

Youth Participation in Politics and the Future of Democracy in Bangladesh

❖ Introduction

“Politics was once a stage for the old
But youth arrives with stories untold
Their rhythm is change, their banner is choice
The future is written in the strength of their voice.”

Any democracy thrives when citizens including youthful ones are actively involved in politics and the promotion of the civil societies. In young-adult-rich Bangladesh, there's no under-estimating the multiplying impact of student-mobility in steering the country's political and social navigation's. Students have been the channel of great political movements, historically; from the Language Movement in 1952 to the Mass Uprising in 1969 and the Liberation War in 1971 wheels of destiny always turned because of their activeness and bravery. In the years that followed, students continued to mobilise in the struggle for democracy and in campaigns for education and social change, demonstrating their continued commitment to change. Even more recently, the

protests of July Uprising in 2024 repeated the importance of youth and student activism in demanding for accountability, transparency and fairness in governance.



❖ Identification of the Problem

Despite their demographic strength and historical contributions, youth in Bangladesh face several obstacles to meaningful participation in politics.

1. **Exclusion from Leadership** – Elites, mostly consisting of senior citizens, still dominate the political arena. Young people are rarely given opportunities to contest leadership positions or influence decision-making.
2. **Low Voter Turnout** – A significant portion of young citizens abstain from voting, believing their votes will not bring change. This weakens democratic legitimacy.
3. **Ignorance and Disinterest** – Many youth perceive politics as corrupt, violent, or irrelevant to their lives. This lack of trust eventually leads youth to apathy. Thus young people get disinterested in political processes.
4. **Lack of Awareness** – A large number of young people lack adequate knowledge about democratic principles, political rights, and governance. Civic education is weak. Educational institutions rarely prioritize political literacy.
5. **Financial & Structural Barriers** – Many youth cannot afford campaigns or political participation; institutional support for youth-led initiatives is minimal.
6. **Overemphasis on Short-term Activism** – Youth focus on protests or social campaigns without long-term strategies, limiting lasting political impact.
7. **Urban-Rural Participation Gap** – Political opportunities, education, and networks favour urban youth. Rural youth often remain underrepresented in decision-making.

❖ Literature Review

Political participation among youth in Bangladesh is low, while registration rates remain high. Previous research shows that youth engagement in politics is crucial for sustainable democracy. According to a 2025 survey by SANEM and ActionAid, while 82.7% of youth (ages 15–35) stated they are uninterested in politics, with the most frequently cited reasons being fear of violence (58.7%) and corruption (56.4%) (The Daily Star; New Age, 2025). A measly 1.6% of Bangladeshi youth engaged in political change, although 76.8% intended to vote in elections (Youth Conference, 2023) Even with 89.4% of youth being registered voters, many have never voted before, only 11.6% were interested in political engagement (Chane, 2025), and 18.7% contemplated permanent emigration from Bangladesh. Overall, they are still connected with other citizens as voters; however, most Bangladeshi youth express disinterest and wedged distance from active political participation.

UNDP's (2014) report on youth in Bangladesh emphasizes that political exclusion and lack of opportunities discourage youth from formal engagement. A World Bank (2020) report highlights that digital platforms can be effective tools to connect youth with democratic processes. Similarly, studies by the International IDEA (2019) stress the importance of youth participation in strengthening governance and achieving SDGs. These findings indicate that innovative solutions are required to empower youth voices and create safe, constructive channels for political participation. A survey conducted by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB, 2019) found that a large number of young people perceive politics as corrupt and inaccessible.

Recent studies draws attention to the impact of the July 2024 Revolution in redefining youth political participation in Bangladesh. It is a student-led protests against authoritarian governance and quickly morphed into a nationwide uprising. As a result of the revolution, the long-tenured prime minister resigned, an interim government was formed, and youth were redefined as key actors in their own democratic change (The Daily Star, 2025).

❖ Proposed Solutions

Idea 1 –“ Amra Korbo Joy”: The Youth Revolution Website

- Developing a website named ‘amrakorbojoy.com’ where students can choose their institution (school, college, university) and submit ideas, writings, and problems related to politics and democracy. The website will contain separate writing segments and the students can submit their writings based on their area of interest. People will have access to the website and can give their opinion by giving star to their chosen idea. All educational institutions at school and college level of Bangladesh must be brought under this app for ensuring the youth participation from root level to developed one.
- Then there will be an annual presentation of ideas to the relevant authorities. The authority will select top ideas from every institutions. Again, the top ideas will be selected from upazila, district, division and national level.
- Awarding students, based on performance, benefits such as discounts on government form-fill-up fees. This will conduct awareness campaigns on democracy and SDGs in their local institutions (school-college) for one year. Ensuring gender equality must be considered.

Idea 2 – ‘Agamir Dak’ :Youth Voices from Every Upazila

- Establishing committees of students from schools and colleges at upazila level.
- These committees will identify local problems and post them on a government-approved website mentioned in previous point.
- Residents will be able to give feedback, and issues with significant public support will be submitted to the upazila chairman.
- A personal rating system will reward active students with benefits such as discounts in admission fees or government form charges.

Idea 3 – ‘Amader Sangsad’: Learning Democracy at School

- There will be student cabinet election in every school annually.
- The students will perform duties based on their resignation for the development of school from their level.
- Six months after school elections, organising debates where student groups play ruling and opposition parties.
- Certificates will be awarded based on performance.

- The year-long debates will build responsibility, accountability, and political awareness among students, while encouraging them to critically evaluate leadership.

Idea 4: Observing Democracy with Youth Competitions

- Schools and colleges can hold debate, quiz and essay writing competitions on International Day of Democracy (15th September) for their students to celebrate the values of democracy. These types of events can allow students to think critically, gain knowledge of the significance of political rights and responsibilities in democracy and express through competition their hopes for democracy in the future. Holding annual celebrations, such as by allowing students to channel their knowledge of current events at a debate, quiz and essay writing competition, will encourage awareness and respect for participation, dialogue and tolerance in the democratic tradition. The hope is that students will become active and responsible citizens through engaging with and respecting their democratic values in Bangladesh.

Idea 5: Rickshaw Art Democracy Campaigns

- Bangladesh's rickshaw art is world-famous. This is why creating democracy-themed rickshaw art (freedom of speech, anti-corruption, equality) by youth will be very impactful initiative. These moving "canvases" will reach streets, villages, and towns where social media doesn't.

Idea 6: Civic Adda in Tea Stalls

- Tea stalls are often treated as Bangladesh's real "parliaments." Youth organizations can host monthly democratic Addas at tea stalls in villages/towns where locals debate real issues openly. Later, youth can document these conversations and send summaries to MPs.

Idea 7. Mobile Democracy Theatre

- Street theatre and jatra are popular in Bangladesh. Youth could create travelling theatre shows in villages dramatizing corruption, justice, and people's power. Thus we can link art with democratic choice.

Idea 8: Democracy on Wheels

- Creating "Democracy Buses" that will travel rural Bangladesh with youth volunteers, interactive games, and civic education programs can be another impactful initiative. These buses can be decorated with cartoons, books and other things of democracy to attract the youth and make them aware of democracy.

❖ Expected Outcomes

- Making politically aware youth generation from school level.
- Increased awareness among youth about politics, democracy, and SDGs.
- Development of a culture of constructive political debate and civic responsibility in schools and colleges.
- Strengthening of youth–government communication through digital platforms.

- Creation of a new generation of socially responsible leaders.
- Institutional recognition and encouragement of politically active and socially aware youth.
- Long-term sustainability of democracy in Bangladesh through inclusive youth engagement.

❖ References

- International IDEA. (2019). Youth Participation in Democratic Processes.
<https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/youth-participation-political-processes>
- New Age. (2025). Survey highlights youth disengagement in politics
<https://www.newagebd.net/post/elections/269519/77pc-of-youths-intend-to-vote-in-next-national-election-survey>
- SANEM & ActionAid. (2025). Nationwide youth survey on political participation.
<https://actionaidbd.org/post/news/survey-sanem-and-actionaid-what-youths-think-about-upcoming-election>
- The Bangladesh Express. (2025). Youth views on ethics and politics.
<https://www.thebangladeshexpress.com/big-story/17679>
- The Daily. (2025). Political violence and corruption discourage youth participation.
<https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/what-young-people-want-year-july-uprising-3953876>
- Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB). (2019). Youth Perceptions of Politics and Corruption.
<https://ti-bangladesh.org/articles/story/4656>
- UNDP. (2014). Youth and Development in Bangladesh. United Nations Development Programme.

<https://www.undp.org/publications/final-report-undp-forum-youth-and-development>

- Youth Conference. (2023). Dhaka Tribune report on youth electoral participation.
<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/328011/youth-disengagement-in-mainstream-politics>
- World Bank, Youth Engagement in South Asia;
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/sar/overview>

