

Youth Belief and Knowledge in Political Participation: The Case of Bangladesh

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Abstract

This study examines how young people in Bangladesh participate in politics generally. Over one billion of the seven billion people on the globe are young, and the great majority of them reside in developing nations like Bangladesh. Even though they make up 33% of Bangladesh's population and frequently take part in formal political engagements, young people do not cast ballots in elections. Unfortunately, this might affect the nation's democracy. What beliefs, behaviors, presumptions, and assumptions do young people consider to be indicators of political participation? Numerous discrete elements go into the explanation of the low levels of active political participation by the youth in existing constructions. Some political beliefs and improper political knowledge are predominant obstacles to this low level of political participation. The study indicates that youth in Bangladesh perceived various barriers to their political participation. Finally, this article offered suggestions for how to deal with them and turn them into active participants in the political system of Bangladesh.

Key Words: Youth, Politics, Belief, Knowledge, Political Participation, Democracy, and Bangladesh.

Introduction

After a historic Liberation War, Bangladesh became an independent nation on December 16, 1971. Bangladesh hasn't succeeded in creating strong political institutions since then. Democracy was never institutionalized because there were no strong political institutions. The army enters politics when democracy falters. Bangladesh has been impacted at a turning point where the vote-based system has frequently been overshadowed, similar to other recent free states in Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Rahaman, 2014:1). As a result, political domains were teeming with various delegated regimes, such as military, one-party, and tailored tyranny (Rahaman, 2014:1). Whether true or false, the Bangladesh government is accused of manipulating elections and abusing its authority to affect the outcome of the vote. Usually, the occupant party initiates this kind of unauthorized outrage. Political parties have the illegal ability to rig results so that they favor their retention of power (Rahaman, 2014:1). In Bangladesh, therefore, effective political participation is still a long way off.

Out of the seven billion people on the globe, 1.8 billion are young people, and the great majority of them reside in developing nations like Bangladesh. According to data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), "the current youth populace of Bangladesh is around 52 million; very 33 percent of the whole populace. Some 4.6 million or 30 percent of the whole 158.5 million individuals in Bangladesh are youth (10-24 years), and it'll be somewhere in the range of 10 and 19 percent by 2050, predictable with it" (Rahaman, 2021:60). One-third of Bangladesh's population is under the age of thirty. Bangladesh was positioned for a "demographic dividend" by this demographic structure. There are more people in our population who can work than not. The "demographic dividend" is associated with youth empowerment and development. However, according to UNFPA (2020), there are roughly 48 million youth in Bangladesh—a significant number frequently disregarded in sociopolitical discussions.

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Furthermore, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), "as of now there are 27 lakh jobless individuals inside the nation and even though per annum 20 lakh individuals enter the work market, new position openings are made only for some 13-lakh individuals" (Rahaman, 2021:60). According to the ILO, youth unemployment has increased at a faster rate during the last seven years. A majority of young people are exposed to media, such as television. In addition, social media is presented to them side by side (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, IMO, and Messenger). Youth's sensitivity to gender issues is inadequate. Youth do not have an egalitarian attitude toward gender roles. Thus, young people receive little consensus for taking part in politics and elections. Nevertheless, the fact that about 23.5 million young Bangladeshis are registered to vote is astounding to us. According to data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) in 2020, approximately 30% of the country's total population is mature and between the ages of 18 and 30, and 15% of all citizens are between the ages of 18 and 24.

Democracy cannot exist without appropriate participation. Participation in politics contributes to the political system's legitimacy (Hussain, 2013: 15). Democracy is a factor in political participation. The importance of people's participation in politics is overstated to defend citizens' rights. To establish their rights, youth must be represented in this regard. Youth in Bangladesh are granted this right by the Constitution. Article 122(2)(B) of the Bangladesh Constitution says that "the election shall get on the idea of adult suffrage, i.e. who is a citizen of Bangladesh and 18 years aged shall be entitled to vote (Tamanna, 2018). In the absence of proper representation, the gap between the state structure and the disadvantaged becomes wider" (Hussain, 2013: 15). The gap between youth and state design must be minimized by including youth in the formal political construction. The next generation of political activists is crucial to a nation's democratic transition and political stability. Sub-sectors including political belief and knowledge, political participation, civic engagement, and others can be used to analyze youth involvement in politics. This study incorporates political knowledge and beliefs that explain how young people get over obstacles to getting involved in politics.

Conceptual Clarification and Underpinnings

The current study brings up the subject of political participation among young people because it is important to define political knowledge, beliefs, and their comprehension of preexisting perceptions. This research establishes a conceptual connection between the ideas of youth political participation, political knowledge, and political belief. The spirit of the 1971 liberation war and its reflection in the 1972 constitution overwhelms the conceptual framework. It aims to determine whether democratic institutions have made it possible or not for young people to participate inclusively in the politics of Bangladesh.

The Youth

There are various ways to interpret the concept of youth. Young people who are not students and those who are students were identified by renowned sociologist Y.B. Damle (Damle, 1989:122). Obi argues that youth are viewed in terms of their contemporary role as public leaders. He notes that: "a strategy for preparing the youth to uphold a specific form of the power relationship that suggests a constant quality of constructions of strength and interests, but with the passage and departure of inhabitants' additional time, is the positioning of youth as future leaders, which avoids challenging the current power relations within the public" (Rahaman, 2021:60). The only limit that defines youth is age. The definition of youth varies depending on national and international public laws. Youth, according to the United Nations (UN), is defined as the age group between 15 and 24 years old. The Commonwealth defines youth as being between the ages of 15 and 29. The National Youth Policy of 2017 examines "individuals who have reached adulthood between the ages of 18 and 35" (Rahaman, 2021:60). The youth in this study is defined as those who are between the ages of 18 and 35.

The Political Belief

The beliefs that a person or society holds regarding what is true or false, as well as what is right and wrong, make up their belief system. This can manifest itself in a variety of ways, such as political affiliation, religion, philosophy, or spirituality. Numerous variables have an impact on and shape these beliefs. All these factors are replicated in their belief system which accordingly influences their political participation. The political belief system in this research thus a complex psychological disposition of the individual (Khan, 2018: 73) youth. Religion is the predominant component in this political belief system. That's why the religion-based political party is seen everywhere. Religious leaders exert significant influence in politics. Religious values influence individual social life as they control individual political life in some respects (Khan, 2018: 73).

The Political Knowledge

Political knowledge is an important idea in the concept of political culture (Pastarmadzhieva, 2015: 16). Political culture both reflects and influences the political values of society as a whole (Pastarmadzhieva, 2015: 16). This element of political culture defines civic values and behavior and is an object which can be defined as political knowledge (Pastarmadzhieva, 2015: 16). Democracy needs competent citizens and requires a certain level of knowledge on political matters. According to Delli Carpini (2005), political knowledge is "the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory". In this sense, political knowledge refers to a person's understanding of the principles, institutions, processes, and actors involved in politics, as well as their ability to critically analyze and evaluate political issues and events. This includes knowledge of the political system, such as the structure of government and the roles and responsibilities of elected officials, as well as knowledge of specific policy issues and current events. Political knowledge can be acquired through formal education, media consumption, personal experiences, and other forms of civic engagement. It is considered an important component of democratic citizenship, as an informed and engaged citizenry is necessary for the effective functioning of a democratic society. The purpose of this paper is to systematic theoretical formulations concerning political knowledge and the approaches for its empirical study in political participation.

The Democracy

There are several ways to interpret democracy. There's no denying, though, that democracy originated in Greece. Greek democracy was direct. However, because of the emergence of large states or nation-states in the modern world, direct democracy is not feasible. Representative democracy is thus put into effect. Representative democracies are exemplified by modern liberal democracies. One could argue that this term and "republic" go hand in hand. According to Madison, representative democracy is characterized by the allocation of governing powers to a small number of citizens "whose insight may best perceive truth interest of their country-the public voice, articulated by the delegates of individuals, will be more consonant to the overall public good than if articulated by individuals themselves" (Ali, 1996:115). W. F. Willoughby provides a useful definition of representative democracy, saying that it is now understood to be a process by which citizens of the state can debate and offer their opinions to those in authority. Government representatives are now thought of as "responsible" representatives rather than as virtual representatives (Willoughby, 1936:114). Representative democracy in this study refers to a form of government where citizens or their representatives choose the government. Successful representation in politics is essential in many developing countries. Young people are frequently undervalued in the official political system. For instance, young people are less likely to identify as members of ideological groups to register as citizens, and to cast a ballot. Nevertheless, compelling representation or involvement is essential to the global advancement of democracy. In this particular scenario, professionals including Electoral Management Bodies, political parties (as ideological groups), CSOs, and aid providers are finding that youth participation in the democratic process is generally becoming more important. Aside from that, appropriate involvement would have resulted in controversy.

Political Participation

Understanding the involvement of youth necessitates being transparent and open about the measured approach that will be taken. How to best define political participation and how to best set it apart from concepts that are similar to it, such as representative democracy. It is essential to analyze the concepts to grasp a clear understanding of them. Citizens' activities impacting politics is a common way to characterize political participation. Participation in politics has no bounds. voting, contacting public officials, boycotting, attending political gatherings, guerrilla planting, posting websites, participating, joining streak crowds, signing petitions, buying reasonable exchange items, and even engaging in self-destruction fights are all included in it. Engaging in politics is a crucial component of democracy. This idea led Verba and Nie to conclude that "democracy is little where there is little participation in choices; democracy is greater where there is greater participation in choices" (Verba and Nie, 1972). "Legitimate demonstrations by a private citizen that is pretty much straightforwardly pointed toward affecting the selection of administrative workforce, as well as the moves that they make" (Rahaman, 2021:62), is how Verba, Nie, and Kim described political participation in *The Civic Culture*. Four types of participation were documented by Verba and Nie (1972): voting, engaging in campaign activities, contacting public officials, and partaking in mutually beneficial or agreeable exercises. Teorell, Torcal, and Montero developed an indistinguishable typology that encompasses five exercises, such as fighting movement, connecting with action, party-based action, and electoral participation, under the influence of Verba and Nie's work (Teorel et al., 2007). Political participation in this study refers to young people's involvement in Bangladesh's formal and informal political processes.

Interrelationship between Concepts

An individual's ideology or set of values that direct their political beliefs and behaviors are referred to as their political beliefs. Political knowledge refers to a person's level of understanding of political systems, institutions, and processes. Youth refer to individuals who are within a certain age range between 18 to 35 years in this research. In a democracy, the people hold power through free and fair elections, and political participation is the act of participating in the political process. The interrelationship between these concepts is complex. People tend to look for information that supports their beliefs, so political beliefs can have an impact on someone's level of political knowledge. Similarly, a person's level of political knowledge can shape their political beliefs, as they become more informed about different political ideologies and issues. Youth are an important group in any democracy because they are the people who will shape society in the future. However, compared to older people, young people might be less politically knowledgeable and engaged, which could affect their political participation and beliefs. Democracy relies on political participation, as it is through active engagement in the political process that individuals can influence policy decisions and hold elected officials accountable. However, political participation can also be influenced by a person's political beliefs and knowledge, as individuals may be more likely to participate if they feel that their views align with those of the political system. There is a complex and dynamic relationship between political belief, political knowledge, youth, democracy, and political participation; each concept influences and is influenced by the others in different ways. An informed and involved populace is necessary for a democracy to function, and initiatives aimed at boosting youth political engagement and knowledge can support the democratic system.

Objective(s) of the Research

Examining Bangladeshi youth's attitudes and knowledge regarding political participation is the primary goal of this research. To attain this main objective other substitute objectives can be mentioned here:

1. How do people generally view political participation, and how does this compare to what they know and believe about it?

2. What expectations, attitudes, behaviors, knowledge, and actions do young people consider to be markers of political participation?

Research Methodology

This study's methodology combined historical and analytical techniques. Political participation in Bangladesh has been examined historically. An analytical method based on both qualitative and quantitative data was applied in this study. Primary and secondary sources of the information had been consulted. The period of data collection for this research ranges from August 2022 to October 2022. In this connection, as many as 123 youths, who come from different categories of youth, were interviewed. Conveniently sampled respondent interviews were one type of primary source. This study focused on two Bangladeshi public universities—Islami University in Kushtia and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Science and Technology University in Gopalganj—to gather primary data from student youth. Primary data from youth who are not students has been gathered in several locations, including Dhaka, Gopalganj, Faridpur, Madaripur, Narail, Barishal, Bagerhat, and Pirojpur District. One KII as well as one FGD have been selected from each area to allow the investigation to observe their social and reaction components. To conceptualize the subject, a broad range of literature has been reviewed in the first phase of secondary sources. During this stage, information about young people's involvement in elections was gathered from academic writings, books, journals, and research papers to create the study's framework. Data from reports published by governmental organizations and agencies have been gathered for the second stage of secondary sources. Finding trustworthy and unbiased sources of data made it difficult to finish the study. During this point in the study, daily newspapers were a common source of information.

Youth Belief and Knowledge in Political Participation

A crucial idea in the theory of political culture is political knowledge. In addition to changing the political system, political culture also reflects the political values and beliefs of the society. Once more, according to Passtarmadzhieva (2015), these components of political culture define civic values and behavior in an item that can be classified as political knowledge. Democracies require informed citizens who possess a certain degree of theoretical and practical political knowledge, as well as familiarity with current political personalities and events. As a fundamental component of the democratic political culture, political knowledge is closely linked to citizens' engagement in the political process.

Measurement of Youth Political Belief

Youth sustain belief in politics. It depends on the history of the origin of a country and the cultural setting of its polity. The belief system is thus a complex psychological disposition of the youth. As a belief, the influence of religion in any political culture is not uncommon (Khan, M.S, 2018: 73). Religious belief influences youth's social life and political life in some respects. Religious belief replicated in the voting pattern of youth. From this perspective, three measures of religious status in politics are considered in this research-(1) political life should not reflect religious values, (2) which ideology do you prefer in politics, and (3) what type of ideological status of party do you prefer? Now the respondent was asked *do they think political life should not reflect religious values*. Table 1 illustrates how young people perceive religious values about youth. Table 1 shows that 57.7% of respondents fall into the "Yes" category. They think that political life should not reflect religious values. The Bangladeshi youth are more secular in mind. Therefore, they don't want to see religious belief in the political sphere. The 'No' category is 22%. They think that political life should reflect religious values. Whereas 14.6% of respondents belong to the "Some Religious Values" category and 5.7% of respondents belong to the "Don't Know" category. In this way, the conflict between "No" and "Some

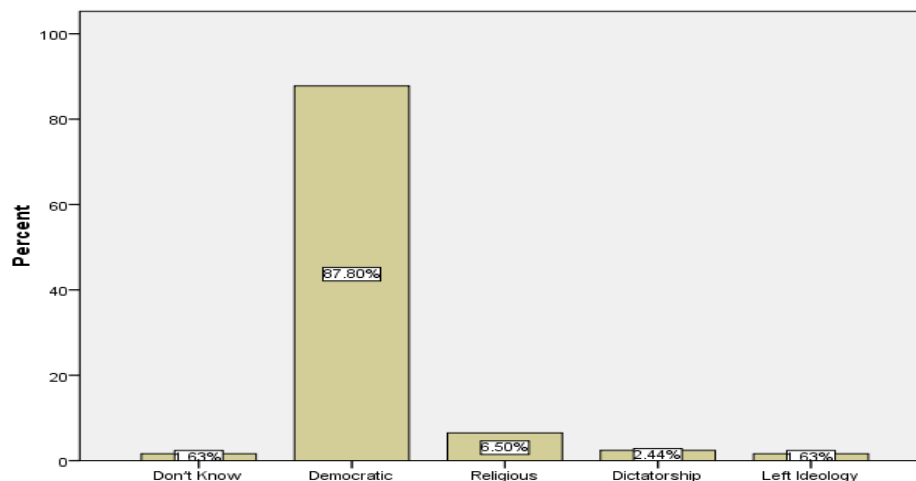
Religious Values" highlights the erratic nature of the youth mentality, which is heavily reliant on how well the political system and government function to satisfy the needs of the youth.

Table 1: Political life should not reflect religious values

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Do not Know	7	5.7	5.7	5.7
	No	27	22.0	22.0	27.6
	Yes	71	57.7	57.7	85.4
	Some religious values	18	14.6	14.6	100.0
	Total	123	100.0	100.0	

For an in-depth understanding of the belief, it was the question which ideology do you prefer in politics? They hold a variety of ideologies, religious convictions, and other opinions (Khan, M.S., 2018: 73). In matters of ideology, we have considered four patterns of the belief system of the youth: (1) democracy, (2) dictatorship, (3) Left ideology, and (4) religious ideology. How are respondents who share such ideological beliefs distributed among them? Figure 1 shows that when compared to all other categories, "Democratic" has the highest percentage (87.50%). It suggests that the younger generation adheres to "Democratic" political principles. The "Religious" category stands second highest category (6.50%). This is not the significant considering influence of religion on political belief. Compared to the "Democratic" category "Religious" category stands very low position. However, after democratic ideology, it's immediately next is religious-minded youth. While another 2.44% belong to the 'Dictatorship' category and 1.63% belong to the 'Left' category. The "Don't Know" category and the "Left" category carry the same value (1.63%).

Figure1: Which ideology do you prefer in politics?



What kind of political party ideological status do you prefer in politics—religious, secular, or mixed—was the subject of another contingency question for the respondent? What are the youth's views on this matter? Table 2 illustrates how young people prefer political parties based on their ideological stance. Table 2 makes it clear that young people prefer the "mixed" ideological

political party (63.4%) over the "secular" (26.0%). Furthermore, 0.8% of people are classified as "don't know" and 9.8% of people as "religious". Specific data are provided in Table 2 below.

Bangladesh is a multi-party democratic country. There are numerous political parties with various ideologies. Among them, the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) are political parties with moderate or eclectic ideologies. There are left-leaning parties, including the Bangladesh Communist Party. Political parties on the left are regarded as secular political parties. Political parties with a religious focus, such as Jamaat-I-Islami, exist as well.

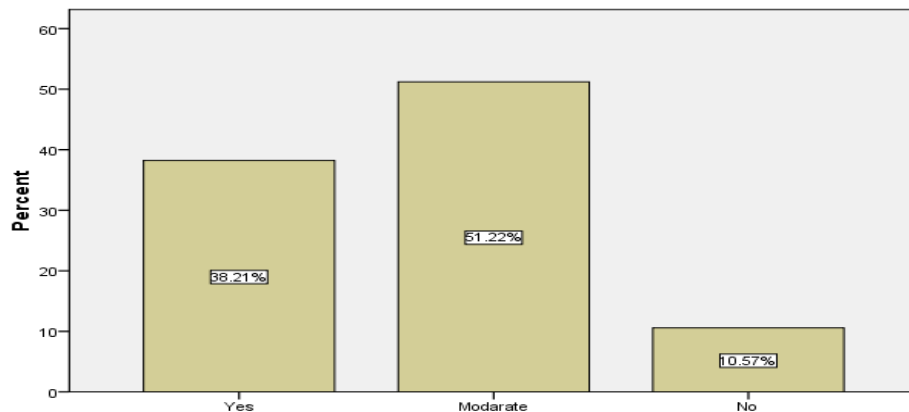
Table 2: What type of ideological status of party do you prefer?

	Category	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Religious	12	9.8	9.8	9.8
	Secular	78	26.0	26.0	73.2
	Mixed	32	63.4	63.4	99.2
	Don't Know	1	.8	.8	100.0
	Total	123	100.0	100.0	

Measurement of Youth Political Knowledge

Political knowledge is necessary for a democracy, both for politicians and for the citizens. Without any or enough political knowledge, it cannot run smoothly and effectively, and democracy is jeopardized. The importance of political knowledge in democratic societies is explained by how it serves various purposes. Also, some citizens move away from politics because they don't understand it. Citizens are better able to comprehend the topic of public discourse and participate in politics in an educated manner. In matters of political knowledge, we have considered here four patterns of political knowledge of the youth: (1) connection with local politics and leaders, (2) connection with national politics and leaders, (3) voting behavior as political knowledge, and (4) knowledge about the present political scenario. How are respondents share such pattern of political knowledge distributed among them? Now the respondent was asked...*have you heard of the following leaders of your locality or community and party affiliation?* According to Figure 2, the category with the highest percentage (51.22%) is "Moderate." It suggests that the youth have a moderate level of political knowledge. The "Yes" category, at 38.21%, is the second-highest category and is quite similar to the "Yes" category. However, 10.57 percent of the sample falls into the "No" category.

Figure 2: Local or community political leaders and their political affiliation



Could you list a few prominent national political figures and their political affiliations for the respondents? Table 3 shows that "Moderate" is the top category in response to this inquiry (69.1%). It suggests that the political knowledge of youth is at a mediocre level. The "Yes" category stands second highest category (27.6%). While another percentage (3.3%) belongs to the "No" category. Table 3 makes it quite evident that as compared to local politics and politicians, youth have a higher level of political knowledge concerning national politics and politicians.

Table 3: National political leaders and their political affiliation

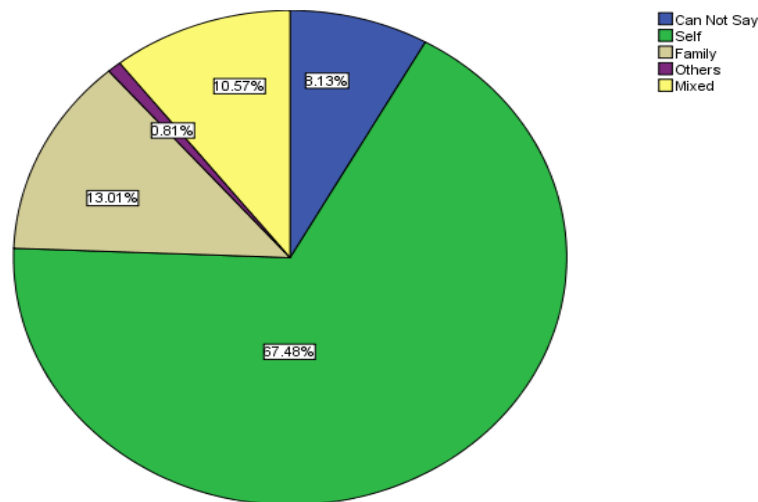
	Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	34	27.6	27.6	27.6
	Moderate	85	69.1	69.1	96.7
	No	4	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	123	100.0	100.0	

The voting behavior in any democracy around the world reflects their level of political knowledge (Bruter, Michael and Harrison, Sarah, 2017:2). Voting behavior, in the opinion of Bruter and Harrison, includes all of the ways that a person's personality, memories, emotions, and other psychological aspects influence how they feel and behave when casting a ballot (Bruter, Michael and Harrison, Sarah, 2017:2). Insufficient political knowledge in Bangladesh casts doubt on the validity of voting. Table 4 provides a comparative analysis of the voting behavior pattern of young people in this context. The Table shows that, in comparison to all other categories, the 'always' category of voting in both local and national elections stands high (40.7%). It appears that young people are very aware of the importance of voting. The category of "First Time Voter" has the second-highest percentage of responders (28.5%). First-time voters typically don't lose their enthusiasm for casting a ballot. Compared to other voting categories, the 'Very Rare' category has a low percentage (12.2%), while the 'Not Yet' and 'Occasional' categories have higher percentages (10.6% and 12.2%, respectively).

Table 4: Comparative pattern of voting

	Category	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not Yet	15	12.2	12.2	12.2
	First Time Voter	35	28.5	28.5	40.7
	Very Rare	10	8.1	8.1	48.8
	Occasionally	13	10.6	10.6	59.3
	Always	50	40.7	40.7	100.0
	Total	123	100.0	100.0	

Another emergency question asked, "Which respondent's opinion do you weigh most heavily when casting your vote?" Most people think that when it comes to voting, young people don't look for their interests. According to data, the majority of young people (67.48%) fall into the "Self" category. When voting, they come to their conclusions. While 13.01 percent of youth make voting decisions based on family influence. Additionally, data shows that 8.94% of youth fall into the "Others" category and 10.57% of youth fall into the "Mixed" category. Figure 3 below displays the data in detail.

Figure 3: Preference of views during voting**Effective Youth Participation: The Way Forward**

1. To encourage ongoing participation by youth in the political process and civic education in schools, colleges, and universities.
2. To build a community-based organization that can provide youth with significant benefits for ensuring political participation.
3. To create a fund to give financial assistance to youth development programs that are centered around youth.
4. Provide scholarships to young people for advanced study with an emphasis on elections, democracy, governance, and government.
5. To guarantee the successful execution of initiatives aimed at promoting greater youth participation in politics.
6. Voters from abroad would be encouraged to participate in politics if they were able to exercise their right to vote.
7. To create enrollment and data centers on campus to increase the involvement of young students in the electoral process.
8. A quota system must be used to include young people in the party's candidacies for elections.
9. The government and Election Commission may lower the voting age from eighteen to sixteen years old.
10. Carrying out the study in a way that complies with the law to encourage youth involvement.

Conclusion

The political situation in Bangladesh today may change if the youth participate in politics effectively. Youth political activity may be revealed by this study in terms of politics, democracy, voting, and participation. This study placed a strong emphasis on the involvement of young people

in politics as a means of bringing about potential reforms for Bangladesh's democracy. What are the prerequisites for youth to get involved in politics? Political belief and political knowledge are two factors that are important for youth political participation, according to the study. Democracy has a unique element known as political participation. Youth political participation was stressed more in this regard. Considering that one-third of Bangladesh's population is made up of Bangladeshi youth.

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