BANGLADESH LAW DIGEST
Peer-Reviewed Open Access Law Journal
ISSN 2708-6313 • Vol. 1, No. 1 (2026)

BDLD
BANGLADESH LAW DIGEST

RESEARCH_ARTICLE

VISUAL POLLUTION AS AN EMERGING ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN: REGULATION OF POSTERS, BANNERS, BILLBOARDS AND PUBLIC ADVERTISING IN BANGLADESH

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.68904/bdld.07364

Received: 18 September 2026 • Accepted: 14 November 2026 • Published: 24 November 2026

ABSTRACT

This article examines whether the proliferation of posters, banners, billboards and other outdoor advertising in Bangladesh can be addressed as a problem of environmental quality and urban governance. It distinguishes visual pollution from pollution defined by material contamination and separates academic recognition, policy recognition, indirect legal protection and express statutory recognition. Drawing on legal materials concerning visual amenity, landscape, public space, traffic safety and heritage, this research compares approaches adopted in São Paulo, Japan, Singapore, Delhi and England. Bangladesh already regulates aspects of this problem through the Constitution, the Graffiti Writing and Poster Sticking (Control) Act and Rules 2012, municipal laws, planning and heritage controls, and election rules. These measures, however, do not constitute an integrated year-round framework for assessing cumulative visual impact. The article, therefore, proposes national minimum standards with locally tailored zoning, proportionate and measurable permit conditions, differentiated administrative capacity, expiry and removal duties, responsible-party cost recovery, coordination among competent authorities and safeguards for freedom of expression. It argues that Bangladesh can expressly regulate adverse visual impact as an environmental and urban-governance concern without mischaracterising it as material pollution already prohibited by the Environment Conservation Act 1995.

Keywords: Environmental Law; visual pollution; outdoor advertising; planning law; public space; Bangladesh

1. INTRODUCTION

Cities in Bangladesh present an unusually visible regulatory paradox. Posters, banners, festoons, wall advertisements, signboards, hoardings, and increasingly digital displays are indispensable tools of commerce, politics, and public communication, yet their uncoordinated accumulation can transform common space into a field of competing private messages. Earlier Bangladeshi scholarship identified 'sight pollution' as a legal concern making it important to specify what this article adds.[1] The conventional description of this condition as an issue of urban "beautification" is too weak. A legal analysis should consider which interests are at stake, who should have the right to defend these interests and what institutional means can be used to differentiate between

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1. Bahreen Khan, 'Legal Aspects of Sight Pollution: Bangladesh Context' (2011) 22 Dhaka U LJ 79.

advertising and harmful visual intrusions. Scholarship on visual pollution now supplies a vocabulary for that inquiry, but it also warns against assuming a settled definition or a single universal method of measurement.[2]

Posters are the most immediate Bangladeshi manifestation of the concern because they are cheap, temporary, and easily attached to walls, poles, trees, and transport infrastructure. They are also the object of a dedicated statute. But poster pollution and visual pollution are not synonymous. The latter may include excessive billboard density, discordant commercial signage, illuminated and animated screens, intrusive structures and, in some settings, non-advertising elements such as tangled utilities, degraded street furniture or accumulated waste.[3] The legal task is therefore one of disciplined classification: advertising media are the primary visual pollutants for this article because their visual occupation of public space is intentional, measurable, and directly susceptible to place-, time-, manner- and design-based control.[4] Other forms of visual disorder are treated as associated phenomena only where their visual effects are genuinely relevant.[5]

1.1 Research question, method and contribution

The central question is whether visual pollution can be established as a legitimate environmental and urban-governance concern in Bangladesh even if it is not expressly recognised as an independent category of "pollution" under existing environmental legislation. The answer advanced here is qualified but affirmative. Pollution is a controversial legal concept: some laws condition pollution on the presence of physical pollutants, discharges or media affected by pollution, whereas environmental governance more generally safeguards the quality of the places where one lives.[6] The statutory definition of environmental pollution in Bangladesh is also mostly material- and medium-based, and it would be doctrinally negligent to merely state that visual clutter can be considered a pollutant under the Environment Conservation Act 1995.[7] However, the very same legal system also serves to safeguard environmental quality, public spaces, urban order, heritage, roads and municipal interests with the use of other instruments.[8]

This article's inquiry is therefore institutional rather than semantic. Bangladesh already contains scattered elements of a visual-environment regime in poster control, local taxation and licensing, planning, public nuisance, heritage, election regulation and administrative practice.[9] Without a clear and consistent

2. Hangyu Gao and others, 'A Systematic Literature Review and Analysis of Visual Pollution' (2024) 13 Land 994 DOI: 10.3390/land13070994.

3. Gao and others (n 2).

4. Eshetu Gelan, 'Assessing Visual Pollution: The Impact of Urban Outdoor Advertisements in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia' (2025) 5 Architecture 9 DOI: 10.3390/architecture5010009.

5. Lemi Dugassa, Getachew Gebeyehu and Daniel Lirebo, 'Quantifying and Assessing Visual Pollution from Outdoor Advertisement in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia' (2026) 4 Discover Environment 46 DOI: 10.1007/s44274–026–00553–2.

6. John Copeland Nagle, 'The Idea of Pollution' (2009) 43 UC Davis L Rev 1.

7. Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act 1995 (Act No 1 of 1995) ('ECA') ss 2–4.

8. Antiquities Act 1968 (Bangladesh) (Act No XIV of 1968), s 2(g); Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, arts 18A, 39 and 40.

9. Local Government (Pourashava) Act 2009 (Bangladesh) (Act No 58 of 2009); Local Government (City Corporation) Act 2009 (Bangladesh) (Act No 60 of 2009); Graffiti Writing and Poster Sticking (Control) Act 2012 (Bangladesh) (Act No 1 of 2012) ('Graffiti Act') ss 2–4, 5(3)–(4), 6, 8–9.

definition and common standards, authorities tend to regulate isolated objects—one poster, one billboard, one campaign—rather than cumulative visual impact. The more defensible position is to treat visual pollution as a distinct regulatory category within a coherent regime while maintaining the legal distinction between environmental pollution, planning harm, nuisance, safety risk and heritage impact. That way, there will be no overreach in ideas and no under-regulation.

This article will employ the doctrinal legal analysis framework with a comparative functional analysis approach. It explores the text and applicability of the respective constitutional, environmental, local-government, planning, building, heritage and electoral laws of Bangladesh and contrasts the regulatory power and protections in five jurisdictions. The analysis evaluates whether each source authorises restrictions on particular advertisements, rather than assuming that general environmental objectives create a freestanding prohibition. It does not present fieldwork, a nationally representative visual pollution survey or empirically validated numerical thresholds for Bangladesh; proposed standards are therefore legislative design options to be tested through local pilots and public consultation.

The contribution is not a claim to have discovered visual pollution in Bangladesh. Bahreen Khan's earlier analysis of "sight pollution" identified the problem and examined legal gaps and potential remedies.[10] This article builds on that foundation by analysing the subsequently enacted a 2012 poster-control regime and more recent electoral and municipal instruments, distinguishing visual harm from statutory material pollution, and assessing comparative mechanisms for cumulative-impact review, proportionate licensing, local capacity, cost recovery and protection of expression. Its central proposal is consequently a coordinated and legally bounded administrative framework, not a general aesthetic prohibition.

2. CONCEPTUALISING VISUAL POLLUTION AS ENVIRONMENTAL HARM

2.1 From an intuitive label to an analytical concept

The term "visual pollution" is rhetorical because it evokes a typical urban experience: visual space saturated by messages, structures or objects that compete for the viewer's attention and make the whole scene less coherent. However, no definitive definition has been found in the literature.[11] An analysis of fifty-two studies completed in 2024 in a systematic review indicated that there was a lot of variability in objects studied, methods, and conceptual boundaries—specifically, that there was no common concept and methodology.[12] Portella's book-length treatment focuses on advertising and signage and relates them to environmental quality and to the experience of space as lived.[13] In contrast, Chmielewski's version of the concept is one that can be highly visualised in a quality landscape expressed in spatial terms and has too much out-of-home advertising as

10. Khan (n 1).

11. Gao and others (n 2).

12. Gao and others (n 2).

13. Adriana Portella, *Visual Pollution: Advertising, Signage and Environmental Quality* (Ashgate 2014).

its most common symptom.[14] Both address deterioration of the visual environment but differ in the objects studied and the methods used to demonstrate adverse effects.[15]

The likelihood of this conceptual uncertainty having practical legal consequences. A regulatory category should not encompass every object that an official considers unattractive. Outdoor advertisements provide a comparatively workable starting point: their cumulative visibility, density, dimensions and location can be assessed, and the responsible commercial actors are often identifiable.[16] By contrast, overhead cables and deteriorating buildings principally engage utility regulation, public safety and property maintenance. Where those objects also detract from the quality of the streetscape, then it would be better to coordinate with the appropriate regulators rather than supplanting their existing legal obligations. Therefore, what constitutes pollution of the image should be a common and tangible visual externality, rather than a replacement for specific law.

2.2 What makes something "pollution"?

Environmental law has never possessed a perfectly stable theory of pollution.[17] Nagle demonstrates that the idea historically oscillates between contamination, impurity, nuisance and broader degradation, and that political choices determine which unwanted consequences receive the legal label.[18] Modern statutes often narrow that open-textured idea by defining pollutants as substances, emissions, heat, noise or radiation introduced into specified environmental media. Bangladesh follows this familiar pattern.[19] While the term 'environment' is defined broadly, the term 'conservation' is qualified in terms of qualitative conservation; the definitions of 'pollutant' and 'pollution' are directed towards the material/energetic contamination of the air, water, soil, or other components of the environment.[20] The doctrinal conclusion should accordingly be limited; the concept of visual pollution is plausible as the concept of environmental harm but does not fall under every statutory definition of pollution.

The distinction between environmental law and pollution-control law matters. Environmental law also addresses land use, ecosystems, landscape, cultural heritage, public access, environmental assessment and the

14. Szymon Chmielewski, 'Towards Managing Visual Pollution: A 3D Isovist and Voxel Approach to Advertisement Billboard Visual Impact Assessment' (2021) 10 ISPRS Intl J Geo-Information 656 DOI: 10.3390/ijgi10100656.

15. Portella (n 13); Chmielewski (n 14).

16. Szymon Chmielewski, 'Measuring Visual Pollution by Outdoor Advertisements in an Urban Street Using Intervisibility Analysis and Public Surveys' (2016) 30 Intl J Geographical Information Science 801 DOI: 10.1080/13658816.2015.1104316; Szymon Chmielewski and others, 'Citizen Science and WebGIS for Outdoor Advertisement Visual Pollution Assessment' (2018) 67 Computers, Environment and Urban Systems 97 DOI: 10.1016/j.compenvurbsys.2017.09.001; Afifatun Nisa, Arwan Putra Wijaya and Muhammad Adnan Yusuf, 'Analysis of Outdoor Advertising Visual Pollution Using Analytical Hierarchy Process in Semarang City' (2024) 21 Jurnal Geografi 1 DOI: 10.15294/jg.v21i1.2274.

17. Nagle (n 6).

18. Nagle (n 6).

19. ECA, s 2.

20. ECA, ss 2–4.

quality of human settlements.[21] Comparative materials then conceptualise the character and usability of places as environmental interests, even if there is no substance that has polluted air, water or soil.[22] Within this more comprehensive perspective on environmental quality, visual harm can be dealt with without any need to restrict the scope of the statutory definition of 'pollutant'.[23] For Bangladesh, it is doctrinally safer to have an express regulatory framework coupled with planning and local government environmental-quality goals.

2.3 Environmental quality, visual amenity, landscape and public space

The strongest legal foundation for visual-pollution regulation lies in neighbouring concepts that are already administrable. "Visual amenity" asks how development or advertising affects the visual qualities enjoyed in a place.[24] "Landscape" focuses on the character of an area as perceived by people.[25] Public-space law protects common places in which movement, social interaction and civic life occur.[26] Heritage law adds the integrity and setting of culturally significant places.[27] None of these concepts require a universal aesthetic taste. They instead permit context-sensitive judgements supported by criteria such as scale, density, obstruction, cumulative impact, architectural relationship and sensitivity of the receiving environment.[28]

It is important in dense South Asian cities, where the visual field is one of the most important but limited resources of the economy.[29] The attention-grabbing property of advertising creates a public good-like effect, since the advertiser is able to enjoy the benefit, but the visual and enforcement costs are partially shifted to the public.[30] A licensing system can thus be seen as a way to regulate the competing claims on shared visibility rather than government determining what is "beautiful".[31] A legal goal is the upkeep of usable, legible and safe public space. If presented in such a way, visual regulation becomes familiar planning principles relating to building mass, frontage, setbacks or illumination, all of which involve balancing private use with public environmental concerns.

21. European Landscape Convention (opened for signature 20 October 2000, entered into force 1 March 2004) ETS No 176, arts 1, 5–6; UNESCO General Conference, 'Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape, including a glossary of definitions' (10 November 2011).

22. UNGA Res 71/256, 'New Urban Agenda' (23 December 2016) UN Doc A/RES/71/256, annex.

23. European Landscape Convention (n 21) arts 1, 5–6; New Urban Agenda (n 22).

24. Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007, SI 2007/783 ('2007 Regulations') regs 3–4 and sch 2.

25. European Landscape Convention (n 21) arts 1, 5–6.

26. New Urban Agenda (n 22).

27. UNESCO and others, 'Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context' (2022).

28. Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007, regs 3–4 and sch 2.

29. Portella (n 13).

30. Anat Rosenberg, 'Ways of Seeing Advertising: Law and the Making of Visual Commercial Culture' (2023) 48 L & Social Inquiry 130 DOI: 10.1017/lsi.2021.61.

31. Rosenberg (n 30).

2.4 Primary and associated visual pollutants

The defensible classification should be based on regulatory connection. Most of the advert types are primary visual pollutants such as posters, banners, festoons, billboards, hoardings, wall ads, commercial signboards, political campaign ads, and freestanding advertising structures or electronic or illuminated advertising.[32] These objects are well-designed to be made available to the public time and again and subject to a standard outdoor advertising code of practice.[33] Graffiti must be qualified: if it is commercial or political graffiti, the same regulatory concern should apply, but if it is art, it should not be considered pollution because it has an undesirable message. When the litter and accumulated waste cause visual disorder, their principal legal attributes are waste pollution and sanitation.[34] Street furniture and antennas and overhead cables are also predominantly utilities and streetscape management.

This distinction has two legal advantages. First, it prevents the proposed framework from becoming a subjective prohibition on visually disliked objects. Secondly, it identifies the actors to whom obligations should attach. Advertising companies, advertisers, consenting property controllers and, in appropriate cases, campaign beneficiaries may be responsible for unlawful displays; utilities and public authorities remain responsible for infrastructure clutter.[35] Permit conditions and restoration costs should reflect each actor's legally established connection with the display.[36] The polluter-pays principle is relevant as an analogy for allocating correction costs, not as proof that an advertiser is a statutory polluter under the Environment Conservation Act.[37]

2.5 Replacing subjective "beauty" with administrable standards

The principal objection to aesthetic regulation is the risk of vagueness and arbitrary or viewpoint-based enforcement.[38] Risk can be minimised with published goals, fair processes and criteria relevant to the local context and not based on the objectives of the officials.[39] There are various outdoor-advertising controls, such as sign area, height, projection, spacing, façade coverage, animation, luminance or display duration, cumulative density, obstruction of sightlines and structural condition.[40] Wherever possible, the limits should be made more

32. Portella (n 13).

33. Gao and others (n 2).

34. Gao and others (n 2).

35. Graffiti Act, ss 5(3)–(4), 6 and 8.

36. Graffiti Act, s 5(3)–(4).

37. UN Conference on Environment and Development, 'Rio Declaration on Environment and Development' (14 June 1992) UN Doc A/CONF.151/26 (vol I), Principle 16.

38. John J Costonis, 'Law and Aesthetics: A Critique and a Reformulation of the Dilemmas' (1982) 80 Mich L Rev 355.

39. R Varkki George and Marcia Caton Campbell, 'Balancing Different Interests in Aesthetic Controls' (2000) 20 J Planning Education and Research 163 DOI: 10.1177/0739456X0002000203; Elizabeth A Garvin and Glen S LeRoy, 'Design Guidelines: The Law of Aesthetic Controls' (2003) 55 Land Use L & Zoning Digest 3 DOI: 10.1080/00947598.2003.10394545.

40. 2007 Regulations, regs 3–4 and sch 2.

stringent in heritage areas and near sensitive uses with evidence and with standards that are publicly available.[41] The purpose is to manage any visual and safety impacts, rather than giving authorities the right to decide upon their preferred messages and appearances.

There is evidence from empirical research to support assessment against observable criteria. Chmielewski's urban-street work focuses on intervisibility in relation to the residents' perception of advertising, and three-dimensional studies analyse the billboard structure's visibility.[42] There are also measurable characteristics of perceived streetscape quality that can be identified from research on colour and cumulative advertising area.[43] None of them, however, provides a statutory threshold for Bangladesh which is applicable in general. The number of signs allowed at a particular site from a foreign study should not automatically become a rule for the number of signs allowed at a particular site. The sounder argument is that locally calibrated standards can be as large or as small as municipal resources, based on sounder evidence obtained from spatial measurements (site photographs) and public perception evidence.[44]

2.6 Evidence: well-being and road safety without overclaiming

Claims that visual clutter directly causes mental illness should be avoided unless supported by robust evidence. Literature more safely supports propositions about perceived visual quality, enjoyment, cognitive demand and context-dependent discomfort.[45] The evidence is stronger and more policy-ready in road safety. A systematic review of ninety documents found that road advertising can alter driver eye movements and attention, particularly where signs are salient or dynamic, but cautioned that evidence was not sufficient to attribute crashes in a simple causal way.[46] Simulation studies subsequently found measurable performance effects from digital billboards and from animated or transitioning content.[47] These findings justify precautionary design controls near traffic conflict points without claiming that every billboard causes accidents.[48]

41. UNESCO and others (n 27).

42. Chmielewski, 'Measuring Visual Pollution' (n 16); Chmielewski, 'Towards Managing Visual Pollution' (n 14).

43. Mastura Adam and others, 'The Effects of Colour Content and Cumulative Area of Outdoor Advertisement Billboards on the Visual Quality of Urban Streets' (2022) 11 ISPRS Intl J Geo-Information 630 DOI: 10.3390/ijgi11120630.

44. Chmielewski, 'Measuring Visual Pollution' (n 16).

45. Klaudia Borowiak and others, 'Urban Visual Pollution: Comparison of Two Ways of Evaluation—A Case Study from Europe' (2024) 14 Scientific Reports 6138 DOI: 10.1038/s41598–024–56403–9; Gao and others (n 2); Gelan (n 4).

46. Oscar Oviedo-Trespalacios and others, 'The Impact of Road Advertising Signs on Driver Behaviour and Implications for Road Safety: A Critical Systematic Review' (2019) 122 Transportation Research Part A 85 DOI: 10.1016/j.tra.2019.01.012.

47. Lynn Meuleners, Paul Roberts and Michelle Fraser, 'Identifying the Distracting Aspects of Electronic Advertising Billboards: A Driving Simulation Study' (2020) 145 Accident Analysis & Prevention 105710 DOI: 10.1016/j.aap.2020.105710; Reem Brome, Mariette Awad and Nadine Marie Moacdieh, 'Roadside Digital Billboard Advertisements: Effects of Static, Transitioning, and Animated Designs on Drivers' Performance and Attention' (2021) 83 Transportation Research Part F 226 DOI: 10.1016/j.trf.2021.10.013.

48. Oviedo-Trespalacios and others (n 46).

2.7 Scientific Evidence of the Harmful Effects of Visual Pollution on Human Cognition, Emotion and Safety

The degree of harm is related to the stimulus and setting in the case of visual pollution, as this may be more than just an aesthetic inconvenience. Neo, Shepley and Won did not test advertising, but litter and construction materials in a controlled virtual reality experiment that involved 124 participants, who did worse on the Stroop test under high conditions of visual clutter than under low.[49] In a second study, in which 301 participants viewed images of street scenes, visible street disorder, specifically litter, was correlated with greater self-reported stress and negative emotions compared to cleaner scenes of neighbourhoods.[50] Also, in an urban-street virtual-reality experiment (n = 26), an association between emotional responses, as self-reported and physiological, and visual composition/fragmentation was found, but not between billboards and emotional responses.[51]

The eye-tracking study, which contained 81 people, was more directly relevant to advertising: ads with low, medium and high clutter levels outdoors showed measurable differences in the amount of time spent fixating on the ads, but no clinical harm.[52] A picture survey study was conducted in Kuala Lumpur, with 59 subjects, that correlated billboard coverage with visual comfort and appreciation of street scenes, which included colour characteristics.[53] Clearly, one immediate public-safety issue is driver distraction. In a study of 96 drivers using a driving simulator, high-risk following distances and more variability in speed and lane position were found in sections of the road with digital billboards compared to sections without billboards.[54] This information warrants evidence-based controls in traffic-sensitive areas.[55] They do not say that visual pollution, as such, leads to depression, psychiatric disorder, permanent brain damage or a specific number of road crashes. It should therefore be regulated because of the actual harm it causes to the attention, visual amenity and safety of which it is known, not simply for its aesthetic sake.

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49. JRJ Neo, MM Shepley and AS Won, 'Using Virtual Reality to Systematically Examine Impacts of Noise and Visual Clutter on Message Elaboration and Cognitive Capacity' (2022) 25 Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking 250 DOI: 10.1089/cyber.2021.0006. Experimental stimuli were litter and construction materials, not posters or billboards. See also <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10081700/> accessed 1 July 2026.

50. A Tavakoli and others, 'Psycho-Behavioral Responses to Urban Scenes: An Exploration through Eye-Tracking' (2025) 156 Cities 105568 DOI: 10.1016/j.cities.2024.105568. 301 online participants; photo exposures to construction sites, RVs and litter compared with a clean scene; not a diagnosis of stress disorder.

51. Z Zhang and others, 'Emotional Responses to the Visual Patterns of Urban Streets: Evidence from Physiological and Subjective Indicators' (2021) 18 Intl J Environmental Research and Public Health 9677 DOI: 10.3390/ijerph18189677. 26 participants; VR street scenes and EEG, electrodermal activity, heart rate and self-report; visual streetscape composition, not advertising-only exposure.

52. K Jin, Y Zhang and J Chen, 'Optimizing Urban Visual Identity: Eye-Tracking Insights for Outdoor Advertising Management' (2025) 15 Buildings 2128 DOI: 10.3390/buildings15122128. 81 participants and 30 advertisement images. The authors' original Figure 5 contains gaze heatmaps for different visual-pollution categories (CC BY 4.0). See also <https://mdpi-res.com/buildings/buildings-15-02128/article_deploy/html/images/buildings-15-02128-g005.png> accessed 4 July 2026.

53. Adam and others (n 43). The study reports visual-quality ratings from 59 respondents in Kuala Lumpur.

54. Meuleners, Roberts and Fraser (n 47). The study reports simulator results from 96 participants, not observed crash rates.

55. Meuleners, Roberts and Fraser (n 47).

2.8 Benefits of Reducing Visual Pollution for Human Well-being and Urban Environmental Quality

Reducing visual pollution can have positive consequences for the well-being and environmental quality of the urban area. Unauthorised posters and the density, brightness, animation and placement of advertising can have a negative impact on streetscape legibility, can affect the protection of heritage settings and can provide conflicting stimuli near traffic hazards.[56] However, the above experimental evidence indicates that there may be a benefit to visual comfort, attentional demands and a safer road environment, but not a quantifiable benefit to mental health at the population level. In another field experiment, 117 adults were randomly assigned to observe a green, grey or mixed feature during a 45-minute urban walk and found that increased perception of natural elements correlated with decreased anxiety and increased perceived restorativeness.[57] This is good for nature-orientated design but cannot be regarded as evidence of the effects of removing billboards alone. In 2023, Dhaka North City Corporation launched a mural project in Moghbazar flyover, which was followed by an announcement in 2025, indicating that posters were being removed from the flyover corridor, while murals were being covered with posters.[58]

3. INTERNATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL NORMATIVE FOUNDATIONS

3.1 No universal treaty of visual pollution

There is no global treaty that creates a universally applicable legal category of visual pollution or establishes binding numerical limits for outdoor advertising as absolutes that automatically disallow posters/billboards. International law is relevant in a different way.[59] It supplies normative ideas, sustainable urban development, environmental quality, public space, landscape and heritage protection that help explain why the visual character of cities can be a legitimate public concern.[60] This is an indirect, not a direct, legal argument for the implementation of treaties.

3.2 SDG 11 and the quality of urban environments

Sustainable Development Goal 11 calls for cities and human settlements that are inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Its targets address participatory planning, cultural and natural heritage, reduction of urban environmental impacts, and access to safe and inclusive public spaces.[61] None mention visual pollution by

56. Meuleners, Roberts and Fraser (n 47); Adam and others (n 43).

57. W Fleming, B Rizowy and A Shwartz, 'The Nature Gaze: Eye-Tracking Experiment Reveals Well-Being Benefits Derived from Directing Visual Attention towards Elements of Nature' (2024) 6 People and Nature 1469 DOI: 10.1002/pan3.10648. 117 initially recruited; the intervention concerned directed gaze towards natural v grey elements, not advertisement removal.

58. 'Mayor Atiqul Inaugurates Moghbazar Flyover Artwork Project' The Daily Star (10 April 2023) <https://www.thedailystar.net/culture/news/mayor-atiqul-inaugurates-moghbazar-flyover-artwork-project-3293696> accessed 10 July 2026; 'Posters Begin to Cover Up July Uprising Images' bdnews24.com (9 April 2025) <https://bdnews24.com/media-en/image/29303e21721d> accessed 13 July 2026. Both document the Moghbazar flyover corridor at different dates but do not verify the identical pillar or identical camera angle.

59. European Landscape Convention (n 21) arts 1, 5–6; UNGA Res 70/1, 'Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' (25 September 2015) UN Doc A/RES/70/1, Goal 11; New Urban Agenda (n 22).

60. European Landscape Convention (n 21) arts 1, 5–6; New Urban Agenda (n 22).

61. UNGA Res 70/1 (n 59).

name.[62] Nevertheless, uncontrolled advertising can intersect with these objectives when it obstructs public infrastructure, degrades heritage settings, impairs streetscape legibility or converts common space into uncoordinated commercial display. The SDG framework is therefore best used as a policy lens for evaluating local advertising governance, not as an independent source of prohibition.

The New Urban Agenda reinforces this orientation by treating urban form, planning, public space and quality of life as integrated governance concerns.[63] UN-Habitat's public-space programme likewise frames public spaces as essential urban systems requiring management, accessibility and quality.[64] The materials will help to move from a one-time removal drive to a permanent management strategy.[65] If a city only cleans up on election posters and commercial banners whenever they get to be an issue, then it is treating symptoms. A Sustainable-City approach is questioning beforehand where and how advertising can take place, how much is tolerated at a specific location, how to dismantle temporary and transitory advertising, how to allocate revenue and how to record the effectiveness of enforcers.

3.3 Landscape as a legal bridge

One of the most explicit transnational formulations of the visual environment idea is found in the European Landscape Convention. It describes the landscape as perceived by humans and is not limited to exceptional landscapes: it also refers to urban, everyday and degraded landscapes.[66] Bangladesh does not have to implement the Convention, but the model is useful in that it does not limit the scope of landscape law to a pristine nature. Quality of images is a common urban interest. The same conceptual linkage is seen in Japan, where legislation on landscapes explicitly works towards "attractive" and "comfortable" living environments and links with the regulation of outdoor advertising.[67] For Bangladesh, landscape language could provide an objective statutory basis for protecting city character without attempting to force visual clutter into a contamination-based pollution definition.

3.4 Heritage, the setting of places and visual impact

Heritage law provides another indirect foundation. International guidance on impact assessment in World Heritage contexts treats visual and setting effects as relevant to the significance and integrity of heritage places.[68] UNESCO's Historic Urban Landscape Recommendation similarly encourages integration of heritage

62. UNGA Res 70/1 (n 59) Goal 11.

63. New Urban Agenda (n 22).

64. UN-Habitat, 'Global Public Space Programme' <https://unhabitat.org/programme/global-public-space-programme> accessed 16 July 2026.

65. UN-Habitat (n 64).

66. European Landscape Convention (n 21) arts 1, 5–6.

67. Landscape Act 2004 (Japan) (Act No 110 of 2004) ('Landscape Act') arts 1, 2 and 8 <https://www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp/en/laws/view/2533/en> accessed 19 July 2026; Mamiko Numata and others, 'Study on the Actual State and Problems of Outdoor Advertisement Administration and Landscape Administration: Through Issues Expressed in Municipalities' (2025) 8 Japan Architectural Rev e70039 DOI: 10.1002/2475–8876.70039.

68. UNESCO and others (n 27).

conservation with the broader social, spatial and environmental dynamics of cities.[69] Bangladesh's Antiquities Act can designate urban sites, streets, groups of buildings and public squares of special value, creating a domestic basis for context-sensitive controls around protected places.[70] A national advertising framework should therefore authorise stricter controls in heritage zones, including limits on façade coverage, illumination, projection, materials and digital animation.[71]

3.5 Four levels of recognition

The comparative record is most accurately described through four levels of recognition. First is academic recognition: visual pollution is a developing interdisciplinary concept with a growing empirical literature.[72] Secondly, policy recognition – planning or urban design documents may refer to visual clutter, quality of streetscape or visual amenity.[73] Third, indirect legal recognition: regulation of underlying harms (landscapes, amenity, advertising, heritage and safety) without the use of the term 'visual pollution'.[74] The fourth is express legal recognition, and that is legislation that calls out the visual pollution.[75] An existing example is the Clean City Law of the city of São Paulo. It is very important to maintain these levels in separate streams. While not affording the article universal legal recognition, it indicates the content of visual-pollution control is firmly amassed in the legal practice.

4. COMPARATIVE REGULATORY MODELS

4.1 Selection of comparative jurisdictions

The five comparators were selected purposively because they represent different approaches to regulation regarding visual pollution and show the potential relevance for Bangladesh: express recognition of visual pollution in Brazil (São Paulo); mixed national recognition of visual pollution with local regulation in landscape in Japan; national regulation with local definition of 'expansion of visual pollution' in Singapore; combination of national regulation with control measures for defacement, public safety and amenity in Delhi; and local enforcement of national regulation, with decisions regarding 'control of advertisements' largely tied to amenity and public safety in England.

69. UNESCO General Conference (n 21).

70. Antiquities Act, s 2(g).

71. UNESCO and others (n 27).

72. Gao and others (n 2).

73. Liriane Baungratz and Vanessa Casarin, 'A Mídia Exterior na Paisagem Urbana: Estudos Recentes' (2022) 19(2) InfoDesign DOI: 10.51358/id.v19i2.948.

74. Landscape Act, arts 1, 2 and 8; 2007 Regulations, regs 3–4 and sch 2; Building Control (Outdoor Advertising) Regulations (Singapore), as amended by the Building Control (Outdoor Advertising) (Amendment) Regulations 2026 (effective 2 November 2026) ('Singapore Regulations') regs 2–13 <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/SL/BCA1989-RG6> accessed 22 November 2026.

75. Lei nº 14.223, de 26 de setembro de 2006 (São Paulo) ('Lei 14.223') arts 1–5 <https://legislacao.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/lei-14223-de-26-de-setembro-de-2006> accessed 22 July 2026.

4.2 São Paulo: express recognition, strong control and a warning about overbreadth

São Paulo's Lei Cidade Limpa is unusually valuable because it expressly links regulation of elements visible from public places to the urban landscape and includes the "combating of visual pollution" and environmental degradation are among its objectives.[76] The statute also links landscape management to quality of urban life, environmental comfort, cultural and historical heritage, and traffic and pedestrian safety.[77] It therefore demonstrates that visual pollution can be legislatively recognised without being limited to a conventional pollution-control statute. The law's sector-sensitive approach also supports differentiated rules by urban context.[78]

Nevertheless, it is not advisable to use the São Paulo experience as a slogan. Tight regulation can create conflicts over the issue of commercial freedom, the sense of community and the distinction between regulation and visual sterilisation.[79] The Academic Review of the Clean City Law acknowledges both the positive and negative aspects of the law and its potential to be too restrictive.[80] Bangladesh's lesson here is that it is not desirable to stop all outdoor advertising. It is that legislation can explicitly define visual pollution without requiring explicit and clearly defined objects, purposes and permit criteria. A Bangladesh statute should be more specific than the Brazilian model regarding cumulative impact, exemptions, low-cost community notices, political communication, and digital media and procedural review.

4.3 Japan: national enabling legislation and local landscape governance

Japan is an example of a multi-layered institutional structure.[81] Historically, the Outdoor Advertisement Act 1949 has provided for local regulation to promote an 'attractive and comfortable living environment', which includes 'good landscapes', and the Landscape Act 2004 allows for landscape plans to include outdoor advertisements.[82] The legal structure is set by the central state, while the prefectures and municipalities develop controls according to the local context.[83]

Recent Japanese scholarship also reveals a caution: coordination between landscape administration and outdoor-advertising administration can be difficult where regulatory competences and local ordinances do not

76. Lei 14.223, arts 1–5.

77. Lei 14.223, arts 1–5.

78. Fábio Nogueira Barros, 'A Lei Cidade Limpa e a Regulação da Poluição Visual na Cidade de São Paulo' (2018) 10 Planeta Amazônia 1 DOI: 10.18468/planetaamazonia.2018n10.p01–10.

79. Barros (n 78).

80. Barros (n 78).

81. Landscape Act, arts 1, 2 and 8.

82. Outdoor Advertisement Act 1949 (Japan) (Act No 189 of 1949), as amended <https://laws.e-gov.go.jp/law/324AC0000000189> accessed 25 July 2026; Landscape Act, arts 1, 2 and 8.

83. Federal Highway Administration, Outdoor Advertising Control Practices in Australia, Europe, and Japan (US Department of Transportation 2011) 41–48.

align.[84] That institutional lesson is directly relevant to Bangladesh. A new framework should not simply add another agency. It should specify which authority sets national standards, which body issues local permits, which agency controls roadside safety, how heritage review is triggered, and which database establishes whether a display is authorised. The Japanese model therefore supports decentralised implementation under national standards but also shows why the interfaces must be legislated rather than assumed.[85]

4.4 Singapore: central licensing, streetscape criteria and removal powers

Singapore's Building Control (Outdoor Advertising) Regulations, amended with effect from 2 November 2026, establish a centralised licensing system distinguishing promotional signs from signboards.[86] Applications require sufficient technical and site information for official review; licensing decisions may take account of the amenities of places, the aesthetics of the streetscape and the setting of historic or public buildings and monuments.[87] The policy objective is more explicitly stated in the guidance provided by the Urban Redevelopment Authority – commercial signage is accepted, and streetscapes are kept free from visual clutter, and the location, size, height, form and heritage elements will influence the decision to approve a sign.[88]

The regime also is enforcement-focused. The Commissioner can order the removal, obliteration, replacement, alteration or maintenance of the displays, including those that are unlawfully displayed, and may remove, without notice, displays that are in contravention of the conditions in specified circumstances.[89] Singapore has its own regulations on public street and road structure advertising.[90] Useful attributes for Bangladesh are licence records, technical submission criteria, clear visual amenity criteria, powerful removal powers, and special attention to dynamic advertising.[91] The institutional capacity is the limit to the transferability: procedures and digital tools need to be simplified, and no system built in Singapore can be simply transferred into all Bangladeshi municipalities.

4.5 India and Delhi: defacement, safety, aesthetics and municipal revenue

Several regulatory goals which are relevant to Bangladesh are gathered in Delhi. Under the Delhi Prevention of Defacement of Property Act, some interference with the appearance of a property is considered to

84. Numata and others (n 67).

85. Numata and others (n 67).

86. Singapore Regulations, regs 2–13; Building and Construction Authority (Singapore), 'New Requirements under the Building Control (Outdoor Advertising) (Amendment) Regulations 2026 and Their Commencement Dates' (Circular APPBCA-2026–08, 12 May 2026) <https://info.corenet.gov.sg/docs/default-source/bca-circulars/new-requirements-under-the-building-control.pdf> accessed 22 November 2026.

87. Building and Construction Authority (Singapore), 'Outdoor Advertising Sign/Signboard Licence' <https://www1.bca.gov.sg/safety-and-standards/applications-and-licenses/outdoor-advertising-sign-signboard-licence-application/> accessed 27 July 2026.

88. Urban Redevelopment Authority (Singapore), 'Revised Guidelines for Outdoor Signs in the Central Area' (Circular No URA/PB/2021/04-CUDG, 1 June 2021) <https://www.ura.gov.sg/guidelines/circulars/dc21-04/> accessed 27 September 2026.

89. Singapore Regulations, regs 2–13.

90. Street Works (Advertisements on Public Streets) Regulations (Singapore), as revised.

91. Singapore Regulations, regs 2–13.

constitute defacement.[92] The Outdoor Advertising Policy 2017 of Delhi explicitly aims to strike a balance between public safety, aesthetic values and municipal revenue.[93] Its treatment of sites and signs provides a model of how a regulatory regime can potentially balance the interests of road users and public infrastructure with a respect for the right to advertise. Such instruments are not meant to replace the existing statutory powers of Bangladesh, but they are a structured alternative to the ad hoc visual-beautification drives.

It's also crucial in the constitutional sense. Supreme Court of India in Tata Press recognised commercial advertising as expression under the Constitution of India and permitted as long as there were lawful regulations.[94] It is not possible to directly apply the specific constitutional interpretation to Bangladesh. It does, however, help to demonstrate the importance of location, dimensions, illumination, duration, and safety as the more defensible criteria than the message that is sent by a display. There is a need to examine political communication, consider proportionate restrictions, community notice space and a system to contest refusals under a permit regime.

4.6 England: amenity and public safety as disciplined legal tests

It is analytically appealing to England that its regime of advertising control is limited to two primary interests – amenity and public safety. The 2007 Regulations require local planning authorities to only exercise planning powers regarding those interests.[95] Amenity can include local character and architectural, historic or cultural features; public safety includes effects on traffic and transport signs.[96] Government planning guidance explains that the same advertisement may be unacceptable beside a listed building yet acceptable in a commercial or industrial setting.[97] This is a model of context-sensitive, not uniform, aesthetics.

The accompanying Explanatory Memorandum recognises that excessive advertising can damage the urban landscape and compromise road safety, while also acknowledging commercial interests and administrative burdens.[98] England's approach treats advertising as a lawful activity subject to context-sensitive control.[99] For Bangladesh, express statutory objectives of amenity and public safety could provide a defensible framework, provided decisions are based on the physical effects of displays rather than officials' approval or disapproval of their content.

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92. Delhi Prevention of Defacement of Property Act 2007 (Delhi Act 1 of 2009) ss 2–4.

93. Municipal Bodies of Delhi, 'Delhi Outdoor Advertising Policy 2017: Balancing Safety, Aesthetics and Revenues for Public Good' (2017) <https://ndmc.gov.in/departments/Departments/Finance/nodal_cell/Delhi%20Outdoor%20Advertisement%20Policy.pdf> accessed 2 August 2026.

94. Tata Press Ltd v Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd (1995) 5 SCC 139.

95. 2007 Regulations, regs 3–4 and sch 2.

96. 2007 Regulations, regs 3–4 and sch 2.

97. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 'Advertisements: Planning Practice Guidance' (GOV.UK) <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/advertisements> accessed 5 August 2026.

98. Explanatory Memorandum to the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007, SI 2007/783.

99. 2007 Regulations, regs 3–4.

4.7 Comparative synthesis: what is realistically transferable

These systems share five mechanisms, irrespective of the tradition of law. First, advertising is subject to authorisation rather than presumed freely placeable, through permits, licences or consent.[100] Second, standards vary across local areas: different standards for heritage streets, roads, commercial centres and ordinary residential streets.[101] Third, visual judgements are disciplined by measurable or contextual criteria rather than a bare preference for "beauty".[102] Fourth, enforcement includes removal, maintenance and responsibility for unauthorised displays.[103] Fifth, the state recognises legitimate economic communication and, in some systems, municipal revenue.[104]

There's no such thing as a universal comparator. Three ways to see the power and risk of express visual-pollution language: Japan's value and costs of decentralisation, Singapore's impressive licence-and-removal system, and Delhi's policy balances safety and aesthetics in integrating revenue. Bangladesh should adopt and integrate, rather than replicate, these models – national minimum standards, local zoning, a single digital permit record, and robust removal and cost-recovery mechanisms; safety and heritage overlays; and rights-protecting and content-neutral criteria.

5. BANGLADESH'S FRAGMENTED LEGAL ARCHITECTURE

5.1 Constitutional and environmental foundations and their limits

Article 18A of the Constitution directs the State to endeavour to protect and improve the environment and preserve natural resources, biodiversity, wetlands, forests and wildlife for present and future citizens.[105] It is not an advertising code, and it should not be presented as one. Its importance is normative: environmental protection is a constitutional state policy.[106] Environmental litigation in *Dr Mohiuddin Farooque v Bangladesh* also helped establish a broad public-interest approach to environmental enforcement and standing.[107] Together, these sources justify legislative attention to urban environmental quality but do not themselves define visual pollution.

The Environment Conservation Act 1995 is similarly both relevant and insufficient. Its purposes include conservation, improvement of environmental standards and control of pollution, while "conservation of environment" is defined in qualitative terms. Yet its operative definitions of pollutant and pollution are not

100. Singapore Regulations, regs 2–13.

101. Landscape Act, arts 1, 2 and 8.

102. 2007 Regulations, regs 3–4 and sch 2.

103. Lei 14.223, arts 1–5.

104. Municipal Bodies of Delhi (n 93).

105. Constitution, arts 18A, 39–40.

106. Constitution, art 18A.

107. *Dr Mohiuddin Farooque v Bangladesh* (1997) 49 DLR (AD) 1.

naturally drafted for purely visual accumulations.[108] The 2023 Rules modernise environmental clearance and standards and repeal the old 1997 Rules, but they do not establish a nationwide outdoor-advertising code.[109] The proper reform is therefore not to pretend that the Act already prohibits visual clutter.[110] It is to connect a new visual-environment framework to environmental-quality principles while locating day-to-day regulation primarily in planning and local government.

5.2 The Graffiti Writing and Poster Sticking (Control) Act 2012 and Rules 2012

The Graffiti Writing and Poster Sticking (Control) Act, 2012, is the most explicit act of Bangladesh related to the subject. These definitions are strictly wider than the often-used term 'poster law' implies: 'wall' includes specified structures and public infrastructure, and 'poster' includes electronic advertising materials, banners and billboards.[111] It is illegal to post or write on the wall outside the areas designated by section 4 of the Act (with exception to the statutory permission process).[112] There are also provisions for the removal and recovery of costs, penalties for individuals and beneficiaries, organisational liability and the special treatment of election materials in the Act.[113] These are key existing tools, and the proposed changes should be based on these and not misrepresent the absence of any liability or removal law.

The Graffiti Writing and Poster Sticking (Control) Rules 2012 were also made under the Act and are also included in the Local Government Division's official rules.[114] What is relevant is not the lack of all implementing rules but the lack of the relevant implementing rules. Instead, the composite framework does not offer a full and continuously applied benchmark for cumulative density, lights, moving signs, heritage fit and integrated permit data. The difference is important because laws should be enacted to complement rather than replace powers that are already in place, and they should not simply assume they do not exist.

Union, upazila and district parishad have been explicitly mentioned as local authority in the definition of local authority under Section 2(9) of the Local Government (Planning and Development Act, 1983). It is therefore suggested that the proposed numbered noticeboard system should be seen as a standardised approach to making use of existing powers to designate locations for posters under section 4 of the Act, rather than a new power, given that it is already provided in that section. A beneficiary is also defined in section 2(8), and sections 5(3) and 5(4) of the amendments set out the bases for costs in removing and liability for unlawful publicity in a beneficiary's interests.[115]

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108. ECA, ss 2–4.

109. Environment Conservation Rules 2023 (Bangladesh), SRO No 53-Law/2023 (5 March 2023).

110. ECA, ss 2–4.

111. Graffiti Act, s 2(1), (3).

112. Graffiti Act, ss 3–6, 8–9.

113. Graffiti Act, ss 5, 6, 8–9.

114. Graffiti Writing and Poster Sticking (Control) Rules 2012 (Bangladesh Gazette, extraordinary, 6 September 2012).

115. Graffiti Act, ss 2(8)–(9), 4, 5(3)–(4), 6(3) <https://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-print-1084.html> accessed 8 August 2026.

5.2.1 Judicial scrutiny of unauthorised billboards and posters

The most directly relevant reported election-publicity decision is *Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association v Election Commission (1994)* 46 DLR (HCD) 235 (Writ Petition No 186 of 1994). During the 1994 Dhaka City Corporation election, the petitioner challenged campaign posters, wall slogans, amplified publicity and obstruction of public roads. The High Court Division examined the steps taken by the Election Commission and city authorities; considering those measures and the Attorney-General's assurance of implementation, it considered further directions unnecessary. The case supports coordinated enforcement of existing election controls, not an unrestricted power to prohibit political expression or all outdoor advertising.[116]

The High Court Division's judgement in *Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) and others v Bangladesh* (Writ Petition No 6072 of 2010, 8 June 2011) provides more specific judicial authority concerning billboards. In litigation over unapproved housing projects affecting flood-flow and water-retention areas, the Court made the Rule absolute, incorporated an earlier interim order and required the responsible authorities to remove signs, billboards and advertising for unapproved housing schemes. This is a planning- and environmental-enforcement decision addressing unlawful project promotion; it is not a holding that all visually intrusive signs are pollutants under the Environment Conservation Act.[117]

A separate High Court proceeding brought by Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh in March 2010 concerned unsafe and unauthorised hoardings. Contemporary reports describe directions to municipal and police authorities and subsequent difficulties in implementing the ruling. As an authenticated judgement and reliable writ number were not located, this episode is used only as documented historical reporting, not cited as a reported judicial precedent. It nevertheless exposes the practical coordination and structural-safety problems that a permanent outdoor-advertising regime must address.[118]

In January 2020 the High Court was reported to have ordered action against plastic-laminated election posters; the reported proceedings concerned material environmental consequences rather than a freestanding judicial test of visual amenity.[119] In February 2023, a reported HRPB application concerning graffiti and posters on Dhaka flyovers sought implementation of the existing poster law. Without verified orders, neither report is treated here as establishing a binding judicial ratio or an independently verified writ number.[120]

Environmental public-interest jurisprudence provides the wider doctrinal context.[121] In *Dr Mohiuddin Farooque v Bangladesh* (Writ Petition No 891 of 1994), the High Court Division's judgement of 15 July 2001

116. *Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association v Election Commission* (1994) 46 DLR (HCD) 235. See also United Nations Environment Programme, 'Compendium of Summaries of Judicial Decisions in Environment Related Cases' (2004) <https://www.ircwash.org/sites/default/files/UNEP-2004-Compendium.pdf> accessed 14 August 2026.

117. *Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association v Bangladesh* (HCD, Writ Petition No 6072 of 2010, 8 June 2011) 22–23 <https://lpr.adb.org/resource/bangladesh-environmental-lawyers-association-bela-vs-bangladesh-writ-petition-no-6072-2010> accessed 17 August 2026.

118. 'Knock Down All Illegal Billboards' The Daily Star (29 April 2010) <https://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-136562> accessed 20 August 2026.

119. 'Stop Production, Display of Laminated Election Posters: HC' The Daily Star (22 January 2020) <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/laminated-election-posters-stop-production-display-1857550> accessed 23 August 2026.

120. 'Remove Graffiti, Posters from Dhaka Flyovers in 2 Weeks: HC' The Daily Star (6 February 2023) <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/remove-graffiti-posters-dhaka-flyovers-2-weeks-hc-3240451> accessed 26 August 2026.

121. Dr Mohiuddin Farooque (n 107).

addressed the regulation of polluting industrial activities. It illustrates judicial oversight of statutory environmental duties but did not decide the legality of outdoor billboards or redefine visual clutter as material pollution.[122]

A subsequent order in the same proceedings, dated 23 June 2009, addressed compliance and implementation. The relevant lesson for visual-environment governance is institutional: enforceable legal duties require administrative follow-through. The 2012 Poster Act, rather than an expansive reading of the environmental-pollution definition, remains the more direct source of rules on designated locations, removal, costs and beneficiary responsibility.[123]

5.3 City Corporations and Pourashavas: permits, taxes and uneven practice

Municipal law supplies a second institutional layer. The Local Government (City Corporation) Act 2009 provides the legal framework of city corporations, while the City Corporation Model Tax Schedule 2016 (STS 2016), issued as SRO No 13-Law/2016, supplies fiscal categories related to advertising.[124] The schedule exists and is administered by the legislative and audit bodies.[125] It is therefore a longstanding municipal responsibility to charge fees for advertising.[126] The legal distinction remains essential: a tax or charge does not, by itself, establish compliance with visual-impact, road-safety or heritage requirements.[127] A functioning regulatory regime must connect fiscal administration to independently defined permit standards.

Municipal practice nevertheless varies. Cumilla City Corporation's official advertisement branch describes removal of unauthorised billboards, signboards, LED signs, banners and festoons, field inspection of applications, and routine removal of illegally placed temporary material to maintain city appearance.[128] Narayanganj City Corporation's citizen charter provides a specific service for permission to install advertisements, signboards and billboards and links the fee to the 2016 Model Tax Schedule.[129] The Local

122. *Dr Mohiuddin Farooque v Bangladesh* (HCD, Writ Petition No 891 of 1994, 15 July 2001) <https://www.supremecourt.gov.bd/resources/documents/308564_W.P.No.891of94%28Judgemnt%29.pdf> accessed 29 August 2026.

123. *Dr Mohiuddin Farooque v Bangladesh* (HCD, Writ Petition No 891 of 1994, order of 23 June 2009) <https://www.supremecourt.gov.bd/resources/documents/308564_W.P.No.891of94%28Order%29.pdf> accessed 1 September 2026.

124. Local Government (City Corporation) Act 2009; City Corporation Model Tax Schedule 2016 (Bangladesh), SRO No 13-Law/2016 (28 January 2016; gazetted 31 January 2016).

125. Legislative and Parliamentary Affairs Division, 'SROs Made in 2016' (entry for SRO No 13-Law/2016, City Corporation Model Tax Schedule 2016) <https://legislativediv.gov.bd/> accessed 4 September 2026.

126. Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of Bangladesh, 'Audit Observation No 1' (Dhaka South City Corporation advertising-tax assessment and collection, Audit Report No 15/2022 for FY 2019–20) 10 <https://cag.org.bd/storage/app/uploads/public/649/870/ac4/649870ac4e2a9252271025.pdf> accessed 7 September 2026.

127. 2007 Regulations, regs 3–4; City Corporation Model Tax Schedule 2016.

128. Cumilla City Corporation, 'Advertisement Branch' and Citizen Charter (official portal) <https://cocc.portal.gov.bd/> accessed 10 September 2026.

129. Narayanganj City Corporation, Citizen Charter: 'Permission for Advertisement/Signboard/Billboard Installation' (official portal) <https://ncc.portal.gov.bd/> accessed 13 September 2026; Local Government (City Corporation) Act 2009.

Government (Pourashava) Act 2009 and Model Tax Schedule 2014 govern Pourashavas.[130] These arrangements illustrate regulatory capacity but also fragmentation: taxation, permission, visual standards and enforcement are disjointed and not managed by a single national permit architecture.[131]

5.4 Planning, building, heritage, nuisance and public-space law

Planning and building law supply additional, but distinct, controls. The Building Construction Act 1952 provides for building-construction permission and expressly authorises the Bangladesh National Building Code to address 'sign and outdoor display' under section 18A(2)(h).[132] The Town Improvement Act 1953 creates a broader planning and improvement framework, while the Dhaka Metropolitan Building Rules 2025 form part of the more recent metropolitan building-control regime.[133] Large hoardings and rooftop advertising structures may therefore engage building and structural-safety requirements.[134] Such approval does not necessarily establish that a sign is acceptable when viewed together with other advertisements along a street. The proposed visual-impact assessment should complement, not replace, existing building and planning controls.

Other statutory regimes provide distinct remedies. The Antiquities Act 1968 may be used to protect certain urban sites, streets, groups of buildings and public squares of special value and to provide greater protection of advertisements that have a negative impact on protected settings.[135] The Penal Code's public-nuisance provisions may address activities that cause common injury, danger or annoyance, but nuisance is a poor substitute for a predictable advertising code because it is reactive and fact-specific.[136] A modern visual-environment system should therefore coordinate with these laws through overlays: building safety approval, heritage consent, road-safety clearance and nuisance enforcement remain distinct, while the advertising permit addresses cumulative visual impact.

5.5 Election advertising: a strong temporary regime, not a permanent solution

Election law demonstrates that Bangladesh can impose strict, specific rules on campaign materials when the political system decides to do so. The Political Parties and Candidates' Code of Conduct for Parliamentary Elections 2025, subsequently amended, prohibits the use of posters in election campaigning and restricts the non-biodegradable campaign materials and placement of permitted materials on specified public and

130. Local Government (Pourashava) Act 2009, ss 2–4; Pourashava Model Tax Schedule 2014 (Bangladesh), SRO No 246-Law/2014 (23 October 2014), as amended.

131. Bangladesh Government Press, Pourashava Model Tax Schedule 2014, SRO No 246-Law/2014 <https://www.dpp.gov.bd/upload_file/gazettes/11889_19438.pdf> accessed 16 September 2026.

132. Building Construction Act 1952 (Bangladesh) (Act No II of 1953), ss 3(1), 18A(2)(h).

133. Town Improvement Act 1953 (Bangladesh) (East Bengal Act XIII of 1953), as amended; Dhaka Metropolitan Building Rules 2025 (Bangladesh), SRO No 469-Law/2025.

134. Building Construction Act 1952 (Bangladesh), s 18A(2)(h).

135. Antiquities Act 1968, s 2(g).

136. Penal Code 1860 (Bangladesh), ss 268 and 290.

infrastructural surfaces.[137] The Election Commission publicly directed compliance with the poster prohibition before the 2026 parliamentary election.[138] This is a major change from older campaign practices and should be accurately distinguished from the general poster statute.[139]

Yet election regulation cannot serve as Bangladesh's visual-pollution policy. It is time-limited, election-specific and administered for electoral fairness and campaign order.[140] Commercial advertising, institutional notices, non-election political communication, religious or educational promotion and ordinary business signage continue throughout the year. The Poster Control Act itself recognises the special status of election materials by referring campaign regulation to electoral rules and directions.[141] The policy lesson is institutional: if the state can define prohibited materials, locations and campaign periods during elections, it can also establish permanent, content-neutral rules for year-round advertising based on location, density, safety, heritage and duration.

The 2025 parliamentary Code of Conduct also establishes a specific post-poll duty: rule 19 requires candidates to remove their campaign material within 48 hours after voting concludes.[142] This pre-existing election-specific deadline is distinct from a possible new notice-triggered duty to report and initiate removal of unauthorised third-party material while a campaign is ongoing. Any proposed 48-hour notice-triggered rule must be separately justified, drafted and reconciled with the Commission's governing election restrictions.[143]

5.6 Institutions: many competent actors, no single visual-environment system

The existing framework distributes responsibility among city corporations and pourashavas, development authorities, the Department of Environment, building-control bodies, the Election Commission, police, road authorities and heritage agencies.[144] This distribution is not inherently defective; specialised agencies are necessary. The problem is the absence of a shared regulatory object.[145] No single nationwide mechanism

137. Political Parties and Candidates' Code of Conduct for Parliamentary Elections 2025 (Bangladesh), SRO No 444-Law/2025 (10 November 2025), r 7, as amended by SRO No 467-Law/2025 and SRO No 39-Law/2026; Bangladesh Election Commission (official materials) <https://www.ecs.gov.bd/> accessed 19 September 2026.

138. Bangladesh Election Commission, directive on election campaign materials implementing r 7 of the Political Parties and Candidates' Code of Conduct for Parliamentary Elections 2025 (2025–26); 'EC Issues Electoral Code of Conduct Banning Posters, Drones in Campaign' (*Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha*, 11 November 2025) <https://www.bssnews.net/news-flash/330646> accessed 21 September 2026.

139. Graffiti Act, s 9; Political Parties and Candidates' Code of Conduct for Parliamentary Elections 2025, r 7, as amended.

140. Political Parties and Candidates' Code of Conduct for Parliamentary Elections 2025, rr 7, 18–19.

141. Graffiti Act, ss 2–4, 9; Political Parties and Candidates' Code of Conduct for Parliamentary Elections 2025, r 7, as amended by SRO No 467-Law/2025 and SRO No 39-Law/2026.

142. Political Parties and Candidates' Code of Conduct for Parliamentary Elections 2025, r 19.

143. Political Parties and Candidates' Code of Conduct for Parliamentary Elections 2025, rr 7, 19 (as amended) <https://asset.ecs.gov.bd/media/uploaded_files/notices/2025/11/mFUVXLxJXGnPmewdd590biNUP4bUQaVXcmKVPadw.pdf> accessed 24 September 2026.

144. Local Government (City Corporation) Act 2009; Political Parties and Candidates' Code of Conduct for Parliamentary Elections 2025, r 7, as amended by SRO No 467-Law/2025 and SRO No 39-Law/2026.

145. Graffiti Act, ss 2–6.

appears to answer for every major outdoor advertisement: who issued the permit, which parcel or structure it occupies, how long permission lasts, which design standards apply, whether safety or heritage clearance was required, and who must remove it on expiry. Fragmentation therefore becomes an information and accountability problem as much as a jurisdictional one.

6. DIAGNOSING REGULATORY FAILURE IN BANGLADESH

6.1 The conceptual gap: regulated objects without a coherent protected interest

The principal conceptual deficit is the absence of a unified standard for cumulative visual impact. Different instruments deal with posters, municipal charges, election materials and building safety.[146] However, if each of the individual structures meets one of the applicable fees or permission requirements, a street can still be oversaturated visually. It is important that there be a coherent framework that recognises the visual environment as a protected public interest and evaluates individual proposals set in the cumulative context of the streetscape.

6.2 The standards gap: permission does not equal visual quality

A second lack is that of criteria to evaluate applications. The process of applying and paying fees for municipalities is already in place to accept applications and fees, but it is not proof of acceptable visual quality.[147] Comparative regimes use the criteria that are expressed through law in terms of amenity, streetscape, landscape, public safety, heritage setting, dimensions and cumulative density.[148] The country should have clear and objective minimum standards with the flexibility of imposing more stringent local standards if necessary.[149] Standards and reasons documented would alleviate arbitrary aesthetic choices and be less likely to result in a compromise to the quality of the public space for revenue reasons.

6.3 The institutional gap: overlapping mandates without a common permit record

There is a lack of coordination, or permits are recorded in different places. The third weakness is that of coordination. A large digital billboard can simultaneously speak up for and get the attention of municipal licensing, building safety, road distraction, electrical, planning and heritage issues. In the event each authority has their own paper system, then an enforcement officer on the street will not be able to easily see if the display is authorised. A centralised digital database would change the way jurisdiction is handled from an uncoordinated to a coordinated approach. The registry does not have to contain all the decisions; it can store a one-of-a-kind permit number, geolocation, photo, size, owner, advertiser, authorities approving, conditions, and expiry date. The Citizen-science and WebGIS research shows that it is technically possible to create inventories of advertising banners by using spatial methods, and these can facilitate visual-impact management.[150]

146. Graffiti Act, ss 3–4; City Corporation Model Tax Schedule 2016; Political Parties and Candidates' Code of Conduct for Parliamentary Elections 2025, r 7, as amended by SRO No 467-Law/2025 and SRO No 39-Law/2026.

147. Cumilla City Corporation (n 128); Narayanganj City Corporation (n 129).

148. Landscape Act, arts 1, 2 and 8; 2007 Regulations, regs 3–4 and sch 2; Urban Redevelopment Authority, 'Revised Guidelines for Outdoor Signs' (n 88).

149. 2007 Regulations, regs 3–4.

150. Chmielewski and others, 'Citizen Science and WebGIS' (n 16); Chmielewski, 'Towards Managing Visual Pollution' (n 14).

6.4 The implementation gap: removal, recurrence and "campaign" enforcement

Bangladesh's legal problem is also one of implementation. The 2012 Act contains removal and penalty mechanisms, and local government practice includes periodic removal of unauthorised material.[151] However, if the legal process does not regulate installation ex ante, ex post installation costs are not recorded, and a record of the permit is not maintained, repeated removal drives can become a maintenance cycle. The costs of wall scraping, banners and surface repair and the use of municipal labour are then socialised. A better regime would continue to allow for summary removal of obvious unauthorised displays and add to that the responsibility of the advertisers and property-holders, cost recovery and increasing penalties for repeat offenders.

6.5 Incentives, revenue and rights

A further difficulty is the tension between municipal revenue, commercial visibility, political communication and the public interest in safe and accessible streets. Revenue-dependent authorities may approve excessive advertising, while an enforcement-driven authority may unnecessarily suppress lawful expression. Delhi's attempt to balance safety, amenity and revenue offers a policy comparator rather than a binding rule for Bangladesh.[152] Articles 39 and 40 of the Constitution require attention to freedom of expression and lawful occupation or business.[153] A defensible framework should regulate the physical occupation of public space through predictable, proportionate criteria and avoid discrimination on the basis of viewpoint.[154]

7. A PERMANENT REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR BANGLADESH

7.1 Institutional model: national minimum standards with local zoning

Bangladesh should adopt a national minimum-standard framework implemented principally by city corporations and pourashavas, with development authorities and specialised agencies retaining their sectoral functions. A fully centralised licence system would ignore local urban character; complete municipal autonomy would perpetuate inconsistent standards. The better model combines national definitions, prohibited practices, safety baselines, digital data requirements, enforcement powers and due-process safeguards with local advertising zones and stricter area-specific rules. Japan's national enabling/local implementation model and England's locally applied amenity test support this architecture.[155]

At the national level, the ministries responsible should issue a Model Outdoor Advertising and Visual Environment Regulation under clear statutory authority or enact a dedicated framework statute if existing delegation is inadequate. These should be clearly defined in the instrument as protection of visual amenity and environmental quality, preservation of heritage and public space, road and pedestrian safety, orderly commercial communication, and accountability in municipal revenue. It should also make it clear that material pollution is

151. Graffiti Act, ss 5(3)–(4), 6; Cumilla City Corporation (n 128).

152. Municipal Bodies of Delhi (n 93).

153. Constitution, arts 18A, 39–40.

154. Constitution, arts 39–40; Tata Press (n 94).

155. Landscape Act, arts 3, 4 and 8; 2007 Regulations, reg 3.

still subject to environmental legislation and adverse visual impact to the regime of the visual environment.[156] In this way, this textual distinction would solve the current conceptual uncertainty, rather than open the door to a lawsuit over the definition of the word "pollutant."[157]

Also, the design should differentiate between public space information and commercial use of space. A coordinated public-information network would comprise physical noticeboards in union and village centres, numbered municipal display spaces in town markets and transport interchanges, and carefully licensed electronic information points in suitable high-capacity urban areas. Municipal authorities would administer civic display spaces under section 4 of the 2012 Act, while the Election Commission would retain exclusive control over election-campaign restrictions. Designated boards for electoral posters must not be presented as lawful for parliamentary election campaigns, while the 2025 Code prohibits those posters.[158]

7.2 Definitions and classification

The framework should define "outdoor or public advertisement" technologically rather than by material. It should include printed posters, banners, festoons, hoardings, wall wraps, painted advertisements, freestanding and rooftop signs, projection, LED and electronic displays, animated or changeable-content screens and future functionally equivalent devices.[159] Singapore's explicit treatment of animated billboards and Bangladesh's already broad poster definition demonstrate why medium-neutral drafting is feasible.[160]

At least the following types of signs should be separated in a classification schedule: business-identification signs, third-party commercial advertising, temporary event advertising, political and election notices, public-service and emergency notices, government signs, community and non-profit notices, heritage interpretation, and digital/illuminated signs. The differences are important because the reason for charging the fee, how long the fee is charged for and the fee amount varies. Hospital directional signage should not be treated like a digital commercial billboard; a small shop fascia should not be charged like a rooftop hoarding; and low-cost civic communication should be able to have dedicated space. Delhi's distinction between business-identification and commercial advertising provides a useful comparator.[161]

7.3 Zoning, density and design standards

Local advertising maps should divide cities into regulatory zones: high-intensity commercial areas; ordinary mixed-use areas; residential districts; heritage and historic areas; educational and hospital zones; parks and waterfronts; public squares; transport hubs; highways and major intersections; and environmentally sensitive locations.[162] Each zone should specify maximum sign area, height, projection, façade coverage and

156. ECA, ss 2–4.

157. Nagle (n 6).

158. Graffiti Act, ss 2(9), 4, 9.

159. Graffiti Act, s 2(3); Singapore Regulations, reg 2.

160. Singapore Regulations, reg 2; Graffiti Act, s 2(3).

161. Municipal Bodies of Delhi (n 93).

162. Landscape Act, art 8.

density.[163] More stringent restrictions may apply for heritage and residential areas, while commercial areas may allow more signage, but with adherence to cumulative visual thresholds.[164] Zoning turns aesthetics into spatial planning and provides advertisers with a sense of predictability in their investment.[165]

Evaluation of density should be carried out cumulatively, not sign by sign.[166] A permit should be denied if the proposed display would place an otherwise acceptable street segment, view cone or façade above the advertising limit. Intervisibility and existing sign concentration calculations can be performed using GIS tools; simple municipal versions may start with spacing, frontage ratios and geotagged inventories, and then move on to more complex three-dimensional ratios.[167] The law should allow for periodic revision because of improvements in methods. It should not be based on the foreign city as a research threshold.

7.4 Roads, intersections and digital advertising

Road-safety standards should not be confused with controls for visual amenity but may be applied at the same time. Large and evolving signs in areas of intersections, pedestrian crossings, traffic signals, sharp curves and other locations that require decision-making should be investigated more thoroughly.[168] Factors such as brightness, contrast, animation, transition and the duration between the transitions of what is being displayed are factors that will be relevant to the design.[169] The existing studies justify location-specific standards and do not indicate that all digital ads create a collision or that a specific number of ads should be limited across the nation.[170] It should therefore be required to consult the competent road and traffic authorities for certain types of proposals.[171] Setback distances stipulated should only be implemented after considering the relevant law, sightline geometry, speed environment and technical evidence.

Legislation for digital ads is to be technology neutral. It should control emitted light, movement, transition frequency, projection, hours of operation, auto brightness and emergency shut off instead of identifying specific brands of displays.[172] Singapore has offered some comparative benchmarks in the form of its

163. Landscape Act, art 8; 2007 Regulations, regs 3–4.

164. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (n 97).

165. Urban Redevelopment Authority, 'Revised Guidelines for Outdoor Signs' (n 88).

166. Chmielewski, 'Towards Managing Visual Pollution' (n 14); Adam and others (n 43).

167. Chmielewski, 'Measuring Visual Pollution' (n 16); Chmielewski and others, 'Citizen Science and WebGIS' (n 16); Chmielewski, 'Towards Managing Visual Pollution' (n 14).

168. Oviedo-Trespalacios and others (n 46).

169. Meuleners, Roberts and Fraser (n 47).

170. Brome, Awad and Moacdieh (n 47).

171. Urban Redevelopment Authority, 'Revised Guidelines for Outdoor Signs' (n 88).

172. Singapore Regulations, regs 2–13; Brome, Awad and Moacdieh (n 47).

treatment of animated billboards and guidance on signage.[173] There might also be identified operators and procedures for responding to malfunction for connected displays. Detailed technical conditions should be established in rules or permit schedules, which are subject to change, and not be locked in the parent statute.

7.5 Duration, expiry and mandatory removal

Temporary ads should have recorded dates of installation and expiration and have an enforceable removal duty.[174] The period for voluntary removal after expiry ends should be commensurate with the crime, and there should be a statutory basis for it to be regarded as a new offence and not a "new crime". Do not forget that campaign material under the Election Commission's election-specific rules must continue to be subject to those special rules.[175] A public entity verifier permit identifier or QR code could reveal minimal information about validity but not too much. An accelerated process of notification and removal - if accepted for objectively identifiable unauthorised political displays - would be a proposed statutory procedure which would need administrative justification and exceptions for objective practical impossibility - not existing law.

A new scheme should give the competent authority the ability to remove and replace displays when they are placed unlawfully or have expired, provided reasonable notice is given, except where there are urgent safety concerns, in which case immediate action may be taken, and to be reimbursed for reasonable and documented removal and replacement costs.[176] An existing provision in the Act 2012, section 5(3)-(4), already allows for certain costs to be removed and recovered from the responsible person or the benefactor; this would be extended to apply in the case of this.[177] The reform should clarify the time limits of the advertiser's responsibility and clarify what constitutes direct involvement versus print/supply.

7.6 Advertiser responsibility, penalties and the polluter-pays analogy

Sanctions should be graded according to the gravity, the recurrence, the real responsibility and the public risk. An administrative consequence for a minor first violation may be proportionate, while repeated and/or hazardous violations may warrant increased administrative consequences in accordance with an express legal power. In particular, the 2012 Act takes care of offenders, beneficiaries and certain organisational actors - any more responsibility allocation shall retain notice, an opportunity to challenge evidence and proportionality. The polluter-pays principle is an analogy for external costs, and removal-cost recovery is grounded in the 2012 Act.[178] Both do not make advertising material pollution under the Environment Conservation Act.[179]

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173. Singapore Regulations, regs 2–12; Urban Redevelopment Authority, 'Revised Guidelines for Outdoor Signs' (n 88).

174. Graffiti Act, ss 4–5; Political Parties and Candidates' Code of Conduct for Parliamentary Elections 2025, r 19.

175. Political Parties and Candidates' Code of Conduct for Parliamentary Elections 2025, r 7, as amended by SRO No 467-Law/2025 and SRO No 39-Law/2026.

176. Graffiti Act, s 5(3)–(4). These provisions concern removal costs; notice, expiry and urgent safety measures in the sentence are proposed reforms, not powers conferred by these subsections.

177. Graffiti Act, s 5(3)–(4).

178. Rio Declaration (n 37); Graffiti Act, s 5(3)–(4).

179. ECA, s 2.

There's just one more evidentiary rule that's needed for political posters. The existing Act already includes a definition of 'beneficiary' in terms of the person in whose interest a display is made, and the posting of a display in favour of someone is already covered by section 6(3) of the current Act; section 8 deals with specified organisational responsibility.[180] The reform is thus not to impose a burden on beneficiaries that does not exist. To establish an evidential presumption for recurring cases where the name of a candidate or organisation is clearly visible in campaign material but the name of the person installing the material is not. The competent authority would be entitled to presume responsibility of that beneficiary if the display is proven to be unlawful and that it has an identifiable benefit.

Any such statutory presumption is rebuttable. The alleged beneficiary should be given clear notice, underpinning photos and location evidence, enough time to respond, and an effective review process (administration or judicial). An inference of proof of reasonable preventative measures, prompt repudiation and genuine third-party placement should be able to be rebutted. An unauthorised display will need to be reported if the campaign is proposed to be carried out over 48 hours (except for safety, access, and logistical reasons as documented). That period would not be a legal obligation but a legislative policy option for which consultation and evidence of the capacity of enforcement and compatibility with special election rules would be required.[181]

This is especially significant for political items, where the difference between obligation and proposal is key. The 2012 Act already covers the person who is benefiting from the illegal posting under sections 2(8) and 6(3), and the parliamentary election Code separately requires a candidate to remove material used in their campaigns within 48 hours of polling (r 19).[182] A proposed additional notice-based response rule should therefore specify the elements of the notice for an evidentiary trigger, who can give the notice, the date for the notice to take effect, practical exceptions, who pays for the removal, and an independent mechanism for contestation of the beneficiary inference. It must not impose strict liability on a candidate for an unauthorised act by a third party if he or she can show that the act was actually unauthorised and was promptly rejected by the candidate.[183]

7.7 Digital permitting, GIS monitoring, complaints and coordination

The implementation should take a 2-tier approach depending on capacities. A common electronic permit registry might document the location, size, owner, permit status, approvals, photo and expiration date of each important display in large-scale city corporations. QR would be useful for inspecting GIS or WebGIS (where technically possible) to map concentrations and capture citizen reports and to enable cumulative-visibility analysis.[184] Such systems should be in addition to, and not a substitute for, legal accountability decisions. The 3D modelling and a nationwide platform should not be required for every municipal licence application.

In resource-limited pourashavas, an easily reproduced paper or basic spreadsheet register, a unique permit number, dated site photographs, periodic site inspections and simple rules regarding frontage, spacing

180. Graffiti Act, ss 2(8), 5(2)–(4), 6(3), 8.

181. Graffiti Act, ss 2(8), 6(3), 9 (existing law; the 48-hour response requirement is a legislative proposal).

182. Graffiti Act, ss 2(8), 6(3); Political Parties and Candidates' Code of Conduct for Parliamentary Elections 2025, r 19.

183. Political Parties and Candidates' Code of Conduct for Parliamentary Elections 2025, r 19.

184. Chmielewski and others, 'Citizen Science and WebGIS' (n 16).

and sightlines would be feasible methods of compliance as a first tier. Later migration to a digital system might be allowed through a common template. They should not be adopted blindly from another country without discernment, based on a numerical setback. In either level, local government is to be the public face of the permit application authority, with building/road and heritage agencies having defined legal roles of advice or approval. The deadlines for applying and recorded decisions and rights to review should be used across both tiers.

7.7.1 Public noticeboards, numbered allocations and equitable access

It is very useful to have a system of public noticeboards for users to use, within certain weather limitations, close to educational institutions, transport terminals of all kinds and local government service points, and near markets. An 11x13" or larger poster board may be marked with numbered spaces, sponsors' names to be displayed, size requirements for the display, and specific rotation and/or booking date/expiry time. The allocation should be affordable or even free to people who want to post public-health, emergency or non-profit notices, and the grounds for choosing the allocation and for judging applications should be clearly and publicly stated and should not be subject to viewpoint-based discrimination. Paper registers could be provided by union parishads (or pourashavas) and the same slot identifiers linked to QR-linked inventories by city corporations. The method should be adopted via published local orders issued under the 2012 Act and not by way of an inappropriate presumption that private walls may be used at will.[185]

However, this is a Japan-specific example rather than a rule: In the official guidance for conducting their elections, the Toshima ward offers a blueprint for publicly provided poster display boards, on which candidates place one poster in the specially numbered compartment assigned to them, with the printing and posting of the poster clearly marked.[186] The relevant transferable mechanism is a legible allocation register which enables easier supervision of space(s) allocated, responsibility and cleanup. However, Japan's election-law-specific system cannot be copy-pasted into Bangladesh, and in the context of parliamentary elections, the existing prohibition on posting pictures and directions of the Election Commission in Bangladesh takes precedence.[187]

The proposal should include who will provide contact and sponsorship details, who will allocate a number and note the date it is allocated, who will arrange safe installation and removal, who will verify the site, and who will provide a complaints mechanism for the receipt of geotagged images and/or a written report.[188] Indiscriminate removal of lawful older notices should not be considered a response to a noticeboard which is full; transparent rotation and renewal are needed to ensure equal access, and where digital records are available, periodic on-site inspections are still vital.

7.7.2 Proportionate digital replacement of printed publicity

For more robust commercial areas, city officials could test a handful of publicly owned digital community-information booths or licensed, multi-advertiser screens in selected locations. Prior permission and streetscape assessment are illustrated with Singapore's online advertisement licensing and location-sensitive

185. Graffiti Act, ss 2(9), 3–4.

186. Toshima City Election Administration Commission, 'Election Campaigning' (official guidance, Japanese) <https://www.city.toshima.lg.jp/361/kuse/senkyo/1606181520.html> accessed 6 October 2026.

187. Political Parties and Candidates' Code of Conduct for Parliamentary Elections 2025, r 7.

188. Building and Construction Authority, 'Outdoor Advertising Sign/Signboard Licence' (n 87).

signage controls.[189] Digital substitution does not mean it cannot be visually harmful; the other dimensions of brightness, animation, density of the screen, the distraction of the road, accessibility and energy consumption, as well as cyber security, require regulation.[190] The disposal of paper used for notices posted on a single supervised display might decrease as compared to unmanaged flyposting, but the benefit should not be taken for granted and should be measured.

What Times Square in New York City shows is not a policy of putting screens in every place but rather a very special, albeit limited, lit signage district.[191] This is to place within a definite portion of the Theatre Subdistrict (Section 81–732 of the New York City Zoning Resolution) the requirements for the location, surface area, illumination and sightlines.[192] The transferable mechanism is not Times Square scaled, bright or required to be lit; it is a mapped, design-controlled commercial media precinct, potentially in a suitable business district, after a road-safety and pedestrian study has been conducted.

There is another protection for outdoor displays in Tokyo: they are normally required to be approved under the Tokyo Metropolitan Outdoor Advertising Ordinance, even in high-trafficked commercial districts, like Shibuya. The local permit process is outlined in Shibuya Ward's official guidance.[193] This does not justify zoning-based authorisation and maintenance requirements; it is just because the digital signage is so prominent that it is unregulated.

Osaka's plan is more specifically geared towards digital media. Its city government has established special procedures for consultation on digital signage in specific landscape-management areas, such as the location, size and design of a signage installation in relation to the character of the local streetscape.[194]

For rural and resource-poor regions, it is better to have an offline-first public board than to have the mandatory electronic screen. A numbered register, a short standard application form, a date-stamped photographic record and a fixed inspection cycle could be kept in a ward or union office; if mobile connectivity allows, officers could upload photographs monthly to a shared photographic database of the district. The QR verification should not be the only form of access: it should be optional. This programme should be trialled, costed for maintenance, and compared to any changes in the occurrence of illegal displays, how citizens can access the displays, the cost of removing the displays and the number of complaints about unsafe road use.[195]

Where a documented needs assessment shows that there is reliable power, capacity to maintain and use the electronic noticeboards and they are being used at specific rural transport hubs, markets or administrative

189. Urban Redevelopment Authority, 'Revised Guidelines for Outdoor Signs' (n 88).

190. Meuleners, Roberts and Fraser (n 47); Brome, Awad and Moacdieh (n 47).

191. New York City Zoning Resolution § 81–732, 'Special Times Square Signage Requirements' <https://zoningresolution.planning.nyc.gov/article-viii/chapter-1/81-732> accessed 9 October 2026.

192. New York City Zoning Resolution § 81–732.

193. Shibuya City, 'Application for Permission for Outdoor Advertising' (22 March 2026) <https://www.city.shibuya.tokyo.jp/kankyo/doro-kasen/doro-shinsei/okugai.html> accessed 12 October 2026.

194. Osaka City, 'Outline of Consultations on Digital Signage and Temporary Advertising in Priority Notification Areas' (1 September 2026) <https://www.city.osaka.lg.jp/toshikeikaku/page/0000671979.html> accessed 15 October 2026.

195. Graffiti Act, s 2(9).

centres, they can be considered as an option. Numerous physical notice boards with numbers are more proportionate elsewhere as a starting point. Before expanding digital displays to new sites, a pilot needs to consider the capital costs, as well as electricity and connectivity costs, accessibility, material waste, equipment life cycle and maintenance requirements. The goal is not to establish a new group of abandoned screens; it's about improving communication.

7.8 Revenue without commodifying public space

Permits can provide legal town revenues for advertising.[196] There is an existing City Corporation Model Tax Schedule which provides for a relevant charging regime.[197] Some municipalities have advertisement permission systems, too; for instance, in Narayanganj.[198] Cumilla is another example of a municipal administration.[199] Charges for numbered noticeboard slots or digital time slots would require public approval of a legal basis and should be adjusted according to the size of the space, the length of the time the paper is displayed and whether it is used for commercial purposes, while exempting notices which are considered to be in the public interest and are not expensive to display.

No revenue shall be allowed to be considered as overriding the public purpose of visual-environment regulation. Municipal income targets should not be linked to binding density ceilings and transparent allocation rules. The proportionate allocation of net advertising receipts to a subject, based on budgetary and fiscal law, could fund Board maintenance, inspections, safe removal of boards, board wall repair, safer public infrastructure for streetscapes and public reporting systems. Councils should make the collection of fees and the use of public funds so that fee collection funds the improvement of public space and not an unchecked monetisation of visibility.[200]

A clear allocation system could be a mix of physical slots with bookable time slots on authorised multi-advertiser screens. Applicants should document the sponsor's name, content category (allowed or prohibited), start and end dates and the person responsible for removal and/or equipment operation. A small charge may be suggested for hire of commercial books subject to lawful and valid authorisation; any earmarking of revenue collected should be brought to a public notice and the rules of finance which authorised it should be established. The position under the 2012 Act should not be confused with the imposition of additional charges simply based on, for example, a reference to section 4 of the 2012 Act, which allows for such charges to be imposed in certain circumstances.[201]

196. Comptroller and Auditor General of Bangladesh (n 126).

197. City Corporation Model Tax Schedule 2016.

198. Narayanganj City Corporation (n 129).

199. Cumilla City Corporation (n 128).

200. Municipal Bodies of Delhi (n 93).

201. Graffiti Act, s 4. The cited provision allows permission subject to a prescribed fee in specified circumstances; it does not itself create the proposed additional charges.

7.9 Freedom of expression, political communication and procedural safeguards

Protection of expression should also be as well protected as protection of amenity in any permanent framework.[202] The right to freedom of thought, conscience and speech is subject to lawful restrictions and is guaranteed by Article 39 of the Constitution, and the right to lawful profession, occupation, trade or business is guaranteed by Article 40.[203] So the first and most important principle of advertising regulation is content neutrality: size, place, duration, illumination, structural safety, density and heritage impact – these are usually legitimate physical criteria; hostility to a political or commercial viewpoint is not.[204] Campaigning continues to be governed by the special electoral rules, which have special restrictions in themselves, and from which it is not appropriate to unilaterally transfer to communication in ordinary times.[205]

Published standards, written reasons for action, time-limited administrative review and a review under ordinary public law through the courts are all procedural safeguards. Specific poster walls and community notice boards are very significant as a city that bans non-formal posting without offering any legal low-cost alternative can negatively impact students, small organisations and local civic groups. The aim is not to give the big advertiser monopoly of visibility, it's to provide ordered access. The practice of billboard law in other jurisdictions provides an example of how the issue of billboard advertising relates to aesthetics, property and speech.[206]

Public authorities should report on the number of approved commercial displays, low-cost community-slot allocations, revocations, complaints, removals, cost-recovery demands and enforcement outcomes from advertisements in an annual report on advertising accountability, including those for commercial displays. The fact that aggregate statistics would be published, combined with a clear appeal against both refusal of permits and penalties, would allow testing to determine if a revenue-based scheme is leaving out the small organisation or increasing the visual saturation. Additionally, a separation of licence income and density ceiling decisions would help to encourage a more measured approach to excess signage.[207]

7.10 Phased implementation and evaluation

There should be a phased approach to implementation. Phase one would include the national definitions and minimum standards, pilot zoning maps and the introduction of a prototype of a digital permit in selected major city corporations. Phase two should document current displays, offer legal transition/removal plans, include building, road and heritage clearances and implement a standard permit identifier. Phase three should build upon an appropriately reduced costed model of register and inspection and on the systems that are in place and include an option for migration to a shared digital system if capacity allows and is necessary. Where

202. Constitution, arts 39–40.

203. Constitution, arts 18A, 39–40.

204. *Tata Press* (n 94).

205. Political Parties and Candidates' Code of Conduct for Parliamentary Elections 2025, r 7, as amended by SRO No 467-Law/2025 and SRO No 39-Law/2026.

206. R Douglass Bond, 'Making Sense of Billboard Law: Justifying Prohibitions and Exemptions' (1990) 88 Mich L Rev 2482; Rosenberg (n 30).

207. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (n 97).

buildings are legal to exist, they can be given proportionate transition periods, except where there is serious safety or heritage concerns, which should be addressed without indefinite grandfathering.

The framework should be assessed utilising published information on permits, refusals, complaints, decision timings, public receipts and restoration expenditure information provided annually. Sign-density standards can be rigorously evaluated through periodic photography in corridors, spatial inventories and public perception surveys to determine if the standards are effective for enhancing visual amenity.[208] Measurable standards, notice space and the consistency of enforcement, along with a scheduled review every 3–5 years, should take a second look at the issue of legitimate expression.

8. CONCLUSION

Visual pollution can be recognised as a legitimate environmental-quality and urban-governance concern in Bangladesh without distorting existing pollution legislation. International law does not establish a universal, freestanding visual-pollution prohibition, and the Environment Conservation Act 1995 should not be described as already treating all intrusive advertisements as statutory pollutants.[209] A more defensible foundation arises from landscape protection, visual amenity, heritage, public space, road safety and sustainable urban-development objectives.[210] Visual pollution is therefore best understood as a coordinating regulatory concept, with specific duties grounded in expressly applicable legislation.

The concept must also be bounded. This article distinguishes advertising-related visual intrusions from other sources of streetscape disorder and proposes assessment by demonstrable individual or cumulative effects. The objective is neither to criminalise objects merely because they are considered unattractive nor to subject public expression to subjective aesthetic vetoes. Research concerning advertisement visibility, cumulative sign coverage, streetscape perception and driver attention demonstrates possible evidential methods, but local standards must be calibrated to Bangladesh's own legal, physical and administrative conditions.[211]

Bangladesh does not start from a legal vacuum. Constitutional environmental principles and existing environmental legislation supply different, limited foundations.[212] The Graffiti Writing and Poster Sticking (Control) Act 2012 and its Rules contain designated-place, permission, removal, cost-recovery and penalty mechanisms, while municipal taxation operates under distinct legislative schedules.[213] Planning, building, heritage and election rules likewise address related interests.[214] The main limitation is fragmentation – today the

208. Adam and others, 'Effects of Colour Content' (n 43); Chmielewski and others, 'Citizen Science and WebGIS' (n 16); Chmielewski, 'Measuring Visual Pollution' (n 16).

209. Nagle (n 6).

210. European Landscape Convention (n 21) arts 1, 5–6; UNGA Res 70/1 (n 59).

211. Oviedo-Trespalacios and others (n 46); Chmielewski, 'Towards Managing Visual Pollution' (n 14); Adam and others (n 43); Gao and others (n 2).

212. Constitution, arts 18A, 39–40; ECA, ss 2–4.

213. Graffiti Act, ss 2–6, 9; Graffiti Writing and Poster Sticking (Control) Rules 2012; City Corporation Model Tax Schedule 2016.

214. Political Parties and Candidates' Code of Conduct for Parliamentary Elections 2025, r 7, as amended by SRO No 467-Law/2025 and SRO No 39-Law/2026.

mechanisms do not offer an integrated, consistent evaluation of cumulative visual impact, nor are there clear lines of administrative responsibility.

The suggested answer is not a general ban but rather a sensible law. National minimum standards should be harmonised with local zoning, objective dimension, density, illumination and duration, and sensitive-location rules, differentiated permitting technology, expiry rules, proportional liability and inter-agency co-ordination. The criteria and safeguards that govern review of public communication must be content-neutral.[215] Comparative approaches from São Paulo, Japan, Singapore, Delhi and England show alternative institutional solutions, not solutions waiting to happen.[216] If designed carefully, the visual environment can be a shared common good of the city while safeguarding legitimate economic, civic and political communication.

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215. Constitution, arts 39–40; *Tata Press* (n 94).

216. Landscape Act, arts 1, 2 and 8; Lei 14.223, arts 1–5; 2007 Regulations, regs 3–4 and sch 2; Singapore Regulations, regs 2–13; Municipal Bodies of Delhi (n 93).

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