Research Article

Understanding First-Time Voters' Desires in Ward No. 30 of Rajshahi City Corporation: A Quantitative Inquiry

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Abstract. This research initiates an inquiry into the perceptions, expectations, and political behavior of first-time voters of Ward No. 30, Rajshahi City Corporation to gauge their role in the democratic process as new entrants in the electoral system. First-time voters provide an insightful view of how youth relate to democracy in Bangladesh. The study uses a structured questionnaire with demographic and issue-based questions to show key concerns at present: unemployment, corruption, and low faith in electoral fairness. It further probes what influences their voting decision—credibility of the candidate, party ideology, or social media and peer influence—and finds that first-time voters have a very sophisticated awareness of politics; they are both enthusiastic and skeptical about such voters who demand accountability with transparent and inclusive governance. The findings show a sophisticated political sensitivity among first-time voters—a mix of zeal and doubt—who weigh much accountability, transparency, and inclusive governance. It is thus concluded that by giving this

demographic more political representation and real engagement opportunities, a more participatory and responsive democratic culture can be encouraged.

Keywords: Voters, Democracy, Participation, Governance, Engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Young, passionate involvement in politics is so important. Indeed, in this respect first-time voters are a unique and active segment, who can help us frame a general picture of democratic engagement, its attitudes and behaviors. In Bangladesh, political awareness and participation of youth are in the upward trend, so the way the new voters are perceiving, participating in and influencing the democracy process are hugely academic and practical concern. The paper specifically concentrates on the first-time voters of Ward No. 30, Rajshahi City Corporation and tries to understand how new or first-time voters, express their perceptions and expectation with the voting behavior during the exposure to the electoral process for them for the first time. The choices and reservations illustrate the dirt in the gears as the state evolves and its young citizens adapt. Results suggest that while first time voters may have little direct interaction with the political system, they are relatively well informed about governance and democracy. They're demanding more accountability and politics that represents them better, and they seem to be both cynical and optimistic at once.

Literature Review

Understanding the political behaviour and desires of first-time voters is essential for improving democratic participation. Studies have shown that elections in Bangladesh face multiple challenges that affect free and fair voting. Abdullah (2018) discussed how national elections struggle with transparency and fairness, highlighting systemic weaknesses that often discourage genuine political participation. Similarly, Momen and Begum (2014) examined the obstacles that prevent free and fair elections, emphasizing procedural flaws and political pressures that affect voters' confidence. Rahaman (2024) proposed reforms like proportional representation to make elections more inclusive and sustainable, which could particularly benefit young first-time voters by ensuring their voices are counted. The role of media and communication in shaping political awareness among young voters has been widely recognized. Razib and Pinky (2023) found that social media strongly influences university students' understanding of politics and encourages engagement with democratic processes. This aligns with observations that political deadlocks and uncertainty can affect first-time voters' motivation, as noted by Azran (2023) in his discussion on how political conflicts may discourage youth from voting. Similarly, Rahman (2024) highlighted that manipulation and lack of transparency in electoral processes can erode public trust, which in turn reduces participation among inexperienced voters. Clientelism and informal power networks also shape electoral

behaviour in Bangladesh. Miaji and Islam (2023) explained how brokers and local power structures can dominate elections, limiting real choice for voters. Hossain (2017) argued that understanding these informal systems is crucial for explaining how citizens, especially the young and new voters, navigate political decisions in contexts where formal institutions are weak. Transparency International Bangladesh (2024) further emphasized the importance of monitoring parliament and political actors to strengthen accountability, which can encourage first-time voters to trust and participate in democratic processes. Historical and cultural factors also play a role in shaping political behaviour. Inglehart and Welzel (2005) demonstrated that modernization and cultural change are closely linked to democratic engagement, suggesting that young citizens' expectations evolve with social development. Norris (2011) similarly highlighted that citizens' critical understanding of democracy is essential for meaningful participation, implying that first-time voters need proper political education and awareness to exercise their rights effectively. Local studies and surveys provide direct insight into voters' aspirations. BRAC (2018) conducted a national survey showing that citizens, including young and first-time voters, have clear expectations from elections and the government. Baized, Rahman, and Ferdous (2025) also noted that challenges in conducting free and fair elections directly affect voter confidence and turnout, reinforcing the importance of institutional reforms and voter education. In final remarks, the literature highlights that first-time voters are influenced by a combination of structural, social, and cultural factors. Their desires and participation are shaped by election integrity, political education, social media influence, clientelism, and broader democratic culture. Understanding these factors is essential to ensure that young voters in areas like Ward No. 30 of Rajshahi City can engage meaningfully with the democratic process.

Research Methodology

Research means a systematic finding and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new results (Arafat, 2024a). This study follows a mixed-method approach.

Data Collection

- **Quantitative**: A structured questionnaire was distributed among 100 local people in Rajshahi City Corporation, selected through stratified random sampling.
- **Qualitative**: A small qualitative element was also included to gather open-ended responses, which were analyzed thematically

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Age group

The respondent compactness in the 18-20 age group itself suggests a thematic emphasis on the birth of the politically-conscious elements among Bangladesh's youth. The young, on the threshold of adulthood, reflects fledgling democratic attitudes of hope and doubt. Their replies underscore important themes: idealism,

careful engagement and a quest for an open government — providing a window into how the next generation views and interacts with the nation's political system.

Figure: 1, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data
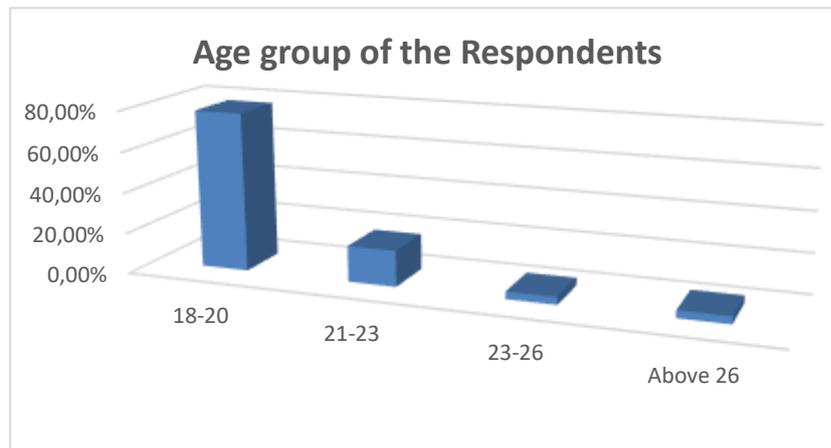

Most of the respondents (77.9%) are in the 18–20 group, which means individuals are overwhelmingly very young, or new, voters. Another less frequent group is 14.7% of the students, aged between 21 and 23, while the 24-26 and more than 26 years olds represent such a small part of the sample.

Gender

First, our respondents are mostly male (59.1%) while about 40.9% are female. This imbalance implies a potential overrepresentation of men's voices in the findings, which in turn, may shape the themes identified in political perceptions and expectations. The lack of representation from non-binary and for other gender identities is indicative of a lack of inclusivity within the sample, restricting the extent of gender-diverse political perspective.

Figure: 2, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data
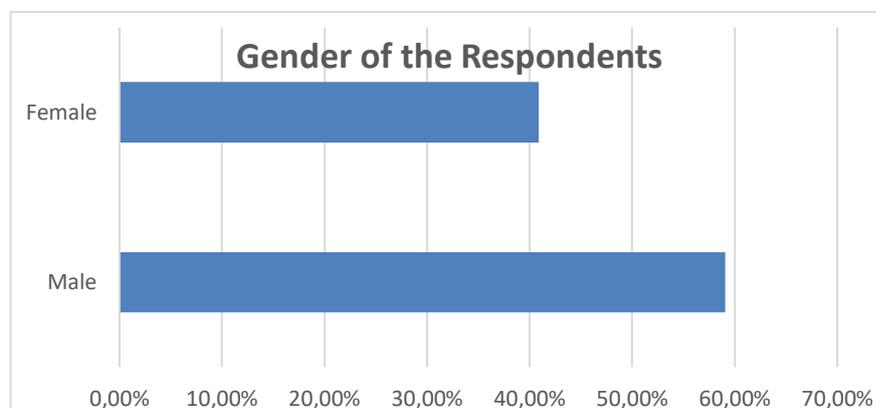
Education level

The level of education of the respondents indicates that the majority have lower to mid level academic qualification, with a clear prevalence of school and university fairly advance students. This implies that the political attitudes represented in the study are mostly formed by people with unfinished education.

Figure: 3, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data

EDUCATION LEVEL OF THE RESPONDENTS

■ SSC or Below ■ HSC ■ Undergraduate ■ Postgraduate
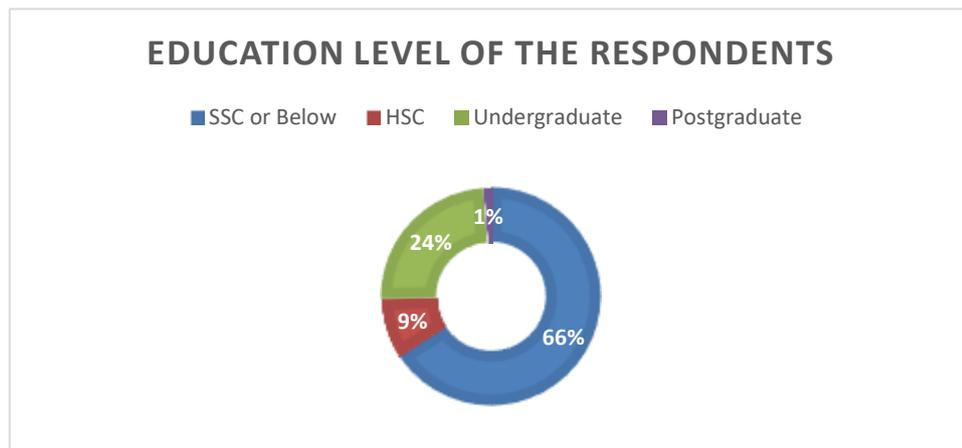
In the questionnaire, 66% of the respondents are SSC or below and 24% are undergraduates. Only one per cent are at the postgraduate level. 9% have passed HSC. Thus, there seems to be a preponderance of participants at the lower or mid-level of education.

Occupation

It is mainly comprised of students, which hints at a sample that is anchored in academic, not professional or economic life. This suggests that the political views collected are predominantly of people under education, with minimal contact with the workforce or the general societal responsibilities.

Figure: 4, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data


Occupation of the Respondents
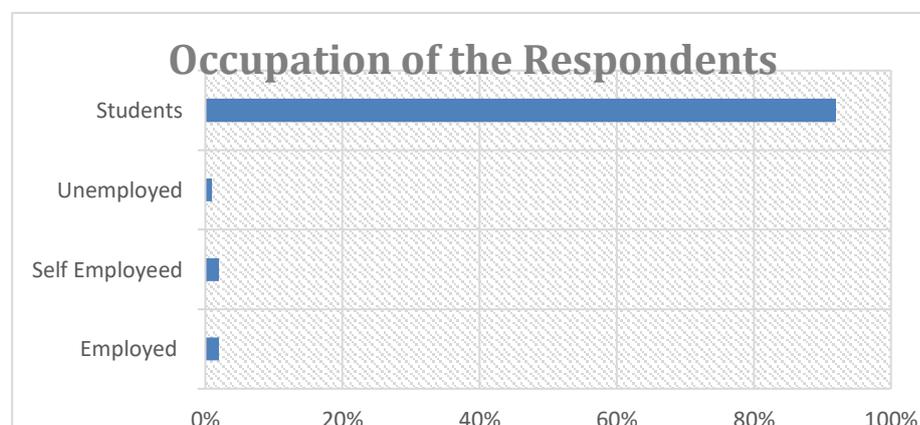
Most sample members were students (92% of the 100 respondents), suggesting that the sample is highly concentrated in the actively learning phase. 2% of the respondents were already working and 1% were unemployed. Further, 2% reported professional autonomy, indicating little economic involvement beyond the student role among the sample.

Importance of Voting

The responses indicate a large portion of respondents sees the vote as a civic duty of importance to society; at the same time, a fair size group is unclear about its value. This confusion points to inadequacies in political education and knowledge about representative engagement in democracy. Furthermore, the existence of out right skepticism by some respondents infers frustration, disillusionment or disassociation from mainstream politics.

**Figure: 5**, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data
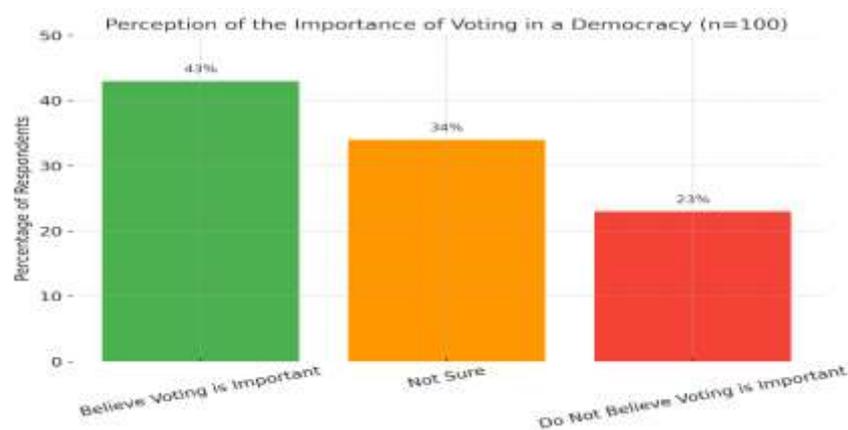
43 out of 100 people say that voting is important in a democracy: this is a strong sense of civic duty from almost half of the respondents. But 34% were undecided, so I think its an awareness issue or a confusion about the purpose of voting. Meanwhile, 23% do not believe voting is important - indicating significant disengagement or cynicism about democratic operations.

Intention to Vote

A low level of electoral enthusiasm, with many people of the survey sample being unsure or wavering in their intention to vote at the next election. This is indicative of a deeper problem, whether that's apathy about politics, a sense of disenfranchisement or a belief that voting is simply not powerful.

**Figure: 6**, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data
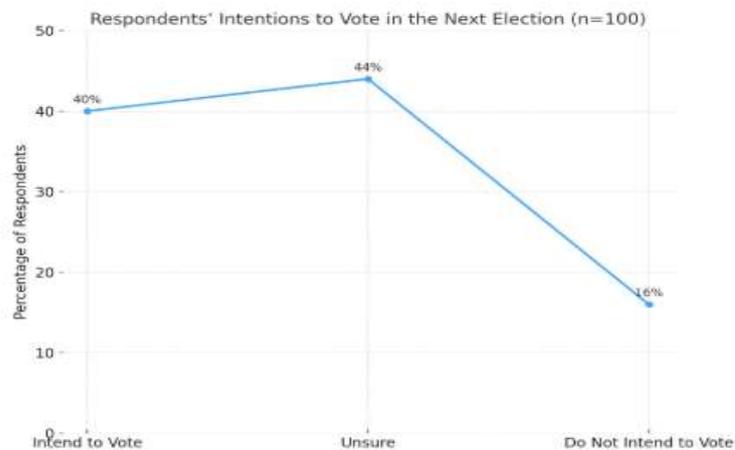
As per the results, 40% of the respondents planned to vote in the next elections indicating moderate level of electoral participation. 44 percent were undecided, an indication of a lot of people who didn't know or weren't ready to endorse. At the same time, 16% said they will not vote, possibly indicating disenchantment, indifference or an obstacle in accessing the vote.

Freely and Fairly Election

The replies reflect a common perception of lack of confidence in the fairness of elections in Bangladesh. The universal perception reflects skepticism and lack of confidence in the impartiality of the electoral process with hardly anyone having full trust in it.

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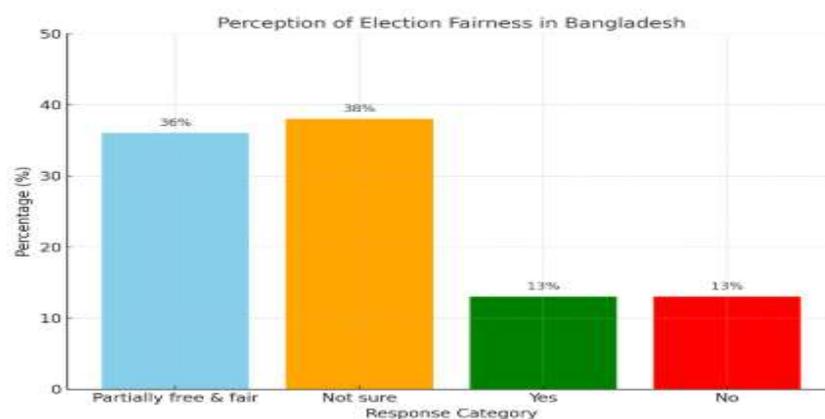
The responses were analyzed and about 36 percent of those who took part believe that elections in the country are 'partially free and fair' and are not truly fare. 38% replied "Don't know", which indicated high uncertainty or distrust of fair election.

13% concede that elections are not free and fair, meaning that nearly 13% reject the notion that elections in the country are free and fair, but another 13% think it is fair.

Expectation from the Elected Political Leader

Today, citizens have great aspirations and demand that political leaders be honest and transparent, further reflecting the common aspiration for a corruption free nation. On top of this, there is an unmistakable demand for social advancement by means of education and enabling the youth to play a bigger role, as well as some real economic and infrastructural updates which seem to tie in with bigger dreams of progress and wealth.

**Figure: 8**, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data
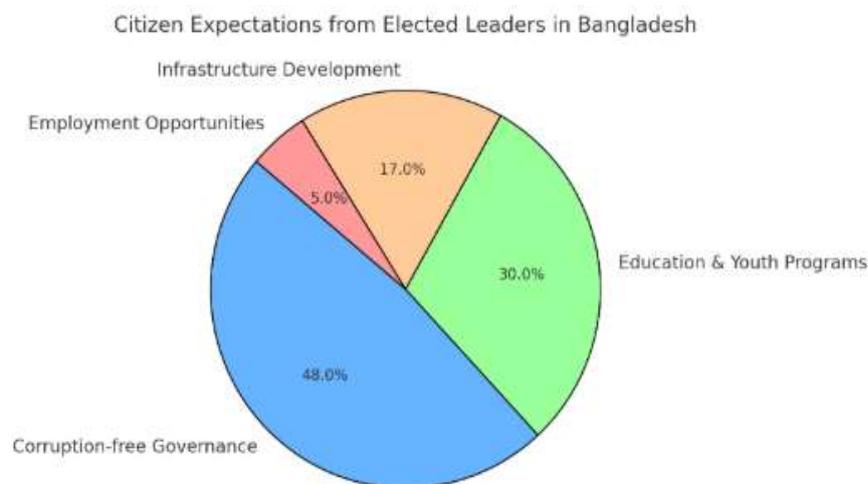
These findings, which show that 48% of respondents expect transparent governance from the government, suggest a high aspiration for a government clean of corruption. 30% address education and youth, indicating that they are very much worried about the future generation and future of the youth. 17% rate infrastructure improvements as a top priority, showing that infrastructure is a strong theme as citizens are looking for "hard results" in the form of physical infrastructure. Another 5% want more employment, suggesting economic worries among voters. Taken together, these results confirm that good governance, social development, and economic growth are desired outcomes from their leadership by citizens.

Trust on Electoral Process

There is widespread disillusionment with Bangladesh's election process among the public, with a large fraction of people expressing doubts about its fairness and integrity. There is some faith in the system by a minority of citizens, but many others express doubt and a lack of confidence, presenting a weak support for democratic participation with implications for political stability.

**Figure: 9**, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data
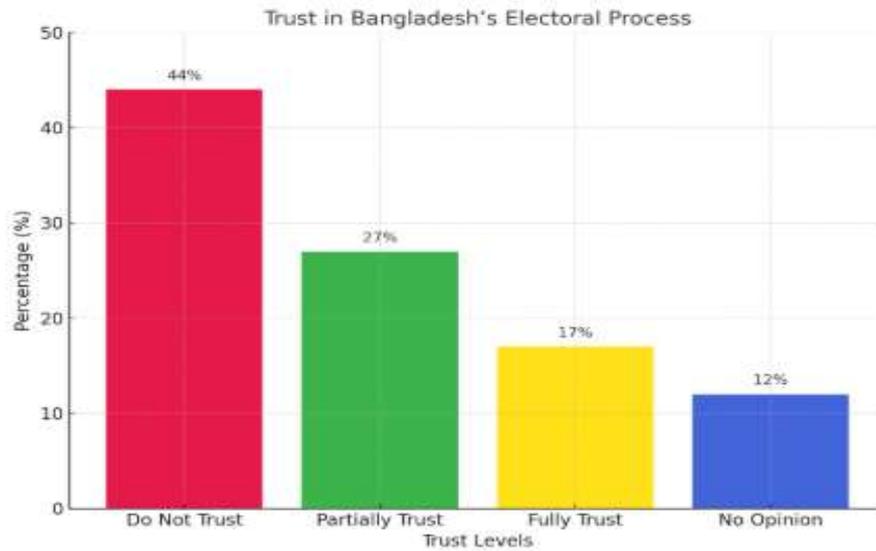
If we consider the trust in Bangladesh's elections then it is obvious that skepticism is predominant among the participants. 44% do not have confidence in the electoral system, a reflection of the degree to which it is trusted to be fair and honest. In contrast, 27 per cent trust the process somewhat, to in effect the extent that we can feel optimistic that the elections are properly run. Around 17% report having a lot of trust in the electoral system, so a lower proportion really believes in its transparency. What's interesting is that 12% had no opinion, which either means that they did not care, were unsure, or simply did not have enough information to make a judgment. This breakdown has implications for political participation and even the stability of democracy.

Youth's Role in Politics

There's a chorus calling for youthful engagement in politics, in all its forms, from voter participation, to participation in electoral processes and competitions. But there are differing attitudes and views here, as well, with some wanting youth to be more cautious and others uncertain — showcasing the tension around what the appropriate responsibility should be for young kids in politics.

**Figure: 10**, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data
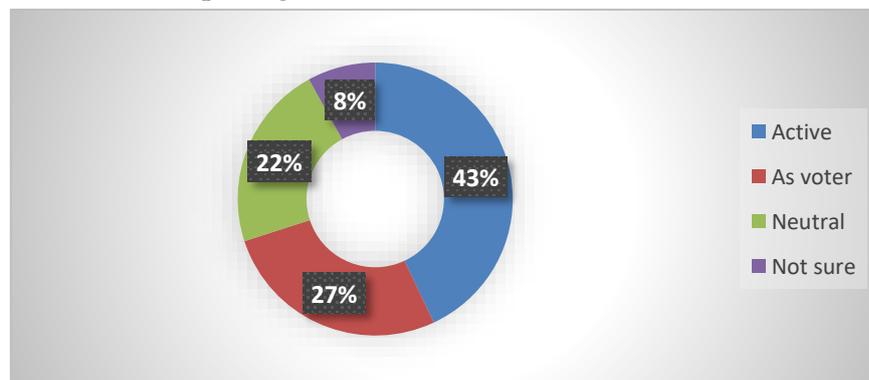
If examining what youth can do politically, approximately 43 percent promote that society should actively participate in elections and campaigns and have a high interest in this policy engagement. At the same time, we have about 27% of respondents who say that young people should be involved only as voters, leaning toward a restricted, yet important role. About 22 percent want young people to "remain neutral," possibly to prevent discord or from unconquerable pressure. About 8% still undecided about what the youths ought to do. That 8 percent don't really know what the youth should do, which shows a kind of confusion in this issue. This range represents different views of the ways in which youth are engaging with politics today.

Political Culture

Most people do not doubt that Bangladesh's political culture is in need of serious reform, and that there is a real hunger for change. A small fragment, however, is still critical with no hope of a change, supportive of the current system, or undecided, hinting at the diverse panorama of public opinion about the transformation of politics.

**Figure: 11**, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data
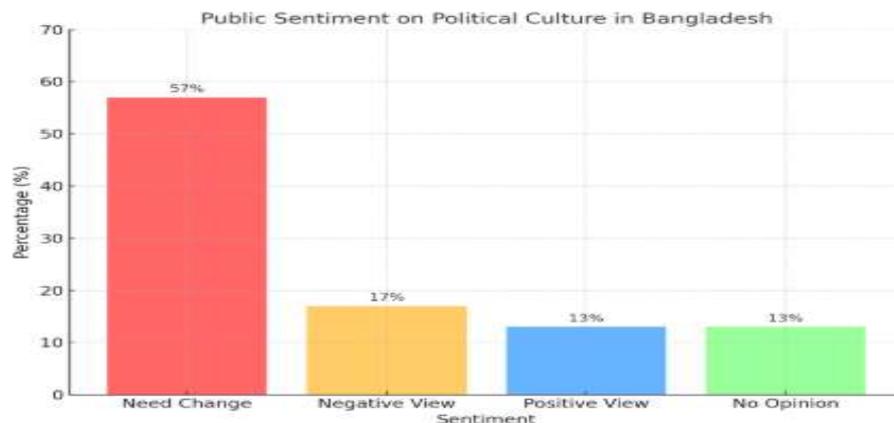
The mood of public opinion with respect to Bangladesh's political culture was in favor of change, with a 57 percent majority of surveyed people saying that there is a need of change. The other percentage, or the significant minority (17%) have a negative view of the present political culture, their dissatisfaction does not actually translate to a solution. Approximately 13% say that the political culture has been positive, a sign that some people believe things have been good or at least stable. Curiously, only 13% are neither here nor there, indicated by their undecided responses. Such an ethical distribution points out the specific public clamor for reform clearly, as well as the section, which either favors or doesn't mind to keep things unchanged.

Quality of a Public Representative

Effective communication is the most important quality for a public representative, or so people generally think, so it's important for leaders to keep connected to their constituents. On one hand, honesty and being effective still count for a lot, revealing a wish for competent leadership that can be trusted, and partisanship plays a secondary but significant role in shaping the public's expectations.

**Figure: 12**, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data
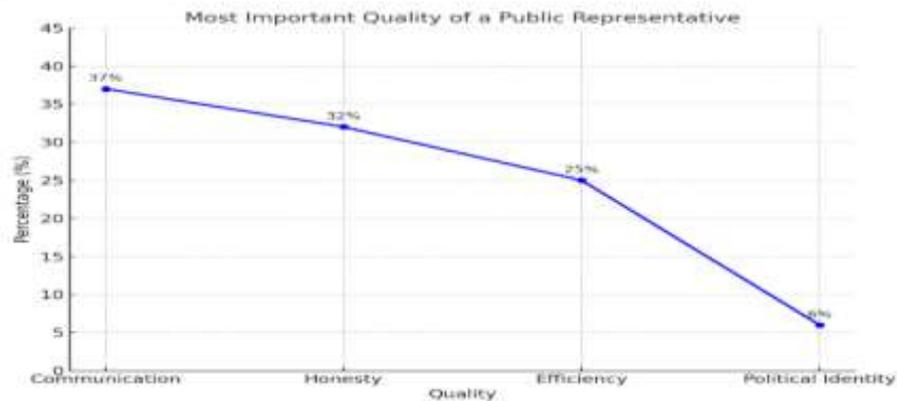
People have different views on what is the most important quality in a representative of the public, but there are four traits that seems to be the most important. Some 37 percent underscore communication with people as critical, stressing the need to remain engaged and also responsive to public needs. Approximately 32% prioritize honesty, appreciating integrity and trustworthiness in leaders. About 25% think the key is to be efficient – meaning to get the outcomes you are tasked with achieving, and to manage your accountabilities well. A smaller, but significant share -— about 6% —- concentrate on political identity, indicating that being in alignment with political values or party identity is important to them. The latter distribution favors representatives who are transparent, approachable, and efficient in their governance.

Importance of Women in Politics

There are many others who are also aware of the significance of women in the political process, their recognition of the fact that women play an important role in the formation of the political culture has clearly increased over a period of time. But for many of the rest, they are still unsure, or dubious, about what difference this will make, indicative of the continuing discussions and varying extent of welcome for gender in politics.

**Figure: 13**, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data
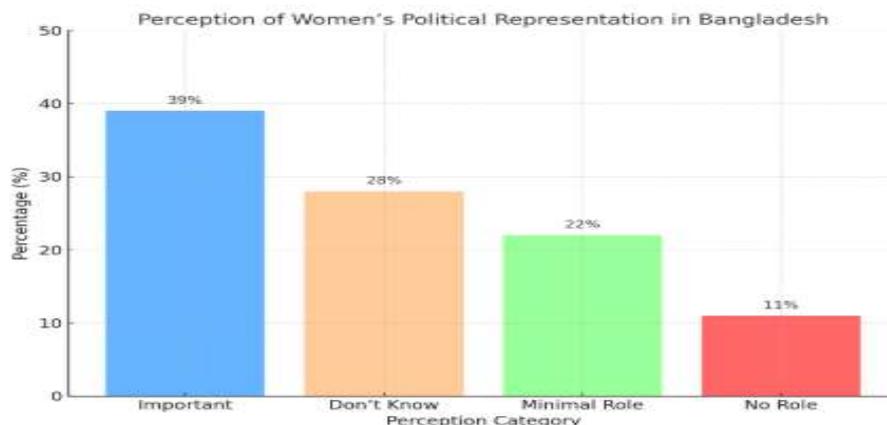
The opinions on women's political representation in political culture come back with mixed answers. A large 39% see it as at least somewhat important, and value the contribution that women make in politics and society. About 28 percent are undecided or don't know, signaling that some ambivalence or ignorance exists on the subject. Meanwhile, roughly 22% think women's representation plays a minor role, and just 11% believe it plays no role at all. This wide spread indicates a recognition of the importance of women's political involvement by many, but a significant degree of skepticism or uncertainty by others.

Reserved Seats for Women Filled Through Direct Election

There are divided views as to how reserved seats for women are to be filled through direct elections but many support it as a step to enhance democracy by representation. Meanwhile, a large share does not know or favors something else, continuing the long-standing argument over how best to encourage women to become involved in politics.

**Figure: 14**, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data
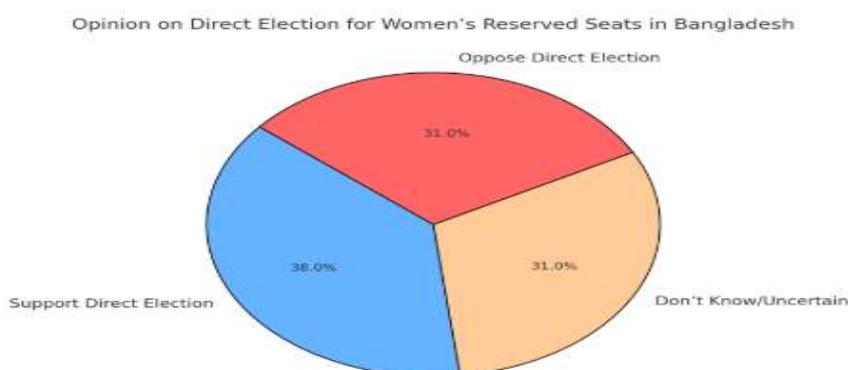
Opinions on whether the reserved women seats should be filled via direct election are divided. Some 38% of respondents favor direct election for reserved women's seats as

a means of improving democratic representation. Some 31% are unsure or have no opinion, which suggests some degree of doubt or lack of knowledge. By contrast, 31% are against direct elections.

Political Dynasties and Its Impact

A majority of young voters see political dynasties as a serious threat to democracy in Bangladesh, indicating deep misgivings about family power structures. And if not, opinions may differ, but few can be entirely indifferent to the phenomenon, as no single, manageable minority would have justified the level of attention this phenomenon has received, reflecting a wide-spread dissemination and opposition to the way dynastic politics can obstruct democratic consolidation.

Figure: 15, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data
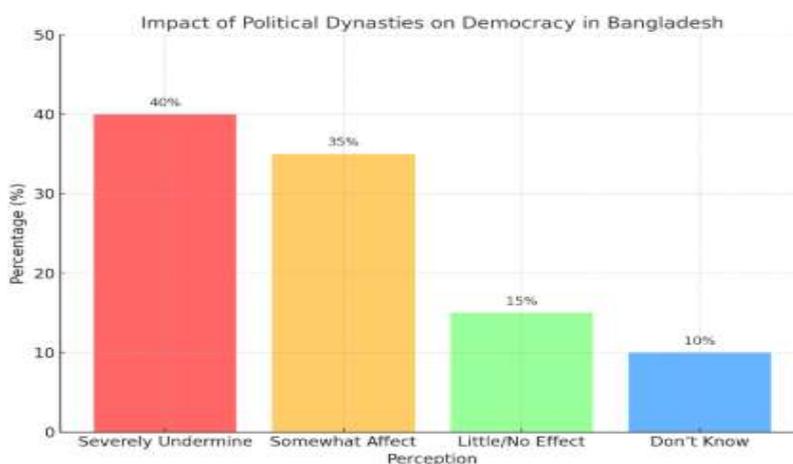
A large majority of the respondents—around 40%—do share the view that political dynasties are cancerous for Bangladesh democracy and expressed grave concern about how family-based political power undermines democratic ethos. Some 35% believe political dynasties somewhat affect democracy showing that they think that, yes, it has some negative impact, but not much. Another 15% assert that dynasties barely affect the democratic process, indicating a more neutral or less consequential perspective. The other 10% did not know or were unsure about the impact of political families. This distribution of views suggests that a majority of young voters are not naive to the reality and implications of the control of political power by families, and see it as a severe impediment to democratic practice in Bangladesh.

Voices of Aspiration and Disillusionment: Youth Expectations and Experiences in Political Leadership

"Bangladeshi youth are looking for political leadership that is transparent, accountable and moral," a leadership that can earn the youth's trust with their actions, not simply their words. They want to see their leaders embrace inclusive leadership which regards the young people more than a vote but as stakeholders to national development and policy formulation. Education, employment take the top seats whilst urging for leaders to rectify tech change, climate challenge and global

economic dynamism. The youth also want a tolerance, recognition for political diversity and long term thinking beyond the next elections. Although numerous young people feel hopeful and are willing to participate, there are those who share stories of silence, intimidation and demoralization, and demonstrate the gap that exists between young people's enthusiasm and the political system's openness to that enthusiasm. And yet, the best chief they see is somebody who listens, cares, and truly connects with the lived realities of the people. Most important, they want more than just politicians; they want role models — leaders who exude integrity, empathy and a dedication to building a fair, inclusive and forward-looking society.

CONCLUSION

The research reveals a politically aware but timid generation of young Bangladeshis. Although many of the respondents are young students between the ages of 18 to 20 with various degrees of political interest – from moderate involvement to marked apathy. Confidence in the election process is not high, with widespread cynicism over fairness and transparency in elections and even more doubt over whether their vote counts for change or accountability. Corruption emerges as the top political concern, followed closely by disapproval of the education system and unemployment. Many millennials 18-30 say that they believe in the importance of voting and understand its role in a democracy, but there is also a high level of disinterest/distance from elections and political campaigns—reinforced by fear, family influence, and political apathy. Yet young generations have clear demands on their politicians: honest, transparent, accessible and youth-oriented policies. And increasingly, this generation wants to be part of the political process—not only as voters, but as leaders and decision-makers. But political dynasties (Arafat, 2025), inheritances, loyalties and skepticism in political institutions prevent full involvement. Social networking sites are also influential in promoting political consciousness despite being considered as having biases that lower its credibility. There were also mixed remarks regarding gender representation and the performance of women in reserved seats, reaffirming an ongoing concern on inclusivity and true representation. Finally, although these are the hopes, awareness and vision are present among the young people, barriers relating to structure, fear of expression and deep political cynicism, constrain their active engagement. The leadership they want must be honest, youth-friendly, inclusive and development-oriented—one that builds trust and encourages civic participation.

Recommendations

The way forward lies in preparing young people with proper civic and political education so they understand their rights, responsibilities, and the value of free expression. They should have safe spaces like debates, workshops, and forums where they can openly share views without fear of censorship or intimidation. Young people also need to be seen as genuine partners in leadership, not just campaign workers or voters. This means political parties and civil groups must mentor them, give them real responsibilities, and let them play a role in shaping policies and governance. At the same time, elections must be transparent and trustworthy, with fair nominations,

honest counting of votes, and strong action against corruption. Broader governance reforms should make institutions more accountable through civic monitoring and digital access to information. Finally, policies must be inclusive, giving equal opportunities to women and young people. Education, jobs, and entrepreneurship should be improved, while women must be allowed meaningful participation in leadership, not just symbolic roles. Building a culture of tolerance and dialogue between political groups is essential for a healthier democracy. But, as discussed, the political frameworks, structures, and functioning of Bangladesh are very complex and crippled with anomalies. Contemporary research by Arafat and Fahmida (2025a), Arafat (2024b) highlights historical and systemic political factors that reinforce hierarchical structures and complicate accountability, while Arafat et al. (2025) examine how national integrity and institutional barriers further influence political and administrative behavior. However, accountability is a cornerstone of democratic governance, ensuring that public officials and government institutions operate in the best interests of the people (Arafat and Fahmida, 2025b) which must be ensured in this nation.

Limitations

This study is geographically limited to the Ward No. 30 area of Rajshahi City Corporation, consequently limiting the generalizability of its findings to other areas of Bangladesh. The sample is overrepresented (in age and occupation) by young students, all aged 18–20, and underrepresented in terms of age, occupation and gender, little by way of non-student or marginalized youth voices are included. Furthermore, the qualitative aspect was restricted, and social desirability bias could have affected answers on questions with political bias. The study is capturing attitudes at one point of time and doesn't take into consideration that young people's political views are likely to evolve over time, and also doesn't dig deep into the role that digital media and misinformation is playing in shaping youth political quantity behavior.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors have declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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