Political Engagement of Youth:
A Comprehensive Study on the Students of Public Universities in Bangladesh

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Abstract: The involvement of students in political activities can be traced back to the beginning of Bangladesh's existence as a nation. Students often questioning the power of political parties. The core point of this paper is to look at the political activity of young students in Bangladeshi public universities. This study gives a picture of how students in Bangladesh participate in politics as well as the social and political issues that affect them. The study breaks down different socioeconomic, family-related, and peer factors to show the reasons and limits that make students participate in or ignore political events. This research study employed a qualitative research design to collect and analyses the data. A small sample of 125 students who belonged to 10 public universities in Bangladesh was chosen through purposive sampling and the universities were chosen randomly. An online survey was undertaken to gather responses from students enrolled in public universities in Bangladesh. The findings of the study suggest that the deliberate use of young political actors as vehicles for social change, Bangladesh can optimize its demographic dividend to tackle the most pressing social issues, national emergencies towards an inclusive democracy.

Keywords: *Politics, Youth, Students, Public University*

Introduction: The involvement of the youth in the political process, especially in Bangladesh, where it has notably shaped the nation's socio-political sphere, is a significant issue that deserves utmost attention. The dynamism of student politics, once a driving force behind national emergencies and transformative movements, have experienced a perceptible shift. This research attempts to uncover the fundamental determinants causing this changing landscape, specifically for public university students in Bangladesh [1].

The aim of this study, therefore, is to pinpoint the factors that underline the downturn in the participation of modern students in national emergencies as it contrasts sharply with its persistent robust engagement in the past. To unfold the tangles around this theme, three key objectives have been outlined on the pathway. The study is going to start with socio-economic conditions and family backgrounds of the students who are in politics is going to be the first part where analysis is done. Secondly, it is about explaining the procedure with which students move into political actions also. Furthermore, it seeks to shed light on the convoluted motives nudging the political involvement of the students. Qualitative research method has been used to perform the data collection and analysis. With the backdrop of the results from the study, the issues of political radicalization in wider or deeper contexts and the effectiveness of mainstream political parties in countering youth radicalization become important questions. The recognition of these significant issues emphasizes the necessity of understanding the contemporary student politics in Bangladesh. As student politics is important, this research seeks to diagnosis the current problem and also to seek feasible solutions that would rejuvenate the political significance with a positive change and progress in university campus. After analyzing the role of student politics in Bangladesh, it is clear that student politics have been very important in the life of Bangladesh throughout its history [2]. In past times, university has always been the breeding ground for student political activities and expression [3]. Student politics has consistently aimed to serve the public's interests. They consistently advocated for the interests of the people and never made concessions on any matter about human rights [4]. However, upon observing the present state of student politics, it is dishearteningly evident that it has deviated from its original purpose. One potential explanation for this phenomenon is the apathetic mindset of individuals who are engaging in student politics in contemporary society [5]. Many people find it difficult to comprehend the qualifications required to be a student politician or the specific qualities that make a good politician [6]. Given the increasing number of students engaging in politics, it is evident that many newcomers are participating without conducting comprehensive studies on politics. Primarily, the majority of individuals lack a comprehensive understanding of the significant political value and engagement [7]. Instead, the unconscious time they spend in political activity results in a significant shortfall for the emergency services and the country's needs.

Aim and Objectives: The core aim of the study is to find out the causes behind why contemporary student politics can't contribute to the national emergency as they used to do before. To find out that some objectives are set to guide the research study.

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i. To study the socio-economic conditions and family background of the students involved in politics.
ii. To find out the types of motives associated with the students to get involved in politics.
iii. To investigate whether students involved in politics are contributing to the national emergency as before.

Materials and Method: The political engagement of youth, particularly within the context of Bangladesh, has been a subject of profound scholarly inquiry, owing to its instrumental role in shaping the nation's democratic fabric and socio-political trajectory. Rooted in the broader theoretical framework of political sociology and youth studies, this endeavors to contextualize the phenomenon of youth political engagement within the intricate socio-political milieu of Bangladesh.

The present study employed a qualitative research design. It considers exploratory research design to interpret the information towards its audiences. This research is a survey-based sample. A small sample of 125 students who belonged to 10 public universities in Bangladesh was chosen through purposive sampling and the universities were chosen randomly. Public universities are chosen because the political engagement of students in such universities is very high. An online survey was undertaken to gather responses from students enrolled in public universities in Bangladesh, who are politically active to some degree. The current investigation was carried out in university dormitories which are chosen randomly. Participants were gathered through purposive sampling at ten universities in Bangladesh selected at random too. The aforesaid survey insights acted as the pivotal aspect in exploring and formulating the present trend of student politics in Bangladesh.

The respondents have been categorized according to their level of political engagement. To grapple the real scenario both male and female students are considered here and for ethical purpose participant's information are kept hidden. Regarding that, participants are treated as students of public universities who stay in dormitories. The information was gathered via an online questionnaire survey. To commence, a meticulously designed questionnaire schedule was formulated to gather the necessary data via Google Docs. The data presented in this study were collected from 125 students (through purposive sampling) from 10 randomly chosen public universities. The representation of data displays the frequency of responses and significant viewpoints, which aids in the comprehensive completion of the study. Through the process of interpretation, discussion and analysis are presented accordingly. There are some secondary sources considered such as journal articles and scholarly studies to supplement the primary resources of the collected data. Data analysis involves generating categories, themes, pattern building and finally discussing it.

Theoretical Framework: The study has considered some of the theoretical perspectives to concentrate on the theoretical stance of the research.
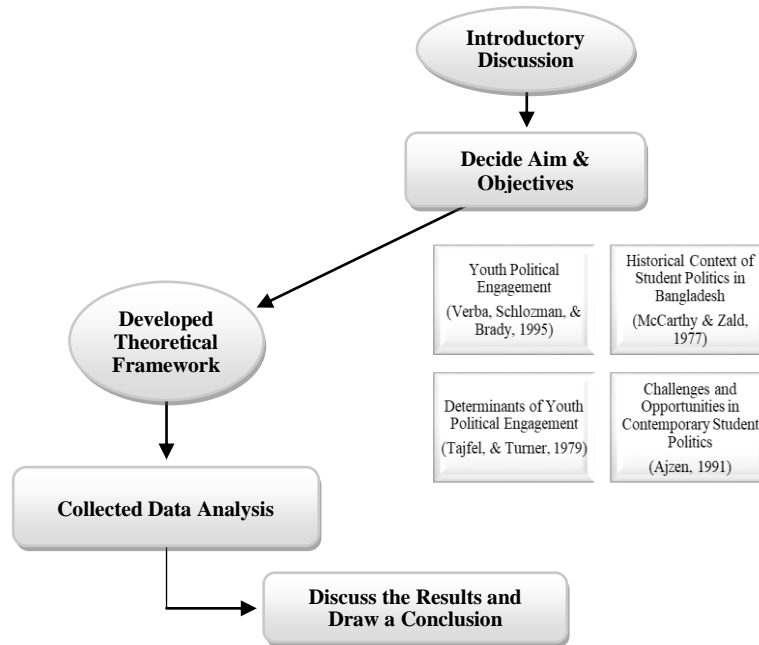
Fig. 1: Theoretical Framework for the research advancement.

At the heart of understanding youth political engagement lies the theoretical underpinnings of socialization, political socialization, and resource mobilization [8]. The Civic Voluntarism Model proposed by Verba, Schlozman, & Brady (1995) suggest that, political attitudes, behaviors, and identities of individuals are determined in a very complex process of social interaction which involves family, school, society and different resources [9]. While, the focus on political socialization suggests that political participation comes about as people learn and gain important skills, values, and knowledge and school and peer

groups are believed to play a critical role when it comes to identity and ideology moulding [10]. Additionally, the resource mobilization theory underscores the important role of political engagement, particularly among the youth. In Bangladesh, these models are very important to let realize the socioeconomic conditions, families, and organizations which are the driving forces of our politics among youths.

The "Resource mobilization theory" proposed by McCarthy & Zald suggested about how different social movements including student politics helps to achieve a certain collective goal. The activism of student politics in Bangladesh was always characterized by its passionate nature, the strong ideology and the tendency to elicit the social-political development in the realm [11]. When looks back into the logical framework of the period of colonialism and independence struggle politics, student politics dominated Bangladesh's political arena then. Nevertheless, it had to deal with the diverse traditions of many party formations as well as the conflict of philosophical trends and socioeconomic factors [12]. The language movement of 1952 spearheaded by the youth who took the fight for the official language of Bengali, indeed, marked the historic point of political past of Bangladesh when the youth activism demonstrated the importance of youthful outburst in shaping nationalist sentiments and making national milestones possible. The following years saw the rise of student liberation movements, which fights against authoritarian regimes, for democratization, social justice, and economic equality.

Social conditions and family backgrounds, the institutional factors and ideological stand are some factors which sway the youth in Bangladeshi politics. Recent observations demonstrated that poorest students tend to be focused on the political activism, seeing it as a way of fighting the in-place socio-economic inequalities and self-protection [13]. Moreover, family ties to politics are equally important to be factored in when considering the political trajectory of students, as most of them often seem to be born into party affiliations or imbibed with the ideologies of their families. Peer networks have an equally deep effect on the youth political engagement which transmits powerful messages, establishes mobilization campaigns and implement joint action processes. Evidence shows that peer pressure and socialization in university settings are the most important factors for students saying yes or no to participation in politics, while students usually form a political consciousness in the process of responsibility sharing [14].

As it is historically important, the current student politics in Bangladesh has to cope with several challenges such as factions and polarization, co-option by the mainstream political parties [15]. The Theory of Planned Behaviour proposed by Ajzen, illustrates about the individual behaviors which are driven by different human actions and norms. The commodification of student politics expressed by patronage networks, Clientelism, and electoral malpractices has eroded its ideological basis and stopped it from being transformative, therefore disillusioning the youth [16]. Also, allegations about the politicization of the academic institutions, erosion of academic integrity, and the instrumentalization of student bodies for political purposes have further fuelled the fighting within the university environment, thwarting dialogue and academic discussions.

After a certain period of time, the political awareness of the youth, especially those young people that are highly involved in the student politics, proves to be a decisive factor in the creation of democratic culture and determination of the country's political landscape. Theoretical assumptions of socialization and resource mobilization give us basis to investigate complexity of factors, as well as to highlight the determinants, challenges and eventual benefits of the evolving student politics [17]. Moving forward, addressing the challenges confronting contemporary student politics requires a concerted effort to cultivate democratic values, foster inclusive spaces for political participation, and galvanize youth momentum in the pursuit of social justice and national emergencies.

Result and Discussion: This study presents a comprehensive discussion on the political engagement of youth of public universities in Bangladesh. It tries to understand the interaction of socio-economic and peer support-constraint factors that shape the diverse identity of student politics. This research study has collected data from the university students around the country. By using Microsoft Excel, the collected data are presented here with visual representation. Each bar and charts show the response frequency of the participants.
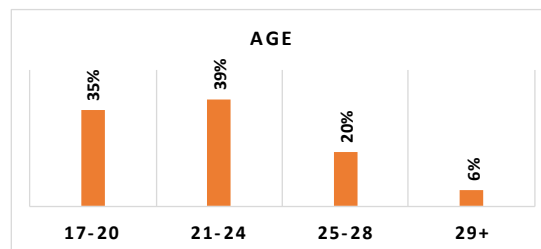
Fig. 2: Age of the participants.

It can be seen from the above chart that the largest proportion of participants for this particular study are those who are between the ages of 21 and 24 years old, which accounts for 39% of the respondents. Additionally, 35% of the respondents are between the ages of 17 and 20 years old. Another 20% of respondents are between the ages of 25 and 28. The estimation also shows that 6% of the respondents who participated are older than 29 years old.

**Table 1.** Educational qualification of participants

Education Level	No of frequency	Percentage
Undergraduate	70	56%
Graduate	28	22.4%
Post Graduate	27	21.6%
Total	125	100%

Here, Table 1 of the educational qualifications of respondents, that 56% of the respondents are undergraduates, 22.4 % of them have completed graduation and 21.6% are post-graduate students. It also shows that most of the students who are involved in politics are from undergraduate backgrounds.

Table 2. Beginning of involvement in politics

Education Level	No. of Frequency	Percentage
SSC	**0**	**0%**
HSC	**15**	**8%**
Honours	**115**	**92%**
Total	**125**	**100%**

At this point, it is possible to make the observation that the beginning of the youth movement in politics. Only 8% of the respondents have been introduced to politics at the high school level, and the majority of students, 92% began their involvement in politics when they were in the honours level of their university studies. Almost no respondents began their involvement with politics at the secondary school level, the level at which they actually continue their education.
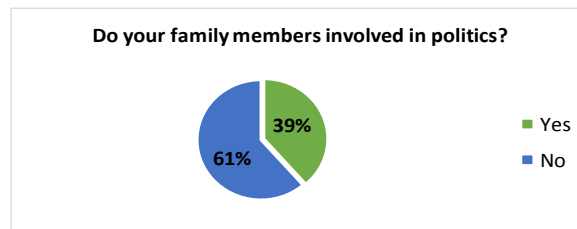

Fig. 3: Family member's involvement in politics.

The following figure-3 illustrates that 61% of the respondents are involved in politics, whereas their family members do not participate in political activities. The total number of respondents who belong to such family backgrounds, in which members are involved in politics, is 39% throughout the entire population. There is a very small percentage of students who are influenced by members of their home families.
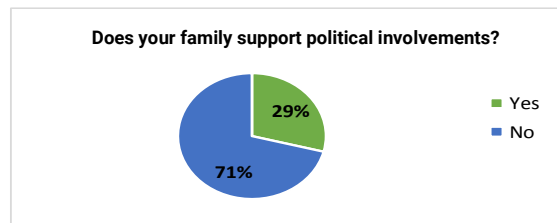

Fig. 4: Family's political involvement.

Here it can be observed that 71% of the respondents, who do politics are not suggested by their families. Their family don't support actively to engage in such activities. Only 29% of the respondents have suggested by their families to do so.

**Did you get invaded in politics influenced by peers?**

36% No
64% Yes
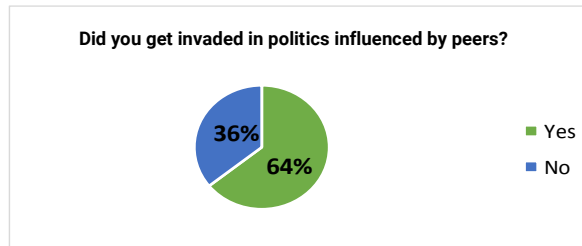
Fig. 5: Involvement of politics influenced by the peers.

The percentage of respondents who entered politics for the first time after seeing their friends or peers involved in politics is depicted in Figure 5. Among participants 64% stated that they did not begin their political careers by meeting with their contemporaries but rather through other means. When it came to beginning their political careers, 36% of the total respondents admitted that they had followed their peers.

Do you think that student Politics is necessary?
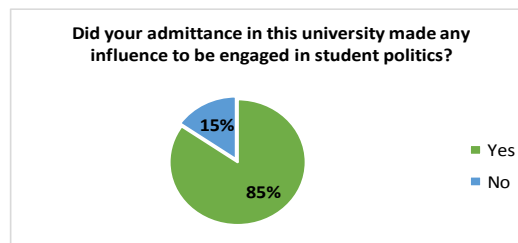
40% Yes
60% No
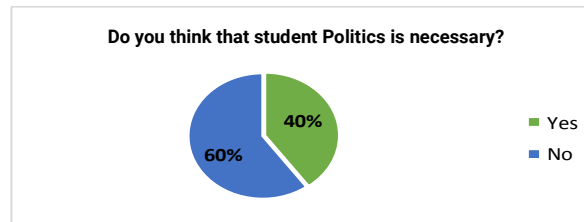
Fig. 6: Necessitates of student politics as per student's opinion.

As because of purposive sampling all the respondents are engaged in politics. During the course of the survey questionnaires, they were asked about the importance of politics in their lives, and the majority of them responded that they did not believe politics to be particularly important during their time as students. Regarding that, 40% of my overall respondents believe that politics in student life is necessary for their future. 60% recognized politics as not necessary for student life so far.

Do you believe that your engagement in politics was appropriate?

35% Yes
65% No
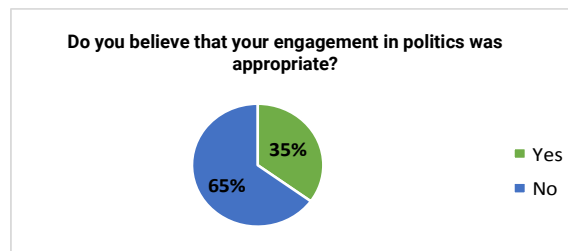
Fig. 7: Ethical ground of political engagement.

There are many debates on the engagement process of students in politics. The data presented in Figure 7 demonstrates that, according to the opinions of the students, 35% of them believed that their system of political engagement was appropriate. On the other hand, 65% of the students continue to hold a negative opinion regarding this statement. Because this research area is located on the campus of public universities, the study aimed to determine the percentage of politically active students who believe that their admission to the university has influenced them to become politically active.

Did your admittance in this university made any influence to be engaged in student politics?
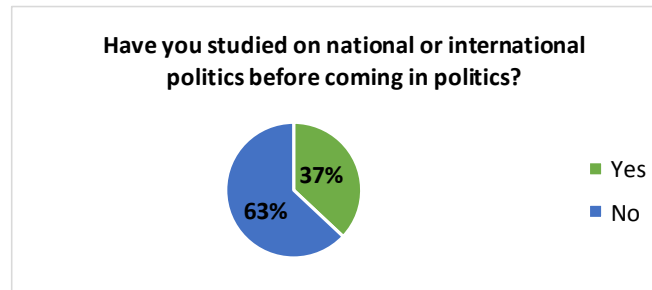
15% No
85% Yes

Fig. 8: University's influence to engage in student politics.

A majority of respondents 85% believe that their admission to a public university was a significant factor in their involvement in political activities. A relatively small percentage of respondents, 15% think that their admission to a public university did not have any impact on their participation in political activities.

Do you know your future in political arena?

29%

71%

■ Yes
■ No
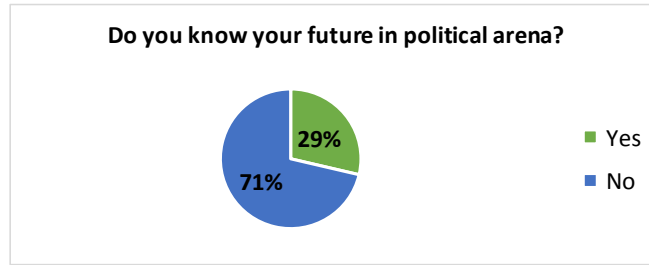
Fig. 9: Futuristic opinion regarding student politics.

Only 29% of the total number of students who participated in the survey stated that they have a clear understanding of their future in the political arena. In spite of the fact that their viewpoint is an issue of dispute among themselves. On the other hand, a significant proportion of people, approximately 71%, are uncertain and don't have the ability to visualise their future in the political arena.

Have you studied on national or international politics before coming in politics?

37%

63%

■ Yes
■ No

Fig. 10: Theoretical understanding of national or international politics.

The data presented in Figure 10 demonstrates that the majority of respondents, approximately 63%, did not engage in any form of political education prior to participating in political activities at a public university. However, 37% of people studied national and international politics prior to entering the political field.

**Table 3.** The opinion of students to study politics to be succeed in politics

Degree	No. of Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	32	25.6%
Agree	48	38.4%
Neutral	5	4%
Disagree	35	28%
Strongly disagree	5	4%
Total=	125	100%

There were 125 students who participated in the study, and almost 64% of them believed and responded that it is essential to study politics in order to be successful in the political career in Bangladesh. On the other hand, almost 32% of respondents were against this particular statement. The rest of the 4% were neutral on that and shared no opinion of theirs.

Is Students politics harmful to studies and the academic environment?

17%

83%

■ Yes
■ No
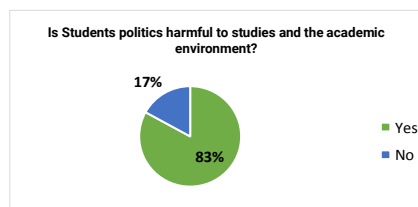
Fig. 11: Judgment of influenced student politics on academic environment.

According to the data presented in Figure 11, approximately 17% of respondents agreed that student politics does not have a negative impact on the environment of public universities. However, an astounding 83% of respondents agreed that student politics does have a negative impact on the environment in which students learn and study. This means a lot and poses a huge responsibility and liability to the shoulders of student politics at the public university in Bangladesh.
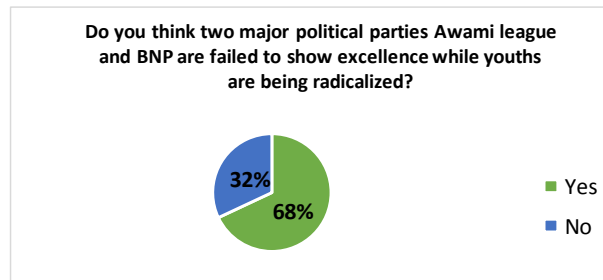
Fig. 12: Opinions on the two big political parties in Bangladesh.

With the exception of a single period of exceptional military dictatorship, the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) have been in power in this country ever since the end of the liberation war [18]. However, study shows, it is better for students to first educate themselves and acquire knowledge about the political history of Bangladesh before they can enter the political arena. In order to ensure that young intellectuals are provided with equal opportunities and that voting elections are conducted in a transparent manner, corruption must be reduced [19]. The comment is that students who have a very rich political background and property should pursue politics.

Overall, the study shows that the high concentration of the age group of this study is between 17-24 (see Fig. 2). Among them almost 56% are undergraduates and 92% enter into the politics after coming to the university (See Table 1 and 2). From the entire result of the participation, an argument can be drawn that students are no longer following through their political obligations [20]. According to the opinions expressed by a few of the respondents, the political structure of the country was mostly to blame indirectly. According to them, students are being influenced by corrupt individuals, and the responsibility for the well-being of students is not solely their responsibility; it is also the responsibility of our majority political system.

Bangladesh's most pressing national problems have been significantly impacted as a result of the influence of universities. The student wing of the political parties that usually stay in power is the sole entity that exercises influence over the university campuses [21]. Political Student wings, the Bangladesh Chatra League, the student branch of the Bangladesh Awami League, Chatra Dal, the student chapter of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Chatra union, Chatra Shibir, Chatra Moitri and Chatra Odhikar Porisad are mostly responsible for the de facto governance of the campus. Usually, first two are relatively violent with students and move around the school area irresponsibly, and they obtain illegal support from their seniors. This is all because they are exercising authority during a period when their mainstream party is in control [22].

Student politics has been practised for a significant amount of time in South Asian countries such as Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka, it is one of the topics that is disregarded the most in the academic discourse that takes place all over the world. Students have the potential to play a significant part in politics if they gather together and take part in activities that are conducted by the government [23]. The Bangladesh Chhatra League, the Bangladesh Jatiyota-badi Chatra Dal, the Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir, and several other basic student groups each represent their own set of political principles and ideologies. There is a significant amount of relevance in the history of student politics in Bangladesh [24]. To protect the banner of truth and patriotism, students have been pioneers in all of history's most momentous movements and crises.

The Language Movement, which took place in 1952, the mass movement, which took place in 1969, the Liberation War, which took place in 1971, and the fall of the military dictatorship, which took place in 1990, brought together students in every significant occasion to develop their perseverance and potential [25]. The student politics of today are detrimental and disheartening when compared to the student politics that existed before the liberation. Student leaders often employ their ideology to exert influence over candidates during the enrolment season, thereby compelling them to participate in party politics. Some arrivals are forced to join their political party, but this only happens in extremely unusual circumstances. In other cases, there is no way out of the situation other than to comply with their request because it is so deeply established. These days, the majority of public colleges and universities follow this standard procedure.

Students who join the governing party are granted "power" in their institutions and halls, which gives them the ability to exert authority over other students who are not members of the party [26]. Abuse, humiliation, and harassment of newcomers, who may even be exposed to physical or psychological anguish, are all behaviours that are included in this practice. They learn about the senior leaders of their campus even before they get a chance to become familiar with their institution [27]. The majority of students become familiar with the culture of ragging, and if any student writes or says something against it, the members of the pro-govt student party usually affix a tag to the student and maliciously attack him [28]. The recent homicide of Abrar Fahad, a student at BUET, serves as an example that is extremely pertinent to this point.

Over the year's student killings and make them wounded were motivated by political ideology. A number of the fatalities and tortures have not been published in the media; rather, sometimes they have been swept under the rug by governmental backing [29]. The politics of today's students are not about people or education; rather, they are all about gaining personal power and gaining influence. It is only for the sake of elevating one's prestige on campus and in the halls that the sacrifice is made [30]. The result of this study has reflected on the aspects of political engagement among youth in the public universities in Bangladesh, where it focuses mainly on the decrease of youth participation in the national emergency as compared to the previous years.

Moreover, the vast majority of students become politically active in the area of their studies while completing an honours degree [31]. A reasonable interpretation of these facts is that the undergraduate period is a critical time for the initiation of politics in the lives of Bangladeshi youth. Furthermore, while there is a substantial proportion of students whose families are not engaged in politics, even the majority do not have the family's support for their involvement [32]. This disparity implies that, while not actively involved in politics themselves, family members tend to regard their children's engagement in the activity with a little caution, worrying perhaps about their safety, academic performance, or societal reputation.

The research affirms the role of peers in students' decisions concerning their participation in politics: 64% admit the role of peer influence on their political initiation. The results highlight the importance of social networks and peer pressures in the sphere of student political activities. At the same time, 40% of the students find student politics necessary, which indicates that they may believe in its positive power. The results also reveal, however, that another 60% of the students think differently: a growing tendency towards students' sceptical attitudes towards student politics exists. Also, 85% of the respondents agreed that university admission played a role in influencing their engagement in student activism.

From an environmental perspective, the results underscore the role of the university environment as an incubator of political activism and how campus dynamics influenced the political future of students [33]. However, the results point to a worrying trend with respect to political readiness. The study revealed that only 37% of the respondents studied national or international politics before starting the student journey at university. It indicates the need for enhanced political learning and understanding for the youth to ensure responsible political participation.

The results of the study even identify numerous problematic issues and worries related to student politics in Bangladesh. A large percentage of young male and female students in the sample – 71% – seem unsure about their future in politics, which implies a lack of transparency or definitive goals for young aspiring politicians. Similarly, the high frequency of radicalization – 73% of respondents – and its harmful impacts on learning and the scholarly environment – 83% of those surveyed stated so – alert to the necessity of urgent measures to eradicate extremist opinions within the student body. Another high percentage – 68% of participants – reported dissatisfaction with the current major political parties' activity against youth radicalization, which indicates a growing distrust towards traditionally recognized political bodies.

This study addresses several vital questions about the political engagement of youth in public universities in Bangladesh. It is dedicated to the interaction of complex socio-economic and peer support-constraint factors that shape the diverse identity of student politics. Investigating the students' reports about the purported decline of the contemporary contributions of student politics to national emergencies, this study contributes rich empirical insights into the nuances of the opportunities, but mostly challenges, faced by student activism. More specifically, this study interested in the role of the student's family socio-economic context, as few of them come from direct political families; there is more evidence that students' family-related constraints and factors are more dominant over opportunities and means. This discrepancy points to the power relations between family expectations, personal independence, and large social and political systems.

Furthermore, the survey finds that peer function heavily influences students' political decisions, stressing the role of sociable dynamic networking in young people's political conduct. The university setting appears to be a key variable in such behavior, and most students link it to their political involvement overall. The fact that respondents attended universities before, and those are places of all sorts of activism, emphasized the university's significant role in determining young people's political paths. It highlights the pressing need to improve the general political culture among youth to promote well-informed and thoughtful political engagement.

Ultimately, these dynamics manifest and contribute to important challenges and considerations. Specifically, political radicalization is a widespread issue and a disruptive factor for educational integrity. Also, uncertain political paths of possible future students, family suspicions, and essential dissatisfaction with political major players are fundamental systemic issues. As such, these challenges necessitate a comprehensive solution that entails reforming the educational process, engaging local communities, and establishing relevant political tools that will enable an adequate environment for young people's political engagement.

Conclusion: Overall, the study provides a significant understanding of political participation of students in Bangladesh and the socio-political context surrounding it. Through the dissecting of various socioeconomic, familial, and peer factors, this research demonstrates the motivations and constraints that lead students to engage or ignore political phenomena. To this end, both government and non-government stakeholders should collaborate to eliminate these constraints and create a conducive and empowering environment for youth political participation. Through the deliberate use of young political actors as vehicles for social change, Bangladesh can optimize its demographic dividend to tackle the most pressing social issues, national emergencies and towards an inclusive democracy.

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