

The Role of Community Leaders in Influencing Voting Behavior: A Study of Santiganj Upazilla, Sunamganj

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Abstract: Community leaders play a crucial role in shaping voting behavior in rural areas, particularly where social networks and personal relationships have a significant influence on political decision-making. This study investigates the way in which community leaders affect voting behavior and analyzes the processes by which this impact appears in the rural areas of Bangladesh. A quantitative study design was used to collect primary data from 380 respondents in Joykolosh Union of Santiganj Upazila, Sunamganj, comprising 350 voters and 30 community leaders. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed with descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. The findings show that community leaders have a major impact on rural voters' voting decisions. Political leaders emerged as the most powerful group, followed by community and religious leaders. Key influencing mechanisms identified include regular interaction, trust-based relationships, candidate recommendation, awareness-building campaigns, problem-solving support, and direct electoral mobilization. Improving openness and accountability in local leadership structures could lead to more informed, participatory, and democratic voting processes in rural Bangladesh.

Keywords: Vote, Influence, Community leaders, Election, Political participation, Rural area.

Introduction

Voting is a common term used in democratic countries. It is the fundamental mechanism through which citizens participate in the political process and influence the direction of governance. Voting is more than just a constitutional right; it reflects citizens' political awareness, societal ideals, and belief in the democratic process. As a result, understanding how people make their voting decisions is critical for explaining larger patterns of political behavior. Voters' decisions are supreme in a democracy, and voting behavior is shaped by social, psychological, and attitudinal factors that lead to a vote. (Anil, 2018) Social, economic, political, religious, and caste factors all significantly influence this decision. People can be influenced by their leaders in their voting choices. Leadership qualities play an important role in shaping voters' support for a political party. Voters often look for specific personal traits in candidates, such as honesty, confidence, and leadership ability. Other important factors include a candidate's image in the community, their past work, and the strength of their political party at the national level. (Costa, 2015). These elements together influence how people make their voting decisions. The study of voting behavior is difficult. Because many other positive and negative reasons influence the voters. Voters

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at the time of voting are attracted by various factors, including the candidate's personality, their party affiliation, and their views, as well as the influence or pressure exerted by leaders. People develop a belief system in their socio-economic context. This belief system influences their political decision-making and voting behavior. The rural people of Bangladesh are not exceptional in this aspect. Various elements influence people's voting behavior. Political parties and community leaders use these elements to increase their chances of winning elections and influence voters in the voting process. So, the question arises here: How do the community leaders influence voting behavior in rural areas? What are the mechanisms by which community leaders influence voting behavior?

Objectives

1. To analyze the influence of community leaders on voting behavior in the rural areas.
2. To explore the mechanisms by which community leaders influence voting behavior.

Review of the Relevant Literature

(David, 2009) hold the view on how campaigns influence voters' decisions and why they matter. He also contends that campaigns shift voters' uncertainty about the candidates, leading them to reconsider their positions. (House, 1993) states that charming, transformational, and visionary leadership enhances motivation and influences voters' decisions in favor of political parties. To influence voters, party workers typically organize rallies under the direction of their leaders, who must demonstrate that they support and promote the party's vision, goals, and manifesto. (Khan et al., 2021) analyzed the influence of party leadership on voting behavior and found that the association of voting behavior and preference of local leaders in the election was significant ($P=0.024$). The leader's inspiration in voters' communities is counted in the electoral process, leaders who work for public welfare ($P = 0.011$), past performance of the leaders is a major concern ($P < 0.001$), and to influence voters by all means. (Hossain et al., 2017) explored the relationship of voting behavior with sociopolitical and economic factors by comparing the voting behavior of casting and non-casting voters and the influences of socioeconomic and political determinants of the voting behavior of local people. (Ashfaq Ahmed, 2013) states that opinion leaders play a vital role in influencing and winning supporters for a specific political party by providing appropriate information and positive recommendations within their communities. (Sheikh, 2014) says that community leaders can influence voting behavior through their charismatic personalities and by involving religious and communal factors. Factors like caste, religion, money, policy, or ideology influence voting behavior. (Biswas et al., 2022). Analyzed that race, gender, and ethnicity can influence people's voting choices and their perspectives. (Jens, 2017) investigated how election information, such as opinion polls, can influence voting intention and discovered evidence of a bandwagon effect among Danish voters. (M. Salimullah Khan, 2018) provides a valuable overview of voting patterns in Bangladesh, connecting electoral behavior to sociopolitical structures. The study explores how class, education, and local leadership influence voter participation and decision-making.

This paper is unique in that it is based directly on primary data collected from 380 participants and focuses on the influence of community leaders on voting behavior and a relevant comparison between different types of community leaders.

Methodology

Study Design

The quantitative methods consist of systematic empirical studies that involve quantifying through the assistance of mathematics and statistics (Bryman, 2007). The study used a quantitative research methodology to explore the influence of community leaders on voting behavior in Santiganj Upazila, Sunamganj. This method made it easier to collect numerical data to analyze voting patterns, relationships, and trends in community leadership.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Joykolosh union of Santiganj Upazilla of Sunamganj district, A rural region for its unique socio-economic dynamics and traditional pattern of voting behavior. The area features a close-knit community setup where factors such as education, age, occupation, and social leadership play a significant role in shaping electoral decisions.

Population and Sampling

The sample size of 380 (350 voters and 30 leaders) was obtained using the estimated population of the selected union and a desired 95% confidence level, with a 5% margin of error. This study used simple random sampling. This method involves randomly selecting participants from the population of interest such that each eligible individual has an equal chance of being included in the study sample.

Data Collection Tools

This study used structured questionnaires to acquire quantitative data from participants. This technique was adopted because it was appropriate for the research aims, which centered on investigating the influence of community leaders on voting behavior. The questionnaire for this study was developed to collect detailed information about demographic characteristics, voting behavior, and the influence of community leaders on voters in Santiganj Upazila.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version [IBM SPSS Statistics 25].

Result and Discussion

Voters' Perception of Community Leaders

This part investigates how voters view local community leaders, focusing on awareness, communication patterns, and the nature of interactions. The results show how people evaluate these leaders' roles, influence, and activities in both social and political contexts. The findings provide useful information about the levels of trust, dependence, and influence that community leaders hold among rural people.

Table 1: Respondents' familiarity with the community leaders

Do you know about community leaders in your Area?		
Answer	Frequency	Percent
Yes	341	97.4
No	8	2.3
No reply	1	0.3
Total	350	100

Table 1 indicates that 97.4% people are aware of community leaders. This is a large majority. It demonstrates that local people have a high level of awareness among local community leaders. This strong familiarity indicates that community leaders maintain a visible and influential presence in the rural areas, providing active involvement and interaction with rural people. Such widespread recognition shows that community leaders have strong social legitimacy and accessibility, both of which are necessary for influencing public opinion and behavior.

Table 2: Contact ratio with the community leaders.

Do you contact them when needed?		
Answer	Frequency	Percent
Always	108	30.9
Sometimes	170	48.6
Rarely	57	16.3
Never	14	4
No reply	1	0.3
Total	350	100

Table 2 shows the wide range of respondents' contact with community leaders when necessary. 30.9% of respondents always contact their leaders, while the majority of 48.6% contact them on occasion, indicating that most villagers maintain some level of relationship with community leaders.

People's tendency to contact leaders indicates a strong sense of trust and dependence within the community structure. This suggests that community leaders are a readily available source of help and guidance, strengthening their social importance and everyday problem-solving. The facts also show a reliance pattern: villagers who have regular contact with leaders are more influenced by them, but those who have little are less likely to shape voter behavior in rural areas.

Table 3: Categories with the most contacted community leaders

What types of leaders do you contact?		
Answer	Frequency	Percent
Political	136	38.9
Social	67	19.1
Religious	49	14
Local	80	22.9
Others	2	0.6
No reply	16	4.6
Total	350	100

Table 3 indicates that Political leaders (38.9) are the most contacted group among community leaders, highlighting their significant impact on local matters and decision-making processes. Local leaders are also very important, as indicated by the 22.9% contacted them. Religious and social leaders also hold a significant position, while very few reached out to other leaders or did not respond.

Overall, the higher dependence on political leaders implies a significant involvement in decision-making and resource distribution, which strengthens their influence over voters. At the same time, the continued relevance of local, social, and religious leaders shows a multi-layered leadership structure in which several types of leaders help to shape public opinion.

Table 4: Most common issues discussed with leaders

If you communicate, which issue?		
Answer	Frequency	Percent
Local development	96	27.4
Family issue	96	27.4
Financial help	12	3.4
Judgement	55	15.7
Others	76	21.7
No reply	15	4.3
Total	350	100

Table 4 demonstrates that community leaders and rural people mainly focus on local development (27.4) and family issues (27.4%), indicating the leaders' engagement in both public and private aspects of community life. In addition, judgment and other concerns are

also important areas of engagement.

Overall, this distribution indicates that community leaders are active in both the public and private domains of rural life. Such multidimensional participation improves trust and dependency, increasing their power to influence others' attitudes and behaviors, including voting behavior. Consequently, leaders' influence depends not only on politics but also on their regular social duties within the community.

Table 5: Advice or benefits received from leaders

Do you get any advice/benefit from them?		
Answer	Frequency	Percent
Always	115	32.9
Sometimes	188	53.7
Rarely	32	9.1
Never	15	4.3
Total	350	100

Table 5 shows that a significant proportion of respondents get guidance or advantages from leaders, which reflects their large presence and impact in day-to-day community affairs. This implies that leaders are usually approachable and actively involved in resolving people's issues. Their ongoing engagement in addressing community problems reflects an effective leader-community relationship, where trust and communication create social unity and encourage problem-solving at the local level. Such connections foster trust, loyalty, and a sense of obligation, all of which play important roles in determining social and political behavior.

Table 6: Influence of community leaders on voting

Do they influence your vote?		
Answer	Frequency	Percent
Yes	250	71.4
No	97	27.7
No reply	3	0.9
Total	350	100

Table 6 presents that 71.4% of respondents are influenced by leaders when voting, indicating that leadership has a significant impact on electoral behavior. On the other hand, 27.7% reported not being influenced, suggesting that voters make individual decisions.

This shows that community leaders have a significant influence on the majority's voting decisions. The influence of these leaders indicates that personal relationships, trust, and social position tend to play important roles in decision-making at the grassroots level.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that community leaders play a significant but not exclusive role in determining voting behavior, emphasizing the importance of social influence and individual choice in rural political dynamics.

Table 7: Mechanisms of Influence on Voting

If yes, how?		
Answer	Frequency	Percent
Candidate's recommendation	103	29.4
Awareness	60	17.1
Want to vote on specific candidates	51	14.6
Others	40	11.4
No reply	2	0.6
Total	256	73.1

Table 7 illustrates that community leaders mainly influence voting behavior through their recommendation of specific candidates, which is the most common method of political influence. Additionally, promoting awareness and increasing support for specific candidates are also effective forms of convincing.

These trends indicate that leaders serve as important agents between politicians and the public, influencing their opinions and preferences. However, the findings show that while leaders play an important role in shaping voters' behavior, systemic issues also influence voting decisions. Community leaders serve as vital mediators, transforming political messages into locally relevant forms and thereby strongly affecting voting behavior.

Table 8: Actions of leaders during the election

How do they behave during an election?		
Answer	Frequency	Percent
Organize meetings	69	19.7
Works for the candidates	169	48.3
Give information	66	18.9
Remains neutrals	15	4.3
No reply	10	2.9
Don't know	21	6
Total	350	100

Table 8 indicates that most community leaders actively participate in election-related activities rather than remaining neutral. Many of them are involved in organizing meetings, campaigning, and sharing information to promote specific candidates. This strong participation reflects their important role in mobilizing voters and affecting local election outcomes.

Overall, the findings show that community leaders play an important role in politics during elections, using their influence and networks to promote candidates and strengthen their image as community leaders. Community leaders employ both organizational and communicative strategies to influence electoral outcomes, leading to a proactive and influential role during elections.

Perception of Community Leaders

This section examines how community leaders observe voters in their area, focusing on their levels of political awareness, participation, and responsiveness during elections. It focuses on how leaders perceive voters' participation in local elections and voting behavior. The findings reflect the leaders' perceptions of voters' goals, attitudes, and motivations, providing insight into the mutual relationship between community leaders and rural people.

Table 9: Voting percentage in the local election

Do you vote in Local elections?		
Answer	Frequency	Percent
Yes	30	100
No	0	0

Table 9 shows the voting record of community leaders in local elections. The data demonstrate that 100% of the leaders reported voting in local elections, showing a high level of civic participation. Active participation indicates a strong sense of political duty and dedication to the democratic process. As powerful members of the community, their consistent involvement not only strengthens their legitimacy but also positions them as role models for voter participation. It also suggests that community leaders not only encourage others to vote but also set a good example by participating in the voting process themselves.

Table 10: Leaders' Engagement in Local Elections

Are you actively involved in the local elections?		
Answer	Frequency	Percent
Always	10	33.3
Sometimes	9	30
Rarely	7	23.3
Never	4	13.3
Total	30	100

Table 10 shows that 33.3% of community leaders are always active in local elections, while 30% are only occasionally involved. Furthermore, 23.3% reported rare involvement, while 13.3% reported never being involved.

This variation in engagement reflects the diversity of leadership roles and suggests that personal motivations, political alignment, and situational factors may all affect participation levels. The overall trend shows that the majority of community leaders participate in the electoral process, and their position is not only as voting influencers but also as active participants. Community leaders serve not just as participants, but also as varying degrees of political actors, with varying abilities to influence electoral behavior within the community.

Table 11: Leaders' role during local elections

If involved, what kind of role do you play?		
Answer	Frequency	Percent
Participate local election	5	16.7
A campaign for someone	7	23.3
Encourage in the vote	10	33.3
Others	8	26.7
Total	30	100

Table 11 presents that community leaders take on several tasks during elections. The most common form of activity is encouraging people to vote, which was recorded by 33.3% of respondents, demonstrating their significant impact on civic participation. In addition to voter mobilization, some leaders actively campaign for certain candidates, while others participate in local elections. A significant number provides informational support.

The findings show that community leaders play an important role in the electoral process by bridging the gap between politicians and ordinary people. Additionally, Community leaders not only influence political choices but also enhance the democratic process by motivating and guiding grassroots involvement.

Table 12: Different roles played by community leaders

What kind of role do you play for the people?		
Answer	Frequency	Percent
Social services	3	10
Conflict resolution	14	46.7
Development of the area	6	20
Advice	7	23.3
Total	30	100

Table 12 indicates that the most popular role of community leaders is conflict resolution. This highlights their central importance in maintaining social harmony and addressing disputes within the community. In addition to conflict resolution, many leaders provide advice and guidance, support local development projects, and participate in social service activities. These different roles show that community leaders are responsible for more than just politics. They also play important social and developmental roles. Overall, their active involvement in conflict resolution and communal welfare highlights their critical role in maintaining social stability and encouraging collective progress.

Table 13: Effectiveness of the leader's recommendations

Do you think people accept your recommendations?		
Answer	Frequency	Percent
Always	10	33.3
Sometimes	9	30
Rarely	1	3.3
Never	2	6.7
Don't know	8	26.7
Total	30	100

Table 13 shows that 33.3% of community leaders believe their recommendations are always accepted, while another 30% believe they are sometimes accepted, indicating a generally positive perception of their influence.

However, some leaders believe that their suggestions are not always accepted, and some are not sure about it. So, this means that community leaders have an important part in leading others, but their level of influence and acceptance may change depending on the problem and how others in the community feel about it. Overall, the data suggest that, while community leaders have significant persuasive power, the efficacy of their suggestions changes, indicating a dynamic link between leadership influence and individual decision-making.

Table 14: Main issues influencing villagers to vote

What issues influence the villagers to vote?		
Answer	Frequency	Percent
Political party	8	26.7
Personal qualities	12	40
Campaign and promise	5	16.7
Influencers opinion	2	6.7
Others	3	10
Total	30	100

Table 14 indicates that 40% of community leaders say that villagers are most influenced by candidates' qualities when voting. This proves that individual character is more influential than party identity or campaign promises in affecting rural voting behavior. Voters are also influenced by party identification, campaign promises, and activities, but these elements seem less important than the candidate's personal qualities. This implies that when making electoral judgments in rural areas, people prioritize candidates' quality over party affiliation or external pressures.

Overall, the data show that voting decisions are heavily influenced by social links and personal credibility, emphasizing the importance of community leaders in influencing these beliefs.

Table 15: Association between community leaders' engagement and voting influence

S.no	Statement	Do Community Leaders Influence your vote?				Chi-square p=value
		Yes	No	Uncertain	Total	
1	You contact Community Leaders when needed					
	Always	93 (26.6%)	15 (4.3%)	0 (0%)	108(30.9%)	$\chi^2=56.725$ (0.000)
	Sometimes	11.3 (32.3%)	56 (16%)	1 (0.3%)	170(48.6%)	
	Rarely	43 (12.3%)	14 (4%)	0 (0%)	57 (16.35)	
	Never	0 (0%)	12 (3.4%)	2 (0.6%)	14 (4%)	
	No reply	1 (0.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.3%)	
	Total	250(71.4%)	97 (27.7%)	3 (0.9%)	350 (100%)	
2	Types of leaders do you contact most					
	Political	134 (38.3%)	2 (0.6%)	0 (0%)	136(38.9%)	$\chi^2=167.553$ (0.000)
	Social	31 (8.9%)	36 (10.3%)	0 (0%)	67 (19.1%)	
	Religious	19 (5.4%)	30 (8.6%)	0 (0%)	49 (14%)	
	Local	65 (18.6%)	14 (4 %)	1 (0%0	80 (22.9%)	
	Others	1 (0.3%)	1 (0.3)	0 (0%)	2 (0.6%)	
	No reply	0 (0%)	14 (4%)	2 (0.6%)	16 (4.6%)	
	Total	250 (71.4%)	97 (27.7%)	3 (0.9%)	350 (100%)	
3	Issues you discuss with Leaders					$\chi^2=70.076$ (0.000)
	Local development	82(23.40%)	13 (3.70%)	1(0.30%)	96(27.4%)	
	Family issue	62(17.70%)	34(9.70%	0(0%)	96(27.4%)	
	Financial help	4(1.10%)	8(2.30%)	0(0%)	12(3.4%)	
	Judgement	50(14.30%)	5(1.40%)	0(0%)	55(15.7%)	

S.no	Statement	Do Community Leaders Influence your vote?				Chi-square p=value
	Others	51(14.60%)	25(7.10%)	0(0%)	76(21.7%)	
	No reply	1(0.30%)	12(3.40%)	2(0.6%)	15(4.3%)	
	Total	250(71.40%)	97(27.70%)	3(0.9%)	350(100%)	
4	You receive advice/benefit from leaders					
	Always	103(29.4%)	12(3.4%)	0(0%)	115(32.9%)	$\chi^2=71.892$ (0.000)
	Sometimes	131(37.4%)	56(16%)	1(0.3%)	188(53.7%)	
	Rarely	16(4.6%)	16(4.6%)	0 (0%)	32(9.1%)	
	Never	0 (0%)	13(3.7%)	2(0.6%)	15(4.3%)	
	Total	250(71.4%)	97(27.7%)	3(0.9%)	350(100%)	
5	Community leaders' behavior during the election					
	Organize meetings	59(16.9%)	9(2.60%)	1(0.30%)	69(19.70%)	$\chi^2=66.736$ (0.000)
	Works for the candidates	138(39.4%)	31(8.90%)	0.00%	169(48.30%)	
	Give information	40(11.4%)	26 (7.4%)	0 (0%)	66(18.9%)	
	Remains neutrals	5(1.40%)	10(2.9%)	0(0%)	15(4.3%)	
	No reply	1 (0.30%)	8(2.3%)	1(0.3%)	10(2.9%)	
	Don't know	7(2%)	13(3.7%)	1(0.3%)	21(6%)	
	Total	250(71.4%)	97(27.7%)	3(0.9%)	350(100%)	

Table 15 shows a significant association between respondents' voting behavior and their relationship with community leaders across several dimensions ($p = 0.000$ in all cases). Regarding the statement "you contact community leaders when needed", the chi-square test value ($\chi^2 = 56.725$, $p = 0.000$) shows a significant correlation between people's contact ratio and community leaders' influence on voting. Leaders frequently influence people's voting decisions who are contacted the most.

For the statement "types of leaders do you contact most," a highly significant association was found ($\chi^2 = 167.553$, $p = 0.000$). Among the leaders, political leaders are more popular, and most of the time, political leaders influence the voting decision of the community. This shows the fundamental role of political leaders in voter engagement and support.

The statement "Issues you discuss with leaders" also indicates a strong correlation ($\chi^2 = 70.076$, $P = 0.000$). Local development and family issues were the most talked-about subjects among those impacted by community leaders. This emphasized the idea that leaders win voter trust and support by addressing common socioeconomic concerns, and leadership impact frequently extends beyond political goals into personal and community affairs.

The correlation for "You receive advice/benefit from leaders" is highly significant ($\chi^2=71.892$, $p=0.000$). Community leaders can influence people in the vote who have consistently or occasionally received real benefits or advice from leaders. Community leaders use guidance to influence voting behavior, serving as a direct engagement technique. It increases personal loyalty, establishes mutual duties, and strengthens the leaders' ability to influence electoral outcomes.

Results also show another significant association between leaders' influence and their behavior during the election ($\chi^2=66.736$, $p=0.000$). The most common behaviors that influenced voters were leaders working for candidates and organizing meetings. The results demonstrate that voters are significantly influenced by clear and direct interaction from community leaders.

Overall, the findings strongly suggest that regular connection, trust-building through socioeconomic aid, and active election-time engagement by community leaders play a critical role in shaping voting behavior in rural settings.

The Major Findings of the Study

The study's findings show that community leaders have a significant and complex influence on voting behavior in rural areas. Their effect is not dependent on a single factor; rather, it is achieved through a combination of social interaction, trust-building, and active political participation.

First, the research found a high level of familiarity and contact between villagers and community leaders. The vast majority (97.4%) of respondents are aware of community leaders, and many regularly contact them as necessary. This frequent connection builds a solid relational foundation, increasing leaders' ability to influence opinions and decision-making processes.

Second, the study found that community leaders gain influence by actively participating in everyday social and economic issues such as local development, family matters, and conflict resolution. By serving as issue solvers and consultants, they foster trust, credibility, and social legitimacy in the community. These jobs establish them as trustworthy and respected personalities, hence considerably increasing their ability to influence voting behavior.

Third, the study reveals that community leaders have a significant influence on the voting decisions of the vast majority of respondents. This influence is wielded through both direct and indirect techniques, such as candidate suggestions, campaigning, and voter mobilization, and long-term social support, guidance, and interpersonal ties. These coupled strategies provide instant and long-term leadership influence.

Fourth, the results indicate that voting behavior in the research area is mostly candidate-centered rather than party-centered. Voters tend to value candidates' personal traits, reputations, and leadership abilities over political ideology or campaign pledges. Community leaders play an important role in establishing these perceptions by influencing voters and promoting candidate images.

Fifth, community leaders arise to be actively involved in the electoral process, rather than remaining impartial. They help organize meetings, promote candidates, and distribute electoral information. This active participation reflects their position as political agents who not only influence voters but also directly contribute to electoral mobilization and outcomes.

Furthermore, the study found that numerous socio-cultural and economic aspects contribute to villagers' high regard for community leaders. Their role in resolving disputes, giving counsel, and providing material or informational support fosters trust, dependency, and reciprocity. In situations when formal institutions are less accessible, community leaders serve as informal authorities, increasing their power over social and political decisions. This dynamic closely resembles the patron-client connection found in rural political organizations.

Furthermore, statistical analysis indicates a strong link between community leaders' engagement and voting behavior, suggesting that factors such as contact rate, leader types, concerns discussed, and benefits received are systematically related to voters' decisions. This illustrates that leadership's impact is not incidental but is structurally integrated into the decision-making process.

Overall, the results show that community leaders use a mix of direct communication, problem-solving responsibilities, material advantages, and calculated election-time mobilization to affect voting behavior. These mechanisms function in a highly relational and service-oriented political context, where electoral decision-making is based on cooperation and trust. Several socio-cultural and economic elements contribute to rural residents' regard for community leaders. First, leaders frequently serve as problem solvers in areas such as family issues, local development, and conflict resolution, which fosters trust among people. Second, their position in giving material or informational support instills a sense of obligation and reciprocity. Third, in an environment where official institutions are less accessible, community leaders act as informal authorities, wielding significant influence in decision-making processes, including voting behavior. This is consistent with the patron-client relationship seen in rural political organizations.

This finding is consistent with the observation that leaders typically use direct mobilization techniques to obtain electoral support, coordinated campaigning, agenda-setting, and personal persuasion that leaders use to impact voter decisions (David, 2009). They reinforce loyalty, construct political narratives, and mobilize community networks to obtain desired vote outcomes by actively participating during the election season.

Conclusion

This study focuses on the important role of community leaders in shaping voting behavior in rural Bangladesh, specifically in Santiganj Upazilla. The findings show that leaders influence voters not only through direct political participation but also through long-term social ties, trust-building, and service-providing. Their involvement in dispute resolution, local development, and ordinary problem-solving increases their authority and reputation in the community.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates that voting behavior in rural areas is firmly rooted in social structures and interpersonal interactions, rather than being solely influenced by individual preferences or political ideology.

Community leaders serve as vital links between political actors and voters, promoting communication, mobilization, and persuasion. From a policy standpoint, these findings suggest that improving democratic norms in rural areas necessitates a stronger focus on local power dynamics and informal leadership structures. Future studies could investigate how these factors differ between locations and demographic groupings.

Overall, this study adds to the expanding body of literature on political behavior by presenting empirical evidence from rural Bangladesh, emphasizing the intricate interplay between leadership, society, and electoral decisions. Ultimately, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the community leaders' influence and their mechanisms that can help policymakers to encourage more participatory and democratic participation in rural areas.

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