

Voter Apathy in the 12th Parliamentary Election of Bangladesh: Causes and Patterns

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Abstract: *Voter apathy has become a significant concern in Bangladesh, particularly in the 12th National Parliamentary Election held on January 7, 2024. This study examines the primary causes of voter disengagement, analyzing the socio-political, economic, and institutional factors influencing voter turnout. Using a mixed-method approach, the research incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, including surveys and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with election officials, political analysts, civil society activists, political representatives, journalists, community leaders, and voters. This study seeks to identify specific reasons behind the reluctance of citizens to participate in the voting process. This study will provide an in-depth analysis of these causes and their collective impact on voter apathy, seeking to uncover why certain segments of the Bangladeshi population are disengaged from the voting process. By understanding the root causes, this research aims to propose actionable recommendations to mitigate voter apathy and enhance democratic participation in future elections.*

Introduction

A vibrant democracy relies on active and informed participation from its citizens. Voter participation is crucial for the stability and legitimacy of democratic institutions. Voting is one of the mechanisms that guides a democratic state and keeps its leaders. It helps prevent the concentration of power and promotes a more balanced and representative government. They are responsible for being informed, holding elected officials accountable, engaging in civic activities, and promoting democratic values. The fundamental role of voters is to participate in the electoral process by casting their ballots (Harder & Krosnick, 2008). High voter turnout is essential for a healthy democracy as it ensures that elected officials represent the will of the people. Voter apathy, or the lack of interest in participating in elections, is a significant issue that impacts the health of democratic processes worldwide. Unfortunately, voter apathy is a significant issue in many democratic societies, including Bangladesh. The 12th

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National Parliamentary Election provides a critical context to explore the causes of voter apathy and its impact on voter turnout. 12th national parliamentary election ended through low voter turnout. (Hye, 2024).

According to constitutional requirement 12th national parliamentary election were held in 7th January 2024 in Bangladesh, led by Awami League and incumbent Sheikh Hasina won the election for the fourth successive time. As said by, election commission less than 40% eligible voter cast their vote in that election, which is agitating for hole nations. (BBC News,2024). The then ruling party Awami League unitarily won 224 seats. Though, most of the opposition independent candidates were supported by Awami League as dummy candidates, they won 62 seats. , won 62 seats. After restoration of democracy in 1991, 12th national parliamentary election marking as second lowest voter turnout. (The New York Times, 2024). In this election voter turnout reported in Khulna 32%, Barisal 31%, Mymensingh 30%, Chittagong 28%, Rangpur 27% and Rajshahi 27%. Lowest turnout were Dhaka and Sylhet divisions respectively 26% and 23% (Bangladesh Election Commission,2024). According to the Chief Election Commissioner Finally the voter turns out in 12th national parliamentary election in Bangladesh is 41.8% (The Daily Star, 2024). The then leading opposition party (BNP) Bangladesh Nationalist Party boycotted the election as they did in 10th election, 2014. Their argument was that, under the ruling party election commission were unable to organize free, fair and credible election (AL Jazeera,2024).

In Bangladesh, voter turnout for parliamentary elections has varied over the years, with notable concerns about decreasing voter engagement. The 12th National Parliamentary Election presents a critical case for analyzing the causes behind voter apathy and understanding the implications for electoral behavior. A major factor contributing to low voter turnout is the absence of robust opposition in this election. Many voters in Bangladesh are doubtful about impartiality and transparency in this electoral process. Reports of vote rigging, manipulation, and intimidation have created widespread distrust in the system. As a result, some citizens feel that their vote would not make a difference, contributing to lower turnout. However, the election climate in Bangladesh has often been marked by political violence and intimidation, especially targeting opposition supporters. A large section of the electorate feels that no matter who wins, there will be little improvement in governance or their daily lives, which leads to voter apathy. One of the most momentous factors is the credibility of the Election Commission (EC) has been questioned, about its impartiality and capability to conduct

free, fair and credible elections. If voters believe that the EC is biased or ineffective in ensuring fair competition, they may lose confidence in the electoral system and refrain from voting.

In this light, we can observe that, In Bangladesh, a significant portion of the population is young, but youth voter turnout tends to be lower. Many young people are disconnected from traditional politics and may not feel that voting will have a meaningful impact on their lives. Therefore, these factors, individually and collectively, contribute to the low voter turnout seen in Bangladesh's 12th national parliamentary election, reflecting broader challenges in the country's electoral democracy. This research seeks to identify the underlying causes of voter apathy in Bangladesh, examine its impact on the electoral process, and propose recommendations to enhance voter participation in future elections by combining theoretical perspectives with practical data analysis methods.

Literature Review

Voter Turnout

Understanding voter turnout requires engaging with a range of theoretical perspectives, from structural and behavioral explanations to psychological and discursive frameworks. Scholars have approached the issue through both macro and micro lenses, each revealing different facets of political participation. While Mohammad (2018) highlighting the role of economic structures, on voter psychology and fear-based disengagement often prevail. In contrast, Abramson (1987) and Kirkland and Wood (2016) adopt the behavioralist approach, which works well in stable electoral systems but is ill-suited to hybrid regimes, where voter choices may be influenced by fear, repression, or disillusionment. Addressing these gaps, in these context Wade and Richardson (2021) explore the psychological model While, Becker and Mulligan (2017) explore, rational choice models to adapt voter cognition are shaped by repression, propaganda, or low civic education, like Bangladesh where structural inequalities and emotional affiliations play a larger role than utility maximization.

Voter Apathy / Voting Behavior

The reviewed literature on voter apathy and voting behavior reflects a broad interdisciplinary engagement with the phenomenon, drawing on psychological, structural, and socio-cultural lenses. The selected works of Widhyharto et al. (2020), Amos et al. (2017), and DeLuca (1995) highlight different facets of the issue, yet the

current review would benefit from a more cohesive synthesis, theoretical integration, and contextual specificity. Widhyharto et al. (2020) highlight the role of hidden social divisions, yet fail to anchor these in broader theories of class and symbolic power, such as Bourdieu's habitus. Amos et al. (2017) demonstrates that logistical barriers like polling place reassignment decrease turnout, but their largely behaviorist approach neglects the deeper structural disenfranchisement affecting lower socio-economic groups. DeLuca (1995) offers a dual theoretical model of apathy rooted in both individual choice and systemic exclusion, however, his analysis remains sufficient empirical grounding. Together, these studies reveal that voter apathy is a complex, multi-layered phenomenon. Yet, their findings, predominantly drawn from Western democracies, may inadequately capture the unique electoral dynamics of countries like Bangladesh, where informal networks, political clientelism, and security concerns further shape voter behavior.

12th National Parliament Election in Bangladesh

Voter apathy in Bangladesh has been shaped by complex interactions between institutional integrity, electoral violence, and democratic dysfunction. While Lehoucq (2003) focuses on fraud's impact on political stability, Mollah and Jahan (2018) highlight electoral violence's direct role in voter disengagement. Together, these findings suggest that perceived electoral illegitimacy whether through fraud or violence is a critical driver of apathy in Bangladesh's elections. Jones & Matthijs (2017) and Ahmed, (2018) they focused on the development, decay, and rebirth of the parliament in Bangladesh. Hasan, (2013), aimed to examine the norms, practices, institutions, and mechanism of democracy in Bangladesh.

At present, we can say that the Causes of Voter Apathy for Casting Votes in the 12th National Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh: An Analysis of Voter Turnout and Electoral Behavior, which was studied from three main perspectives: G.S., Mulligan, C.B. (2017), Mohammad Shihab Khan, (2018), Wade, J.C., Richardson, B. (2021), analyses determinants of the low voter turnout rate. Widhyharto, D. S., Rahmawati, D., & Abheseka N.M.R (2020). Mollah, M.A.H., & Jahan, R (2018) DeLuca, T. (1995) discussed Why voters become political apathy as a political role. And finally, Mollah, M. A. H., & Jahan, R. (2018) examines the causes and outcomes of violence took place centering the 10th parliamentary election in Bangladesh. The role of media as a platform for political participation and voting behavior.

Most existing studies on voter apathy in Bangladesh have analyzed previous elections, but the 12th National Parliamentary Election (2024) occurred under unique political and institutional conditions. This study fills the gap by examining contemporary voter behavior in light of recent political developments. Prior research often overlooks the role of electoral institutions, such as the Election Commission, law enforcement agencies, and administrative oversight, in influencing voter confidence and turnout. This study can explore how governance and electoral management shaped voter apathy.

Theoretical Framework

Voter Apathy

Voter apathy refers to a lack of interest, motivation, or enthusiasm among eligible voters to participate in elections. When people are apathetic about voting, they may feel that, their vote won't make difference. that the political system doesn't represent them, or that elections lack fairness or transparency. When voters believe that elections are rigged or feel their votes won't lead to meaningful change. If voters feel that all candidates are similar and also fear of violence, can also contribute to voter apathy. In essence, voter apathy reflects a general disengagement from the political process, which can lead to lower voter turnout and a less representative government.

Voter Turnout

Voter turnout is the ratio of entitled voters who really cast a ballot in an election. It's a significant measure of political participation and reflects how engaged or interested people are in the electoral process. High voter turnout generally indicates a healthy level of public interest in the election and confidence in the democratic system, while low turnout can suggest voter apathy, disillusionment, or barriers preventing people from voting. High turnout is typically seen as positive, indicating broad public engagement, while low turnout can raise concerns about political

Rational Choice Theory:

This theory suggests that voters make decision based on cost benefit analysis, weighing the perceived benefits of voting against the effort required to participate. RCT assumes that voters act rationally by weighing the costs and benefits of voting. If the expected benefits outweigh the costs, they will vote; otherwise, they will abstain.

Formula:

$$R = PB - C + D$$

R = Probability of voting

P = Probability that one's vote will influence the outcome (usually very low)

B = Benefit derived from the preferred candidate winning

C = Cost of voting (time, effort, risk, etc.)

D = Psychological or civic duty satisfaction (Ferejohn, Fiorina, & McKelvey, 1987).

If R is negative or close to zero, voter apathy occurs. If voters believe the election is not competitive (e.g., opposition boycott or rigging), they see no benefit in voting. If major parties do not present clear ideological alternatives, voters feel indifferent. Many voters don't see an immediate personal gain from voting (Ahmed, Hodler & Islam, 2024).

In Bangladesh, election-related violence, arrests, or harassment increase the cost of voting. Long queues, inadequate polling stations, or difficult access deter voters. Daily wage laborers may lose income if they take time off to vote. Low Psychological or Civic Motivation (D is low) people believe the election will be manipulated, they feel their vote doesn't matter. Over time, repeated experiences of unfair elections reduce civic duty motivation. Corruption and broken promises weaken voters' sense of responsibility.

Political Alienation Theory:

According to this theory, voters may feel disillusioned or powerless, believing that their vote does not matter or that the political system is indifferent to their needs. Political Alienation Theory explains why individuals feel disconnected, disempowered, or disinterested in political processes, leading to lower participation, including voter apathy. It is often used to analyze declining political engagement, especially in the contexts where people perceive elections as unfair or meaningless (Wentz, 2016).

Types of Political Alienation

- 1) **Political Powerlessness:** Voters feel their participation has no impact on government decisions or policies.
- 2) **Political Meaninglessness:** People believe politicians do not represent their interests or that the system is corrupt.
- 3) **Political Normlessness (Anomie):** Individuals perceive widespread violations of political norms (e.g., electoral fraud, violence, repression).
- 4) **Political Isolation:** Citizens feel disconnected from mainstream political discourse and parties.

Political Cynicism: Distrust in politicians and institutions leads to skepticism about political participation (Wood, 2014).

Political alienation can help explain low voter turnout and electoral disengagement in Bangladesh's 2024 election. If voters believe outcomes are predetermined, they feel powerless. The absence of a strong opposition candidate reduces voter motivation. When people see politics as benefiting elites rather than the public, they disengage. Intimidation tactics can make voters feel isolated from the system.

Methodology

The study was conducted using a mixed -method approach, qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. A survey questionnaire has been designed for a quantitative study. The primary and secondary data were collected to complete this study. The Key Informants Interviews (KIIs) were gathered as a qualitative study due to primary data collection. Twenty-five KIIs have already been conducted regarding qualitative methods for primary data collection. The target population included, election officials (Election Commission representatives), political analysts and academics, civil society and human rights activists, political party representatives, journalists and media professional, local community leaders, voters (both those who participated and those who abstained). The study has maintained research ethics throughout the process. The research has reviewed several secondary documents from authentic publications, websites, newspapers, articles, peer review journals, books, and printed documents.

Results and Discussion

1.Voter Turnout Trends and Patterns

The 12th National Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh, held on January 7, 2024, experienced a significant decline in voter turnout compared to previous elections. According to the Election Commission, the overall voter turnout was approximately 41.99%. Though the overall voter turnout was 41.99% in the 12th parliamentary election on more than 60% of registered voters cast their ballots in 21 constituencies and less than 30% voted in at least 52 constituencies. (Bangladesh Election Commission, 2024). This marks a substantial decrease from the 2018 general election, which recorded a turnout exceeding 80%. Historically, Bangladesh has seen higher voter participation rates:

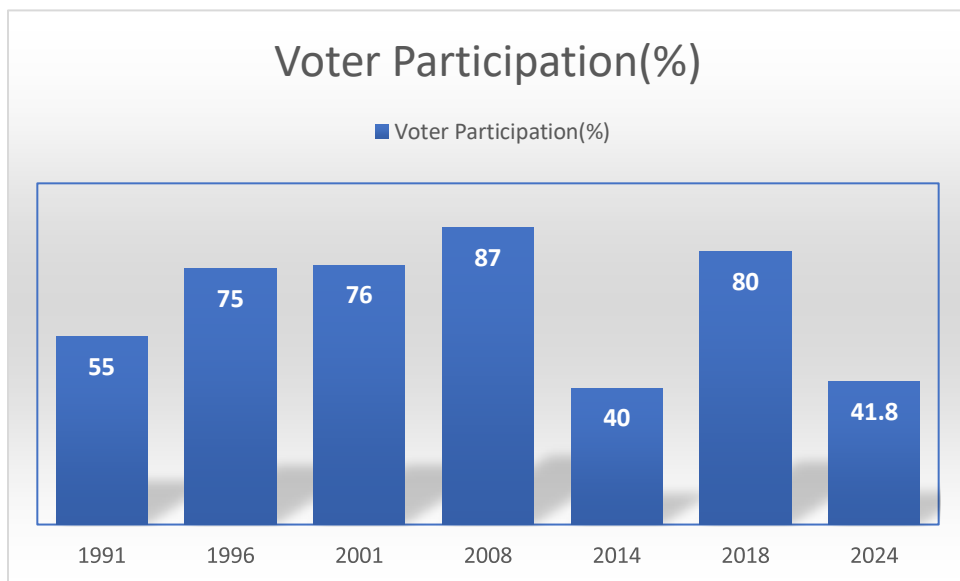


Figure-1: Voter Turnout Trends and Patterns

Source: Bangladesh Election Commission, 2024

These figures indicate significant fluctuations in voter turnout over the years, with notably low participation in the 2014 and 2024 elections. These charts representing the causes of voter apathy in the 12th National Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh.

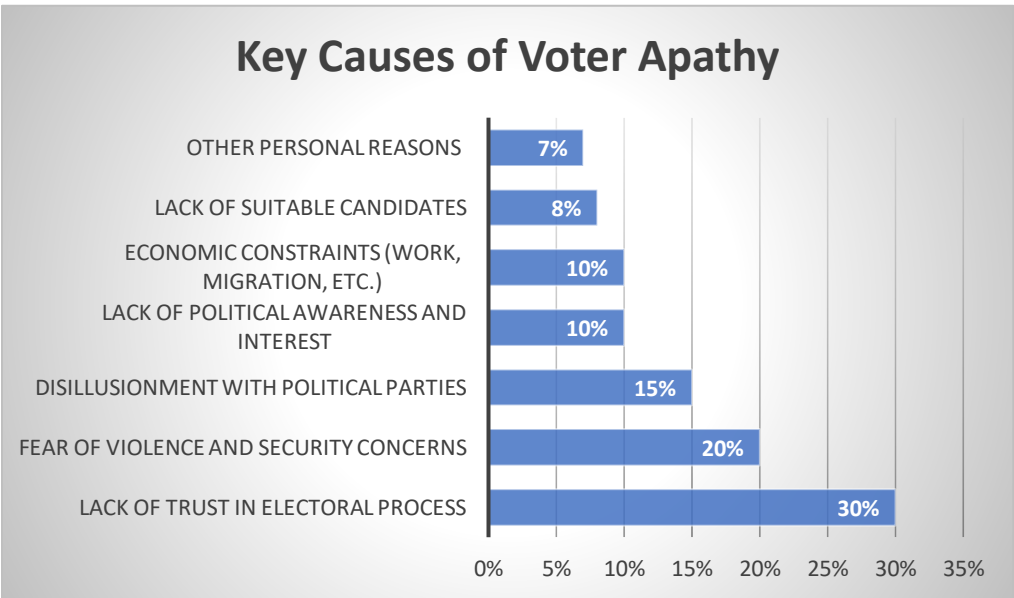


Figure-2: Key Causes of Voter Apathy

The largest factor is the lack of trust in the electoral (30%), followed by fear of violence and security concerns (20%) and disillusionment with political parties (15%).

The 2024 election's lower turnout reflects a notable shift in voter engagement, indicating potential factors contributing to voter apathy that warrant further investigation. In this election the then ruling party candidates won 222 seats. Independent candidates, mostly aligned with the Awami League (AL), won 62 seats. Additionally, the Jatiya Party secured 11 seats, while one candidate each from the Bangladesh Workers' Party, Jatiya Samajtantrikh Dal and Bangladesh Kalyan Party won a seat. (The Diplomat, 2024). Voting was suspended at one center in Mymensingh-3 and a new election will take place there on January 13. The election was held in 299 out of 300 constituencies, as the Election Commission had postponed the election in Naogaon-2 after the death of independent candidate Aminul Haq, a former Awami League leader. (The Daily star,2024). Though, the highest voter turnout was 87.24% in Gopalganj-3, where the then Awami League president and prime minister Sheikh

Hasina won the election. The lowest turnout was 13.04% in Dhaka-15 where Kamal Ahmed Majumdar, a candidate from the AL, won the election (The Business Standards, 2024).

However, high voter turnout would enhance the legitimacy and credibility of the election. It implies that greater participation signals public confidence in the electoral process and reduces doubts about manipulation or lack of representation. If there is a healthy turnout, it will be work in favors of the election and its credibility (Anonymous², 2024). In 12th National Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh there were regional variations in voter turnout was higher in rural areas compared to urban areas. Many people in cities don't vote, and others live or work abroad. These factors should be considered when looking at voter turnout (Anonymous³, 2024). A low voter turnout, described often signals deeper issues within the electoral process or the political environment. If the ruling party or dominant candidate is perceived as having a guaranteed victory, voters may feel their participation is meaningless. We have never seen an election with so few voters. In the 2014 and 2018 elections, there were always people standing in line. But this time, 2024, there was no line all day, and only a few voters showed up to cast their votes (Anonymous⁴, 2024). If citizens feel that their votes don't matter, especially in environments where the political process is perceived as unfair or corrupt, they may choose to abstain. This can happen in situations where voters feel there's little to no difference between the candidates or parties. (Anonymous⁵, 2024) was not seen any voters gathering or waiting outside of the center. There was small voter queue. Moreover, none of the centers had any voter queue. Due to this condition, election officials at the booths were seen gossiping among each other. Besides this, police and ansar personnel were passing idly time. (Anonymous⁶, 2024). Similarly, only Awami League candidate's polling agents were seen at the centers. Jatiya Party and Trinamool BNP were not present at all polling booths. The absence of polling agents from certain parties like Jatiya Party and BNP. While only presence of the Awami League (AL) representatives, at polling stations which raises significant concerns about the impartiality and competitiveness of the election process. However,

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we see political discussion everywhere, from tea stalls to street corners. So, it feels strange that there are no candidates in a democratic country. The lack of fairness and transparency along with low voter turnout, has made people lose interest in voting. Young people, in participation, don't feel motivation to take part in an election they see as unfair, which has reduced their excitement about it (Anonymous⁶, 2024). Usually, people of Bangladesh make election as festivities but this festive mood was no longer exists in the election. There were lack of potential candidate in upazila election, the voting system was not competitive. (Anonymous⁷, 2024)

2. Political and Institutional Factors

Public trust in political institutions and the electoral process in Bangladesh has been declining over time, shaped by persistent concerns over electoral integrity, political partisanship, and governance issues. Due to these issues, a growing sense of electoral apathy has emerged, with many voters believing that elections are mere formalities rather than a means of meaningful political participation. However, trust fluctuates depending on political cycles, the role of opposition movements, and external pressures on the government to uphold democratic norms.

Lack of Competitive Elections

The 12th National Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh, was widely criticized for its lack of electoral competition, raising concerns about democratic legitimacy, political inclusiveness, and voter participation. The absence of a meaningful contest was driven by a combination of political, institutional, and structural factors, making the election largely one-sided. Raising concerns about electoral integrity, democratic legitimacy, and voter apathy. On the other hand, 12th national parliamentary election was characterized by toxic politics due to boycott of the opposition, restriction o opposition, suppression, voting indiscretions and extensive violence. All of these are symbol of lack of inclusion, healthy competition, operational integrity, legitimacy, security, credibility and voter participation (Ruhullah, Ushama, & binti Norman, 2024).

The main opposition (BNP) Bangladesh Nationalist Party boycotting for the third national election in a row, citing concerns over the lack of a neutral caretaker government and unfair electoral conditions. This boycott left only smaller opposition parties and independent candidates in the race, making the election a contest primarily

⁷ Anonymous

within the ruling party rather than against strong challengers. Without BNP's participation, voters had no real alternative, leading to widespread political disengagement (Al Jazeera, 2024).

Although, Bangladesh's political system and laws require regular and competitive elections, but the election process has many weaknesses. These problems keep repeating in every election, making people lose trust in the government's ability to hold fair elections. Although the country has an independent election body, many people believe it is not truly independent (Shehabuddin, 2016).

Public Perception of Electoral Integrity

The 2024 general election in Bangladesh was marred by widespread allegations of electoral fraud and vote rigging, leading to significant political turmoil. The then governing party, Awami League (AL), held nearly 75% of the parliamentary seats, but the election faced severe criticism for various irregularities (The Daily Star, 2024). International observers and human rights organizations criticized the election for not being free and fair. Human Rights Watch reported extensive suppression and violence against opposition members ahead of the election, undermining the credibility of the vote (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) published a report indicating that the election was one-sided and lacked true competition with 241 out of 300 constituencies having lacked true competition. The report also noted that 41.8% of polling occurred, including a controversial 15.43% in the last hour of voting, raising questions about the integrity of the process (Transparency International Bangladesh, 2024).

Elections in Bangladesh are heavily influenced by money and patronage networks, where candidates often rely on business elites, local strongmen, and party loyalty rather than policy platforms. This creates a perception that elections are more about personal gain than public service, discouraging voter engagement. In the 2024 general election in Bangladesh, Pre-election periods often see arrests of opposition leaders, intimidation of voters, and clashes between party activists. Violence discourages voter turnout, especially among marginalized communities who fear reprisals (The Daily Star, 2025). The 12th general election lacked credibility and fairness, raising serious concerns. As a result, Bangladesh is likely to face another five years of intense political conflict, division, and even violence. This ongoing political deadlock could lead to serious long-term problems for the country.

3. Institutional Factors

Institutional factors focus on how electoral institutions, legal frameworks, and administrative mechanisms affect public trust in elections.

Election Commission (EC) and Perceived Bias

The 2024 general election in Bangladesh faced significant criticism over the perceived bias and performance of the Election Commission (EC). The then EC, led by chief Election Commissioner, Kazi Habibul Awal, oversaw the 12th national election, which was marred by allegations of irregularities and boycott by main opposition parties, including the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. Critics accused the then EC of failing to address violations of the electoral code of conduct and of being complicit in advancing a one-sided agenda favoring the ruling party (The Financial Express, 2024)

In response to the widespread criticism and following a mass uprising that led to the end of Sheikh Hasina's 17 years rule, The then EC resigned in September 2024. Subsequently, a new commission under CEC Nasir Uddin was appointed in November 2024. The reconstituted EC has pledged to investigate irregularities in past elections, particularly those held in 2014, 2018, and 2024, with the aim of restoring public trust and ensuring that future elections are free, fair, and impartial. CEC Nasir Uddin has emphasized the need for electoral reforms and has stated that the date of the next election will be determined after implementing required changes. He has assured the public of the EC's commitment to conducting inclusive elections that guarantee equal opportunities for all political parties (The Daily Star, 2024).

These developments reflect the EC's recognition of past shortcomings and its efforts to address concerns regarding its impartiality and effectiveness in administering elections in Bangladesh. The Election Commission's independence has been questioned, as it has been accused of failing to act against election irregularities. In Bangladesh, opposition groups have frequently accused the EC of bias, leading to large-scale protests before and after elections. Due to biasness of EC voter turnout dropped in 12th national election in 2024, especially among opposition supporters which led to political disengagement in that election (Anonymous⁸, 2024) A lack of transparency in electoral management, such as delays in publishing results, ignoring complaints, or refusing

⁸ Anonymous

international observers, has damaged credibility of Bangladesh Election Commission or BEC (Anonymous⁹, 2024).

Role of Bureaucracy and Law Enforcement

The role of bureaucracy and law enforcement agencies in the 12th National Election of Bangladesh (January 7, 2024) was highly significant and controversial. Given Bangladesh's history of electoral disputes and allegations of state influence over election-related institutions, these entities played a vital role in shaping both the pre-election setting and election-day dynamics. Police, intelligence agencies, and local administration have been accused of favoring the ruling party by suppressing opposition activities (International Federation for Human Rights, 2024).

The bureaucracy, particularly the civil administration, was instrumental in election management, voter mobilization, and maintaining order. However, these formed concerns about partisan influence and lack of neutrality raised serious questions about its role. The Election Commission (EC), along with district and upazila-level bureaucrats, managed polling centers, voting materials, and election personnel (Mashiur, Fahad & Salma, 2018). Allegations surfaced that some officials were instructed to favor the then ruling Awami League (AL). In the pre-election context, the returning officers (mostly government bureaucrats) had the authority to validate or reject nomination papers. Opposition candidates, particularly from the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), faced legal and administrative hurdles, leading to mass disqualifications (Anonymous¹⁰, 2024).

Bureaucracy and law enforcement agencies as acting in favor of the then ruling party (Awami League) rather than ensuring a free and fair election. Which shaped concerned that, state institutions were being politicized (Anonymous¹¹, 2024). Similarly, it warned that the bureaucracy and law enforcement's role in suppressing opposition could push Bangladesh further into authoritarian rule (Anonymous¹², 2024). Independent and opposition-aligned media houses reported election irregularities, police crackdowns,

⁹ Anonymous

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and mass arrests. However, pro-government media largely ignored or downplayed these reports. Some journalists faced harassment or threats for reporting on election fraud (Anonymous¹³). In many places, activists supporting AL candidates filled ballot boxes with extra votes in the final hours of voting.

The bureaucracy and law enforcement agencies were pivotal in shaping the consequence the of the 12th National Election in Bangladesh. Their perceived bias and suppression of opposition activities undermined electoral integrity and further entrenched authoritarian tendencies rather than democracy (The Daily Star, 2024).

4. Role of International and Domestic Election Observers

In Bangladesh's 12th national election, both international and domestic election observers played crucial roles in promoting transparency, fairness, and public confidence in the electoral process.

Role of International Election Observer

International observers, such as those from the European Union, The Commonwealth, and the International Republican Institute, were invited to monitor the election. A group of observers, including political analysts, former congressmen, and journalists from the US, Australia, Norway, Germany, Japan, and Ireland, visited 20 polling stations in Dhaka and nearby areas during the election on January 7. Their primary functions included assessing the electoral process's adherence to international standards, evaluating the impartiality of election management bodies, and ensuring that the voting environment was free from intimidation and coercion. These observers provided impartial assessments, which were instrumental in validating the election's credibility on a global scale (Prothom Alo, 2024). For instance, after the vote on January 7, 2024, many international observers acknowledged that the election was conducted freely and fairly, praising the efficiency of Bangladesh's Election Commission (The Business Standard, 2024).

Domestic Election Observers

Domestic election observers in Bangladesh have expressed significant concerns regarding the 12th national election. Domestic observers, familiar with the local context, monitored various aspects of the electoral process, including voter registration, the

¹³ Anonymous

criticism process, instances of pressure, human rights abuse, and media coverage. Their deep understanding of the local language and culture enabled them to observe more extensively across the country and throughout the election cycle. Domestic observers can specialize in certain aspects of election observation, while international observer cover the election process as a whole. They can more efficiently verify the voter role, observe the protest voter role, observe the protest process, document instance of intimidation and human rights abuses and monitor the media (Transparency International Bangladesh, 2024). The election was characterized by a lack of competition, with many constituencies witnessing uncontested seats or minimal opposition, leading to questions about the overall inclusivity of the electoral process (Anonymous¹⁴). The pre-election period leading up to the election the election was marred by violence, particularly during strikes and protests organized by the major opposition part, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). This unrest fostered an atmosphere of fear among citizens (Anonymous¹⁵).

The collaboration between international and domestic observers enhanced the overall integrity of the electoral process. International observers provided an external perspective, lending credibility and global legitimacy to the election outcomes. Domestic observers offered detailed insights into local dynamics, ensuring that specific regional issues were addressed. This synergy helped in identifying areas for improvement and in formulating recommendations to strengthen future electoral processes (ACE, The Electoral Knowledge Network, 2006).

The Socio-Economic and Psychological Factors

The Socio-Economic Factors

In the context of Bangladesh's 12th National Parliamentary Election, several socio-economic factors significantly influenced voter turnout and electoral behavior. Economic Disparities is one of the key factors to influenced voter turnout and electoral behavior. The composition of the newly elected parliament highlighted economic inequalities. A significant majority of the Members of Parliament (MPs) were affluent, with 90% possessing wealth exceeding Tk 10 million, while only 3% had assets below Tk 2.5 million. This disparity may have led lower-income citizens to feel underrepresented, potentially diminishing their motivation to vote (Baldersheim, Jamil & Aminuzzaman, 2001).

¹⁴ anonymous

¹⁵ anonymous

In 12th National Parliamentary Election, the urban-rural divide in voter turnout presents a complex dynamic influenced by multiple political and structural factors. While rural areas may face logistical challenges, the actual turnout pattern does not always align with the conventional expectation that urban voters participate more due to better accessibility. Urban areas, particularly in Dhaka and other major cities, have better access to polling stations and political information. However, turnout in urban areas is often lower due to disenchantment with the political process, perceptions of election manipulation, and security concerns (Baldersheim, Jamil & Aminuzzaman, 2001). While rural areas face logistical barriers such as transportation issues and long distances to polling stations, turnout in these regions has historically been higher due to strong local political networks, patron-client relationships, and pressure from local elites. In the framework of 12th National Parliamentary Election, the absence of strong opposition candidates in many constituencies might have disproportionately affected urban turnout, where voters are generally more aware of political alternatives. In rural areas, voters may still turn out due to social obligations, incentives, or coercion from local political actors, maintaining relatively higher participation rates. The 2018 election saw high reported turnout amid allegations of vote rigging and ballot stuffing (Amegnan, 2017).

On the other hand, in 2024, with the opposition boycott and reduced electoral competition, turnout reportedly declined, with urban areas showing particularly low participation. The urban-rural divide in voter turnout in the 12th National Parliamentary Election was shaped not just by access to polling facilities but by political mobilization, local influences, and perceptions of electoral legitimacy. While rural areas may have faced logistical challenges, they likely saw higher turnout due to political pressures, while urban areas experienced greater voter apathy due to skepticism about the electoral process (Al Jazeera, 2024).

Psychological Factors

During the 12th National Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh many voters believe the election was not free and fair, the election was not free and fair, citing allegations of vote rigging, intimidation, and lack of opposition participation. They argue that the Election Commission is biased and fails to ensure a level playing field. Some voters' express frustration over the absence of a strong opposition, leading them to view the

election as one-sided or predetermined. They feel disillusioned and believe that voting is pointless, reinforcing political apathy (Al-Zaman & Noman 2024).

However, voters report being afraid of violence, threats, or repercussions if they vote against the then ruling party. There are concerns over coercion, ballot stuffing, and voter suppression, which make them hesitant to participate. Many feel a sense of learned helplessness, believing that no matter how they vote, the outcome is already decided (Anonymous¹⁶). A segment of voters, especially young and first-time voters, express disinterest in politics due to lack of faith in the system. They believe elections in Bangladesh are always manipulated, leading them to avoid voting altogether. Some feel both the ruling party and opposition have failed them, leading to complete disengagement from political participation (Daily Star, 224).

A combination of socio-economic and psychological factors contributes to voter apathy in Bangladesh's 12th National Parliamentary Election. Addressing these issues through electoral reforms, public awareness campaigns, and improved governance can enhance voter participation in future elections (Mollah & Jahan, 2018).

Electoral Administration and Campaigning

The electoral administration and campaigning process played a crucial role in shaping voter participation and electoral outcomes. The 12th national election of Bangladesh was marked by low voter turnout, opposition boycotts, electoral irregularities, and questions about democratic legitimacy.

Role and Credibility of the Election Commission (EC)

The 12th National Parliamentary Election of Bangladesh was led by the then Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal, along with commissioners Md. Alamgir, Anisur Rahman, Rashida Sultana Emily, and Ahsan Habib Khan, who supervised the electoral process. (The Daily Star, 2022). The then EC was accused of lacking independence and being influenced by the then ruling party, Awami League (AL). Opposition parties, particularly BNP, alleged that the then EC failed to ensure a level playing field, leading to boycott of the election. The EC's inability to address voter concerns, irregularities, and election-related violence contributed to low public trust (Al Jazeera, 2024).

Though, the EC successfully completed voter registration and polling station management, but concerns arose regarding accessibility for all political groups. Reports

¹⁶ anonymous

emerged that some polling centers in opposition-stronghold areas experienced restrictions, intimidation, or manipulation, affecting voter participation (Bangladesh Election Commission, 2024). The deployment of law enforcement agencies and administrative officials was criticized for allegedly suppressing opposition activities rather than ensuring a peaceful voting process (Martin, 2021). However, reports from domestic and international observers suggested that the election lacked full transparency, with allegations of ballot stuffing and pre-marked ballots, low voter turnout but inflated official figures, voter suppression tactics, including intimidation of opposition supporters. These concerns led voters to believe that the election did not reflect the true will of the people (The Daily Star, 2024). The then EC introduced EVMs in selected constituencies, but the then opposition parties opposed their use, citing concerns over potential vote manipulation. Technical difficulties and a lack of voter awareness about EVMs led to confusion and further skepticism (Sayem, 2023).

Political Campaigning

The campaigning process in the 12th National Parliamentary Election was dominated by the then ruling party, as major opposition parties either boycotted or faced state-imposed restrictions. The main opposition BNP and several opposition groups boycotted the election, alleging that it would not be free or fair. The absence of a competitive multi-party contest led to low voter enthusiasm and a predetermined election outcome. The ruling Awami League (AL) and its allies campaigned extensively, but the lack of strong opposition led to one-sided political discourse (Hossain, 2024).

As campaign strategies and media influence the AL used state resources, the then government-controlled media, and local administration support to strengthen its campaign. Opposition candidates and supporters faced legal cases, arrests, and restrictions on rallies, limiting their ability to campaign. State-controlled and pro-government media promoted the then ruling party's agenda while downplaying opposition grievances. Social media was used for political propaganda, misinformation, and counter-narratives (Mahmud & Amin, 2017). The pre-election period saw widespread political violence, with clashes between police and opposition activists. Arrests and legal cases against opposition leaders and activists led to a climate of fear and restricted political participation. On election day, reports surfaced of intimidation tactics at polling stations, further discouraging opposition-leaning voters

(Anonymous¹⁷). The ruling party mobilized its support base through local party structures, patronage networks, and incentives. The EC and civil society organizations attempted voter awareness campaigns, but their effectiveness was limited due to widespread voter skepticism. The opposition's boycott strategy led to disengagement among opposition voters, further lowering turnout (Opeyemi, 2018).

The 12th national election of Bangladesh was marred by allegations of unfair electoral administration, an opposition boycott, political violence, and voter apathy (VOA, Bangladesh, 2024). The United States, European Union, and other international observers raised questions about electoral credibility, while the then Bangladeshi government defended the process as legitimate (The Business Standard, 2024). The lack of genuine competition and public skepticism toward the electoral process resulted in low voter turnout and disengagement from electoral politics. This election further deepened concerns about democratic backsliding and the future of fair electoral practices in Bangladesh. The psychological impact of past electoral violence increases a sense of learned helplessness, where people believe their votes will not change the outcome.

Media Influence and Public Discourse

As we know 'Media' refers to the various communication channels used to disseminate information to the public. To shape public opinion, influencing political discourse, and informing citizens about current events it plays significant role. The media's role in shaping public discourse significantly contributed to voter apathy in the 12th national election in Bangladesh. The combination of state-controlled narratives, social media misinformation, lack of electoral debates, and widespread skepticism created an environment where many voters felt disillusioned, fearful, or indifferent toward the election (Latif, Samad, Rinawulandari, & Kadir, 2024). As a result, voter turnout was negatively affected, reinforcing concerns about democratic backsliding and political disengagement.

The Role of Traditional Media

Traditional media played a significant role in shaping voter perception, either by influencing public discourse in favor of the then ruling party or by failing to provide diverse viewpoints. As traditional media in Bangladesh, especially state-owned

¹⁷ anonymous

television (BTV) and government-aligned newspapers, played a significant role in shaping the election discourse. Coverage was often skewed in favor of the then ruling party, with opposition parties receiving limited airtime or negative portrayals. Government-backed media emphasized stability, development, and electoral legitimacy while downplaying allegations of electoral fraud and repression (Mou, 2023). Similarly, government-aligned television channels and newspapers framed the election as a smooth democratic process, downplaying concerns about fairness, opposition suppression, and electoral integrity. On the other hand, many opposition voices were either ignored or framed as disruptive elements, reducing voters' access to diverse perspectives. Many opposition leaders and activists were either denied media coverage or presented negatively, reducing the visibility of alternative political choices (Norris, 2022). Due to fear of the then government backlash or legal restrictions such as the Digital Security Act, many media outlets avoided reporting on electoral irregularities, suppressing critical discourse that could have mobilized voters (Anonymous¹⁸).

This lack of transparency and pluralistic debate contributed to voter apathy, as many citizens felt the election was one-sided and predetermined. Also, lack of balanced coverage eroded public trust in the electoral process, leading to disillusionment and apathy among voters. The controlled and biased coverage by traditional media played a significant role in shaping voter apathy in 12th national election election in Bangladesh (Anonymous¹⁹). The lack of pluralistic debate, investigative journalism, and fair representation of opposition voices contributed to voter disengagement and cynicism. Furthermore, media-induced fear, low public trust, and limited issue-based reporting discouraged many citizens from casting their votes, reinforcing the perception that the electoral process was neither free nor meaningful (Latif, Samad, Rinawulandari, & Kadir, 2024).

Social Media and the Spread of Political Disinformation

With traditional media often controlled or censored, social media platform such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Tok-tok became crucial spaces for political discourse during the 12th National Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh (Anonymous²⁰). These

¹⁸ Anonymous

¹⁹ Anonymous

²⁰ Anonymous

platforms allowed citizens to express opinions, engage in debates, and access alternative sources of election-related information that were not available on state-controlled television or newspapers. Social media enabled opposition groups, independent activists, and civil society organizations to share their perspectives. Platforms like YouTube and Facebook Live were used by political commentators to discuss election-related issues, even when mainstream media avoided them (Ogolla, Kwanya, 2024). Social media was a key tool in 12th National Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh for mobilizing voters, especially among younger demographics who rely heavily on digital platforms for information. Political parties, candidates, and activists used Facebook and YouTube with voters, promote manifestos and organize virtual rallies (Anonymous²¹). On the other hand, ordinary citizens played an active role by posting videos, live-streaming election events, and exposing electoral irregularities. However, despite its potential for mobilization, social media also contributed to voter apathy due to the spread of misinformation and political polarization (Balo & Shawon, 2019).

While social media provided alternative narratives, it also became a battleground for fake news, propaganda, and fear-based narratives that discouraged voter participation. Similarly, false claims about election boycotts, rigging, and security threats created confusion and uncertainty. Reports of government monitoring of social media activity led to self-censorship among activists and journalists. Besides these, opposition supporters and independent voices faced online threats, hacking attempts, and harassment, discouraging political activism ((Anonymous²²).

Public discourse on social media was highly polarized, with different groups using digital platforms to push competing narratives about the election's credibility. Supporters of the ruling party used social media to emphasize economic development and stability, portraying the election as free and fair. On the other hand, opposition groups highlighted issues of voter suppression, lack of electoral competition, and alleged fraud, framing the election as illegitimate. Social media also played a role in bringing international scrutiny to the election, as global news agencies and human rights organizations monitored online discussions (Anonymous²³)

²¹ Anonymous

²² Anonymous

²³ Anonymous

As digital activism grew, the government took steps to control and restrict online political activities 12th National Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh. On election day and during key political events, internet speed reductions were reported, limiting access to independent news source. Several opposition supporters and online activists faced legal actions under the Digital Security Act for social media posts critical of the election ((Anonymous²⁴).

The Role of Civil Society and Independent Voices

The broader public discourse shaped by media, political leaders, and civil society and had a significant impact on voter enthusiasm in 12th National Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh. The absence of a strong opposition presence in many constituencies led to discussions about the meaninglessness of voting, discouraging participation. Reports of pre-election violence, voter intimidation, and ballot-stuffing dominated public discourse, making many voters fearful or disillusioned. Global media and international organizations raised concerns about the election's credibility, reinforcing perceptions that the results were pre-determined. When public discourse is dominated by skepticism, fear, and disillusionment, voter apathy naturally increases (Anonymous²⁵). Despite state control over mainstream media, some civil society organizations, independent journalists, and election monitors attempted to provide neutral election coverage. Many civil society groups faced restrictions, arrests, or financial pressures, limiting their ability to educate voters. Unlike in many democracies, Bangladesh saw very few public forums or candidate debates, reducing voter engagement. Without a vibrant and independent civil discourse, many voters remained disconnected from the electoral process (Tasnim, 2017).

Demographic Differences in Voting Behavior

To explore demographic differences in voting behavior in the 12th National Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh, we can analyze voter turnout based on key demographic factors:

1. Age Group
2. Income Level

²⁴ Anonymous

²⁵ Anonymous

3. Education Level

4. Regional Variations (Urban vs. Rural)

Now, I will generate four pie charts to visualize how voter turnout varied across these demographic categories.

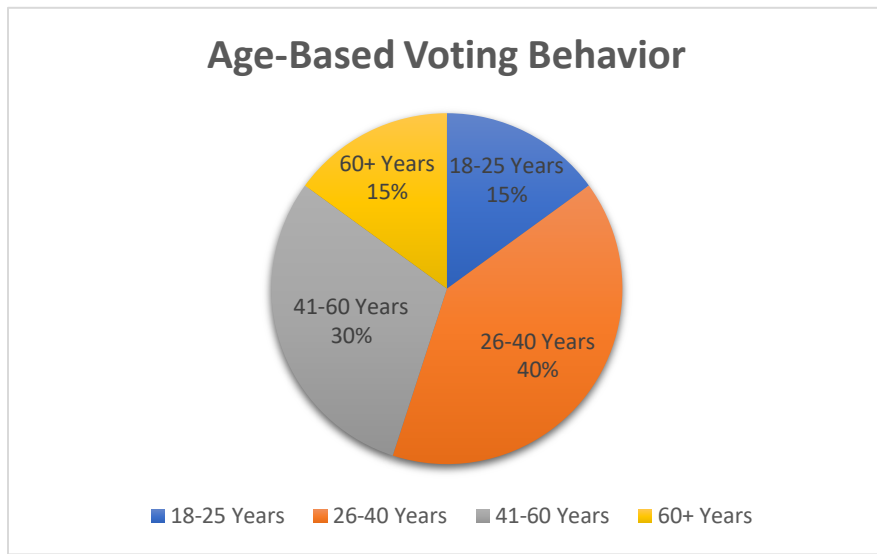


Figure-3: Age-Based Voting Behavior

Younger Voters (18-25 years), generally show lower voter turnout due to political apathy, migration for education/jobs, and skepticism about electoral impact. Middle-Aged Voters (26-40 years), highest voter turnout, as they are more engaged in political and economic stability. Older Voters (41-60 years and 60+ years), more likely to vote due to strong political affiliations and traditional participation in elections. Older citizens tend to vote more actively than younger voters.

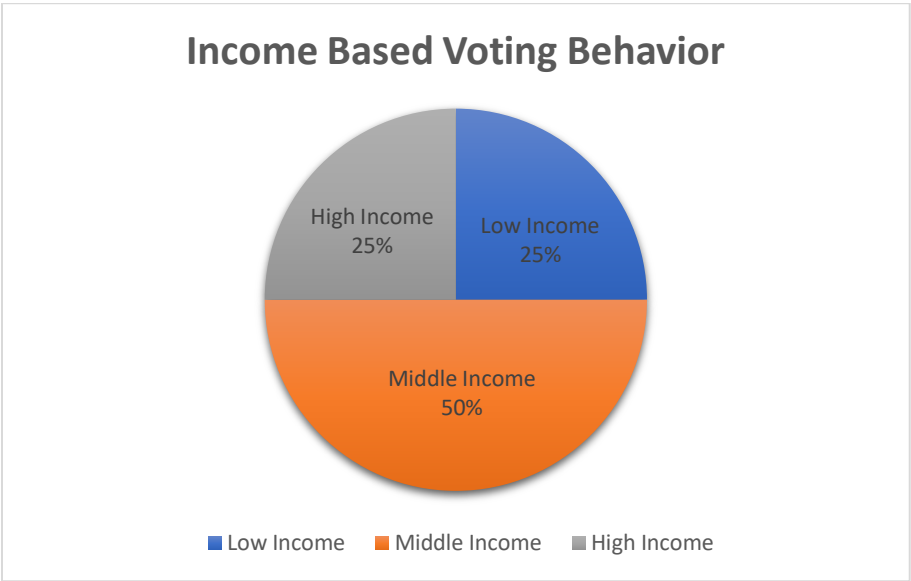


Figure-4: Income-Based Voting Behavior

Low-Income Group, faces challenges like work obligations and lack of transportation, leading to lower voter turnout. Middle-Income Group, most engaged in voting, as they seek economic stability and policy benefits. High-Income Group, often disengaged, believing that election outcomes have minimal personal impact. Middle-income voters show the highest turnout, while low-income groups face practical voting barriers.

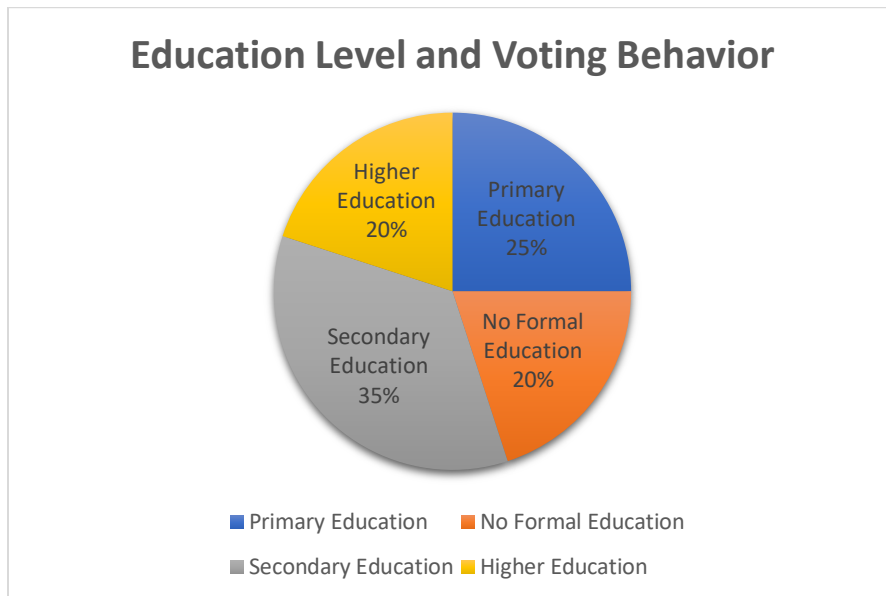


Figure-5: Education Level and Voting Behavior

No Formal Education participation is influenced by community mobilization and traditional party loyalty. Primary Education: Moderate turnout, with voting decisions often influenced by family or local leaders. Secondary and Higher Education: More critical of the political system; some avoid voting due to distrust in the electoral process. Voters with secondary education show the highest engagement, while those with higher education often express political disillusionment.

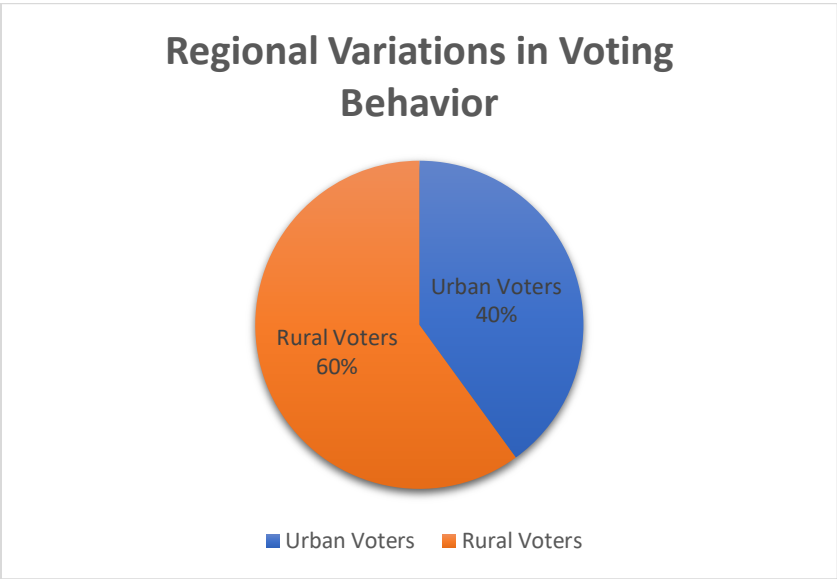


Figure-6: Regional Variations in Voting Behavior

Urban Voters are more skeptical of elections, affected by political disillusionment, and often engaged in protests or alternative political activities rather than voting. On the other hand, rural voters are higher turnout, often influenced by local political leaders, traditional party loyalty, and community mobilization. So, rural areas generally have higher voter turnout than urban areas.

Comparative Analysis of Voter Apathy in the 12th National Election with Past Elections

Voter apathy in Bangladesh has varied across different national elections, influenced by factors such as political competition, election credibility, security concerns, and media influence. The 12th National Parliamentary Election (2024) showed a notably low voter turnout, marking a significant shift in electoral behavior. A comparison with past elections reveals patterns of declining political engagement, growing distrust in the electoral process, and changing voter motivations.

Voter Turnout Trends: A Declining Pattern

Voter turnout in Bangladesh's general elections has historically been relatively high but has fluctuated based on political contexts.

Table-1: Voter Turnout Trends: A Declining Pattern

Election Year	Voter Turnout (%)	Key Characteristics
2008 (9th)	87.13%	Competitive, participatory, opposition engaged
2014 (10th)	40.04%	Boycotted by BNP-led opposition, one-sided election
2018 (11th)	80.20%	Allegations of fraud, controlled participation
2024 (12th)	41.8%	Opposition boycott, low enthusiasm, legitimacy concerns

The sharp decline in turnout in 2024 mirrors the 2014 election, where the main opposition (BNP) also boycotted, resulting in uncontested seats and low public interest. However, unlike 2014, where voter suppression through violence played a role, the 2024 election was characterized more by apathy and disillusionment rather than physical intimidation.

Political Competition and Electoral Legitimacy

In 2008, 9th National Parliamentary Election, a highly competitive election where both Awami League and BNP actively participated, leading to a record-high turnout. In 2010, 10th National Parliamentary Election, BNP's boycott led to 153 uncontested seats, causing voter disengagement as the election became one-sided. In 2018, 11th National Parliamentary Election, opposition participated but alleged massive electoral fraud, ballot-stuffing, and vote rigging, raising doubts about the legitimacy of the results. Finally in 2024, 12th National Parliamentary Election opposition boycott, lack of competition, and disillusionment over previous election irregularities contributed to voter apathy. Many citizens felt their votes would not impact the outcome.

Role of Media and Public Discourse

In 2008, 9th National Parliamentary Election, a vibrant media landscape allowed for open political debates and fair coverage, which encouraged voter engagement. In 2010, 9th National Parliamentary Election government-controlled media and limited

opposition coverage resulted in one-sided election narratives, suppressing enthusiasm. In 2018 11th National Parliamentary Election, traditional media largely supported the ruling party, while social media became an alternative platform for electoral debates. However, increased surveillance and arrests under the Digital Security Act (DSA) discouraged open discussion. In 2024, 12th National Parliamentary Election, the government further tightened control over media. Many voters expressed frustration over biased reporting, and social media was both a tool for activism and a source of misinformation, leading to confusion and disillusionment.

Influence of Electoral Violence and Repression

In 2008, 9th National Parliamentary Election was under a caretaker government with international oversight ensured fair play, reducing electoral violence and boosting participation. In 2014, 10th National Parliamentary Election, opposition repression and violence (clashes, arson attacks, blockades) created fear among voters, contributing to lower turnout. In 2018, 11th National Parliamentary Election, widespread pre-election arrests of opposition leaders, voter intimidation, and allegations of ballot fraud raised questions about fairness but still resulted in high reported turnout. In 2024, 12th National Parliamentary Election, while physical violence was lower than in 2018, mass arrests of opposition activists before the election and a lack of a viable opposition candidate created an environment where many voters felt disillusioned rather than directly threatened.

Public Trust in the Electoral Process

In 2008, 9th National Parliamentary Election, high trust in the process due to the neutral role of the caretaker government. In 2014, 10th National Parliamentary Election severe loss of trust due to the one-sided election, but some hoped for future improvements. In 2018, 11th National Parliamentary Election widespread allegations of vote rigging led to further erosion of trust. In 2024, 12th National Parliamentary Election, one of the lowest levels of public confidence in electoral integrity, as many believed the election outcome was pre-determined.

The 12th National Election (2024) marked a continuation of declining voter enthusiasm, reflecting deepening democratic backsliding and growing political disillusionment in Bangladesh. Unless future elections restore competition, transparency, and public trust, voter apathy is likely to persist or worsen.

Policy Recommendations

Bangladesh's political landscape in 2024 remains highly polarized, characterized by political dominance, opposition suppression, and concerns over democratic backsliding. The 12th National Parliamentary Election was widely criticized for lacking inclusivity, as the major opposition party, BNP boycotted the election. The ruling Awami League (AL) secured a landslide victory, extending for a fourth consecutive term (Transparency International Bangladesh, 2024).

Voter apathy in Bangladesh's 12th National Parliamentary Election (2024) can be analyzed from multiple perspectives, including political, social, and institutional factors. Voter apathy in the 12th National Parliamentary Election (2024) was influenced by political boycotts, lack of competition, declining trust in electoral integrity, and media manipulation. Comparing it with past elections (2008, 2014, 2018), several key lessons can be drawn to restore voter engagement and democratic participation in future elections. Below are some suggestions to counter voter apathy based on past electoral trends. In the past five years, Bangladesh has seen a decline in both elected government and judicial independence. The country ranks poorly in Rights (134) and Rule of Law (135), placing it among the lowest 25% in the world. A major concern is judicial independence, which both major political parties use as a tool to strengthen their power. (Spinelli, 2024).

Bangladesh's political deadlock highlights the need for fairer elections. To improve election integrity, the process should be legally, procedurally, and operationally stronger. Elections should also be more competitive and managed independently and professionally. One of the major reasons for voter apathy in 2024 was the perception that elections were pre-determined. To rebuild trust in the electoral system, need to reintroduce a neutral election-time government similar to 2008 to ensure free, fair and credible elections. Strengthen the Election Commission's independence by preventing government interference and ensuring transparent voter registration and vote counting. International election monitoring should be increased to enhance credibility and voter confidence (The Daily Star,2025).

At present, Bangladesh needs to encouraging political competition and opposition participation. Voter turnout was high in 2008 (87.13%) when all major political parties participated, while it was low in 2014 (40.04%) and 2024 (~41.8%) due to opposition boycotts. To address this: Engage opposition parties in political dialogue to encourage

their participation in future elections. Prevent mass arrests and repression of opposition leaders to create a more level playing field. Promote internal democracy within political parties so that they remain competitive and responsive to public needs (Transparency International Bangladesh, 2024).

Bangladesh political scenery need to emphasis strengthening voter confidence through transparent electoral processes. Voter apathy often results from a lack of trust in electoral integrity, as seen in the 2018 and 2024 elections, where allegations of vote rigging and unfair practices discouraged participation to restore confidence such as implement electronic voting systems with verifiable paper trails to prevent ballot-stuffing and ensure transparency. Establish independent election monitoring bodies with participation from civil society organizations. Hold debates between candidates on national platforms to allow voters to make informed choices.

Bangladesh is grappling with combating media manipulation and fake news. Both traditional and social media played a role in voter apathy by spreading biased narratives, misinformation, and election-related confusion. Compared to 2008, when media freedom was higher, the 2024 election saw state-controlled media dominance. To ensure a balanced media environment need to Protect press freedom and allow independent journalism to cover elections fairly. Strengthen media literacy programs to educate voters on identifying fake news and political propaganda. Encourage social media platforms to regulate disinformation and provide fact-checking resources.

Fear and political repression in Bangladesh have intensified, particularly with the weakening of opposition voices, shrinking democratic space, and increased state control over civil liberties. Unlike the violent voter suppression in 2014, the 2024 election saw systemic suppression through legal threats, surveillance, and arrests. This discouraged political activism and civic participation. To ensure a more democratic and inclusive political environment, the following steps can be taken, abolish restrictive laws like the Digital Security Act (DSA) that are used to silence opposition voices. Ensure a safe political environment where voters can express their opinions without fear of harassment. Should Stop using law enforcement agencies for political purposes to build public trust in institutions.

In Bangladesh, voter apathy, political repression, and public disillusionment have contributed to a decline in civic engagement and political awareness. Revitalizing public participation in democratic processes requires institutional reforms, public education, and grassroots mobilization.

In 2008, voter enthusiasm was high due to strong political mobilization. However, in 2024, voters were largely disengaged due to political disillusionment. To reinvigorate civic participation, need to introduce voter education programs in schools and universities to promote democratic awareness. Encourage grassroots movements and local political discussions to make elections more relevant to citizens. Promote youth engagement in politics

Conclusion

Voter apathy in 2024 is a direct result of declining democratic norms, lack of competition, electoral fraud, and media control. By ensuring free and fair elections, encouraging opposition participation, increasing transparency, protecting media freedom, and promoting civic education, Bangladesh can restore public confidence in the democratic process and improve voter turnout in future elections. Restoring voter enthusiasm in Bangladesh requires structural reforms, public awareness, youth engagement, and an inclusive electoral process. Without addressing the root causes of political distrust, voter turnout will continue to decline, weakening democratic participation and governance. For meaningful electoral reform in Bangladesh, the major political parties must set aside their conflicts, engage in honest discussions, and focus on the country's well-being rather than just gaining power. They need to work together to fix the ongoing problems that undermine fair and credible elections. Furthermore, strengthening independent election commissions, ensuring judicial impartiality and enforcing strict accountability for electoral misconduct are essential steps toward rebuilding trust in the voting process. Civil society organizations, academia, and international observers also play a crucial role in advocating for democratic integrity and monitoring electoral practices. Additionally, leveraging digital platforms for voter education and engagement can enhance political awareness, particularly among younger demographics. A collaborative effort involving political leaders, institutions, and citizens is necessary to create a political culture that values democratic principles, participation, and accountability. Without such collective action, the erosion of electoral credibility will persist, further alienating the electorate and deepening democratic backsliding in Bangladesh.

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