation, regulatory statutes, supreme law instruments, and court opinions that define police power, supervision regimes, and accountability frameworks. Furthermore, socio-legal aspects are taken into account by reviewing policy documents, organisational reports, and civil society comments to determine how the practical reality of legislation differs from its formal portrayal. Using a comparative perspective allows one to identify convergences, divergences, and best practices across different legal regimes, particularly in transitional democracies undergoing legal change and international normative impact.

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2.1 Research Design

The research is structured as a multijurisdictional comparative legal study that combines doctrinal methodology with sociolegal contextual analysis. The doctrinal examination will look at legal frameworks in both Bangladesh and the Western Balkans (which include Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and the Republic of Northern Macedonia). The mapping of statute provisions, monitoring organisations, constitutional assurances, and court opinions on law enforcement accountability are all important. Sociolegal factors are gathered from current international institution and NGOs reports, media stories, and empirical study conducted in 2021-2025 to assess real-world applicability. Comparative studies will focus on tracking structural elements (politics, institutions, cultures) that determine how legal frameworks function, such as the effects of external forces (e.g., EU accession) and internal civil society pressures.

2.2 Jurisdictional Selection

Jurisdictions chosen reflect transitional democracies with legal reforms in enforcement and supervision, but are nevertheless afflicted by authoritarian legacies, political intervention, or war. Bangladesh, as a representation of South Asia, has a colonial-era centralised policing model with longstanding challenges of accountability and public confidence. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and North Macedonia from the Western Balkans were also chosen because to recent reform attempts, EU integration procedures, post-conflict or post-authoritarian legal reforms, and availability to current legal and sociolegal resources. The options allow for comparative assessments of scenarios in which EU normative goals appear against contexts in which domestic governance processes predominate.

2.3 Data Sources

2.3.1 Primary Legal Materials

These contain constitutional documents, police codes, oversight laws, rules, and case law (including higher court decisions) of the selected countries. Sources include official gazettes, case law databases, official government websites, and published case law libraries, as well as documents enacted or interpreted between 2021 and 2025 when applicable.

2.3.2 Secondary Sources

Secondary sources include current academic journal articles, policy briefs, reports from non-governmental organisations and human rights organisations, as well as evaluations from international organisations (for example, EU or OSCE reports). The emphasis is on works published after 2021, therefore addressing current legal and institutional contexts. For example, research on human rights breaches in police in Bangladesh (Uddin, 2022) and new studies on parliamentary supervision in Western Balkan countries (OECD, 2024) provide socio-legal insights.

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2.3.3 Comparative Legal Analysis

International expert review, comparative legal theories, and law scholarly analysis are utilised to position territorial judgements in international standards and to comprehend broad trends. This contains academic publications that discuss oversight procedures, police reform, and problems with public confidence that occur in transitional environments.

2.4 Limitations

The scope of this study is restricted to a literature review. Surveys, participant observations, interviews, and other primary data gathering methods are not employed. Inferences drawn from published sources and reports are therefore entirely dependent on them, which may unintentionally add bias or omission through selective or underreported reporting. Although the comparative study covers important countries, it does not fully represent all transitional democracies; hence, it is important to use caution when extrapolating conclusions beyond the examples examined. Second, there can be a failure to observe some long-term patterns because of the dependence on recent sources (2021–2025). Lastly, the actual execution of the law frequently differs significantly from theory; it is inherently immature to evaluate actual enforcement or public opinion in the absence of field factual evidence.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Legal Framework of Policing in Bangladesh

The primary legislation governing policing in Bangladesh is the Police Act of 1861, which was mostly passed down from colonial times. Instead of creating a democratic police paradigm based on accountability and rights, the British colonial rulers first enacted the particular legislation to maintain power and crush resistance (Rahman & Chowdhury, 2023). Despite Bangladesh's independence in 1971 and the ensuing changes that supported democratic principles, the Police Act has not seen much revision, which has resulted in long-standing flaws in the controls placed on police authority and accountability. The Act gives police ranks broad discretionary powers without corresponding accountability mechanisms, placing a major focus on a command-and-control pyramid. The consequence is that many of its provisions are still ill-suited to modern police demands, including community policing, civil rights protection, and open supervision (Islam, 2022).

These attempts to make Bangladeshi law enforcement more professional have been inconsistent and largely unsuccessful. As demonstrated by the proposed Police Reform Bill, attempts to implement new legislative measures or supportive frameworks have either stagnated or haven't significantly changed the way police operate (Hasan, 2023). A police tradition that is difficult to reform has been upheld by such legislative paralysis, which has encouraged authoritarian behaviours that are contrary to the values of law and order and democratic government.

The Constitution of Bangladesh has a number of pertinent clauses that protect citizens' rights and limit police conduct. While Article 35 protects people from arbitrary arrest and imprisonment and mandates due process, Articles 27 and 31 provide equality before the law and forbid discrimination of any form (Ahmed & Hossain, 2023). Additionally, Article 44 grants the judiciary the authority to provide writs to support the enforcement of basic rights, giving individuals

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a way to seek redress for unlawful actions by the government, including the police. However, there is a significant gap between constitutional protections and actual police operations. As a sign of a systemic failure to apply legal principles in reality, law enforcement agencies frequently ignore court orders and judicial oversight, and judicial action is inherently drawn out and unavailable to many of its residents (Khan et al., 2024).

Institutional independence is seriously compromised by the Bangladesh Police's administrative subordination to the Ministry of Home Affairs. Political influence on police appointments, transfers, promotions, and operational directives is a result of this structural positioning (Rahman & Chowdhury, 2023). Because of the Home Ministry's authority, political meddling is made easier, and police are frequently employed as tools to quell dissent and repress opposition rather than impartially ensuring public safety (Siddiqui & Chowdhury, 2024). Because of the highly centralised chain of command and the little operational autonomy granted to lower ranks, accountability and responsiveness to community demands are further weakened.

Bangladesh does not have a civilian review process or an impartial complaints authority against the police. Most police complaints are handled internally through departmental investigations or administrative disciplinary actions, which are often seen as unfair and opaque (Hasan, 2023). Reports from civil society and the media often detail instances of police torture, deaths in custody, and arbitrary incarceration; yet, very few of these incidents lead to prosecution and conviction of law enforcement officials (Khan et al., 2024). Despite being available, legal redress is rarely used due to structural obstacles including intimidation, corruption, and convoluted procedures (Ahmed & Hossain, 2023). As a result, the institutional and legal system neither effectively discourages police abuses nor fosters public trust.

3.2 Legal Framework of Policing in the Western Balkans

States in the Western Balkans, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and North Macedonia, provide a distinct picture, with major post-conflict reform motivated more by the possibility of EU membership and international integration (Marković, 2023). These nations, in contrast to Bangladesh, have carried out significant law reform to align policing tactics with EU standards for accountability, democratic governance, and human rights protection. However, complex political arrangements and the legacy of violence have created disparate institutional forms and reform trends.

As a legacy of the Dayton Peace Agreement, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a prime example of a decentralised policing approach based on the nation's political entities. According to Šimić and Vuković (2023), the Brčko District and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska are the two core entities that share police power. Each of these entities has its own police force and legal code. The Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina, an independent agency with the authority to look into complaints, monitor police behaviour, and push for reform, helps to mitigate the division's impact on standards and oversight consistency (Šimić & Vuković, 2023). Even though the Ombudsman's recommendations are not legally binding, they have made a substantial contribution to openness and giving residents a forum to file grievances.

Although both Serbia and Northern Macedonia have more centralised police forces, they have also been implementing more legislation reforms to increase accountability, openness, and

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community engagement (Petrović & Kovačević, 2024). The Law of Internal Affairs in Northern Macedonia and the Serbian Police Law both have clear provisions demanding respect for human rights while putting institutional mechanisms in place to deal with wrongdoing (Petrović & Kovačević, 2024). Internal auditing units and inspectorates also have increased investigative power, and parliamentary commissions have been established with the purpose of continuing to monitor police operations and financial resources. Civil society organisations, sometimes in collaboration with foreign organisations like the EU and OSCE, regularly monitor police operations and promote change (Janković & Petrov, 2024).

Furthermore, the legal systems in North Macedonia and Serbia show an increasing emphasis on crime prevention and community-oriented policing. According to Petrović et al. (2024), police departments are required by law to engage with the community, promote communication, and carry out projects that address local safety concerns. Institutional reforms aimed at eliminating political influence from law enforcement and maintaining professional standards through meritocratic hiring and training procedures in line with European norms underpin this legislative progress.

Notwithstanding these advancements, obstacles still stand in the way of the equitable and efficient application of the law throughout the area. Corruption, ethnic division, and political meddling continue to be problems that impact enforcement in some areas, complicating reform initiatives and undermining public trust (Marković, 2023). However, in contrast to Bangladesh, the Western Balkans have established more comprehensive and multifaceted accountability systems that include international monitoring, parliamentary oversight, ombudsman review, and civil society engagement.

3.3 Abuse of Power and Accountability Mechanisms

Despite having quite different scopes, characteristics, and institutional responses, police abuses of power remain a serious problem in Bangladesh and the Western Balkans. Both domestic and foreign human rights organisations have extensively documented the recurrent use of extrajudicial methods in Bangladesh, including arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, torture, and murders (Khan et al., 2024). Bangladesh's special law enforcement unit, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), has been heavily accused of violating human rights through extrajudicial killings, torture, and enforced disappearances (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Sanctions on RAB officials have been imposed by the US government and other international organisations, demonstrating widespread concern over abuse and impunity.

The prevalence of these abuses in Bangladesh is also a reflection of more pervasive political and institutional problems. Police personnel who violate the law continue to enjoy a culture of impunity since they are rarely prosecuted or penalised (Siddiqui & Chowdhury, 2024). Inadequate judicial enforcement, a lack of decentralised supervision, and political protection of law enforcement agencies all contribute to systemic barriers to accountability. The end result is a law enforcement environment where human rights violations are systematic rather than sporadic.

In the Western Balkans, police abuse also happened, particularly in relation to anti-corruption raids, protests, and ethnic tensions. However, international agencies that monitor human rights compliance and pursue institutional reform, such as the OSCE and the EU Fundamental

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Rights Agency (FRA), are increasingly documenting such incidents (FRA, 2023). Increased attention and follow-up on recorded violations were facilitated by independent human rights agencies and a more outspoken civil society (Marković, 2023).

Institutional accountability mechanisms in the Western Balkans, including autonomous complaint reviewing boards, legislative commissions, and ombudsman offices, also began operating more transparently, albeit unevenly around the area (Petrović & Kovačević, 2024). In contrast to the Bangladesh case backdrop, more transparency and more intense media attention have created pressure for both probes and sanctions, even though prosecutorial action against officials is still uncommon.

However, the politics of the Western Balkans still restrict the application of comprehensive responsibility. Political patronage systems frequently continue to shape law enforcement organisations, and national differences in judicial independence may allow for the selective protection or enforcement of well-known individuals (Janković & Petrov, 2024). Therefore, even while the institutional architecture has improved, persistent governance deficiencies still prevent police abuses from being completely eradicated.

3.4 Community Policing and Public Trust

Bangladesh and the Western Balkans have developed community policing programs with different degrees of success, with the goal of increasing trust between law enforcement and society via contact and effective communication. Projects with external finance, notably the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Police Reform Programme (PRP), have been the primary drivers of this paradigm in Bangladesh. The primary aim of these efforts is to improve community participation, encourage police organisations to be more responsive, and lower crime rates via cooperative action (UNDP Bangladesh, 2023). However, the absence of a clear legislative authority for community policing, as well as entrenched police culture and politicking, has hampered the success of such efforts (Hasan, 2023).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, law enforcement, local authorities, and community leaders collaborate to establish security goals, create crime deterrent plans, and assess police efficacy under the "safe community" paradigm (Vuković & Šimić, 2023). Rebuilding confidence has been aided by the projects' excellent outcomes, which include a decline in small crimes and the removal of communication obstacles between the community and law enforcement. In a similar vein, Serbia has appointed community liaison officers to serve as a liaison between the police and the local population. The cops help prevent crime, report locals' concerns, and serve as communication channels (Petrović & Kovačević, 2024). Although the impact varies depending on the area and the resources available, these initiatives have significantly improved community relations amongst the participating communities.

In addition to human rights knowledge, police officer training now incorporates community policing ideas (Janković & Petrov, 2024). Even with these encouraging advancements, difficulties still exist. In the Western Balkans, community policing frequently faces inconsistent funding, sporadic political backing, and inadequate institutional integration (Marković, 2023). Political meddling consistently erodes the efficacy and independence of law enforcement in both areas, which in turn damages public confidence. Overall, the comparative analysis concludes that legislative frameworks and institutional transformation have remarkably different effects

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on prospects for community involvement and policing accountability. Bangladesh encourages widespread mistreatment and mistrust since it is reliant on precolonial legal standards and lacks independent supervision mechanisms.

In contrast, the Western Balkans, which are subject to EU-initiated reform influences and have more robust civilian oversight, have more developed accountability mechanisms and emerging community policing accomplishments. However, both regions are beset by political and governance issues that impede the full realisation of democratic policing aspirations.

4. DISCUSSION

The intricate challenges that these law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh and the Western Balkans face have historical roots and have a significant influence on their democratic legitimacy and operational proficiency. This section of the conversation critically examines the same challenges that these areas face when it comes to police accountability and reform, the alternative paths they have taken under various institutional and political circumstances, the potential and significance of community policing in fostering public trust, and tactics that can be employed to improve democratic accountability in policing models.

This section provides a critical study of these dynamics based on current academic articles, policy assessments, and international studies covering the years 2021–2025. The goal is to identify the potential and challenges for police reform in transitional countries.

4.1 Shared Challenges

In Bangladesh and the Western Balkans, a major challenge is the widespread and ingrained political meddling in police operations, which seriously undermines the impartiality concept that is essential to democratic administration. Political actors have a significant impact on personnel appointments, operational directions, and the handling of politically sensitive cases, as demonstrated by the ample evidence of the police institution's tight ties to political elites in Bangladesh (Ahmed, 2023). A policing culture that prioritises regime security over public safety or respect for the law is created by this politicisation, seriously undermining public confidence (Rahman & Chowdhury, 2022). The consequences of political meddling include selective enforcement of the law as well as the use of police forces as repressive instruments against journalists, civil society members, and political opponents, endangering the police's ability to act as an impartial mediator.

Additionally, despite significant advancements in institutional reform, political meddling in law enforcement is still institutionalised throughout the Western Balkans. For instance, ethnic-based decentralised policing in Bosnia and Herzegovina complicates reform and exposes police to political party influence as they vie for control of their local organisations (Marković, 2023). Despite being more centralised, Macedonia and Serbia both experienced instances where political factors overshadowed professional policing norms, particularly during election seasons or during periods of elevated political tension (Janković & Petrov, 2024). In post-authoritarian and post-conflict environments, weak democratic institutions are unable to exert control over security agencies, as seen by the politicisation of policing in both cultures.

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This is connected to the absence of adequate, genuinely independent supervision systems that can hold the police force accountable. In Bangladesh, the Ministry of Home Affairs is mostly in charge of internal policing supervision, exercising administrative control over the police forces and conducting biassed and opaque internal investigations (Rahman & Chowdhury, 2022). There are prevalent views of police impunity and underreporting of violations as a result of the incapacity to establish an independent complaints authority. Human rights organisations have highlighted the institutional void and advocate for the establishment of civilian-led over-sight bodies that have the authority to look into complaints and enforce sanctions (Khan et al., 2024).

Furthermore, there are official monitoring mechanisms in the Western Balkans, such as par-liamentary committees, ombudsman offices, and internal audit organisations; nevertheless, these organisations usually confront significant resource and political constraints (Petrović et al., 2024). Particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the ombudsman offices play a crucial role in civilian supervision; yet, their efficacy is hindered by their lack of political influence and enforcement authority (Vuković & Šimić, 2023). Additionally, legislative supervision lacks open-ness, since parliamentary committee meetings are usually closed to the public and civil society involvement is limited. This limits public scrutiny of police activity (Janković & Petrov, 2024). Additionally, the limitations impair accountability by exacerbating the pervasive lack of trust between civil society and monitoring organisations.

One of the common features is aversion to democratisation and openness, which penetrates the cultures of police institutions. Law enforcement institutions in both contexts are the result of authoritarian governance regimes, which are distinguished by rigid hierarchical practices, secrecy, and loyalty to one's superiors over compliance with legal norms and public accounta-bility (Siddiqui & Chowdhury, 2024; Stojanovic, 2024). Such organisational cultures create con-ditions in which police personnel frequently hesitate from disclosing colleague misbehaviour, delaying investigations, or withholding vital evidence from oversight agencies. Such opposition is bolstered by fear of reprisal and potential professional repercussions, fostering a culture of silence that is harmful to institutional transformation (Stefanovic & Jovanovic, 2024). Changing established police cultures needs recurrent efforts targeted at training, leadership, and institu-tional rewards; nonetheless, such efforts in both settings are insufficient.

Human rights violations and extremely common coercive tactics further erode public confi-dence and democratic policing ideals. The Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) is a symbol of police violence and impunity in Bangladesh, where arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial executions, and torture in detention are still commonplace. Officers are seldom tried and found guilty of viola-tions, despite international condemnation and local indignation (Khan et al., 2024). Particularly among disadvantaged populations, who perceive policing as repressive rather than protecting, the abuses exacerbate mistrust.

Despite being less institutionalised, police violence is still reported throughout the Western Balkans, especially in areas where ethnic sensitivity is high and when officers are interacting with migrants or demonstrators. Although significant institutional adjustments and enhance-ments in reporting procedures were required due to pressure from foreign organisations like the EU and the OSCE, accountability gaps still exist. According to Vuković and Šimić (2023), fu-ture progress is discouraged by political intervention and implementation challenges, although such changes have started to incorporate victim assistance structures and human rights edu-

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cation. The necessity of establishing a culture of respect for fundamental liberties inside law enforcement organisations is further highlighted by such human rights issues.

Lastly, two major impediments are a lack of resources and insufficient training. The law enforcement agency in Bangladesh has challenges such as inadequate funding, antiquated infrastructure, and a deficiency in training on human rights and community policing (Rahman & Islam, 2023). Similar to this, institutional division, political unpredictability, and budgetary disparities prevent Western Balkan enforcement services from meeting EU standards (Janković & Petrov, 2024). Reform will remain surface-level unless ongoing investment is made in professional development and modernisation.

4.2 Divergent Reform Pathways

Since political settings, external incentives, and governing regimes differ, reform paths in Bangladesh and the Western Balkans have diverged despite parallels in the challenges faced. The European Union's accession conditionality, which has been a major force behind policing-related institutional and legislative reforms, has a considerable amount of foreign influence over the Western Balkans. In order to comply with the EU's guidelines for democratic governance, human rights, and the rule of law, candidate nations must align their policing practices with European standards as part of the accession process (Janković & Petrov, 2024).

Due to the external pressure this generates, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and North Macedonia have improved their training and accountability processes, implemented new police statutes, and established civilian oversight committees (Petrović & Kovačević, 2024). This process is further enhanced by the participation of international organisations like the OSCE and the Council of Europe, who offer technical support, monitor adherence to norms, and promote civil society engagement (Marković, 2023; Vuković & Šimić, 2023). The dynamic environment created by the cooperative arrangements supports gradual but meaningful reform advancement.

In a similar vein, Bangladesh's policing reform environment is marked by little to no external pressure and internal political resistance. Although community-based police initiatives and institutional-building programs have received backing from foreign donor organisations, particularly the UNDP, they are subject to substantial political restrictions and do not have the enforced character of EU conditionality (UNDP Bangladesh, 2023). Reform initiatives are hampered and authoritarian practices are strengthened when the government uses security laws, like the Digital Security Act, to stifle dissent and shield law enforcement from accountability (Khan et al., 2024). These conditions significantly stifle potential reform and foster a culture of fear and restriction among media journalists and civil society organisations. Bangladesh works in a geopolitical setting that restricts the foundations of reform since there are fewer foreign actors promoting whole-of-government police reform than in the Western Balkans.

These characteristics of governance and political will help to explain the disparate outcomes seen. Western Balkan nations exhibit varying levels of commitment to policing reform as part of larger democratisations, despite protracted ethnic conflicts and shaky democratic systems (Petrović et al., 2024). This dedication is frequently motivated by aspirations for membership in European organisations and an understanding that rule of law-related changes is essential to both advancing economically and establishing credibility internationally. Political leaders in

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Bangladesh, on the other hand, prioritise regime stability above institutional accountability, resulting in sporadic and superficial change that has little effect on enduring patronage networks or instances of police brutality (Ahmed, 2023). This disparity highlights the degree to which political leadership and motivation may both facilitate and obstruct change initiatives.

The trajectory of reform initiatives is significantly influenced by organisational design. According to Hasan (2023), Bangladesh's highly centralised policing approach consolidates authority under the Ministry of Home Affairs, allowing political meddling while restricting institutional autonomy. Because of this, creating autonomous monitoring systems or community policing models with actual authority is difficult. There are notable variations in policing structures in the Western Balkans. Bosnia and Herzegovina's decentralised, entity-based approach exemplifies political division while fostering local policing and oversight innovation (Marković, 2023). In contrast, North Macedonia and Serbia still have more centralised police forces, despite increased civil society involvement in monitoring, which has encouraged a change in this direction (Petrović & Kovačević, 2024). Organisational disparities draw attention to the need for reform initiatives that are specifically customised to the unique settings of each area.

4.3 Community Policing: Missed Opportunity or Future Hope?

Community policing is one of the most crucial strategies for re-establishing public confidence, improving transparency, and incorporating democratic principles into law enforcement agencies. Although Bangladesh and the Western Balkans both acknowledge the theoretical and practical significance of community policing, its implementation has been uneven and limited by institutional, political, and legal limitations.

The UNDP and other development stakeholders were consulted before community policing programs were implemented in Bangladesh. The goal of these community-police cooperation is to address security and crime issues collectively (UNDP Bangladesh, 2023). The lack of clear-cut law supporting the police authority's ability to practise community policing, however, made such programs ineffective in enacting systemic change. Despite being replaced, the 1861 Police Act does not specifically include community policing, which leads to ambiguous directives and operational misunderstandings (Rahman & Chowdhury, 2022).).

Effective community engagement is further hindered by political meddling and the police culture of command, as officers are unwilling to cede discretionary authority or interact with civil society actors who are perceived as hostile (Khan et al., 2024). As a result, community policing remains superficial and frequently resembles tokenistic outreach rather than institutional conduct.

Community policing approaches have become more institutionalised in the Western Balkans, especially in ethnically diverse and post-conflict communities where intercommunal trust-building is strong (Marković, 2023). For example, Bosnia's "safe community" initiatives have been effective in lowering local crime rates by encouraging police attention to community problems and incorporating citizens in safe community planning (Vuković & Šimić, 2023). According to Petrović and Kovačević (2024), community liaison officers in Serbian towns have improved police visibility and confidence, as well as crime reporting and dispute resolution. However, these kinds of programs encounter obstacles such limited funding, inadequate training for community orientation, and ongoing political interference that stifle the autonomy of

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community policing units (Janković & Petrov, 2024). In this regard, the transformational paradigm of community policing is still constrained in terms of sustainability and scalability.

Legal standards that institutionalise community policing and clearly define duties, responsibilities, and accountability procedures must be developed in both regions (Hasan, 2023; Marković, 2023). Community policing is still vulnerable to politicisation and inconsistent program implementation in the absence of legal support. In order to improve police forces' perspectives and skills, comprehensive training programs emphasising human rights, cultural sensitivity, and community engagement are also desperately needed (Siddiqui & Chowdhury, 2024; Stefanovic & Jovanovic, 2024). Lastly, in order to maintain democratic accountability and public confidence, community police must be protected from political meddling through open reporting procedures and independent supervision.

Beyond minimising crime, community policing offers opportunities to empower marginalised groups, deter conflict, and foster social harmony- all of which are critical in transformative societies where ethnic divisions and historical injustices are prevalent (Vuković & Šimić, 2023; Rahman & Islam, 2023). Thus, community policing presents a viable means of overcoming the lack of confidence between law enforcement agencies and civil communities in Bangladesh and the Western Balkans provided it is properly institutionalised.

4.4 Strengthening Democratic Accountability

A complex strategy involving institutional architecture, legislative frameworks, civil society engagement, and political culture is required to make policing more democratically accountable. Bangladesh is one of the post-transition democracies that can learn from the Western Balkans.

The creation of ombudsman offices as independent institutions of accountability is one significant step. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Human Rights Ombudsman has done a fantastic job of looking into police abuse instances, making recommendations, and taking up victim cases, among other things. This has allowed for a level of civilian control that is lacking in Bangladesh (Vuković & Šimić, 2023). Even while enforcement concerns persist, ombudsmen might be strengthened as monitoring organisations by expanding their authority, ensuring their political independence, and receiving more funding. Bangladesh may start by establishing such agencies or bolstering current human rights commissions by giving them the authority to look into and punish instances of police abuse (Khan et al., 2024).

A crucial component is the unambiguous parliamentary examination of police matters. Transparency and accountability have increased in the Western Balkans as a result of initiatives to make committee hearings public and to solicit feedback from civil society, even while legislative monitoring is restricted (Petrović et al., 2024). It is possible to improve public trust and police accountability by granting parliamentary institutions the power to conduct independent investigations and publicise the results. The establishment of specific committees devoted to law enforcement oversight, which would be in charge of conducting frequent hearings and disseminating reports about police behaviour in public, would enable the Bangladeshi parliament to examine the police more closely (Rahman & Chowdhury, 2022).

Through their examination and disclosure of police abuses, participation in public discourse, and accountability of authorities, independent media also play a vital role in democratic accountability (Ahmed, 2023; Janković & Petrov, 2024). Although political involvement and har-

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assment have occasionally occurred, dynamic investigative journalism has been more successful in exposing injustices and promoting changes in the Western Balkans (Marković, 2023). Bangladeshi media is more restricted, but in order to create an educated public that can hold the police force responsible, there must be a strong push for a free press and protection for journalists (Khan et al., 2024).

Bangladesh, on the other hand, may teach the Western Balkans about the dangers of recentralization during times of political unrest. Especially during times of state crisis, the Bangladeshi policing regime, which is centralised at the Ministry of Home Affairs, has been vulnerable to power concentration that undermines institutional checks and balances (Hasan, 2023). Such centralisation could speed up decision-making, but if it is not restrained by independent monitoring and judicial review, it runs the risk of becoming autocratic. Defending democratic resilience requires Western Balkan nations to resist pressures to recentralize policing authority at the price of independent scrutiny and decentralised community policing (Petrović & Kovačević, 2024).

Furthermore, a comprehensive legislative reform that modernises police legislation to specifically incorporate human rights protection, community policing responsibilities, and efficient monitoring is necessary to ensure democratic accountability (Rahman & Islam, 2023; Janković & Petrov, 2024). To combat obscurity and arbitrariness, laws must contain clear definition of police authorities, protection for whistleblowers, and transparent disciplinary procedures. Political will for enforcement and police force capacity improvement must go hand in hand with legislative reforms.

The most important thing is to increase civil society engagement. Both areas emphasise the importance of supporting community organisations, victim advocates, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in monitoring law enforcement practices, offering training opportunities, and promoting communication between police and civil society (UNDP Bangladesh, 2023; Vuković & Šimić, 2023). Instilling a culture of accountability and openness, civil society serves as a vital check on state authority and a conduit for public interests.

In summary, this cross-regional research shows that police reform initiatives in Bangladesh and the Western Balkans face comparable obstacles, which are tempered by particular institutional, political, and external factors. Important measures towards success include removing longstanding political meddling, putting in place impartial supervision procedures, encouraging community-focused police, and strengthening democratic accountability through institutional, legal, and civil society channels. The lessons learnt by both areas provide crucial direction for creating more locally appropriate and successful reform initiatives that can protect human rights, increase democratic control of law enforcement, and strengthen public confidence.

5. CONCLUSION

This comparative study analysed Bangladesh's legal systems, institutional frameworks, and workplaces in relation to the Western Balkans in terms of democratic accountability, public trust, and law enforcement. Despite the fact that both contexts face deeply ingrained systemic barriers, the investigations show that these barriers differ significantly in terms of their form and scope because of differences in historical background, legal cultures, and sociopolitical circumstances.

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The colonial heritage of Bangladesh has a significant impact on the institutional framework of police, as seen by the Police Act of 1861, which remains the basic statute governing law enforcement operations. Despite due process and equal protection guaranteed by the constitution, police independence and accountability have been undermined by institutionalised centralised authority in the Ministry of Home Affairs and significant political interference. Without adequate legal remedy or civilian monitoring, crimes like extrajudicial murders and torture in detention continue to be commonplace due to the lack of external accountability mechanisms. Despite some community policing efforts, they lack the necessary statutory authority and political will to actually improve their interactions with civil society. In broad terms, these reveal a police force that is still unable to reconcile its authoritarian history with the democratic demands of accountability and fostering public trust.

However, attempts to reconstruct after the conflict and EU-initiated reforms that try to achieve a balance in policing tactics based on democratic values have given the Western Balkans a more complex but adequately progressive path. Although decentralised arrangements along entity lines characterise policing in states like Bosnia and Herzegovina, the adoption of institutional accountability structures- which include parliamentary oversight committees, ombudsman offices, and civil society involvement- is a significant step towards greater levels of transparency and adherence to the rule of law.

With the support of international pressure and civil society scrutiny, centralised policing models in Serbia and North Macedonia have made institutional transformation more commonplace. However, the pace and extent of transformation are constrained by obstacles including shifting political will, ingrained authoritarian inclinations, and the fragility of democratic institutions. Although community policing methods vary from municipality to municipality and are typically dependent on institutional backing, they show promise in fostering local trust, particularly in ethnically mixed or conflict-affected areas.

These findings highlight the significant influence that legislative frameworks and institutional arrangements have on public confidence and policing accountability. This case demonstrates how external pressures and diverse accountability structures collectively produce positive outcomes in the Western Balkans, whereas in Bangladesh, the widespread existence of antiquated legislation and the lack of independent oversight impede progress towards democratic policing. However, all areas face significant challenges related to political meddling, cultural opposition within law enforcement agencies, and the general challenge of integrating democratic principles into policing procedures.

It is apparent that resolving such issues calls for a comprehensive approach, in which institutional strengthening and cultural shifts should be bolstered by legal change. The comparative analysis highlights that police reform should not be viewed as a legal or procedural step, but it is actually closely related to the political and social processes of all societies. To change policing from a regulatory instrument to a community-focused service in the interest of security, human rights protection, and accountability in a democratic society, both situations need for consistent effort.

This study aims to provide light on the reality and factors that underpin police in both regions rather than offering prescriptive solutions. The results provide a foundation for further research and policy debate, emphasising that the quest for lawful, responsible, and reliable policing is a protracted and challenging undertaking that is impacted by institutional contexts, historical legacies, and shifting societal expectations.

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In summary, this comparative research between Bangladesh and the Western Balkans emphasises that, despite differences in their policing reform patterns and institutions, the last imperative- achieving a balance between police authority, democratic accountability, and public trust- remains true. Finding this equilibrium is essential for the credibility of law enforcement agencies and is also crucial for the strengthening of the rule of law and general democratic governance in emerging and transitional environments.

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POLICIJSKI RAD, POVJERENJE JAVNOSTI I DEMOKRATSKA ODGOVORNOST: KOMPARATIVNA PRAVNA ANALIZA BANGLADEŠA I ZAPADNOG BALKANA

Izvorni naučni rad

Sažetak

Ovaj naučno-istraživački članak pruža komparativnu pravnu analizu odgovornosti policije i povjerenja javnosti u Bangladešu i izabranim zemljama Zapadnog Balkana. Fokusira se na naučni problem s kojim se suočavaju tranzicione demokratije u procesu demokratizacije policije, unutar okvira autoritarnih naslijeđa, pravnih nedostataka i ograničenog nadzora. Istraživanje analizira policijsko zakonodavstvo, zloupotrebu ovlasti, policiju u zajednici i demokratsku odgovornost kao međusobno povezane izazove, primjenjujući kvalitativne, doktrinalne i komparativne metodološke pristupe. Osnovna teza sugeriše da, iako obje regije imaju strukturne i političke prepreke reformi policije, države Zapadnog Balkana su, usljed pritisaka u procesu evropskih integracija, ostvarile veći napredak u institucionalizaciji mehanizama demokratskog nadzora. Cilj istraživanja je identifikovati pravne i političke reforme koje bi mogle povećati legitimitet i odgovornost policije. Originalnost ovog istraživanja ogleda se u međuregionalnom poređenju, koje je rijetko zastupljeno u naučnoj literaturi o policiji. Istraživanje pokriva širok spektar tema, uključujući pravne tekstove, institucionalne okvire i razvoj politika. Nalazi istraživanja imaju značajnu kognitivnu vrijednost za nauku i praksu, posebno u kontekstu reforme policijskih sistema u tranzicijskim društvima.

Keywords: policijski rad u zajednici, komparativna pravna analiza, demokratski policijski rad (demokratsko policijsko djelovanje), odgovornost policije, javno povjerenje

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