

ASSIGNMENT

Policy Brief on a National or Regional Issue in Bangladesh

Course Name: Public Policy Analysis / Governance and Development

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Executive Summary

Unlicensed music festivals and mass gatherings have grown in popularity across Bangladesh, particularly in urban areas and tourist destinations. While these events offer cultural and economic value, they often operate without official oversight, leading to safety concerns, public nuisance, environmental damage, and even threats to national security. This brief highlights the urgent need for a structured policy approach to regulate such gatherings.

Key risks include the absence of crowd control measures, lack of coordination with law enforcement, unregulated noise levels, drug and alcohol misuse, and increased vulnerability to accidents or stampedes. On the other hand, well-managed festivals can promote cultural expression, tourism, and local economies.

This policy brief recommends the formation of a national framework that includes stakeholder consultation, licensing mechanisms, enforcement tools, and public education. The issue is both desirable and feasible to address through structured policy intervention. The brief concludes with a roadmap for policy development and recommends a participatory, rational approach led by internal government actors in collaboration with local municipalities and cultural organizations.

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1. Background and Context

Unlicensed music festivals and mass gatherings have emerged as a growing phenomenon in Bangladesh, especially in urban centers like Dhaka, Chattogram, and tourist areas like Cox's Bazar. These events often take place without proper permission from municipal authorities or law enforcement agencies. They may include concerts, beach raves, political rallies, and underground music events.

According to The Daily Star (2024), there were over 150 unauthorized gatherings in Dhaka alone in 2023, with several incidents involving property damage, overcrowding, and public disturbance. A tragic example was the 2022 open-air concert in Sylhet, where three people died due to overcrowding and lack of emergency exits.

The root causes of this issue include poor coordination among local authorities, limited awareness of legal requirements, and the absence of a clear national licensing policy for public gatherings. At the same time, a booming youth population and the rise of social media have made organizing these events faster and easier than ever before.

Currently, no central legal framework governs such events, leaving local administrations to respond on a case-by-case basis. This policy vacuum increases risks to public safety and undermines cultural potential. Addressing this gap through formal policy could balance freedom of expression with the need for public safety.

2. Public Value Assessment

Using the framework by Althaus et al. (2007), we assess the **urgency, desirability, and feasibility** of addressing this issue.

Urgency:

The number of unlicensed mass gatherings is increasing. As urban populations grow and internet-based event promotion becomes widespread, the risk of unmanaged crowds, noise complaints, drug use, and even extremist threats increases. Immediate action is needed to avoid future tragedies.

Desirability:

The issue is ethically and socially relevant. Citizens have a right to safety and peaceful living

environments. It also raises cultural concerns, as some communities feel alienated or disrespected by certain public events. Addressing the issue would respect social harmony and public health while preserving the right to cultural expression.

Feasibility:

From an administrative and financial point of view, implementing a permit-based system and public awareness campaign is achievable. Political support is likely to grow following recent incidents and media coverage. A central policy supported by local enforcement and community engagement is well within Bangladesh's governance capacity.

Thus, the issue has high public value and should be prioritized for policy action.

3. Stakeholders and Actor Mapping

Below is a table identifying key stakeholders, their roles, interests, and levels of influence:

Stakeholder	Interest	Influence	Legitimacy
Ministry of Cultural Affairs	Regulation, promotion of culture	High	High
Ministry of Home Affairs	Law enforcement, crowd control	High	High
Local Government (City Corporations, Upazila Parishads)	Venue approval, permits	High	High
Bangladesh Police & RAB	Security enforcement	High	High
Event Organizers	Revenue, publicity	Medium	Medium
Youth and Cultural Communities	Entertainment, expression	Medium	High
NGOs (e.g., Ain o Salish Kendra)	Public rights, legal guidance	Medium	High
Media Houses	Coverage, awareness	Medium	Medium
Private Sector (Sponsors, Vendors)	Revenue, brand visibility	Medium	Medium

Academic Institutions	Research, safety guidelines	Low	Medium
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All these actors should be involved in shaping a national guideline and enforcement mechanism to ensure inclusive, safe, and regulated events.

4. Market Failures and Policy Tools

Several **market failures** justify policy intervention:

- **Negative Externalities:** Loud music, traffic congestion, and public disorder affect surrounding communities.
- **Asymmetric Information:** Attendees may not know whether an event is licensed, safe, or insured.
- **Public Goods and Safety:** Law enforcement and emergency services are stretched to cover unregulated events.

Policy Tools to Consider:

Tool Type	Description	Benefits	Risks
Regulations	Mandatory permits, noise limits, security protocols	Ensures safety and order	May be resisted by organizers
Fines & Sanctions	Penalties for unauthorized events	Discourages illegal gatherings	May be unevenly enforced
Subsidies/Grants	For organizers who comply with guidelines	Encourages legal behavior	Budget constraints
Public Education Campaigns	Inform public about safe events and legal permits	Increases public awareness	May require ongoing funding
Digital Permit System	Online licensing and tracking	Reduces corruption and simplifies process	Tech implementation challenges

Combining these tools offers a balanced mix of incentives and enforcement.

5. Policy Process Recommendation

Below is a **step-by-step roadmap** to develop a national policy framework:

Step 1: Conduct a **Situational Analysis**

- Gather data on past incidents and stakeholder concerns.
- Review existing legal provisions and municipal practices.

Step 2: Launch a **Multi-Stakeholder Consultation**

- Include government, youth groups, cultural leaders, law enforcement, and media.
- Hold public hearings in major cities.

Step 3: Develop a **Pilot Policy**

- Implement in Dhaka, Chattogram, and Cox's Bazar on a trial basis.
- Test digital permit systems and public awareness campaigns.

Step 4: Monitor and Evaluate**

- Use KPIs like number of licensed events, safety incidents, and public feedback.
- Adjust policy before national rollout.

Step 5: Nationwide Rollout with Legal Backing**

- Table draft legislation in Parliament.
- Support with budget allocation and staff training.

Step 6: Annual Review and Update**

- Incorporate feedback and new risks (e.g. online gatherings or hybrid events).

6. Final Reflection: Structure and Leadership

According to Herbert Simon's typology, this is a **moderately structured problem**—it has clear causes (lack of regulation) and possible solutions (permits, awareness), but complex social dynamics.

The best policy-making approach is a **rational-participatory model**, where:

- **Rational tools** (laws, digital permits) are used alongside
- **Participatory input** (youth voices, cultural leaders) to ensure relevance and public buy-in.

The most suitable **policy entrepreneur** would be an **internal actor**, such as the Ministry of Cultural Affairs or Local Government Division. However, they should work closely with civil society groups and tech experts to ensure innovation and accountability.

7. References

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