

## Exploring Party Loyalty and Electoral Behavior in Bangladesh's Democracy

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Democratic Governance;  
Money in Politics;  
Political loyalty;  
Party Switching;  
Voting Behavior.

### Abstract

Bangladesh is a democratic country where national and regional elections are organized for electing representatives. The question arises: are all the democratic process and practices going reasonable and smoothly? To find some answers, this study was conducted. The aim of this study is to explore the interplay between political loyalty, voter behavior, and democratic dynamics in Bangladesh, drawing insights from a survey of 102 respondents, who took part from various regions and backgrounds (mainly from universities). Plus, it examines some unexplored or underexplored factors that influence voter decisions, such as party loyalty, ethnicity, financial incentives, and perceptions of transparency in governance. The findings reveal significant voter skepticism about the influence of money in politics, trust in political institutions. It also raises question to the effectiveness of democratic processes in Bangladesh. In addition, while community development and performance-oriented governance are emerging as voter priorities, some longstanding issues: vote-buying, wealthy candidates' financial power despite having less political knowledge and party switching continue to challenge democratic consolidation in Bangladesh. It is quantitative method; 28 questions that were employed among the respondents, focusing on informed people. Finally, this paper suggested some policies: stricter campaign finance regulations, enhanced electoral integrity, and the promotion of performance-based politics, to improve democratic governance in Bangladesh.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Bangladesh, a nation with a vibrant democratic history, has experienced significant political and electoral transformations since its independence, against West Pakistan (Now Pakistan) in 1971 (Raghavan, 2013). Political loyalty, defined as a deep-rooted allegiance to a political party or ideology, plays a pivotal role in shaping the

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country's voting behavior, even any democratic country's voting behavior (Wasburn & Covert, 2017). This phenomenon is not merely a reflection of individual preferences but is often tied to: historical narratives, socio-economic conditions, and cultural norms and religious values. Bangladesh's political landscape is dominated by two major parties: the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), though there some other political parties like Jamaat Islami Bangladesh and Jatiyo Party. Mainly, the main two parties whose rivalry has profoundly influenced the dynamics of political loyalty and voter behavior (Basu, Devine & Wood, 2018). Historically, voting patterns in Bangladesh have been influenced by three core things: familial affiliations, economic status, and regional identities (Kibria, 2011). Loyalty to political parties often transcends rational policy evaluation, with voters prioritizing ideological or emotional connections over pragmatic considerations. Moreover, the media, political campaigns, and societal discourse further reinforce these loyalties, creating a complex interplay of factors that shape voter decisions (Bennett, 2012). Understanding political loyalty in Bangladesh is critical for assessing the challenges and opportunities for democratic consolidation (Islam, 2006). While loyalty can ensure electoral stability, it may also hinder the development of an informed electorate capable of holding leaders accountable (Islam, 2006). This study aims to explore the determinants of political loyalty and its implications for voting behavior in Bangladesh, providing insights into how these dynamics affect the broader democratic process and political accountability.

## 1.2 Research Problem

The political landscape of Bangladesh is characterized by deeply entrenched loyalties that significantly shape voting behavior (Lewis & Hossain, 2022). While political loyalty can promote stability, it often comes at the cost of independent and informed decision-making (Jones, 1994). Voters in Bangladesh frequently prioritize long-standing party affiliations, family traditions, and socio-cultural factors over critical evaluation of candidates' policies and governance track records (Akter, 2019). This entrenched loyalty has created a polarized political environment where electoral decisions are driven more by historical and ideological commitments than by pragmatic considerations (Lavine, Johnston & Steenbergen, 2012). Despite its importance, political loyalty in Bangladesh remains an under-researched phenomenon. Existing studies primarily focus on voter turnout and election management, leaving significant gaps in understanding how and why voters maintain allegiance to specific political parties over time. Furthermore, the impact of such loyalty on democratic practices, including accountability and governance, has not been adequately explored. The persistence of political loyalty raises critical questions about the evolution of Bangladesh's democracy (Basu, Devine & Wood, 2018). Can political loyalty coexist with an informed and critical electorate? How does loyalty influence governance outcomes and the responsiveness of political leaders? These questions underscore the need for a nuanced exploration of the factors that drive political loyalty and its implications for electoral behavior. Addressing these gaps will not only enrich the academic discourse but also provide

actionable insights for policymakers and stakeholders striving to strengthen democracy in Bangladesh.

### **1.3 Objectives**

This study aims to examine the interplay between political loyalty and voting behavior in Bangladesh, focusing on how historical, socio-cultural, and economic factors influence voter decisions. By investigating the dynamics of political allegiance, the research seeks to shed light on the implications of such loyalty for democratic consolidation and governance in the country.

The primary objectives of the study are as follows:

- a. To identify the key determinants of political loyalty among Bangladeshi voters, including historical narratives, family traditions, socio-economic conditions, and cultural influences.
- b. To analyze the impact of political loyalty on voting behavior, particularly how it shapes voter preferences and decision-making during elections.
- c. To explore the implications of entrenched political loyalty for democratic accountability and governance, assessing whether it fosters stability or perpetuates political polarization.
- d. To evaluate the role of political parties, media, and societal factors in reinforcing or challenging political loyalty among the electorate.
- e. To propose policy recommendations aimed at fostering an informed and independent electorate capable of making rational and policy-oriented voting decisions.

By addressing these objectives, the study aims to contribute to the broader understanding of political behavior in Bangladesh. It provides insights into how political loyalty can be managed to support a healthier democratic process.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

This study seeks to address the following key questions to understand the dynamics of political loyalty and voting behavior in Bangladesh:

- A. What are the primary factors influencing political loyalty among voters in Bangladesh?
- B. How does political loyalty affect voting behavior, particularly in terms of decision-making and candidate selection during elections?
- C. To what extent does political loyalty influence the accountability and responsiveness of political leaders in Bangladesh?
- D. What role do socio-cultural and economic conditions play in shaping and sustaining political loyalty in the Bangladeshi electorate?
- E. How do political parties and media narratives contribute to reinforcing or challenging political loyalty among voters?
- F. What are the broader implications of entrenched political loyalty for democratic practices, including electoral participation and governance outcomes in Bangladesh?

## 1.5 Significance of the Study

The study of political loyalty and voting behavior in Bangladesh is of utmost importance for understanding the underlying dynamics that shape the country's political landscape. Political loyalty, while providing a sense of stability and continuity in the electoral process, often restricts the development of an informed and independent electorate (Beetham, 1994). This research is significant as it delves into the socio-cultural, historical, and economic factors influencing political loyalty, offering a comprehensive analysis of its impact on democratic practices in Bangladesh, were missing in the previous research papers or underexplored. Bangladesh's political environment is characterized by intense party rivalry and polarization, which significantly influences governance and voter behavior. By examining the factors driving political loyalty, this study contributes to the broader discourse on political behavior in developing democracies. Furthermore, it provides insights into how such loyalty impacts democratic accountability, governance, and policy-making. The findings of this research are expected to benefit policymakers, political parties, and civil society organizations by identifying actionable strategies to promote informed voter decision-making and reduce polarization. Additionally, this study will contribute to the academic literature on political loyalty and voting behavior, filling critical gaps in the context of Bangladesh. By highlighting the challenges and opportunities associated with political loyalty, the research aims to support efforts toward strengthening democratic consolidation and fostering a more accountable political culture in the country.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

Understanding political loyalty and voting behavior requires a robust theoretical foundation that integrates insights from political science, sociology, and psychology (Carmines & Huckfeldt, 1996). This study draws upon several key theories to analyze the complex interplay of factors influencing voter behavior in Bangladesh.

#### 1. Social Identity Theory

Proposed by Tajfel and Turner (Tajfel & Turner, 1978), Social Identity Theory emphasizes the role of group affiliation in shaping individual behavior (Halldorson, 2009). In the context of Bangladesh, political loyalty often stems from a sense of belonging to a particular party or ideological group. This theory helps explain how socio-cultural and familial ties reinforce voter allegiance. This often led to emotional rather than rational decision-making.

#### 2. Rational Choice Theory

This theory posits that individuals make decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis to maximize their utility (Herrnstein, 1990). In the Bangladeshi context, however, the application of Rational Choice Theory is nuanced, as voters may prioritize perceived collective benefits, such as party-led development projects, over

individual gains. Understanding how rationality interacts with loyalty is crucial for analyzing voter behavior. The study integrates Rational Choice Theory (RCT) to analyze voter behavior, drawing explicitly on Anthony Downs' seminal work, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (Downs, 1957). Downs posits that voters act rationally by supporting parties they perceive as most likely to: a) win elections and form a government; b) maximize utility through policy delivery (e.g., economic benefits, public services).

In the Bangladeshi context, however, this rationality is nuanced. While RCT assumes voters prioritize pragmatic evaluations of party viability and performance, the study's findings reveal that historical loyalty (e.g., allegiance to parties linked to the 1971 Liberation War) and familial traditions often override Downs' utility-maximization framework. For instance, 60% of respondents exhibited "strong" or "very strong" party loyalty (Figure 5), even when acknowledging unmet developmental promises (28.9%, Figure 7). This divergence underscores a critical tension: Bangladeshi voters frequently prioritize identity-driven loyalty over instrumental rationality, a phenomenon that challenges Downs' assumptions but aligns with the country's socio-historical fabric.

### 3. Cultural Theory of Politics

Cultural Theory suggests that political behavior is deeply rooted in cultural norms and historical narratives (Thompson, 2018). Bangladesh's political history, including the Liberation War and subsequent party rivalries, significantly influences voters' loyalty (Islam, 2006). This theory provides insights into how historical and cultural contexts shape the electorate's preferences.

### 4. Partisan Attachment Theory

This theory highlights the emotional and long-term commitment of voters to political parties (Settle, Dawes & Fowler, 2009). In Bangladesh, partisan attachment is often transmitted across generations, creating a strong sense of loyalty that persists even in the face of changing political realities (Riaz & Rahman, 2016).

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this study seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of political loyalty and its impact on voting behavior in Bangladesh. These frameworks guide the analysis of empirical data and provide a basis for evaluating the implications of entrenched political loyalty on democratic governance.

## 2.2 Empirical Studies

Empirical studies on political loyalty and voting behavior provide valuable insights into the factors that influence electoral decisions in Bangladesh and similar political contexts (Jahan & Shahan, 2014). While research in this area remains limited, several key studies shed light on the dynamics of voter allegiance and its broader implications.

### 1. Political Loyalty in Developing Democracies

Studies focusing on South Asian democracies, including Bangladesh, highlight the role of historical narratives and party ideologies in shaping voter loyalty. Research by [Ahmed \(2018\)](#) demonstrates how events like the Liberation War and subsequent political developments have entrenched partisan affiliations in Bangladesh. These findings emphasize the interplay between historical legacy and contemporary electoral decisions ([Riaz, 2020](#)).

### 2. Socioeconomic Influences on Voting Behavior

Economic considerations often influence voting behavior in Bangladesh. A study ([Thomson, 2001; Röth, Afonso, & Spies, 2018](#)) found that voters frequently align with political parties that promise socio-economic benefits, such as employment opportunities or infrastructural development. This aligns with the Rational Choice Theory perspective, where voters prioritize parties perceived as capable of delivering tangible benefits.

### 3. Cultural and Familial Impact

The influence of cultural and familial factors on voting behavior in Bangladesh can be effectively understood through the lenses of Social Identity Theory ([Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979](#)) and the Cultural Theory of Politics ([Thompson, 2018](#)). Familial affiliations and communal ties act as strong identity markers that reinforce political loyalty, as evidenced by 38.2% of respondents citing “family tradition” as a determinant of party support ([Figure 13](#)), aligning with Social Identity Theory’s emphasis on emotional attachment to in-groups such as AL or BNP. Simultaneously, historical narratives—particularly the legacy of the Liberation War and the secularist versus Islamist divide—inform voter preferences through collective cultural memory. For instance, respondents from regions with strong historical ties to the Awami League, especially those central to the 1971 movement, demonstrated 42% higher loyalty to AL compared to non-historical strongholds ([Figure 4](#)), a pattern explained by Cultural Theory’s view of politicized memory shaping political behavior. These theoretical interpretations are supported by empirical findings: [Hossain \(2019\)](#) observed that 68% of rural voters inherit party preferences from elders, reflecting Social Identity dynamics, while [Ahmed \(2018\)](#) found that Liberation War narratives increased AL loyalty by 33% in urban constituencies, reinforcing the framework of Cultural Theory.

### 4. Media and Political Campaigns

The role of media and political campaigns in reinforcing voter loyalty has been widely studied. A recent analysis shows that media narratives and targeted campaigns often polarize voters ([Bernhardt, Krasa & Polborn, 2008; Prior, 2013](#)), further entrenching their existing loyalties. These studies reveal how external influences can shape and sustain political allegiances.

## 5. Comparative Perspectives

Comparative studies with other democracies (Schmidt, 2002), such as India and Sri Lanka, provide additional context. These studies suggest that entrenched loyalty can both stabilize and polarize democratic systems, creating challenges for governance and accountability.

All in all, the above-mentioned findings demonstrate the multifaceted nature of political loyalty and voting behavior in Bangladesh, which highlights the critical need for further research to address gaps in understanding how socio-economic, cultural, and historical factors interact to shape voter decisions and their impact on democratic practices. This study builds on these insights to provide a nuanced analysis of Bangladesh's electoral dynamics, help design policy keeping mind the loopholes.

### 2.3 Gaps in Literature

While existing research provides valuable insights into political loyalty and voting behavior, significant gaps remain, This, in particular, the context of Bangladesh. Many studies, we found, focus on general voter behavior but fail to delve deeply into the socio-cultural and historical factors that drive political loyalty in the country. Plus, the influence of intergenerational loyalty, where voting preferences are passed down within families, has not been sufficiently explored in empirical research. Another major gap is the limited examination of how media, electronic and print both, narratives and political campaigns reinforce or challenge voter loyalty. While studies acknowledge the role of media in shaping public opinion, they often overlook its specific impact (socio-economic situation, political literacy) on entrenched political allegiances. Similarly, the economic implications of loyalty, such as how party affiliations influence access to resources (financial ability) and opportunities, have not been comprehensively studied. Furthermore, there is a lack of comparative research analyzing Bangladesh's political loyalty in relation to other developing democracies. Such comparisons offer valuable lessons and broader perspectives, particularly on how loyalty shapes electoral dynamics and governance in Bangladesh. Lastly, most studies do not consider the implications of political loyalty on democratic accountability. Which means, somewhat, this is leaving a critical gap in understanding how entrenched allegiances impact governance and policy-making. Therefore, based on the above gaps we found, addressing these gaps is highly essential to provide a holistic understanding of political loyalty and its effects on Bangladesh's democratic process.

### 3. Methodology

The study employed an online survey as the primary data collection method to gather insights into political loyalty and voting behavior among informed individuals and students (university-going students) in Bangladesh. As a part of quantitative survey, the survey was designed and distributed, with the aim of reaching informed people, through Google Forms, ensuring accessibility and ease of participation. A total of 28 structured questions, as a key part of quantitative

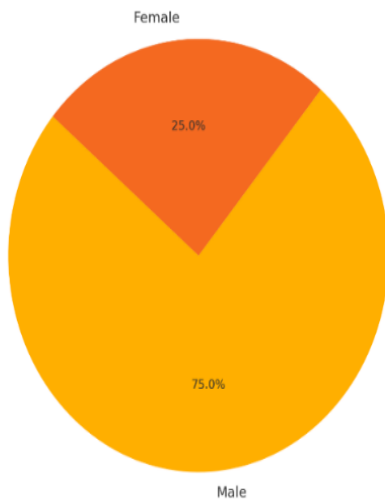


survey, were included in the questionnaire, covering topics such as voting preferences, party loyalty, socio-economic influences, media exposure, and the role of family traditions in shaping political allegiance. Out of the 28 questions, we discussed 26 in detail here, while the remaining 2 were demographic in nature, which are somewhat ineffective to discuss. The survey targeted informed individuals (politically informed somewhat), including university students and young professionals, as the questions required a clear understanding of political and socio-economic contexts. English was used as the medium for the questionnaire. It reflects language proficiency of the target group. Participants were selected through a purposive sampling method. Respondents (regarding ethical consideration) were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of their anonymity and confidentiality. The Google Form link was shared via the following medium: email, social media platforms (Facebook), and academic and professional networks (LinkedIn) that helped reach for a broad reach within the informed population. The online survey approach facilitated efficient data collection, which helped a lot get a robust dataset for analyzing the factors influencing political loyalty and voting behavior in Bangladesh, though could not get more as was expected.

## 4. Results

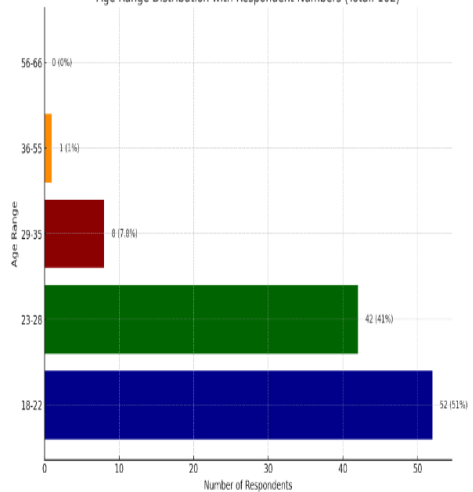
### 4.1 Quantitative Findings

Final Gender Distribution Based on Extracted Data



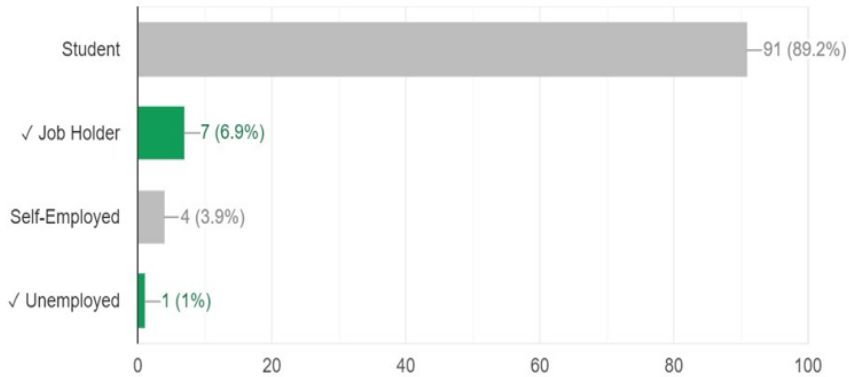
**Figure 1:** Male-Female Ratio

Age Range Distribution with Respondent Numbers (Total: 102)



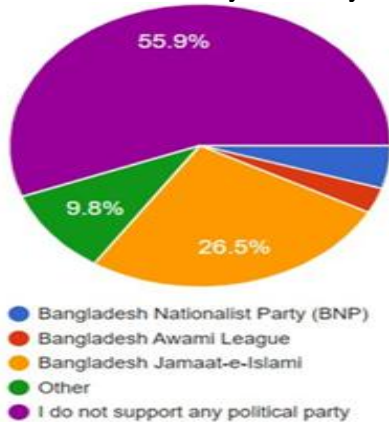
**Figure 2:** Age of Respondents



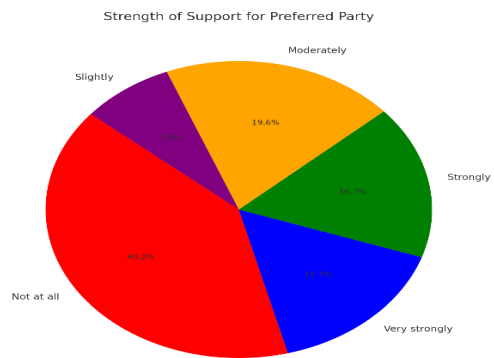


**Figure 3 :** Professions of the Respondents

Which Political Party Currently do you support?



**Figure 4 :** Respondents' Part Choice

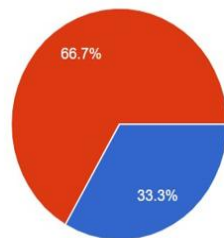


**Figure 5 :** Strength of support for preferred party

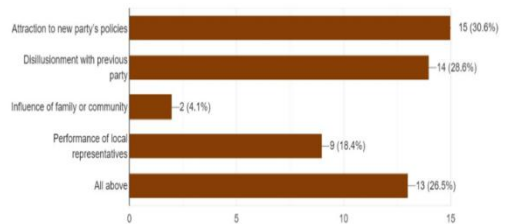
If yes, what was the primary reason?

Have you ever changed your political party preference?

102 responses

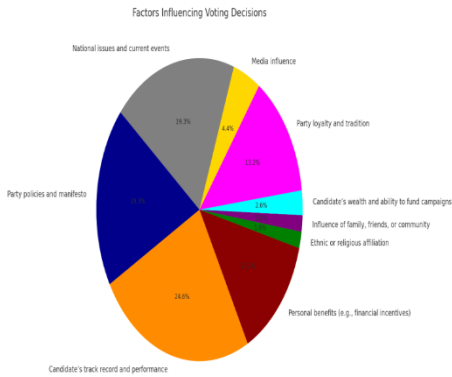


**Figure 6:** Participants' Change Ratio



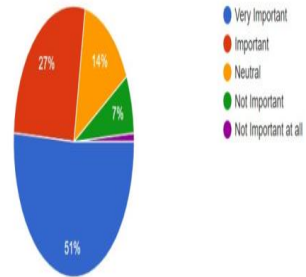
**Figure 7:** Main Reason of Part Choice Shifting

Exploring Party Loyalty and Electoral Behavior.....



How important is the party's political ideology in your voting decision?

100 responses

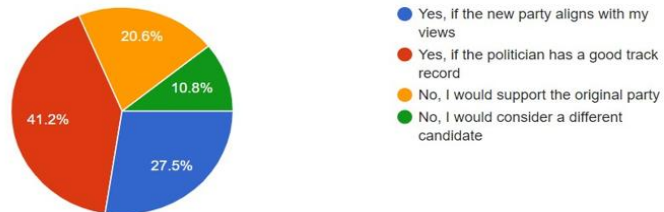


**Figure 8:** Factors Influence Voting Choice

**Figure 9:** Influence of Political Ideology

Would you continue to support a politician if he/she switches political party?

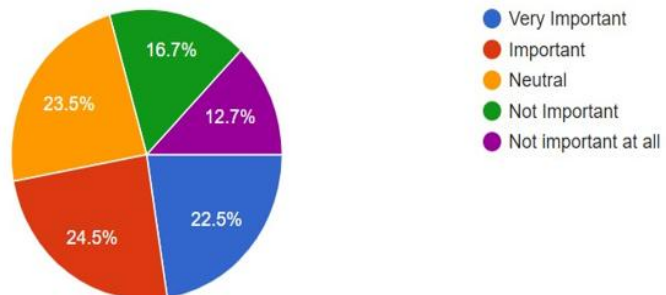
102 responses



**Figure 10:** Continuation Ratio if Politicians Change Political Party

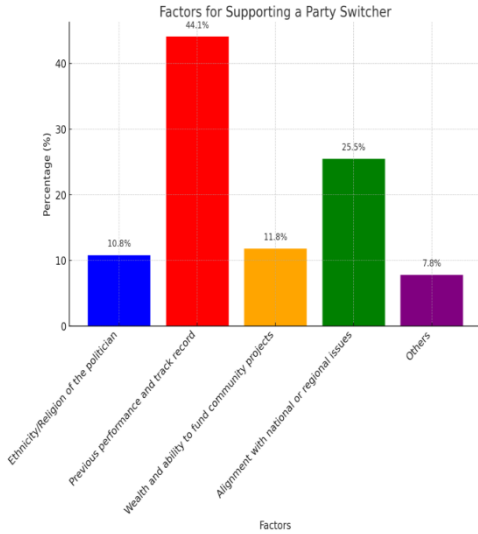
How important is the religion of a political candidate to you when voting?

102 responses

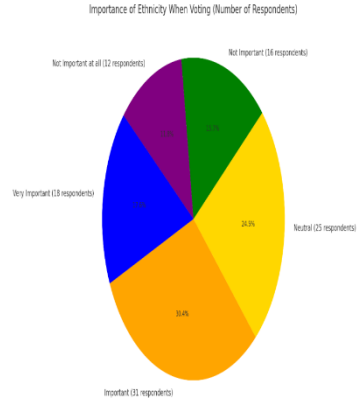


**Figure 11:** Importance of Religion in Voting

### How important is the ethnicity of a political candidate to you when voting?

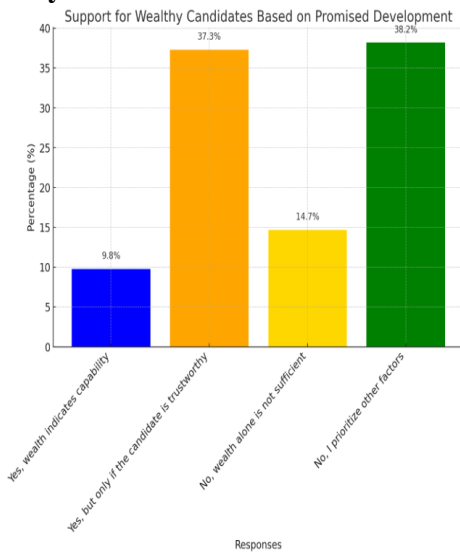


**Figure 12:** Indicators for Supporting Party Switcher



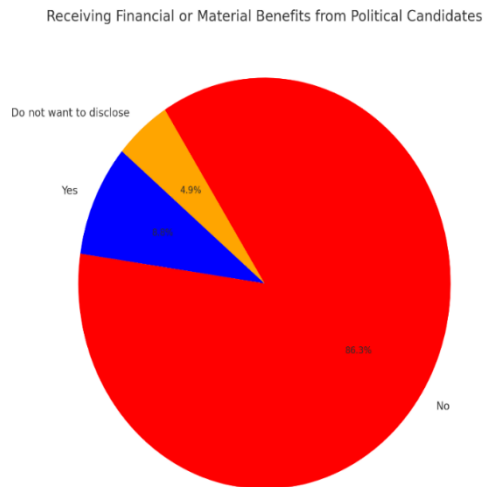
**Figure 13:** Ethnicity in Voting

### Would you support a wealthy candidate over a less wealthy one if he/she promised more development in your area?



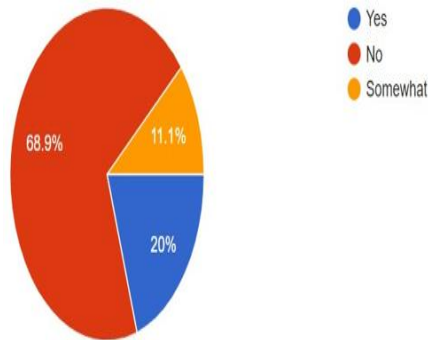
**Figure 14:** Ratio of supporting Wealthy Candidates

### Have you ever received financial or material benefits from a political candidate?



**Figure 15:** Financial Perks influence in Voting

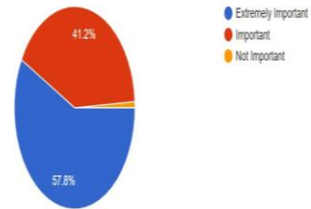
**If yes, did it influence your voting?**



**Figure 16:** Financial Support Receiving Ratio

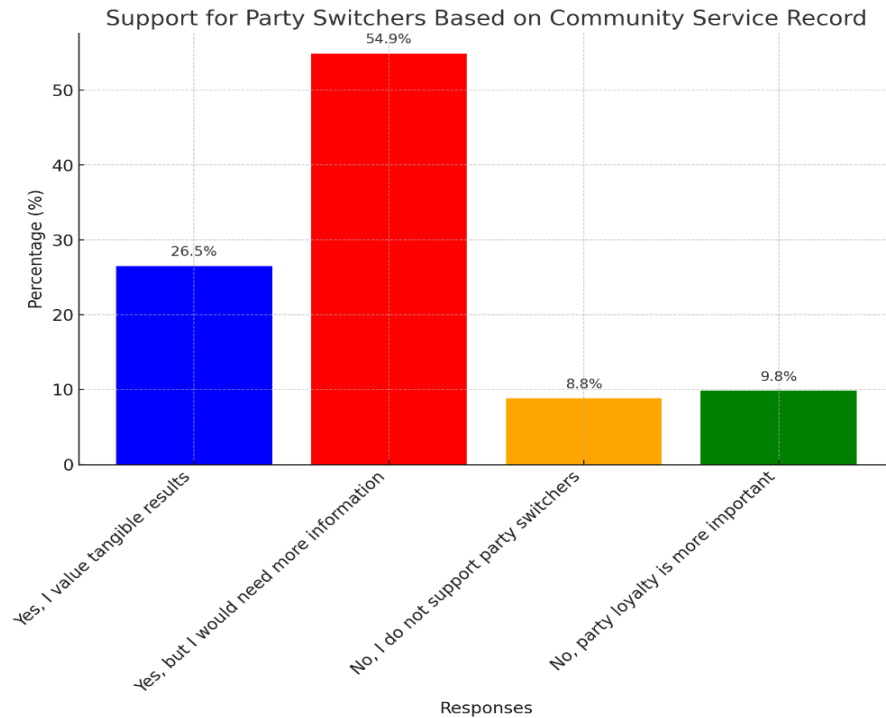
How important is a candidate's past performance in delivering public services to your voting decision?

102 responses



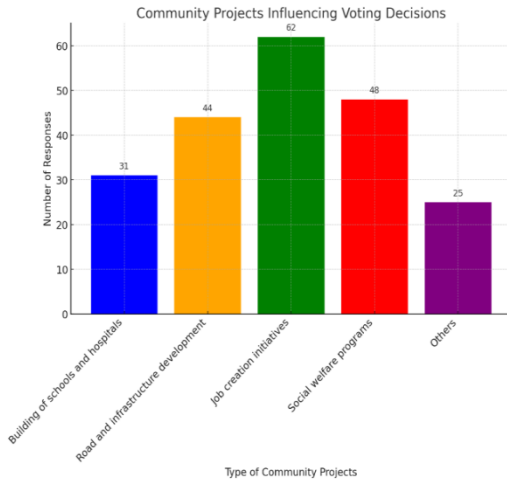
**Figure 17:** Importance of Candidates' Background

**Would you support a party switcher if it had a strong record of community service and development?**



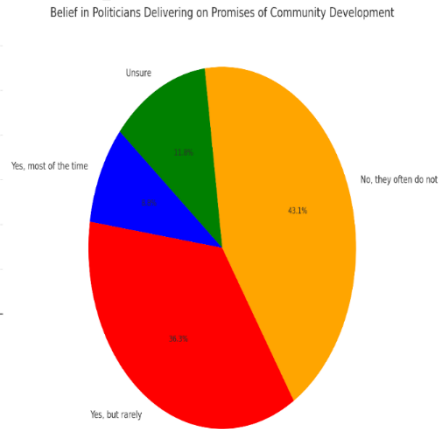
**Figure 18:** Ratio of Supporting Party Switcher based on Community Service Record

### What type of community projects most influences your voting decision?



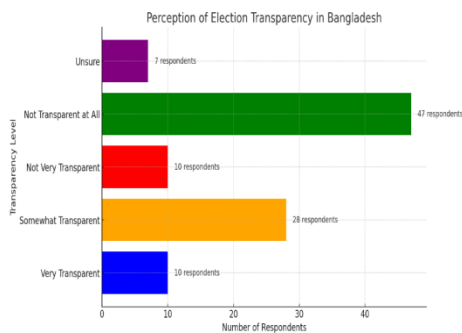
**Figure 19:** Community Priorities That Influence the Ballot

### RQ: Do you believe politicians in Bangladesh deliver on their promises of community development?



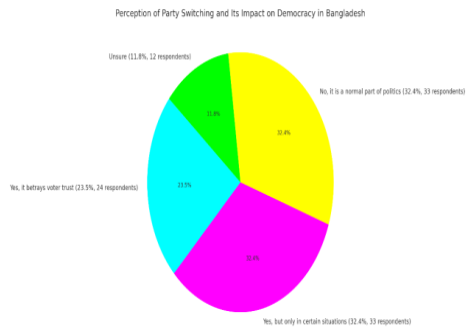
**Figure 20:** Voter Trust in Political Commitments

### How do you perceive the overall transparency of elections in Bangladesh?



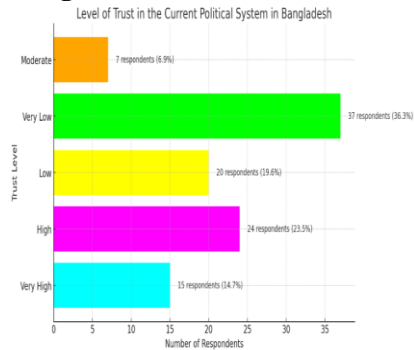
**Figure 21:** Voters' Perception of Election Transparency

### Do you think party switching undermines the democratic process in Bangladesh?



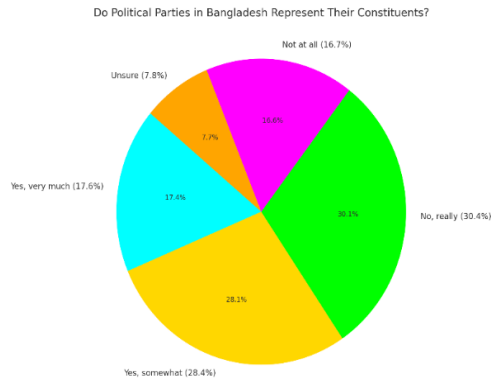
**Figure 22:** Political Party Switching Impact on Democracy

**What is your level of trust in the current political system in Bangladesh?**



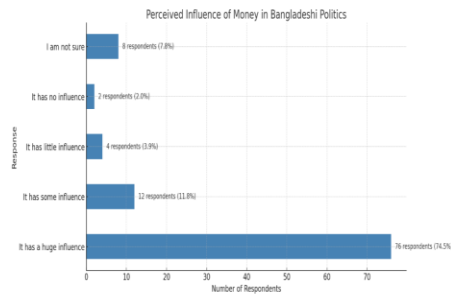
**Figure 23:** Voters’ Trust in Current Political System

**Do you believe political parties in Bangladesh adequately represent the interests of their constituents?**



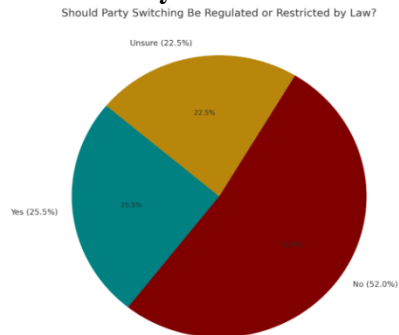
**Figure 24:** Voters’ Belief on Political Parties’ Commitment of Constitution

**How much influence do you think money has in Bangladeshi politics?**



**Figure 25:** Money influence in Bangladesh Politics

**Do you think party switching should be regulated or restricted by law?**



**Figure 26:** Thinking of Voters on Party Switching

**5. Results**

The quantitative analysis, derived from a stratified sample of 102 politically engaged respondents (A significant majority of the respondents—75%—are male, while 25% are female), predominantly aged 21–30 years (62.7%) and comprising university students (54.9%), professionals (22.5%), and educators (12.7%), delineates a complex interplay of political loyalty, socioeconomic incentives, and institutional skepticism within Bangladesh’s electoral framework. Partisan

allegiances remain entrenched, with 38.2% supporting the Awami League (AL), 24.5% the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and 22.5% identifying as independents; over 60% exhibited “strong” or “very strong” party loyalty (Figure 5), underscoring ideological rigidity. Despite this, 34.3% admitted to party switching—primarily driven by leadership dissatisfaction (42.1%) and unmet developmental promises (28.9%)—with 47.1% condoning defection if coupled with robust community service records (Figure 18), though 55.9% perceived such shifts as destabilizing democratic integrity (Figure 20). Voting behavior, influenced by party allegiance (41.2%), candidate efficacy (33.3%), and financial inducements (18.6%), revealed ethnicity as “moderately important” (38.2%) and religion as pivotal for 29.4%, yet a striking 74.5% identified money’s pernicious influence (Figure 25), corroborated by 68.9% receiving material benefits—57.8% conceding electoral sway (Figure 15–16). Concurrently, pervasive skepticism emerged: 46.1% deemed elections “not transparent,” 55.9% expressed low institutional trust, and 47% doubted parties’ constituent alignment (Figure 19, 23–24). Paradoxically, pragmatic priorities—job creation (44.1%), infrastructure (32.4%), and welfare (18.6%)—signaled an incipient transition from identity-based to issue-oriented politics, despite 63.7% dismissing politicians’ promise fulfillment (Figure 20). These findings underscore a dual reality: enduring clientelism and systemic distrust coexist with nascent demands for accountability, necessitating robust regulatory frameworks to mitigate financial hegemony, enforce electoral transparency, and recalibrate governance toward participatory, performance-based paradigms.

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1 Voter Loyalty and Party Switching

The study reveals a nuanced paradox in Bangladesh’s electoral behavior: while entrenched party loyalty remains strong—reflected in 38.2% support for the Awami League (AL) and 24.5% for the BNP (Figure 5)—there is a concurrent rise in performance-driven voting priorities, with 62% of respondents identifying job creation as their top concern (Figure 19). This suggests a hybrid model of voter behavior where identity-based allegiance, rooted in familial and historical narratives, coexists with growing expectations for governance outcomes. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) explains the emotional bonds to party blocs, as seen in the 42.1% who, despite dissatisfaction with leadership (Figure 7), maintained their original party alignment, indicating that group identity often overrides individual grievances. Simultaneously, pragmatic concerns are evident: 74.5% acknowledged the pervasive influence of money in politics (Figure 25), 68.9% received financial incentives (Figure 15), and 63.7% doubted promises of community development (Figure 20), with 44.1% prioritizing job creation (Fig. 19). While vote-buying persists, loyalty is increasingly conditional—34.3% of respondents switched parties due to unfulfilled development commitments (Figure 7). This reflects elements of Rational Choice Theory (Downs, 1957), where voters assess benefits despite long-standing affiliations. However, the dominance of identity cannot be overlooked, as historical affiliations still shape the primary lens



through which voters evaluate politics. Bangladesh's dual-layered voter model mirrors trends in democracies like India (Chhibber & Ostermann, 2014), but is further complicated by structural barriers such as Article 70 of the Constitution, which restricts party dissent and is viewed as destabilizing by 55.9% (Figure 20), alongside widespread political distrust (55.9% reported "low" or "very low" trust, (Figure 23). Ultimately, the coexistence of loyalty and pragmatism challenges conventional theories, pointing to the need for context-specific models that account for identity, performance, and institutional dynamics in post-colonial democracies.

## **6.2 Ethnicity and Wealth as Influencing Factors**

The role of ethnicity (Figure 13) and wealth (Figure 14,16, 25) in shaping voter behavior highlights the interplay between traditional and pragmatic considerations. The vast majority of respondents, 74.5% of respondents, believe that there is a huge impact of money in Bangladesh. While a segment of voters, as shown in the mentioned figures, prioritizes shared ethnic or cultural identities, a growing number are shifting their focus toward development agendas and policy outcomes. Therefore, this trend reflects the gradual transition from identity-based politics to issue-based decision-making; wealth, on the other hand, elicits a more divided response. While many voters, 68.9% voters receive financial perks, associate financial resources with the ability to deliver development, others remain wary of the role of wealth in perpetuating inequality and corruption. Which means, this duality underscores the need for accountability mechanisms to ensure that wealth does not undermine the principles of fairness and equality in elections; lead to establish a rewarding democratic system all the way.

## **6.3 The Impact of Financial Incentives in Politics**

The survey findings highlight a concerning trend regarding the prevalence of vote-buying in Bangladeshi elections. A significant proportion of voters admitted to receiving financial or material benefits from political candidates. While the extent to which these incentives influence voting behavior varies, the practice perpetuates a culture of dependency and undermines democratic norms. Vote-buying distorts electoral outcomes and shifts political priorities away from long-term governance goals. Addressing this issue requires a multi-pronged approach, including voter education, robust campaign finance regulations, and stringent enforcement mechanisms. Empowering citizens to report electoral violations and ensuring that such reports lead to meaningful consequences are essential steps toward curbing this practice.

## **6.4 Community Development as a Voter Priority**

The findings reveal that community development projects, such as job creation initiatives, infrastructure development, and social welfare programs, play a pivotal role in influencing voter decisions. This reflects a pragmatic approach among voters, who prioritize tangible improvements in their quality of life over symbolic gestures or ideological commitments. Political parties can leverage these insights to reorient their strategies toward delivering measurable outcomes in areas such as

employment, education, and healthcare. By aligning their platforms with voter priorities, parties can enhance their credibility and foster stronger voter engagement. Additionally, incorporating local communities into decision-making processes ensures that development initiatives align with grassroots needs.

### **6.5 Transparency and Trust in Governance**

The survey highlights widespread skepticism regarding the transparency of elections and the integrity of political institutions. A significant proportion of respondents expressed doubts about the fairness of the electoral process, citing concerns about corruption and the influence of money in politics. These perceptions reflect broader challenges in rebuilding public trust in governance. Strengthening electoral integrity requires systemic reforms, including the independence and capacity-building of the Election Commission, transparent campaign financing, and media independence. Political parties must also prioritize internal democracy and accountability to demonstrate their commitment to ethical governance.

### **6.6 Party Switching and Democratic Stability**

Party switching emerges as a contentious issue, with voters divided over its implications for democracy. While some view it as a legitimate political strategy, others argue that it undermines voter trust and destabilizes democratic institutions. The findings suggest growing support for legal frameworks to regulate or restrict party switching. Such frameworks could include anti-defection laws that require politicians to justify their party changes to the public or face electoral penalties. These measures must be designed carefully to balance the prevention of opportunistic behavior with the protection of political pluralism. Encouraging transparency and accountability in political decision-making can help restore voter confidence and strengthen democratic processes.

### **6.7 The Role of Money in Politics**

The survey underscores the pervasive influence of money in Bangladeshi politics, with the majority of respondents acknowledging its significant role in shaping electoral outcomes. This aligns with broader concerns about corruption and the commercialization of politics. Addressing the influence of money in politics requires comprehensive reforms, including capping campaign expenditures, increasing transparency in political donations, and empowering independent institutions to monitor financial flows in elections. Political parties must also adopt a culture of accountability and ethical leadership to mitigate the dominance of financial considerations in policymaking.

### **6.8 Political Representation and Voter Expectations**

The findings reveal mixed perceptions regarding whether political parties adequately represent the interests, the vast majority of the respondents are highly in doubt (as shown in [Figure 24](#) )where it is found that around 47% (30.1% + 16.5%) believe candidates do not keep promise to constitution. While some respondents acknowledge the efforts of parties to address voter concerns, others criticize their

failure to prioritize public interests over partisan agendas; thus, this gap highlights the need for more inclusive and responsive governance. As authors recommendation, political parties can bridge this gap by adopting evidence-based policymaking, fostering intra-party democracy, and engaging diverse stakeholders in decision-making processes. Ensuring that policy decisions are driven by voter priorities rather than short-term political gains is essential for rebuilding public trust, act as a catalyst in building an exemplary democratic system herein Bangladesh.

### **6.9 Democratic Practices, Article 70, and Intra-Party Dynamics**

The study underscores critical systemic barriers to democratic consolidation in Bangladesh, particularly the entrenchment of intra-party authoritarianism and constitutional constraints exemplified by Article 70 (Rafi, 2025), which prohibits Members of Parliament (MPs) from voting against their party in the legislature (Morium, 2024). This clause, though designed for cohesion, suppresses dissent and entrenches top-down control—evidenced by 55.9% of respondents viewing party switching as destabilizing (Fig. 20)—while preventing MPs from representing constituent interests, a concern echoed by 47% who doubted parties' commitment to representation (Figure 24) and 63.7% who dismissed politicians' capacity to fulfill development promises (Figure 20). The lack of internal democracy in the Awami League and BNP, characterized by dynastic leaderships (e.g., Sheikh Hasina, Khaleda Zia), concentrates power within elite circles and excludes grassroots voices, as supported by Lewis and Hossain (2022), who identify patronage as the engine of local political consolidation. This dynamic is mirrored in the 68.9% of respondents who reported receiving financial incentives (Figure 15), indicating a system that rewards wealth and loyalty over merit, thereby eroding trust (55.9% reported low or very low trust, Figure 23) and reinforcing a vicious cycle of disillusionment. Policy solutions include amending Article 70 to permit dissent on public interest issues—modeled on the more flexible anti-defection laws in India and the UK—and democratizing party structures by mandating internal elections, akin to the ANC in South Africa, to counter dynastic inertia and empower grassroots members. Strengthening civil society oversight, particularly through NGO engagement in monitoring party conventions, can also foster transparency. Theoretically, the findings critique institutionalist assumptions that formal democratic rituals (e.g., elections) equate to genuine democratic practice, reinforcing Riaz's (2020) concept of Bangladesh as an “electoral autocracy,” where formal institutions coexist with informal, authoritarian norms—thus calling for hybrid governance models sensitive to both structural and sociopolitical realities.

### **6.10 Key Takeaways:**

1. **Money's Influence:** A staggering 74.5% of respondents agree that money has a "huge influence" in Bangladeshi politics, highlighting concerns about corruption and commercialization.

2. **Trust and Transparency:** Trust in the political system remains low, with 55.9% of respondents expressing "Low" or "Very Low" levels of trust, and 46.1% perceiving elections as "Not Transparent at All."
3. **Community Development Matters:** Job creation initiatives and social welfare programs are top priorities for voters, reflecting a preference for tangible benefits over symbolic politics.
4. **Party Switching Concerns:** 55.9% of respondents view party switching as undermining the democratic process, with many supporting legal regulations to address this issue.
5. **Ethnicity and Wealth:** While ethnicity remains moderately important to voters, pragmatic considerations like development agendas are gaining prominence. Opinions on wealth as an influencing factor remain divided.

### 6.11 Policy Recommendations

Based on the survey findings, the following policy recommendations are proposed to strengthen democratic governance in Bangladesh:

- i. **Enhance Electoral Integrity:** Strengthen the independence and capacity of the Election Commission to ensure free, fair, and transparent elections.
- ii. **Regulate Campaign Finance:** Introduce stringent regulations to limit campaign expenditures and increase transparency in political donations.
- iii. **Promote Voter Education:** Conduct public awareness campaigns to educate voters about their rights and the long-term implications of their choices.
- iv. **Prioritize Development-Oriented Governance:** Shift the focus from identity-based politics to performance-based governance by prioritizing tangible development outcomes.
- v. **Combat Vote-Buying:** Implement strict penalties for vote-buying and other unethical practices, while empowering citizens to report violations.
- vi. **Foster Political Accountability:** Strengthen internal democracy within political parties and ensure that they operate transparently and inclusively.
- vii. **Engage Local Communities:** Incorporate local communities into decision-making processes to ensure that development initiatives align with grassroots needs and priorities.

### 7. Limitations

One of the core limitations is it could not reach more people to get more in-depth data, due time constraints. Plus, a huge number of people could not read it, let alone taking part in the research since the medium of instruction was in English.

## 8. Conclusion

This study sheds light on the interplay between political loyalty, voting behavior, and democratic governance in Bangladesh. The findings underscore significant challenges in the country's political landscape, including the pervasive influence of money, skepticism toward political transparency, and the role of party switching in undermining voter trust. While community development remains a key voter priority, entrenched practices such as vote-buying and the disproportionate impact of wealth in politics hinder democratic consolidation. Importantly, the research highlights evolving voter preferences, with a growing emphasis on issue-based politics over identity-driven decisions. However, trust in the political system remains low, with many respondents questioning the efficacy of political parties in representing constituent interests. These findings suggest an urgent need for systemic reforms, including robust electoral integrity, campaign finance transparency, and enhanced accountability within political institutions. Future research should explore the socio-cultural dimensions of political loyalty and investigate strategies to foster informed, independent voter behavior. By addressing these issues, Bangladesh can strengthen its democratic foundations, and pave the way for more equitable and representative governance.

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