



Political Situations in South Asian Countries: Challenges and Prospect

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Abstract: *This study commences a comprehensive exploration of the intricate political fabric interwoven across countries in South Asia. From the dynamic democracy of India grappling with its diversity to Pakistan's delicate equilibrium amidst internal stability and external relations, each nation contributes its distinct shades to the region's ever-changing array. The study aims to scrutinize these political landscapes, placing emphasis on governance structures, key actors, and prevailing obstacles. The objectives span a wide spectrum, seeking to decipher the present political situations, analyze the challenges confronted by these nations, and evaluate the sustainability of democratic governance. The enduring challenges of instability, corruption, and socio-economic disparities serve as focal points, providing insights into the underlying causes and potential remedies. Beyond the regional context, the study acknowledges the worldwide significance of South Asian countries in geopolitics. Amidst these challenges, the study recognizes the resilience and potential for positive transformation in South Asia, shaping a narrative that extends beyond obstacles to encompass opportunities for political reforms, social progress, and economic development. The research thus establishes the foundation for a nuanced comprehension of the region's trajectory and its role in the global landscape. The examination of political dynamics in South Asian nations necessitates a comprehensive approach, encompassing historical, socio-economic, and geopolitical factors. Primary investigations through interviews with key individuals, combined with a thorough analysis of existing literature, serve as the foundation. The political circumstances in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives bring to light a range of diverse challenges, including ethnic tensions, border disputes, and terrorism. These nations grapple with political instability, corruption, poverty, and environmental concerns. The ever-changing political prospects emphasize the requirement for regional cooperation. The findings disclose the intricate complexity of challenges, prompting recommendations for the support of democracy, transparency in governance, and inclusive policies to cultivate stability and collaboration in the region.*

Keywords: India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Politics, Governance

1. Introduction

Each nation in the political fabric of South Asia spins its own tale, fusing difficulties and opportunities in a delicate dance. The greatest democracy in the world, India, struggles with issues like a diverse population, local conflicts, and economic inequality. Pakistan's geopolitical landscape is characterized by a precarious equilibrium that navigates internal stability, relations with India, and the fight against terrorism. Afghanistan seeks stability amidst shifting regional power dynamics following years of conflict. Bangladesh must simultaneously work toward political stability and economic progress. With its post-civil war era, Sri Lanka aims for peace and sustainable development. Nestled in the Himalayas, Nepal and Bhutan forge their own trajectories amidst regional pressures. A glimpse of a better future is provided by the region's youth demography, economic potential, and shared desire for growth despite these obstacles. The political landscape of South Asia is a very interesting kaleidoscope of hues that is always changing and influencing the future of its countries. The 'success' of democracy in India and its 'failure' in neighboring Pakistan and Bangladesh has been one of the more fascinating subjects in modern South Asia. However, research on democratic politics in India and military-dominated authoritarian governments like Pakistan and Bangladesh has rarely discussed, much less explained, how a shared British colonial history resulted in what appear to be divergent political growth patterns in South Asia after independence (Jalal, 1995). In South Asia, the triangular relationships between Bangladesh, India, and Nepal present a fascinating and unusual set of circumstances that highlight the impact that one country's policies can have on neighboring nations. India has substantially influenced the foreign economic ties between Bangladesh and India as well as between India and Nepal, particularly insofar as the cooperation and development of water resources is concerned. In fact, Bangladesh and Nepal are geographically close to India, which has forced them to collaborate with India in how each nation uses its water resources (Salman & Uprety, 1999). The numerous continuing conflicts in the region have made it difficult for South Asia to have lasting peace and development. The SAARC has avoided meddling in the domestic affairs of its member states, but political discourse frequently takes place in the background of its sessions. Greater cooperation amongst SAARC countries was strongly emphasized during the 12th and 13th SAARC meetings in order to combat terrorism (Billah, 2019).

Such a study's objective would probably be to examine and comprehend the current political environments in South Asian nations, stressing the difficulties they confront and identifying potential opportunities for progress. It could entail a thorough investigation of political structures, concerns with governance, geopolitical dynamics, socioeconomic variables, and the functions of numerous players. The objective might be to offer information that could support the creation of policies, informed decisions, or global understanding of the area.

2. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of a study on the political situations in South Asian countries could be quite diverse. Here are a few possibilities:

1. To understand the current political situations in South Asian countries, analyzing the governments, political parties, and major political players.

2. To identify and analyze the key challenges faced by South Asian countries in their political environments.
3. To evaluate the prospects for the growth and sustainability of democratic governance in the region, considering historical trends and current developments.

3. Rationale of the Study

The political situations in South Asian countries present a complex tapestry of challenges and prospects, making it a compelling subject for study. The rationale behind delving into this topic is multifaceted:

South Asia comprises countries with diverse political systems, ranging from democratic to authoritarian. Understanding the nuances of governance in this region provides insights into the varied approaches to political organization and their impacts. The region faces persistent challenges such as political instability, corruption, ethnic and religious tensions, and economic disparities. Investigating these challenges helps identify root causes and potential solutions for sustainable development. South Asian countries play a crucial role in global geopolitics. Studying their political situations is essential for comprehending how these nations contribute to or mitigate global issues such as climate change, terrorism, and economic fluctuations. Despite challenges, South Asia is marked by resilience and potential for positive change. Examining the prospects for political reforms, social progress, and economic development provides a foundation for understanding the region's trajectory.

4. Literature Review

This study collectively highlighted the political situations in South Asian countries. Hilali & Smith (2016) emphasizes the diversity and complexity of the region, with shared values and a history of internal strife and territorial disputes. Gordon (1995) discusses the failure to address issues such as population growth, poverty, and political instability, which often spill over into regional conflicts. Ahmar (2016) focuses on the strategic significance of South Asia, with unresolved disputes between India and Pakistan leading to foreign interference and regional tensions. Kingsbury (2016) discusses political challenges in Southeast Asia, it is not directly relevant to the research question on South Asian countries. Ahmar (2016) also pointed out that South Asia has remained a region of considerable prominence and the existence of multiple socioeconomic and political disputes among the regional states and the acceleration of global tension has contributed to the strategic significance of this part of the world. *South-East Asia* (2001) outlines the political processes and institutions of the countries in South-east Asia, in particular tracing their past and explaining how they have come to be what they are. Humida et al. (2022) used a dataset of 500 firms in ten Cambodian provinces and a natural experiment to test a long-held convention in political economy that the predictability of a corruption is at least as important for firm investment decisions as the amount of bribes a firm must pay, provided the bribes are not prohibitively expensive. C. Oberst, (1987) quoted that "Government and Politics in South Asia" is a valuable resource for courses on the politics of South Asia, offering a comprehensive and accessible analysis of the region's political landscape. Askari Rizvi (1991) defines the military rule in Pakistan is currently confronted with a crisis pertaining to its legitimacy.

Previous military leaders were successful in enlisting the support of a faction within the civilian elite to establish a semblance of civilian governance, yet these alliances ultimately proved to be transitory in nature. The military's protracted involvement in governance failed to attain the highly sought-after legitimacy, thereby fostering an antagonistic dynamic with the political elite. The military's present disengagement from active political affairs is perceived as a strategic maneuver rather than an acknowledgment of their incapacity to assume a paramount role.

5. Methodology

Examining the political circumstances in South Asian nations necessitates a multifaceted approach, given the diverse and intricate nature of the region. The methodology employed in this investigation encompasses a comprehensive examination of historical, socio-economic, and geopolitical factors that have shaped the political landscape in South Asia. Primary research will be undertaken through interviews with key political figures, scholars, and experts to obtain firsthand insights into the challenges faced by these countries. Furthermore, a meticulous evaluation of existing literature, policy documents, and media reports will establish a contextual understanding of the current political situations. Comparative analysis will be employed to discern commonalities and disparities among South Asian countries, illuminating regional dynamics. The study seeks to evaluate the potential for political stability, democratic governance, and socio-economic development in light of emerging challenges, offering a nuanced comprehension of the complexities that define politics in South Asia.

6. Political Situation in South Asian Countries

Here's a brief overview of the political situations in key South Asian countries:

India: India, as the world's largest democracy, experiences a vibrant political scene. The dominant political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has been in power. India faces challenges related to economic reforms, religious and social tensions, and regional geopolitics.

Pakistan: Pakistan has a history of political instability with periods of military rule. As of 2021, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, led by Prime Minister Imran Khan, was in power. Pakistan deals with issues such as economic reforms, security concerns, and relations with neighboring countries, particularly India and Afghanistan.

Bangladesh: The political landscape in Bangladesh is characterized by a two-party system led by the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Sheikh Hasina, the leader of the Awami League, has been the Prime Minister, and the country has made economic progress. Political tensions, however, persist between the major political parties. The government of Bangladesh ordered a lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic, but citizens soon returned to economic and social life due to slow and uncertain relief efforts, and the government's inability to provide assistance. The Bangladeshi state, despite its growth in capacity and political incentives to manage the pandemic without harming the economy, was unable to sustain the lockdown due to pressures to maintain legitimacy with the masses. The weak state failed to enforce its authority over local political elites and ensure a fair and timely distribution of relief, highlighting the challenges of weak states in managing novel shocks

like the pandemic. The strength of widely shared 'moral economy' views within Bangladeshi society provided ethical and political justification for citizens' non-compliance with the lockdown and officials' lack of enforcement. The Covid-19 pandemic underscores the importance of state capacity in managing global shocks and the difficulties faced by weak states embedded in strong societies (Ali et al., 2021). The implementation of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2009, in Bangladesh was initiated in order to ensure the citizenry's entitlement to acquire information from both governmental and non-governmental entities. This includes organizations that receive substantial financial support from the government. The primary objective of this act is to grant individuals the authority to hold the government accountable for its actions. In Bangladesh, the RTI Act was collaboratively drafted by the government and civil society organizations (CSOs), subsequent to an analysis of similar acts implemented elsewhere. It was sanctioned by the Council of Advisors of the caretaker administration in September 2008 and officially legislated in October 2008. The democratically elected government subsequently passed the RTI Act in March 2009. Unlike in India, where this legislation originated from a protest by a citizens' rights body, the demand for the RTI Act in Bangladesh emerged from the elites residing in Dhaka and lacked a grassroots connection. The primary objective of the RTI Act in Bangladesh is to endow citizens with information, thereby facilitating the lives of those who lack alternative means of attaining answers from the state or other societal actors (Ahsan et al., 2020). Haque (2017) examines the political framework surrounding constitutional modifications in Bangladesh and their effects, as well as their consequences. The article offers insights into the historical and contemporary patterns of politicization and the consequences of the eliminated and current modifications. The investigation puts forth suggestions for the improvement of the ongoing predicament in the constitutional politics of Bangladesh. Farid Uddin (2017) asserts that Bangladesh possesses a historical background characterized by political turbulence and the dominance of the ruling party, ultimately resulting in a predicament within the regional governance.

Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka faces challenges related to ethnic and religious tensions, particularly between the Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority. Political dynamics are influenced by efforts towards reconciliation, economic development, and addressing human rights concerns.

Nepal: Nepal has seen political changes with shifts in government structures and power dynamics. The country grapples with issues such as constitutional reforms, ethnic tensions, and economic development. The political landscape is marked by a multi-party system.

Bhutan: Bhutan, known for its unique approach to governance, maintains a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democracy. The country focuses on sustainable development, cultural preservation, and maintaining diplomatic relations with neighboring countries.

Maldives: The Maldives, an island nation, has faced political challenges including issues related to climate change, tourism, and political stability. The country has experienced shifts in political leadership, and its political landscape continues to evolve.

7. Political Challenges of South Asian Countries

South Asian countries face a myriad of political challenges that are both diverse and complex. Some of the key issues include:

Ethnic and Religious Diversity: Many South Asian countries are characterized by a mosaic of ethnicities and religions, leading to tensions and conflicts. Managing diversity and ensuring equal representation is a constant challenge.

Border Disputes: Territorial disputes are common in South Asia, particularly between India and Pakistan, as well as between India and China. These disputes often lead to diplomatic tensions and, in some cases, military conflicts.

Political Instability: Several countries in the region have experienced political instability, with frequent changes in government and issues related to corruption. This instability can hinder long-term development and cooperation.

Terrorism: South Asia has been a hotspot for terrorist activities, with several militant groups operating in the region. Addressing terrorism and ensuring regional security is a significant challenge for these countries.

Poverty and Economic Disparities: High levels of poverty and economic disparities contribute to social unrest and political challenges. Governments face the task of addressing economic issues while ensuring inclusive growth.

Environmental Challenges: South Asian countries are vulnerable to environmental challenges, including floods, cyclones, and water scarcity. Climate change exacerbates these issues, posing a threat to food security and economic stability.

Corruption: Corruption is a pervasive issue in some South Asian countries, affecting governance, public services, and economic development. Fighting corruption requires concerted efforts to strengthen institutions and promote transparency.

Human Rights Concerns: Human rights violations are reported in some South Asian countries, including issues related to freedom of speech, gender equality, and minority rights. Addressing these concerns is crucial for fostering a just and inclusive society.

Healthcare and Education Challenges: Access to quality healthcare and education remains a challenge in many South Asian countries. Governments must invest in these sectors to ensure a healthy and educated population.

Regional Cooperation: Historical animosities and geopolitical rivalries often hinder regional cooperation. Establishing strong diplomatic ties and fostering collaboration is essential for addressing common challenges.

8. Political Prospects of South Asian Countries

The political landscape in South Asia is quite dynamic and complex, with each country having its unique challenges and opportunities. Let's take a brief look at some of the key players in the region:

India: As one of the largest democracies in the world, India plays a crucial role in regional politics. The country has experienced shifts in power between the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC). The Narendra Modi-led BJP government has been focusing on economic reforms and national development, while also facing criticism on various fronts.

Pakistan: Pakistan has seen a cyclical pattern of military and civilian rule. As of my last update, Imran Khan was serving as the Prime Minister. Political stability and economic challenges remain significant issues for Pakistan.

Bangladesh: The political scene in Bangladesh has been dominated by the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Sheikh Hasina, leader of the Awami League, has been in power, and the country has experienced economic growth, but concerns about human rights and political freedoms persist.

Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka has faced political and ethnic tensions in recent years. The country has seen power shifts between different political parties. The government's handling of human rights issues and post-civil war reconciliation efforts have been under scrutiny.

Nepal: Nepal has experienced political instability and changes in government frequently. The country transitioned to a federal democratic republic in 2008. Political parties in Nepal often face challenges in forming stable governments and addressing socio-economic issues.

Afghanistan: The situation in Afghanistan has been highly fluid, and my last update predates the U.S. withdrawal and the Taliban's return to power. The political landscape in Afghanistan has significant implications for regional stability and security.

It's essential to note that political situations can evolve rapidly, and developments may have occurred since my last update. Factors such as regional geopolitics, economic challenges, and internal dynamics all contribute to shaping the political prospects of South Asian countries.

9. Discussion

South Asia is undoubtedly a region of incredible diversity, not just in terms of culture and geography but also in its political landscapes. The overview of key countries gives a snapshot of the complex challenges they face. India's vibrant democracy grapples with economic reforms and religious tensions. Pakistan, historically marked by instability, is navigating economic reforms and regional relations. Bangladesh, with its two-party system, experiences political tensions despite economic progress. Sri Lanka deals with ethnic and religious tensions, while Nepal undergoes frequent political changes. Bhutan's unique approach to governance stands out, emphasizing sustainable development and cultural preservation. The Maldives faces challenges related to climate change and political stability. The political challenges in the region are diverse and multifaceted, from managing ethnic and religious diversity to addressing border disputes and combating terrorism. Political instability, corruption, poverty, and human rights concerns add layers of complexity. The need for regional cooperation is crucial, but historical animosities and geopolitical rivalries pose obstacles. Access to quality healthcare and education, environmental

challenges, and the cyclical pattern of military and civilian rule in some countries further contribute to the intricate tapestry of issues. As for the political prospects, the dynamics are fluid. India, a major player, grapples with economic reforms under the BJP. Pakistan faces cyclical patterns of military and civilian rule, and Bangladesh experiences economic growth amidst concerns about human rights. Sri Lanka navigates political and ethnic tensions, while Nepal undergoes frequent political changes. Afghanistan's situation remains uncertain post-U.S. withdrawal. It's fascinating and concerning to see how these political landscapes evolve, each with its unique set of challenges and opportunities. The region's destiny is intertwined, and the resolution of these challenges requires not only national efforts but also a commitment to regional collaboration and understanding. What are your thoughts on these political dynamics in South Asia? Addressing the intricate dilemmas confronted by Bangladesh necessitates adopting a comprehensive approach. Primarily, it is imperative for the government to reassess and fortify its state capacity, specifically in the realm of crisis management. Endeavors should be focused on constructing a resilient healthcare infrastructure and enhancing coordination mechanisms to ensure prompt and efficacious responses to crises akin to the Covid-19 pandemic. Concurrently, the government must confront the underlying factors that contribute to the inability to sustain lockdowns, including the pressures to maintain legitimacy and the failure to exert authority over local political elites.

10. Findings

South Asia presents a complex and diverse political landscape with each country facing unique challenges and opportunities. Here are some key findings from the overview:

1. India stands out as the world's largest democracy with a vibrant political scene dominated by the BJP.
2. Pakistan has a history of political instability with a mix of military and civilian rule.
3. Bangladesh operates under a two-party system with ongoing tensions between major political parties.
4. Sri Lanka grapples with ethnic and religious tensions.
5. Nepal has experienced frequent political changes and struggles with constitutional reforms.
6. Bhutan maintains a constitutional monarchy with a focus on sustainable development and cultural preservation.
7. Common challenges include ethnic and religious diversity, border disputes, political instability, terrorism, economic disparities, environmental issues, corruption, human rights concerns, and healthcare and education challenges.
8. Historical animosities and geopolitical rivalries hinder regional cooperation despite the interconnected challenges.
9. India focuses on economic reforms under the BJP.
10. Pakistan deals with cyclical military and civilian rule.

11. Bangladesh experiences economic growth but faces human rights concerns.
12. Sri Lanka navigates political and ethnic tensions.
13. Nepal undergoes frequent political changes.
14. Afghanistan's situation remains uncertain post-U.S. withdrawal.
15. Resolving challenges requires not only national efforts but also a commitment to regional collaboration and understanding.
16. The endeavor by the Bangladeshi government to implement a lockdown amidst the Covid-19 pandemic encountered obstacles as a result of sluggish and uncertain relief initiatives. The failure to promptly render support and assert control over regional political elites played a part in the inability to uphold the lockdown.

11. Recommendations

Here are some recommendations based on the key findings:

1. Support democratic institutions and processes in India, reinforcing the importance of political pluralism.
2. Encourage transparent and accountable governance practices in all countries, fostering citizen participation.
3. Advocate for a stable democratic government in Pakistan and discourage military intervention in civilian affairs.
4. Support initiatives that strengthen democratic institutions and ensure the rule of law.
5. Facilitate constructive political dialogue in Bangladesh to reduce tensions between major political parties.
6. Encourage inclusive governance to address the concerns of various ethnic and religious groups.
7. Support efforts to promote ethnic and religious harmony in Sri Lanka through inclusive policies and dialogue.
8. Encourage initiatives that address the root causes of tensions and promote reconciliation.
9. Assist Nepal in achieving political stability through inclusive constitutional reforms and dialogue.
10. Support the consolidation of democratic institutions and the rule of law.
11. Acknowledge and support Bhutan's focus on sustainable development and cultural preservation.
12. Explore opportunities for collaboration on sustainable development projects in the region.
13. Advocate for increased regional cooperation to address common challenges such as terrorism, economic disparities, and environmental issues.
14. Encourage diplomatic dialogue to resolve border disputes and historical animosities.
15. Support India's economic reforms while ensuring they benefit all segments of society.

16. Foster international collaboration on economic initiatives to promote regional development.
17. Work with Bangladesh to address human rights concerns, promoting a balance between economic growth and human rights protection.
18. Encourage international partnerships to support Bangladesh in achieving sustainable development.
19. Work towards a comprehensive and inclusive political settlement in Afghanistan post-U.S. withdrawal.
20. Provide humanitarian assistance and support efforts to rebuild and stabilize the country.
21. Emphasize the importance of regional collaboration in addressing shared challenges.
22. Facilitate diplomatic efforts to improve understanding and cooperation among South Asian nations.
23. Engage in the cultivation of collaboration with political elites of the region in order to secure their concurrence in the implementation of measures aimed at the imposition of lockdown. Institute unequivocal channels of communication and actively participate in discourse to effectively tackle apprehensions and elicit backing for the joint endeavor against the prevailing pandemic.

12. Conclusion

The political dynamics in the South Asian region encompass a multifaceted interaction between obstacles and possibilities. From the flourishing democratic system observed in India to the historical instabilities prevalent in Pakistan, each nation grapples with a distinctive array of concerns, which encompass ethnic tensions, economic reforms, and regional geopolitics. The destiny of the region is intricately linked, and effectively addressing these challenges necessitates not merely national endeavors, but also a dedication to regional cooperation and comprehension. As these nations navigate their respective political landscapes, the promotion of transparent governance, inclusive policies, and diplomatic discourse assumes paramount importance in fostering a stable and prosperous South Asia.

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