

SHIFTING POLITICAL CULTURE IN BANGLADESH, LINGUISTIC PRIDE TO FUNDAMENTALISM: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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*“You can safely assume you’ve created God in your own image when
it turns out that God hates all the same people you do” — Anne Lamotte*

The political culture and political consciousness are interlinked phenomena. In case of a post- colonial nation state like Bangladesh, it becomes important to understand the shifting tides of cultures and socialisation in the political realm to come to terms with the challenges faced by the state. The historical analysis of the advent of political culture in Bangladesh allows an in depth understanding of the political processes and people’s belief system. The valuable interaction between the theory of development of political thought and ideas shaping the formation of a political culture in Bangladesh and how it got socialised into the psychologies of people is the mainstay of this article. Also, it tries to analyse how the shift in political culture impacts a nation’s understanding of the self and impacts its journey in the due course of time. The political behaviour manifests itself in the non-governmental organisations, the state institutions and the peer groups in educational institutes. The entire system feels the churning of thoughts and hence the political discourse feels a major shift and tunes itself to the new social reality of the new social grooming which gives political colour to the social fabric and vice versa. The effects of such political norms are of immense significance for a state in both the domestic domain and international system.

Keywords: political culture, transformation, fundamentalism, political socialisation, imagined community, proliferation, reflexive ideology, modernity

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СДВИГИ В ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ КУЛЬТУРЕ БАНГЛАДЕШ — ОТ ЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКОЙ ГОРДОСТИ К ФУНДАМЕНТАЛИЗМУ: ИСТОРИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ

Абхиджит Сингх

Политическая культура и политическое сознание — взаимосвязанные явления. В случае с постколониальной нацией, такой, как Бангладеш, для того чтобы оценить вызовы, с которыми сталкивается государство, необходимо оценить сдвиги в культуре и политической социализации. Исторический анализ зарождения и развития политической культуры Бангладеш позволяет глубже понять политические процессы и систему взглядов народа. Основной темой статьи является взаимодействие между теорией развития политической

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мысли и воззрениями, определяющими формирование политической культуры и способ ее внедрения в психологию масс. Статья также представляет попытку проанализировать, как сдвиг в политической культуре влияет на самосознание масс и его развитие с течением времени.

Культура и политика взаимосвязаны и влияют друг на друга. Культуру делает политическое проникновение в народные массы.

Политическое поведение проявляет себя в неправительственных организациях, государственных институтах и поколенческих группах учебных заведений. Вся система ощущает бурление мыслей, и таким образом политический дискурс переживает сдвиг и настраивается на новую социальную реальность, новое социальное воспитание, которое придает политическую окраску социальной ткани, и наоборот. Воздействие таких политических норм имеет огромное значение для государства как во внутренней политике, так и на мировой арене.

Ключевые слова: политическая культура, трансформация, фундаментализм, политическая социализация, воображаемое сообщество, пролиферация, рефлексивная идеология, современность

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INTRODUCTION

Fundamentalism may be referred to any tendency which makes dogma feel like a philosophy and philosophy feel like an absolute truth. The basic tenets of fundamental belief are the infallible character of the faith, belief system or trust put in some ideas by a group of people or community. What differentiates between the boundary of faith and fundamentalist assumptions is the idea that a specific belief system has a monopoly over the concept of being right. Also, it is important to note that there is a subtle yet paramount distinction between fundamentalism and communalism. Sometimes it is mistakenly identified as the same thing but the biggest difference between the two is the goal achieved. The former is an attempt to impose the narrow beliefs, culture, ideas or faith upon the people to sometimes change the national character or redefine the social customs while the latter is unequivocally a tool used by the elites of community to forge the ideas into the imagination of the people and use such a stream of ideas for a secular purpose like gaining power in an election or achieve a desired result in a social movement. Communalism is political in nature while fundamentalism is a function of religion and faith.

Another important aspect that lies at the core of the fundamentalist principles is the imagination of the people which is tapped by those seeking revisionism of some sort. There are multitudes of belief systems or religious faiths that people hold very dearly to their identity and any push in that direction which makes them feel threatened or has the potential to deprive them of this identity is met with ferocious response. In their sociological set up people are conditioned to cling to a specific belief or an idea and it is this idea that gives them a version of themselves or to say it makes them who they think they are. To put this into perspective, people in a community or a group of people of any faith tend to describe themselves by associating with a very specific identity pool. This is the pool of identity of 'imagined community'.

A distinct yet connected aspect linked to the cultivation of identity and imagination is the development of a particular political culture owing to such belief patterns. Political culture can be understood as the beliefs and normative judgements that people hold regarding the system in which they stay and the sets of rules according to which they are governed. Political culture can also be understood as a link between how people perceive their identity and politics governing that identity. Just like identity they

also share the views about their governance and politics and how it impacts their way of life and how they can influence it and contour it to their own benefit. The political culture is the result of push and pull forces that a community undergoes before finally describing for itself the beliefs and values which define political customs.

It is in these concepts that the present-day Bangladesh has developed since its formation in 1947 as East Pakistan. Here we deal with the phenomenon of identity and a reflexive identity, the imposed political culture and the subsequent formation of a different culture in the 1950's and 60's leading to a beginning of new aspiration within the community for a distinct political culture. The complex processes of political socialisation were working in tandem with the norms of the society unmatched to the political culture. Such an evolution is the hallmark of the political developments that took place in the erstwhile East Pakistan and transformed it to Bangladesh. The current period is marked by another identity being formed within the group and the community of people and it derives from the notions and understanding of life based on religion.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Fundamentalism can be traced to a direct response to a perceived threat by the liberal values and the modern approach to society. The self-identity gets pushed to a corner in the process which results in a reaction characterised by fundamental principles. According to Anthony Giddens, the globalisation has triggered the recent rise in fundamentalism due to the rapid promotion of cosmopolitan values [Giddens, 1991, pp. 189–190]. There is a reflex action triggered by the community mindset that the liberal principles are somehow eroding a way of life that has been established since long or more importantly described in the scriptures.

There is another set of scholarly constructions that ascribes the surge in fundamental ideas as a response mechanism to an increase in post-modern beliefs. Post modernism resulted in the formation of a resistance identity which manifested itself as fundamentalism [Castells, 1989, pp. 11–31]. The fundamental belief systems are a result of a widespread acceptance ascribed to modern and post-modern beliefs about life, gender, sexual identity and the like topics. Such a push has resulted in a counter movement; this movement is not outward looking, but rather it focusses on the principles which were a dominant part of the lives of people but faded to obscurity with the advent of globalisation and an acceptance of liberal principles both in life and politics.

With the identity threats and formulations and reformulations comes the question about political culture. Since any political culture is a result of an interaction between the political and social components of the society comprised of a faith, beliefs and identities of people, it becomes important to understand the interplay between these factors. The political culture in a society is a direct result of values and normative beliefs/ customs interplaying and mingling with the governance/government structure and how people perceive it and understand it. All the political processes are governed by this complex formation of a political identity of people/group/community/nation. American political scientist Lucian Pye defined political culture as the composite of basic values, feelings, and knowledge that underlie the political process. Hence, the building blocks of political culture are the beliefs, opinions, and emotions of the citizens towards their form of government [Pye, 1969, pp. 56–57]. The political culture also shapes the relationship between people and the government. The relationship between citizen participation and citizen's attitude towards the political system is a direct result of the attitude that people share with the structure of the government and the institutions therein. [Almond and Verba, 1963, p. 175]. There are

three types of political cultures that were identified on the basis of citizens activity and perception of the system of their governments.

Participant Political Culture. This is a system characterised by robust participation by the citizens and an active understanding of politics. Voluntary Association and group formations are a norm.

The Subject Political Culture. This is a system characterised by a peace in the system because there are no questions raised by the people. The citizens are obedient but have a little understanding of the political processes. The inherent quest to participate in the political processes is low. The government usually is at the maximum.

The Parochial Political Culture. This is a system characterised by a citizenry which is neither informed or aware of the political processes but also have no interest to do anything in politics. They are just aware of the government which governs them [ibid].

The placement of fundamental ideas in the psyche of the citizens brings out another dimension in the understanding of the political culture. Political culture as a theory cannot alone explain the fundamental principles which seep into the minds of the people. The reformulation of the understanding of people regarding their government and the associated institutions is also informed by the process of political socialisation. Political Socialisation refers to the process of ideas, values and norms being developed and passed on within a society or a community/ nation and it leads to a cementing of the political culture within the group, community or the nation. The peculiar aspect of the socialising process is that it not only taps the factual information but also accounts for the emotional exchanges within the family, community or the peer groups.

Political socialisation acts on the people/citizens at every stage of their lives. As kids, the belief system of the parents and the broader family shapes the worldview of the person. As an adolescent, the same job is performed in the school as well as the media, which is turn itself is promoted by the culture of politics which is ongoing in a nation/ community. Religion and religious worldview are also an important aspect of political socialisation. As an adult, the same process goes on within a wide network of, mostly like-minded people, who strengthen the beliefs via talks of politics and processes. Political socialisation is a very powerful tool to maintain or mould the political culture [Almond and Powell, 1966, p. 49].

The identity formation, development of political culture and the subsequent dissemination of the culture by the process of political socialisation represents a continuous process. It is important to note that identity forms the basis of such cultural formations and socialisations. In the course of time both political culture and socialisation impact each other. There is no way to chart out which impacts the other more but the shift in Political culture is possible via a different kind of social mobilisation that is a direct result of political socialisation. In a nutshell political socialisation works as an independent variable affecting and impacting the political culture. The political culture may begin with a set of values and beliefs but over a period of time the political socialisation which is a result of influence by some outside factors like Language, Region, cultural assimilation can turn the existing political culture upside down or mould it to an extent where the entire meaning and understanding of the political culture that existed hitherto, changes.

Also, a very pertinent question that links the idea of political culture and political socialisation is the idea of an identity itself. An identity, as mentioned earlier, gives a meaning to people for their day-to-day life and experience. But what is the source of such identity, how do the people, groups, communities and nations get such an identity? The idea for this identity lies in the shared imagination. An imagination which does not need people to know each other personally yet present with everybody in a group or a community. Such an imagination may or may not be homogenous but the link that it provides is enough to make the entire group hold on to it for the very life that they lead. It also serves as a bond that allows the formation of a specific mentality and perceive reality including social and political lives. As put forward by Benedict Anderson, 'Imagined communities refer to groups of individuals who identify with

a shared community, identity, despite often never interacting with most of the other members' [Anderson, 1983, p. 7].

INCEPTION OF IDENTITY AND CULTURE IN BANGLADESH: POST-1947

The beginning of Pakistan and India were tumultuous, to say the least. The situation was rife with communal tensions and geographical mismatch by the colonial British Empire and in doing so it perpetrated the biggest communal clashes that history witnessed. Another major undoing of the time was to not pay attention to the social fabric and understanding of ties while dividing the territories, the maps drawn in a room with a pencil and a scale did not correspond to the ground reality and this resulted in unfulfilled expectations and bitterness in the collective memory of the people of the Indian subcontinent.

Even during British times, the idea of a separate homeland for Islamic section of the population of the Indian subcontinent was doing the rounds. There was a cultural assimilation of the two groups of people but the seeds of communal tensions were sown so deep that it started impacting the basic understanding of the people. What started as a political quest to have a separate state soon took religious and ideological colours and religion rather politics became the swaying factor. It is in the seeds of this religious fundamental approach that socialised a generation of population in the late 1940s and resulted in a chaos that lasted for almost two and half decades.

The formation of East Pakistan and West Pakistan was rife with tensions from the beginning. The formative principle of Islam as a binding factor was not enough to bridge the cultural gaps between the people of the East and West Pakistan. There were fissures seen soon after the end of 1940s. The death of Jinnah and the assassination of the Liaquat Ali Khan paved the way for military takeover of Pakistan (first indirectly and then directly via military coups). The Punjabi dominated military brass considered the Eastern citizens as mere subjects and the situation soon escalated to economic inequality, military actions against the East Pakistani Bengali future dominated population.

The entire political system was gathering inputs from the resentment and unfulfilled aspiration from the Eastern side while derogation and disregard for the former from the Western side. It was a classic example of how inputs in a political system were responsible for impacting political outputs directly. David Easton [Easton, 1965, pp. 32–33] notes that inputs into political system represents the demands which can take varied forms like ideas, interests and most importantly identities. In this case the output should have been corrective policies or decisions to make way for the demands of the people from the Eastern side which paved the way for a new political culture based on linguistic pride and distinct cultural understanding in the imagination of the people.

SHIFT IN POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: FROM RELIGIOUS HOMOGENEITY TO LINGUISTIC DISTINCTION, THE FORMATION OF BANGLADESH

The political system always responds to inputs via the feedback mechanism [Easton, 1965, p. 32] but in the case of West Pakistan it was not an issue to be resolved but to be suppressed. Hence a brutal campaign of subversive activities against the East Pakistani people started. To this effect there was counter effect. The tides of political culture shifted not in the favour of region inspired ideas of consciousness among the people but towards the Bengali language that acted as a political glue to cement the new ideas and identity among the people of 'East Bengal'. The imagination of the people about their existence and their political life saw a major revamp with the advent of Linguistic Nationalism.

The East Bengal nationalism had, at its roots, a shared feeling of an idea that the people of East Bengal are a distinct group and they deserve a separate nation. This marked shift in the imagination of the people as a separate community also led to a shift in the existing political culture of the East Bengal and gave vent to the customs, ideas and imagination of distinctness and a quest to achieve that difference even at the level of the political system. The aspiration was to have a system which is responsible to the demands of the people whom it serves.

The idea of an imagined community rests upon the shared feeling of the of a group of individuals who identify with a shared community identity though no formal interaction takes place between them. An imagined community is a social construction, put together by the group or community of people who feel attached and strengthened by such an idea and perceive themselves as part of a larger group representing this idea. The maligned community as a collective identity forms the basis for nationalism and the formation of a nation state [Anderson, 1983, pp. 6–9]. The East Bengal nationalism was focussed upon the idea of ‘oneness’ given by such an imagination where the entire community dwelled upon shared common heritage that is Bengali language and also the Bengali culture.

The new political consciousness of people started a revolution within the society itself. The new generation started getting acquainted with a new political socialisation which imbibed a national character based on the language as a uniting force. This uniting force was not only horizontal in character but also redefined the vertical columns of power that till then existed in the political system of ‘East Bengal’. This gradual but stern shift in the culture of ongoing politics led to the formation of resistance bands, most famous of which is Mukti Bahini (the private army that was fighting the Pakistani army in the late 1960s and till 1971 when a new state of Bangladesh was formed) which resulted in the formation of militant political culture for a brief period of time. This specific character of militancy was short lived as the aspirations of people was to have a system of their own which coincides with their own cultural values, belief systems and norms. Once this goal was realised a brief period of calm was witnessed in the newly formed Bangladesh.

THE ADVENT OF FUNDAMENTALISM IN POLITICAL CULTURE OF BANGLADESH

Everything went fine in Bangladesh with all the processes being on the track in the making of a modern state, but then came the twist that would change the course of history. The brutal assassination of the founder of Bangladesh, Zia-Ur-Rehman was a watershed moment which put the county along a downward spiral of a dogmatic political outlook which over the years got deeply entrenched with religious fervour. The mixing of politics with religion paved the way for a modern state to go down the road of ‘politics based upon religion’ system. This system was not a days’ work but a factor of several internal variables as well as external influences. The year 1975 saw dramatic changes in the political environment of Bangladesh [Islam, 1984, p. 556].

The shift in the attitude of people was a result of an inside movement which was silent but it grew from within the powerful and elite sections of the society. Such groupings were fearful of the lost way of life that Islamic principles preached and hence they developed a reflexive response to the four cardinal principles that were enunciated by the first prime minister of Bangladesh as the bedrock of the modern state, namely; Nationalism, Socialism, Secularism and Democracy. The very first witness to the insidious change in the political consciousness of the people was seen when the constitution itself was amended to incorporate the religious beliefs.

The Bangladesh constitution was amended in 1977 to include the formula ‘Bismillah-Ar-Rahman-Ar-Rahim’ which translates as ‘in the name of Allah, the merciful and benevolent’. The preamble was changed to accommodate this amendment. Furthermore, the phrase ‘Absolute trust in Almighty Allah’ was written in the preamble. Clause 1A was added to Article 8 of the constitution to which technically and legally changed the

state's view on religion de facto [Chanda, Gupta, 2002, pp. 5–8]. There was attempt to get rid of any clause that would limit the religious zeal in the state policies and the biggest step towards that was taken when Article 12 of the 1972 constitution was deleted which promoted secular value and a new addition was made in Article 25 of the constitution that made it mandatory for the state to seek religious backing and preserve religious principles in every walk of life [The Constitution of People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, pp. 2–4].

The constitutional amendment was just the first step towards the shift in the political consciousness of the citizens. This was a direct response to the chaos after the leadership was assassinated in a single blow. The subsequent government skill-fully deployed the legal channel to appeal to religious identity of the people, once again. In this case the political culture took time to shift in a very gradual manner but first the political socialisation of beliefs that transpired from the above, crept into the social domain. Clause 2 of Article 25 of the Bangladesh constitution is of special importance which states that 'The state shall endeavour to Consolidate, Preserve, and strengthen fraternal relations among Muslim countries based on Islamic Solidarity'.

The phenomenon of creating an identity by the ruling elites from the top became blatant in the late 1970s, a trend which continues till date, and it led to several cracks in the political culture that was based upon people's imagination. The identity which was forged in 1971 gave people a hope to move forward in a secular manner away from dogmatic beliefs and principles and usher Bangladesh as a modern state in the South Asian realm. The advent of fundamentalism in the political system of the country was noticed not at the political and bureaucratic level but also within the generation of population which witnessed these changes. It became far easier for the new identity to proliferate not just vertically but also disseminate horizontally as it still had some remnants in the society from the pre-1971 times. There was a section of people who could not accept the modern foundations of the state and always had an appetite for revisionist beliefs and ideas. These people served as the principle means of Political Socialisation of the new yet old ideas about religious way of life and the primacy of Islamic values in the state. The reflexive ideas countered the established political culture and sought, successfully, to shift it.

THE CONTEMPORARY TIMES IN BANGLADESH

The political culture in present-day Bangladesh is rife with stress and communal tensions. The democratic character is more or less executed on paper and the stability of the government in recent times can be best described as shaky. Being a post-colonial country and gaining independence from another post-colonial country comes with its own sets of challenges. The issues of economic underdevelopment and underdeveloped social structures is nothing uncommon in such societies but much, as the time progressed, Bangladesh seemed to take a step backwards in the parameters of modernity. The economic boom in the manufacturing sector and the improved businesses was a shot in the arm but it was coupled with a deteriorating political underdevelopment.

In order to be a successful democratic polity the country must strive to seek a compromise between the traditional and the modern aspects of a modern nation state. In Bangladesh, right now, the opposite is happening. The participation of the people in the political processes is governed by the political elites. There is no independent mobilisation of a counter political thought which can challenge or force the existing state of affairs to change for the better. The Sheikh Hasina government which fell in the most dramatic fashion in 2024 is stark reminder of how neglected political needs and top-down models of political culture can lead to communal tensions and break the delicate social fabric of a multi-ethnic and multi-ethnic societies like Bangladesh.

The present caretaker government regime of Mohammed Yunus is acting in the same manner of political revisionism and vendetta which has had the market the political culture of Bangladesh since 1975. The shift in the political culture has not just resulted in some historically fatal choices for the nation as a whole it has Las

impacted the foreign policy choices of the country. Such a practice is ill suited for a nation-state in the long run as it undermines its capacity to work in the 21st century to work with the immediate neighbours, in an efficient manner. Also, this results in alignments which acts as drainage mechanism of national character rather than strengthening it. Bangladesh in its quest to claim its place in the Islamic world and attach itself to an Islamic identity has not only shaped the entire political culture to theological realm but at the same time it had to let go of the crucial partnerships that would have helped it secure much needed business and economic opportunities.

THE POLITICAL SHIFTS: 2024 — PRESENT

This paper examines the ideological transformation in Bangladesh, concentrating on the tension between its foundational linguistic nationalism and the growing impact of religious fundamentalism, exacerbated by the political developments from 2024 to 2026. The political identity of Bangladesh has historically been defined by a dichotomous conflict: linguistic-secular nationalism versus religious-Islamic nationalism. The 1952 Language Movement served as the moral and cultural bedrock of the state for fifty years, culminating in the 1971 Liberation War. After the Monsoon Revolution² in August 2024 and the general elections in February 2026, the country's political culture has changed a lot. The collapse of the Awami League's secular-authoritarian framework has enabled the ascendance of religious conservatism, which threatens to eclipse linguistic pride as the primary driving force of the Bangladeshi state.

Linguistic nationalism was the glue that held East Bengal together and allowed it to break away from Pakistan's religiously based Two-Nation Theory. It said that having a common language and culture was more important than having the same religion. This 'linguistic pride' became a state religion during Sheikh Hasina's long time in office (2009–2024).

Political scholars assert that the Awami League ultimately exploited this identity to marginalize opposition. The government caused intellectual exhaustion by calling anyone who disagreed with them 'Razakars' (collaborators with Pakistan) or 'anti-liberation forces.' The protests led by students in July 2024 started out focusing on job quotas but quickly grew into a larger rejection of the story told by the government. The regime's use of deadly force, which killed about 1,400 people, permanently changed the state's definition of the 'Spirit of 71'. [UK Parliament, 2025]³; [SWP Berlin, 2026]⁴.

² Following a massive protest movement in Bangladesh that toppled the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, politicians, civil society, students, diplomats, United Nations rights experts, and others quickly started work with an interim government to bring lasting reforms. After the monsoon Revolution, 2025. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/01/27/after-monsoon-revolution/roadmap-lasting-security-sector-reform-bangladesh>.

³ Terrorism in contemporary Bangladesh is motivated not only by the aim of exterminating or expelling its minorities and creating an unsullied theocracy at home, but by a global agenda. That is why events in Bangladesh are of grave concern to the wider global community, and to us in the UK. Bangladesh is the fourth largest Islamic society in the world, and the deepening roots of religiously motivated terrorism there pose a significant challenge to peace and security in a world already besieged by terrorism from other sources. A handful of determined killers, influenced by intensifying extremist ideology in their country of origin and the right to visa-free travel as EU or US nationals, will create an additional nightmare for national security agencies. [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2016-09-08/debates/0A950408-39DC-4436-B1DC-62BCA8D35891/Bangladesh\(ReligiousMinorities\)?highlight=extremism&_cf_chl_f_tk=fgUZKsaMbX57kjZjTxUMe_xrVeBBOwW93ZZcfpL.95M-1776933030-1.0.1.1-iBwHd9Odkx.B0ULY2goPboz7kGKXHlPH5VDdpWRiOro](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2016-09-08/debates/0A950408-39DC-4436-B1DC-62BCA8D35891/Bangladesh(ReligiousMinorities)?highlight=extremism&_cf_chl_f_tk=fgUZKsaMbX57kjZjTxUMe_xrVeBBOwW93ZZcfpL.95M-1776933030-1.0.1.1-iBwHd9Odkx.B0ULY2goPboz7kGKXHlPH5VDdpWRiOro).

⁴ The election outcome raises new questions regarding the future of democratic pluralism in the country. The decisive election victory of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) means that one of the country's two historic political family dynasties will remain at the helm of government. The Muslim fundamentalist camp gained vote share, which could negatively impact the role of women in society as well as complicate Bangladesh's renewed rapprochement with neighbouring India. <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/bangladeshs-political-realignment-after-the-parliamentary-elections>.

THE 2024 INSURRECTION: A REASON FOR CHANGE

When Sheikh Hasina left on August 5, 2024, there was a power vacuum like no other. Muhammad Yunus, a Nobel Prize winner, led the interim government in an effort to guide the country toward state repair and a change to democracy. However, the country's basic social structure began to break down along religious lines.

1. Iconoclasm and Symbolic Transformations. The destruction of statues of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the Nation, was not only an act of vandalism, but also a symbolic breaking down of the secular-linguistic cult of personality.

2. The Rise of Majoritarianism. Without a strong secular police force, communalist discourse spread. The protests in 2024 started out as a mix of different groups, but then there was a rise in violence against Hindu minorities, which experts have called an exclusionary form of nationalism. [Paul, 2025, p. 4]⁵.

THE REBIRTH OF ISLAMIST POLITICAL GROUPS (2025–2026)

The clearest sign that the shift from linguistic pride to fundamentalism is happening is the rise of Islamist groups in elections and society.

The Return of Jamaat-e-Islami

In February 2026, Jamaat-e-Islami, which was banned in early 2024 for rejecting the secular constitution, became a major force again. The official results from the Election Commission show that the party won 77 out of 300 seats, which is the most seats it has ever won in the country's history [Democratic Erosion, 2026]. This shows that voters' feelings have changed a lot. More and more, they see religious power as a more 'genuine' option than the corruption they see in secular dynasties.

Hifazat-e-Islam: A Parallel Social Institution

Hifazat-e-Islam Bangladesh, commonly known as Hefazat-e-Islam, is an Islamist advocacy group stemming from the Qawmi madrasa system, established in 2010 by its leaders. Primarily based in Chittagong, particularly at the Hathazari Madrasa, the organization comprises Islamic scholars, educators, and students and operates independently from mainstream political entities. Its formation was a reaction against perceived threats to Islamic values, particularly following the government's proposals of the Women's Policy 2011 and Education Policy 2010, which the group deemed contrary to Islamic principles. The group's national prominence surged during a significant rally in Dhaka in 2013, where it put forth a 13-point demand advocating for stricter blasphemy laws and increased Islamic influence in public life.

The organizational structure is decentralized, overseen by a central council (Majlis-e-Shura) and historically led by prominent figures like Shah Ahmad Shafi and Junaid Babunagari. Hifazat-e-Islam rejects involvement in electoral politics, maintaining a clear distance from both secular and Islamist parties such as the Awami League and Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami. Its ideological framework is deeply rooted in Deobandi conservatism, focusing on the preservation of Islamic values, modesty, and religious education, alongside calls for societal reforms aligned with traditional interpretations of Sharia.

One of the group's most notable actions occurred on May 5–6, 2013, during a major demonstration pressing its demands, which resulted in a violent response from security forces. Since then, Hifazat-e-Islam has actively opposed governmental policies viewed as secular, reacted against educational reforms, and protested against items such as sculptures and celebrations seen as contrary to Islamic teachings. Its

⁵ URL: <https://ejournal.uinsgd.ac.id/index.php/rpj/article/view/1442/708>.

relationship with the state has been complex, oscillating between confrontations over secular policy and moments of negotiation, including the government's recognition of Qawmi madrasa degrees as equivalent to postgraduate qualifications, suggesting a degree of accommodation aimed at appeasing the group [Pattnaik, 2020, pp. 3–4].

The social impact of Hifazat-e-Islam has sparked contrasting views. Supporters consider it a crucial defender of Islamic values amid a secularizing society, while critics accuse it of promoting intolerance, hindering women's rights, and limiting freedom of expression. Human rights activists have condemned the group's stances on issues like blasphemy laws, interpreting them as violations of global free speech norms and minority rights. In conclusion, Hifazat-e-Islam remains a pivotal force within Bangladesh's socio-political context, its influence indicative of the Qawmi madrasa system's resilience and the ongoing struggle between secular and religious narratives, profoundly affecting discussions around national identity, state policies, and the future of pluralism in the country. Hefazat-e-Islam is not a political party, but it has had a big impact on the reform process since 2024. They have spoken out for: getting rid of secularism in the constitution, the repeal of laws that protect women's equal rights to inherit, more religious oversight in the national curriculum.

ROLE OF HIFAZAT-E-ISLAM POST 2024

Hifazat-e-Islam (HEI) will play a very important role in Bangladesh after 2024 because of its historical impact and the way politics and society work in the country. HEI was founded in 2010 as a response to what people saw as the secularization and cultural dilution of Bangladesh. At first, its advocacy was focused on protecting Islamic values and practices, which was in line with the views of a large part of the population. After the 2024 general election, Bangladesh's politics are likely to change a lot. People think that HEI will try to strengthen its position as a major player in shaping political narratives, especially if the current government, led by the Awami League, starts to lose power. The organization's grassroots support could show up in getting people to speak out against policies that are seen as secular or against Islamic values.

Politically, HEI may take a more aggressive approach to building coalitions with other Islamist parties and groups. This could mean working with the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami and newer groups that have similar beliefs. The possibility of a united Islamist front poses a significant threat to the secular political framework and may result in heightened polarization among the electorate. In addition, HEI's impact goes beyond politics to include social issues, especially education and cultural practices. The group has spoken out against school and university curricula that it thinks go against Islamic teachings and has called for a more Islamic-centered educational system. This push changes how people talk about things in public and could lead to changes in school policies. It could even make Bangladesh rethink the secular versus religious education model.

Activism related to Hifazat-e-Islam is also likely to grow as people become more unhappy with society, especially when the economy is bad or politics are bad. HEI could take advantage of this anger by presenting itself as a defender of the rights of regular people. This strategy could lead them to look at problems like unemployment and economic disenfranchisement through an Islamic lens and convince people to look for answers that are based on their faith. In addition, HEI's ties to other countries could become stronger after 2024. Due to changes in the geopolitical climate, HEI may try to work with transnational Islamic groups to gain more power and possibly adopt positions that are influenced by global Islamic movements. This could change the way Bangladesh handles its foreign policy, especially when it comes to its ties with other Muslim-majority countries.

The world of social media has both good and bad things for HEI. The fast spread of information makes it easy for young people to get involved and support each other, but it also makes the organization open

to criticism and counter-narratives. How HEI adjusts to the digital age will be very important for keeping its audience and growing it. In short, Hifazat-e-Islam's role in Bangladesh after 2024 could change a lot as it deals with changes in politics, social issues, and outside forces. It could build coalitions, push for Islamic education, deal with social and economic problems, and use social media to reach out to people. The relationship between HEI's goals and the larger social and political situation will definitely affect the future of Bangladesh's politics.

THE NEW NORMAL AND THE GENERAL ELECTION OF 2026

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) won a huge victory in the February 2026 elections. Still, a big change in the way people talked about religion helped the BNP get into power. In early 2026, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir publicly declared that secularism was inappropriate for Bangladesh's sociocultural context, advocating a framework that prioritizes religious sensibility (News9Live, 2026)⁶. This change shows that even the mainstream center-right is moving toward a mix of nationalism and Islam to keep popular support. This change is marked by:

1) **The Cyber Security Ordinance (2025)**⁷. The new law keeps parts of the strict Digital Security Act that make it illegal to hurt religious feelings, which gives fundamentalist groups a legal way to silence secularists and atheists (Gov.uk, 2025). This law is an institutional overreach which allows for majoritarianism in a sustained manner. This reflects a broader social affinity and dimension wherein the state itself becomes a tool for propagating the interests of the majority. The minorities are having a bulwark of protection in a post-colonial society only when the state keeps itself away legally and institutionally from the calls of majority pressure groups and social movement tactics. This law disguised as a document to spearhead Bangladesh into a next generation IT hub is another step towards terminating the secular credential that Bangladesh could have saved.

This is not happening because of the top leadership was keen to have it while the general population was ignorant about the facts. Rather it showcases a grassroots movement where such thoughts are manifested socially and politically. There is a general consensus among the population that Islam is the way out and the society itself is going towards a trend of Islamisation. The biggest fact for the support of this act is the rise of radical parties which are getting immense electoral results. The populace is gearing itself towards a new social set up and resetting the earlier peaceful co-existence mechanism.

2.) **Cultural Festivals Being Pushed Aside**. Religious leaders who think that traditional Bengali holidays like Pohela Boishakh (Bengali New Year) are un-Islamic have been calling for them to be limited more and more. Bangladesh is at a turning point where the linguistic citizen is being replaced by the religious subject. Years of political abuse have weakened the linguistic pride that used to protect against religious extremism. As the political situation in 2026 settles down, the new government will have to stop this religious resurgence from turning into state-sponsored fundamentalism that hurts the rights of women, minorities, and the democratic pluralism that the 2024 revolution was meant to protect.

CONCLUSION: THE WAY FORWARD

The most important step that must be taken with an urgency is to develop the institutions in the country. The institutional mechanism, if robust enough, is a cure to most of the bureaucratic issues.

⁶ BNP Rejects Secularism Ahead Of Bangladesh Elections, Sparks Debate. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XQnTl8OF-8Q>.

⁷ Bangladesh Artificial Intelligence readiness assessment report. URL: [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2025-11/final_digital_bangladesh_ai_ram.pdf#:~:text=A Cyber Security Ordinance was,2 https://a2i.gov.bd/](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2025-11/final_digital_bangladesh_ai_ram.pdf#:~:text=A%20Cyber%20Security%20Ordinance%20was,2https://a2i.gov.bd/).

This in turn will lead to reduction in the attitudes of people towards the system and it would also promote transparency between the civil and social component of the state. Second, the state of Bangladesh must revisit the constitution and reinvent the secular institution in the country. A multi ethnic country can't ever be driven or inspired by theological beliefs. Religion can be the staple for people but it being the staple of state brings disaster specially in a multi-national and ethnically diverse societies such as Bangladesh. Politics must be separated from religion and it should remain so no matter which party is in power.

The top-down model of state policy proliferation must stop and the third tier of government must be started so that the grassroots level, the most populous of all, of the society and the nation is strengthened and is able to give its feedback to the system. The public policies made for the people must also take a review of their effect from the very people for whom it is designed. The state must take utmost care that no individual or group must rise above the rule of law and put the state and its institution to ransom for the realisation of some idea which amounts to putting the entire society subservient to a dogmatic belief system or principles. Another important aspect of national building is an active cultivation of friendly relations with the neighbouring countries on the basis of national interest and not on some parochial notion of shared brotherhood based upon religion. Such an approach not only harms the present generation of people and the state but also corrupts the upcoming generation with the famous 'frog in the well' notion of ideas. The realist notions of state building must be taken into consideration and not the religious ones.

The last, but not the least, aspect is that Bangladesh as a nation evolved from a separate understanding of itself vis-a-vis the rest of the world. Its language and culture are intangible heritage for the entire world and must be presented in the most reputable and respectable manner all across the world. It is from these values that the distinct political culture took birth in the nation of Bangladesh. The state must correct the deviations and check for any undue slopes in the political systems and processes that may derail the nation building effort. State sponsored education of the modern arts and sciences must be the focus rather than state sponsored teaching of theology. Bangladesh caters to the need of all its citizens and not just one group or community and this must remain in the political consciousness all the time as it is one of the most important markers of a modern nation state.

Bangladesh has prospered a lot since its inception as a separate state in 1971. It made huge strides in all round directions and developed with a striking pace in human growth indicators like Human Development Index and per capita income. The need of the hour is to allocate these successes successfully, via the institutions, to the citizens without any consideration for ideas or belief system that may disrupt the growth or lead to a change in the social understating of politics. The people must always connect to the government and its policies and the state must always remain in consonance with the ideas and beliefs and identities of the citizens. Any attempt to make such beliefs, ideas and identities from the top leads to a destruction of the real social and political culture and replaces it with a virtual understanding which is forced upon the people. Such an identity leads to cracks and fissures in the society and it disrupts the entire political and social organisation of the state and sometimes leads to breakdown of the state itself.

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