

# Gender and Political Culture: Women's Participation in the Politics of Bangladesh

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## ARTICLE INFORMATION

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the intersection of gender and political culture in Bangladesh, with a particular focus on women's participation in the political sphere. Despite notable progress—such as the presence of women in the highest political offices and the implementation of reserved seats in parliament—women in Bangladesh continue to face significant structural, cultural, and institutional barriers to full political engagement. Deeply entrenched patriarchal norms, limited access to resources, and gendered social expectations often hinder women's active involvement in decision-making processes. This paper analyzes the historical evolution of women's political participation, assesses the current landscape, and investigates how political culture influences gender dynamics in governance. By examining both challenges and opportunities, the study highlights the importance of creating an inclusive political environment through policy reforms, education, and capacity-building initiatives. It concludes that meaningful empowerment of women in politics is essential not only for gender equality but also for the broader democratization and sustainable development of Bangladesh.

## 1. Introduction

Women's participation in politics is widely recognized as a critical indicator of a healthy and inclusive democracy. In Bangladesh, a country with a complex socio-political history and deeply rooted cultural norms, the role of women in politics presents both significant achievements and persistent challenges. Despite notable milestones—such as having women as prime ministers and reserved parliamentary seats—women's overall representation and influence in political decision-making remain limited. Political culture, shaped by patriarchal values, religious traditions, and social expectations, continues to affect women's ability to engage fully in political processes. This study seeks to examine how gender and political culture intersect to shape the participation of women in Bangladesh's political arena. Understanding these dynamics is essential not only for promoting gender equality but also for strengthening democratic governance and social development in the country. This research aims to analyze historical trends, identify existing barriers, and explore opportunities for enhancing women's political empowerment in Bangladesh.

## 2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in Political Culture Theory, Feminist Political Theory, and Gender Representation Theory to explain women's political participation in Bangladesh. Political Culture Theory, developed by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, argues that political behavior is shaped by societal values and norms. In Bangladesh, deeply rooted patriarchal traditions and confrontational party politics influence perceptions of women's roles in public life, limiting their meaningful engagement despite formal democratic rights. Feminist scholars such as Carole Pateman and Anne Phillips further distinguish between formal equality and substantive representation, emphasizing that numerical inclusion does not automatically translate into real decision-making power. This perspective is highly relevant in the Bangladeshi context, where reserved seats have increased women's presence but not always their autonomy.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, Gender Quota and Critical Mass Theory, advanced by Drude Dahlerup, suggests that higher female representation can gradually reshape political norms, provided institutional and cultural support exists. Conceptually, this study argues that women's political participation in Bangladesh is shaped by the interaction of political culture, institutional structures, and socio-economic conditions. While quotas and legal reforms enhance descriptive representation, sustainable empowerment requires transforming patriarchal political culture and strengthening women's educational, economic, and leadership capacities.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Statement of the Problem

Despite significant progress in women's political representation in Bangladesh, including leadership at the highest levels and constitutional provisions for reserved seats, women's overall participation in politics remains disproportionately low. Persistent patriarchal norms, cultural biases, and structural barriers continue to limit women's access to meaningful political power and decision-making roles. The prevailing political culture often marginalizes women, affecting not only their representation but also their ability to influence policy and governance effectively. This gap between formal political inclusion and substantive participation highlights the need to critically examine how gender and political culture interact to shape the experiences and opportunities of women in Bangladesh's political landscape. Addressing these challenges is crucial for achieving gender equality and ensuring that women can fully contribute to the country's democratic and developmental processes.<sup>3</sup>

### 4. Literature Review

Scholarly works on political culture and gender provide an important foundation for understanding women's political participation in Bangladesh. Classical political culture theorists such as Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba in *The Civic Culture* argue that citizens' values and beliefs shape political behavior. Later feminist scholars expanded this framework to highlight how patriarchal norms influence women's access to political power.<sup>4</sup>

Feminist theorists like Carole Pateman in *The Sexual Contract* and Anne Phillips in *The Politics of Presence* emphasize that formal equality does not guarantee substantive representation. Their arguments are relevant to Bangladesh, where women's presence in the Jatiya Sangsad has increased through reserved seats, yet their influence often remains limited.<sup>5</sup>

Research on gender quotas by scholars such as Drude Dahlerup shows that quotas can improve women's numerical representation but require strong political commitment to ensure real empowerment. In Bangladesh, although women have reached top leadership positions like Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, broader grassroots participation remains constrained by patriarchal political culture.<sup>6</sup>

Overall, the literature suggests that while legal reforms and quotas increase representation, meaningful empowerment depends on transforming socio-cultural norms and strengthening institutional support. This study builds on existing scholarship by linking political culture with women's lived political experiences in Bangladesh.

### 5. Research Objectives

The main objective of this research is to assess the current status of women's participation in the politics of Bangladesh and to ensure prospects for the future, but it has some specific objectives:

- i. To examine the historical evolution of women's participation in politics in Bangladesh, from the pre-independence era to the present.
- ii. To analyze the influence of political culture and societal norms on women's political engagement and leadership opportunities.
- iii. To identify the key barriers—social, economic, institutional, and cultural—that hinder women's full participation in the political process.

- iv. To evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies and mechanisms, such as reserved seats and gender quotas, in promoting women's political representation.
- v. To explore the role of political parties, civil society, and media in shaping perceptions and opportunities for women in politics.
- vi. To propose actionable strategies for enhancing women's participation and leadership in the political arena of Bangladesh.

## 6. Research methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to explore the interplay between gender and political culture and its impact on women's participation in politics in Bangladesh. The research is descriptive and analytical in nature, aiming to understand the underlying social, cultural, and institutional factors that influence women's political engagement. Primary data is collected through semi-structured interviews with female politicians, party members, activists, and local government representatives, alongside focus group discussions with women from diverse backgrounds. These methods are intended to capture in-depth perspectives and lived experiences. Secondary data is gathered from academic literature, policy documents, government records, and reports by NGOs and international organizations. A purposive sampling technique is used to ensure that participants with relevant experience and insight are included. Thematic content analysis is employed to interpret the qualitative data, allowing for the identification of key patterns and narratives. While the study provides valuable insights, it is limited by time constraints, potential respondent bias, and challenges in accessing certain high-level stakeholders.

## 7. Definition of Keywords

- i. **Women's Political Participation** : The active involvement of women in political activities, including voting, candidacy, holding public office, leadership in political parties, activism, and policymaking.<sup>7</sup>
- ii. **Gender and Politics** : The study of how gender influences political behavior, power structures, and representation in political institutions and decision-making.<sup>8</sup>
- iii. **Political Culture** : The collection of attitudes, beliefs, values, and norms about politics and governance shared by a society. It shapes how citizens engage with political institutions, leaders, and processes, including perceptions of gender roles within politics.<sup>9</sup>
- iv. **Bangladesh** : A South Asian country with a parliamentary democracy, notable for its unique socio-political history, cultural traditions, and ongoing efforts to enhance gender equality in political representation.<sup>10</sup>
- v. **Gender Equality in Governance** : Equal participation and representation of all genders in political leadership, decision-making, and policy implementation processes.<sup>11</sup>

## 8. Historical Context

The political participation of women in Bangladesh has a rich and complex history shaped by the country's social, cultural, and political transformations. Even before independence in 1971, women played a significant role in political movements, including the struggle for autonomy from Pakistan. During the Bangladesh Liberation War, many women actively contributed as freedom fighters, organizers, and supporters, highlighting their early involvement in national politics. Following independence, women's political participation was further shaped by the emergence of prominent female leaders such as Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia, who each served multiple terms as prime minister. Their leadership brought international attention to women's roles in high-level politics, though their dominance often overshadowed broader female political participation.<sup>12</sup>

Despite these milestones, women's representation beyond these top leadership roles remained limited, constrained by patriarchal traditions and social expectations. In the 1990s, constitutional amendments introduced reserved seats for women in the Jatiya Sangsad (national parliament),

aiming to increase female legislative presence. Additionally, women's participation at the local government level was institutionalized through quotas in union councils and municipal bodies. However, these measures have not fully dismantled the cultural and institutional barriers that restrict women's political empowerment. The historical trajectory of women's political participation in Bangladesh thus reflects a paradox of visible female leadership alongside widespread challenges to broader gender inclusivity in politics.<sup>13</sup>

### 9. Current Status of Women in the Politics of Bangladesh

As of early 2025, women's political participation in Bangladesh reflects both notable achievements and persistent challenges.

**i. Parliamentary Representation:** Women hold 20.9% of the seats in the Jatiya Sangsad (National Parliament), with 20 directly elected members and 50 reserved seats allocated through proportional representation. However, only 7% of these women were directly elected, indicating limited grassroots electoral success. The remaining 93% are appointed by political parties, often based on loyalty rather than merit. These figures are from the 12th Parliamentary Elections held on 7 January 2024, with the reserved seats filled in March 2024.<sup>14</sup>

**ii. Cabinet and Ministerial Roles:** Despite the presence of women in top political offices, such as the Prime Minister, Speaker, and Leader of the Opposition, their representation in the cabinet is minimal. So, as of January 11, 2024, the cabinet comprised 25 ministers (1 female) and 11 state ministers (4 female), confirming minimal female representation at the cabinet level.<sup>15</sup>

**iii. Local Government:** At the local government level, women constitute approximately 23% of representatives (2016-2017). While this is a step forward, it still falls short of achieving gender parity in local governance. It reached about 25.21% in 2018. Women hold approximately 23.46% of seats in local government bodies (2023-2024). Breakdown by tier (2024 data): City corporations- 25.0%, Municipalities- 23.3%, Zilla parishads (district councils)- 26.06%, Upazila parishads (sub-district councils)- 35.09%, Union parishads (village councils)- 23.15%. However, despite these gains, women remain underrepresented and have not reached gender parity (50%) in any tier of local government.<sup>16</sup>

**iv. Political Party Committees:** The Representation of the People Order (RPO) 1972 mandates that political parties allocate at least 33% of all committee positions to women. However, major political parties have consistently failed to meet this requirement, reflecting a gap between policy and practice. Up to 7 March 2023 Awami League at -23%, BNP at -13.7%, Jatiya Party -12.3%, and no party meeting the 33% mandate, even after EC reminders.<sup>17</sup>

**v. Recent Developments:** In November 2024, the Yunus-led interim government established the Women's Affairs Reform Commission to address gender inequality and propose reforms. The commission's report, released in April 2025, includes 443 proposals, such as increasing parliamentary seats to 600 with 300 reserved for women. These recommendations have sparked significant debate and controversy, with some groups opposing them on religious and constitutional grounds.<sup>18</sup>

In summary, while Bangladesh has made strides in integrating women into political structures, substantial barriers remain. Achieving genuine gender equality in politics will require not only legal reforms but also a cultural shift towards valuing women's leadership and participation at all levels of governance.

### 10. Political Culture and Gender Norms

Political culture in Bangladesh is deeply intertwined with traditional gender norms that shape societal attitudes towards women's roles in public and private spheres. Despite progress in legal frameworks and women holding prominent political positions, the prevailing political culture remains largely patriarchal. This entrenched patriarchy manifests in expectations that women prioritize family and domestic responsibilities over public life, discouraging many from active political participation.

Gender norms rooted in religious beliefs, cultural practices, and social conditioning often limit women's access to political spaces and leadership roles. Women aspiring to enter politics face skepticism about their capabilities and legitimacy, both from male counterparts and the broader community. This skepticism is reinforced by media portrayals that frequently emphasize women politicians' personal lives over their professional achievements, perpetuating stereotypes and biases.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, political culture in Bangladesh is characterized by intense competition and often confrontational politics, which can be particularly hostile to women. Gender-based violence and harassment, both within political parties and during elections, serve as deterrents to women's participation. Women also face challenges in mobilizing resources and networks, as political structures tend to favor male-dominated patronage systems.

At the same time, there is a gradual shift as education levels rise and younger generations challenge traditional norms. Civil society organizations and women's advocacy groups play a vital role in promoting gender-sensitive political culture by raising awareness, conducting leadership training, and campaigning for policy reforms. However, transforming political culture to be truly inclusive requires sustained efforts to dismantle deep-seated gender biases and create supportive environments for women leaders.<sup>20</sup>

In summary, political culture and gender norms in Bangladesh continue to pose significant obstacles to women's political empowerment. Addressing these cultural barriers is as crucial as implementing legal quotas and institutional reforms to achieve substantive gender equality in politics.

## 11. Barriers to Participation

Women's participation in politics in Bangladesh faces a range of multifaceted barriers—social, economic, cultural, and institutional—that restrict their full and meaningful engagement. Some practical barriers are discussed below:

**i. Patriarchal Social Structures :** Deeply entrenched patriarchal values assign women primarily to domestic roles, limiting their public visibility and political ambitions. Social expectations often pressure women to prioritize family responsibilities over political careers, discouraging their sustained involvement.<sup>21</sup>

**ii. Cultural and Religious Norms :** Cultural beliefs and conservative interpretations of religion sometimes restrict women's mobility and public engagement. These norms perpetuate stereotypes that politics is a male domain, fostering resistance within communities to women's political leadership. As for example in a democratic state like Bangladesh, female candidates in rural areas may avoid door-to-door campaigning due to fear of social backlash or accusations of violating modesty norms.<sup>22</sup>

**iii. Limited Access to Education and Resources :** Lower levels of education and economic dependence restrict women's ability to compete politically. Lack of financial resources impedes campaigning, networking, and mobilization, especially in grassroots and local elections. As for example in many rural districts of Bangladesh, such as Kurigram or Sunamganj, women often have lower literacy rates compared to men due to early marriage, poverty, and limited access to secondary education. As a result, few women acquire the skills or confidence needed to run for political office. Even when women are nominated for Union Parishad reserved seats, they often struggle to finance their campaigns, lacking personal income or access to party funding. In contrast, male candidates benefit from stronger economic networks and community support. This disparity makes it difficult for women to campaign effectively, organize supporters, or engage with voters, ultimately weakening their political competitiveness.<sup>23</sup>

**iv. Structural and Institutional Barriers :** Despite legal provisions like reserved seats in parliament and local bodies, women often remain marginalized within political parties. Party nomination processes tend to favor male candidates, and women's wings within parties are often symbolic with little influence on decision-making.<sup>24</sup>

**v. Political Violence and Intimidation :** Women politicians and activists frequently face gender-based violence, harassment, and intimidation, both during elections and within party politics. Such hostile environments deter many women from entering or continuing in politics. As for example during the 2018 general elections in Bangladesh, several female candidates, especially those from opposition parties, reported facing threats, verbal abuse, and physical harassment while campaigning. In one widely reported case, Afroza Abbas, a prominent BNP leader and wife of senior politician Mirza Abbas, was attacked by ruling party supporters while attempting to hold a campaign rally in Dhaka. Her convoy was vandalized, and she was verbally abused, reflecting the broader culture of hostility toward outspoken female politicians. Many grassroots female activists, especially in rural areas, also face harassment from rival male politicians and even within their own parties, leading to withdrawal from active political life out of fear for personal safety.<sup>25</sup>

**vi. Lack of Supportive Infrastructure :** Insufficient gender-sensitive policies, mentorship programs, and training opportunities reduce women's capacity to develop leadership skills. The absence of safe spaces and networks further isolates women from mainstream political processes.<sup>26</sup>

**vii. Media Representation :** Women politicians are often portrayed in stereotypical or trivializing ways in the media, focusing on their appearance or family life rather than political agendas, which undermines their credibility and public support. As for example Bangladesh, media coverage of female leaders often emphasizes their personal lives over their political contributions. For instance, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia—two of the country's most prominent political figures—are frequently referred to in the media as "the daughter of Bangabandhu" and "Begum Zia, the widow of Ziaur Rahman," respectively. News reports often focus on their familial legacies and personal rivalries rather than their policies or leadership roles. Similarly, when younger female politicians or councillors appear in local news, headlines may highlight their clothing choices or marital status rather than their community work or legislative goals. This kind of gendered portrayal reinforces stereotypes and diminishes their professional legitimacy in the public eye.<sup>27</sup>

Together, these barriers create a challenging environment for women's political participation in Bangladesh. Overcoming them requires comprehensive approaches combining legal reforms, education, cultural change, and institutional support to enable women's empowerment and leadership.

## **12. Positive Developments and Opportunities**

Recent developments in Bangladesh have created a more favorable environment for women's political participation, offering both institutional support and grassroots momentum.

**i. Youth-Led Political Movements :** The student-led Anti-Discrimination Movement of 2024 marked a significant turning point. Women students played a pivotal role in organizing and leading protests against authoritarianism and corruption, culminating in the formation of a new interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus. This movement highlighted the critical role of young women in shaping the nation's political future.<sup>28</sup>

**ii. Institutional Reforms and Legal Frameworks :** Bangladesh has made strides in gender-inclusive governance. The Jatiya Sangsad (Reserved Women Seats) Election Act, 2004, established reserved seats for women in parliament, enhancing their representation . Additionally, the government's allocation of Tk175,350.5 crore in the 2023-24 fiscal year for women's empowerment initiatives underscores a commitment to gender equality.<sup>29</sup>

**iii. Emergence of New Political Parties :** In the aftermath of the 2024 revolution, former student leaders launched the National Citizens' Party (NCP), aiming to establish a "second republic" through constitutional reforms and a more inclusive political system . This initiative reflects a growing desire among women and youth to reshape Bangladesh's political landscape.<sup>30</sup>

**iv. Recognition of Women's Leadership :** Women leaders have gained international recognition for their contributions to human rights and social justice. Fawzia Karim Firoze, a prominent human rights lawyer, was honored with the 2024 International Women of Courage Award for her advocacy in labor rights and protection against gender-based violence . Such accolades inspire and empower other women to engage in political activism.<sup>31</sup>

**v. Support from Civil Society Organizations :** Organizations like the JAAGO Foundation have been instrumental in promoting women's political participation. Through initiatives such as the "When Women Win, We All Win" program, they provide training, mentorship, and networking opportunities for women in politics. These efforts are crucial in building a pipeline of future female leaders.<sup>32</sup>

These developments indicate a positive trajectory toward greater gender equality in Bangladesh's political sphere. While challenges remain, the increasing involvement of women in political movements and leadership roles offers hope for a more inclusive and representative governance system.

### 13. Case Studies

#### **i. Begum Khaleda Zia – A Trailblazer in Bangladeshi Politics**

Begum Khaleda Zia stands as a pivotal figure in the discourse on gender and political culture in Bangladesh, being the first female Prime Minister of the country and a symbol of women's participation in national politics. Rising to prominence after the assassination of her husband, President Ziaur Rahman, she assumed leadership of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in the 1980s—a time when women in South Asian politics were often sidelined. Her political journey highlights both the potential and challenges for women in a patriarchal political culture. Khaleda Zia served as Prime Minister three times (1991–1996, 1996, and 2001–2006), navigating a political landscape traditionally dominated by male elites. Despite criticism that her rise was initially tied to dynastic politics, her sustained leadership, electoral successes, and ability to mobilize mass support reflected her political acumen. However, her career also reveals the gendered nature of Bangladeshi politics, where female politicians often face personal attacks, character assassination, and political marginalization. Her rivalry with Sheikh Hasina, another female leader, paradoxically both reinforced the visibility of women in leadership and underscored the persistence of confrontational and patriarchal political culture. Overall, Khaleda Zia's career exemplifies how women can ascend to the highest offices even in male-dominated systems, yet also highlights how systemic gender biases continue to influence political participation and representation in Bangladesh.<sup>33</sup>

#### **ii. Sheikh Hasina: Breaking the Highest Political Glass Ceiling**

Former Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina is one of the most prominent examples of female leadership. As the daughter of Bangladeshi leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, her political journey has been driven by personal sacrifice and resilience. Since first becoming prime minister in 1996, Hasina has led several governments, championing policies of women's empowerment, economic development, and social reform. Her leadership has challenged traditional gender norms by assuming the highest political office in a male-dominated society. However, critics argue that her tenure has also concentrated power within the political elite, with limited impact on women's participation at the grassroots level. Hasina's government lacked legitimacy; her elections lacked transparency and credibility; and she had reached the extremes of corruption and authoritarianism. She was ultimately ousted from power and forced to flee.<sup>34</sup>

### **iii. Reserved Seats in the Jatiya Sangsad (Parliament)**

Since the 1990s, Bangladesh has implemented reserved seats for women in parliament to boost female representation. While this institutional mechanism increased the number of women parliamentarians, the case study reveals limitations. Many women appointed to reserved seats depend on male party leaders for their positions, which constrains their independence and influence. Nonetheless, some have successfully used these seats to advocate for women's rights and social welfare legislation, showing the potential of quotas when combined with political will.<sup>35</sup>

### **iv. Women in Local Government: Union Parishad Elections**

In local government, reserved seats for women in Union Parishads (village councils) have been a significant step toward political inclusion. Studies show that women elected to these positions often face social resistance, lack of training, and limited financial resources. Despite these barriers, many female representatives have successfully mobilized community support to address local issues such as education, health, and water sanitation. This grassroots participation illustrates the growing political agency of rural women and the importance of decentralization for women's empowerment.<sup>36</sup>

### **v. The 2024 Anti-Discrimination Student Movement**

A recent case study of the 2024 youth-led Anti-Discrimination Movement highlights the rising political activism among young women in Bangladesh. Women student leaders played key roles in organizing protests against authoritarian governance and corruption, contributing to the establishment of an interim government. This movement represents a new generation of politically engaged women challenging traditional norms and advocating for democratic reforms. It also underscores the potential of youth-led initiatives to transform political culture.<sup>37</sup>

### **vi. Fawzia Karim Firoze: Human Rights Advocacy and Political Influence**

Fawzia Karim Firoze, a human rights lawyer and activist, exemplifies women's growing involvement in political advocacy outside formal politics. Awarded the International Women of Courage Award in 2024, she has campaigned extensively against gender-based violence and labor exploitation. Her work has influenced policy discussions and raised awareness about women's rights in political and social arenas, demonstrating how civil society actors can complement formal political participation.<sup>38</sup>

These case studies collectively show the diverse pathways and challenges for women in Bangladesh's political landscape—from elite leadership to grassroots activism. They highlight the importance of both institutional reforms and cultural change in advancing gender equality in politics.

## **14. Prospects for the Future**

The future of women's political participation in Bangladesh holds significant promise, driven by evolving social dynamics, institutional reforms, and increasing advocacy for gender equality. Growing awareness of women's rights, combined with the rising involvement of youth and civil society, creates a conducive environment for expanding women's roles in politics.

One promising prospect is the potential expansion of legal and constitutional reforms, such as increasing the number of reserved seats for women in the national parliament and local government bodies. Proposals emerging from recent commissions and advocacy groups aim to not only raise the quantity but also enhance the quality of women's political participation by ensuring they hold meaningful decision-making power rather than symbolic roles.<sup>39</sup>

Technological advancements and social media platforms are also empowering women by providing new channels for political engagement, awareness-raising, and mobilization. These tools can help

women overcome traditional barriers like limited mobility and social scrutiny, enabling broader participation from diverse geographic and social backgrounds.

Moreover, educational gains and improved economic opportunities for women contribute to stronger leadership pipelines. As more women attain higher education and economic independence, their capacity to compete in political arenas and challenge gender biases will increase. Political parties may increasingly recognize the electoral benefits of promoting female candidates, especially among younger and urban voters.<sup>40</sup>

However, the prospects for progress depend heavily on sustained efforts to transform entrenched patriarchal attitudes and political cultures that marginalize women. Continued activism, gender-sensitive policy implementation, and the creation of supportive networks and mentorship programs will be essential to nurture and sustain women's political leadership.<sup>41</sup>

In summary, while challenges remain, the convergence of social change, legal reforms, and technological empowerment presents an optimistic outlook for the future of women's participation in Bangladesh's politics. With concerted action from government, civil society, and communities, Bangladesh can move towards a more inclusive and representative democratic system where women play an integral role.

## **15. Findings and Discussion**

The study reveals a complex landscape where women's political participation in Bangladesh has made notable progress but continues to face significant obstacles rooted in social, cultural, and institutional factors.

- i. While women's representation in political institutions has increased through reserved seats, their actual influence remains limited due to constrained decision-making power and dependence on male-dominated party structures.
- ii. Patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes continue to dominate the political culture, creating significant barriers that hinder women's participation, limit their effectiveness, and highlight the need for cultural change alongside legal reforms.
- iii. Economic and educational disparities hinder women's political participation by limiting their resources, confidence, and access to opportunities necessary for effective engagement and leadership.
- iv. Youth-led movements and civil society initiatives are creating new opportunities for women's political empowerment by promoting inclusive activism, offering leadership support, and challenging traditional gender norms.
- v. Policy and institutional reforms, including reserved seats and gender-sensitive initiatives, reflect growing political will to promote gender equality, but persistent gaps between legislation and implementation highlight the need for stronger enforcement and accountability.

These findings highlight that enhancing women's political participation in Bangladesh requires a multi-dimensional approach. Institutional mechanisms like quotas are essential starting points but must be complemented by efforts to challenge and change deep-rooted patriarchal political cultures. Empowering women economically and educationally can strengthen their political agency and leadership capabilities.

The growing activism among young women and civil society involvement presents an encouraging trend that could accelerate cultural and political change. To maximize these opportunities, political parties need to become more inclusive and supportive of women candidates, providing equal access to resources and decision-making roles.

Ultimately, sustainable progress depends on integrating legal reforms, cultural change, capacity building, and supportive infrastructure. Such comprehensive strategies will ensure that women's participation in politics moves beyond symbolic representation to meaningful influence, thereby strengthening Bangladesh's democracy and social development.

## 16. Conclusion and Recommendations

Women's participation in politics in Bangladesh has witnessed significant progress over the decades, marked by increased representation in parliament and local government, and the rise of influential female leaders. However, this progress remains uneven and largely symbolic due to persistent socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers. Patriarchal political culture, limited access to resources, gender-based violence, and tokenistic political inclusion continue to undermine women's ability to fully engage and influence political processes. Despite these challenges, emerging opportunities through youth activism, civil society initiatives, and institutional reforms offer hope for a more inclusive political future. To achieve substantive gender equality in politics, Bangladesh must move beyond quotas and formal representation toward empowering women as active, influential leaders across all levels of governance. For this I have some recommendations as a remedy, such as-Strengthen Legal and Institutional Frameworks; Promote Political Party Inclusivity; Enhance Capacity Building and Education; Address Socio-Cultural Barriers; Ensure Safety and Protection; Leverage Technology and Media; Support Civil Society and Grassroots Movements. Implementing these recommendations requires coordinated efforts from the government, political parties, civil society, and communities to create an enabling environment where women can participate equally and effectively in Bangladesh's political landscape.

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