

Research Article

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Youth Voices Unleashed: Media Narratives in Bangladesh's 2024 Quota Reform Movement

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the impact of reporting on social movements by different media outlets. Currently, youth predominantly utilize social media to communicate their demands and preferences to adults. A robust popular movement seeking to modify the quotas for 2024 has emerged through both social media and traditional media. Public outrage is chiefly accountable for this, as seen by tweets and news articles. Individuals expressed significant dissatisfaction with their employment and task allocation to achieve objectives. The 2024 Quota Reform Movement significantly alters politics and culture. It demonstrates the engagement of Bangladeshi youth and their aspiration for transformation within the nation. National and international news outlets have reported on the passionate and resolute tone of the adolescents leading the demonstrations. This article analyzes news articles that robustly endorse the Reform Movement in Bangladesh to explore possible media impact on the movement's future. Journalists worldwide reporting on the protests emphasized the importance of the movement.

Key Words: Youth, Media, Bangladesh Quota Reforms, Social Media

Introduction

The Quota Reform Movement for 2024 is a significant progression in Bangladesh's ongoing effort to establish a more equitable and just society. This pertains to a notably important era in American history. This trend indicated a substantial transformation in Bangladesh's enduring efforts for a fairer society. Numerous proponents of this movement regarded the current government's employment and educational quota policies as obsolete and inequitable. The quota system was established to ensure fair representation of disadvantaged groups. Nonetheless, it has emerged as a contentious topic, prompting several demonstrations and demands for reform. In early 2024, civil society organizations, activists, and students collaborated to promote a meritocratic system. This elevated the movement's visibility. The protesters asserted that the current method of quota distribution is discriminatory, favoring certain groups while exacerbating circumstances for others. Due to the rapid changes in the country's population and socioeconomic conditions, the restrictions must be meticulously examined and adjusted. Reluctance and frequent attempts to settle the unrest through dialogue and minor modifications marked the government's early stance on the movement. However as the movement gained momentum, it became apparent that significant reforms needed to be implemented to adequately address the protesters' demands (Ellis-Petersen & Ahmed, 2024).

The Bangladesh protests of 2022–24 were a series of anti-government demonstrations against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's administration. Initially low-level, the movement gained momentum in 2024 and became linked to the student–people's uprising. In July 2024, the unrest intensified and turned into a civil disinvestment movement, leading to Hasina's resignation and eventual exile. In December 2022, tens of thousands marched in Dhaka demanding the resignation of Sheikh Hasina. The protests were linked to

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rising commodity costs and inflation due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Bangladesh's former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, was ousted by a student-led revolution on August 5, 2024. The revolution began after the High Court Division reinstated a quota system for government jobs, forcing Hasina to flee to India and resign. The Awami League government collapsed, with over 30,000 injured and 875 killed, 77% of whom died from gunshot wounds (Hossain, [2024](#)). In June 2024, the Supreme Court announced the reinstatement of the pre-2018 quota system in government jobs, triggering massive quota reform protests by students. The July massacre resulted in thousands more casualties and hundreds killed. The protests ended after the march on Dhaka resulting in the resignation of Sheikh Hasina.

The 2024 Quota Reform Movement received media attention in various ways emphasizing the complexity of this issue. National and international media outlets provided in-depth coverage, weighing on the youthful energy and determination driving the movement. Several news sites discussed the significance of equitable reform and the validity of the demonstrators' objectives. Other news sites characterized the movement as disruptive and emphasized the issues it generated. The dual approach of media coverage altered public sentiment, influenced the progression of the movement, and affected the regulations employed by legislators and organizers. The 2024 Quota Reform Movement emphasized the significance of media coverage on political and social issues and the efficacy of collective action in effecting social change. This study will examine the movement's history, significant events, and impacts, alongside the contributions of various individuals, the repercussions of subsequent changes, the evolving nature of media coverage, and how these factors influenced the movement's development. This paper's primary focus is a thorough examination of a significant social movement in contemporary Bangladesh ([2024](#)).

Catalysts of the 2024 Movement: Key Events Leading to the 2024 Protests

The Quota Reform Movement, spearheaded by student rallies, sought to amend the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) quota, which was abolished in 2018 and reinstated in 2024. The BCS quota significantly influences the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. Of the 56 percent of jobs, 30 percent are allocated to individuals descended from Bangladeshi Freedom Fighters. Families affiliated with the Awami League obtained the majority of the quotas due to their assistance in facilitating the success of the 1970 Pakistan General Elections. The BCS employment guaranteed stable, lifelong employment accompanied by government-funded benefits. The demonstrators asserted that these benefits were intended for members of the Awami League. The Quota Reform Movement declined as youth unemployment rose and state government prejudice emerged. The limitation was based on Hasina and her Awami League party's dominance over the elections as a whole. The US State Department issued warnings before both the 2018 and January 2024 elections, offering an ultimatum to allow a caretaker-run election in October 2023. The Awami League faced US and European Union scrutiny and sanctions for human rights abuses, including the establishment of a secret prison called "Aynaghor" for protestors. Hasina evaded these sanctions and allowed a free and fair election in January 2024, while the main opposition boycotted the election. This timeline of sanctions and other disciplinary measures was put into perspective within the Biden administration's wider democracy promotion campaign, targeting Bangladesh due to its strong people-to-people ties, business interests, and diaspora lobbying for human rights ([2024](#)).

The quota system has posed a substantial barrier for the nation's youth, many of whom are unemployed, in obtaining desirable civil service roles. This has incited controversy due to the substantial number of quota seats being occupied by proponents of the ruling Awami League party. In response to significant pressure from a prior student campaign about the matter, Hasina eliminated the entire quota system in 2018. In June 2024, the nation's supreme court deemed the action illegal, resulting in a renewed surge of demonstrations nationwide. In July, public institutions in Bangladesh witnessed a succession of walkouts by teachers and students in response to proposed pension reforms that would entail salary cuts if enacted. The protests began peacefully; however, tensions intensified after Hasina delivered a provocative speech, referring to the students as "rajakaar," a term denoting pro-Pakistan collaborators from Bangladesh's War of Independence. The Bangladesh Chhatra League, the militant faction of the Awami League, commenced assaults on students utilizing tear gas and live ammunition, with police backing. The Rapid Action Battalion, a contentious paramilitary organization known for extrajudicial killings, torture, and enforced disappearances, was also mobilized (Sajjad, [2024](#)).



The 2024 Bangladesh quota reform movement was a series of anti-government and pro-democracy protests in Bangladesh, primarily led by university students. The movement began in June 2024, following the Supreme Court's decision to reinstate a 30% quota for descendants of freedom fighters. The protest spread due to the government's violent response and public dissatisfaction. The government shut down educational institutions, deployed their student wing, and declared a nationwide shoot-at-sight curfew. The government also blocked social media and cordoned off parts of Dhaka. As of August 2, there were 215 confirmed deaths, over 20,000 injuries, and over 11,000 arrests. UNICEF reported that at least 32 children were killed during the protests. The Awami League government suggested that political opponents co-opted the protest. The movement expanded its demands, including accountability for violence, a ban on the student wing of the government Chhatra League, and the resignation of government officials.

Dr. Muhammad Yunus, a Nobel laureate and social entrepreneur, is appointed to lead the nation, but his task of restoring public trust is challenging due to growing challenges such as Islamist parties, communal tensions, inflation, and the inability to hold revolution perpetrators accountable. The interim government aims to establish reforms in the election commission, civil administration, and judiciary and security forces for the upcoming elections (Hossain, [2024](#)).

Fall of Hasina's Government and its Impact on Supporting External Powers

Bangladesh's student-led revolution on August 5 led to the collapse of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government, paving the way for a new era in the country. Despite the success of the previous government, corruption, inequality, poor labor protections, and a lack of political stability have hindered progress. The new interim government, led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, will need to address these issues and revamp key political institutions. The country's economy also needs reform. However, this will be challenging due to competing pressures from students, opposition parties, and bureaucratic actors. Elections are needed to reestablish legitimate governance, but premature holding could entrench an established political elite with less interest in systemic change. The rise of a political opposition that often criticizes the Hasina government for its obeisance to regional powers further exacerbates the situation. The United States, despite being outside Bangladesh's neighborhood, has important interests at stake, as it is Bangladesh's largest destination for garment exports and a key source of foreign direct investment. Bangladesh's transition to democracy is expected to be unstable in the short term, but a more democratic country is beneficial for America. A stable, multi-party democracy with fair elections will promote accountability, reduce corruption, and stabilize politics. Robust democratic institutions and civil society are more resilient to China's influence. Bangladesh's opposition often advocates for liberal reforms and greater foreign policy ties to the West, suggesting a potential for a strong relationship with the next government. The U.S. can support Bangladesh's reformers by encouraging dialogue, providing technical assistance, investing in youth empowerment, and supporting economic growth. The greatest danger for Bangladesh is its unfinished revolution, which could lead to a repression of democratic aspirations (Macdonald, [2024](#)).

The collapse of Hasina's regime in Bangladesh was a strategic failure for India, as the Awami League had little legroom to launch a comeback. However, recent developments and the trajectory set for the next Bangladeshi election seem to sway against New Delhi's favor, as anti-Indian sentiments have reached all-time highs. Bangladesh plays a tough balancing act in the Indo-Pacific due to its immense population, resource endowments, and strategic location in the Bay of Bengal. With Yunus at the helm, Bangladesh is under a transitory governance scheme, whereas Washington has a more receptive head of state. Diplomatic overtures and economic cooperation can collectively aid in preventing Bangladesh from becoming another autocratic regime and becoming a vassal for Beijing's interests in the Indo-Pacific neighboring its regional rival, India (Hossain, [2024](#)).

Media Narratives and Youth Activism

It was a pivotal event in Bangladesh's recent history. The 2024 Quota Reform Movement was predominantly spearheaded by youth. The movement aimed to abolish the contentious system of job quotas within the government. Numerous news articles have highlighted the significant influence of young people's thoughts in molding political discourse. Social networks facilitated the organization of protests

and the mobilization of participants. Researchers assert that social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were essential in disseminating information, coordinating strategies, and conveying the demonstrators' perspectives. Utilizing hashtags and trending material facilitated broader recognition among individuals throughout and globally. A significant portion of our knowledge regarding the revolution is derived from historical texts and articles. The protests received extensive attention in newspapers, on television, and on the radio. Much of it pertained to the concerns and desires of the youth. This scrutiny made the movement more tangible and compelled the administration to respond to the demonstrators' grievances. Following the media exposure of young activists, they occasionally faced harassment and surveillance from authorities, which was not intended to occur. Researchers have emphasized the necessity for journalists to conduct themselves with integrity, ensuring the safety and confidentiality of activists. Janapati (2024) asserts that news coverage of the quota reform movement significantly altered public perceptions. Positive news facilitated public support for the initiative. During adverse conditions, individuals began to scrutinize the movement and resist it. The media's portrayal of the movement altered the primary narrative and influenced public sentiment significantly. The principal Bangladeshi newspapers and other media present numerous narratives and perspectives regarding the Bangladesh Revolution of 2024. This is an examination of how prominent Bangladeshi newspapers have reported on the development.

Dhaka Tribune

The Dhaka Tribune has focused on the international ramifications and the role of foreign media in shaping Bangladesh's post-revolution narrative. The journal emphasized that widespread coverage has heightened knowledge of the nation's political trends and emerging challenges. The Dhaka Tribune emphasized the necessity for Bangladesh to alter its narrative and capitalize on possibilities for development and reform.

The Analyst News

The Analyst News scrutinized the University Teachers Network's activities extensively. The organization and financing of the student-led initiative were significantly supported by this group of scholars. The document examined the history of the network, its initiatives to avert the privatization of public colleges, and its involvement in the protests. The coverage focused on the concepts and organizations facilitating the transformation.

United States Institute of Peace (USIP)

Although it is not a Bangladeshi newspaper, the USIP's appraisal of the pertinent topics in the revolution is highly commendable. The article examined the perpetual necessity for political transition and the challenges the interim government encounters in sustaining stability and advancing democracy. From the perspective of USIP, one can fully see how the development will impact Bangladesh's future.

Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI)

The FPRI primarily examined the ramifications of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's abrupt exit and the challenges confronting the interim government led by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus. The publication highlighted concerns such as the rise of Islamist factions, sectarian conflict, the necessity for accountability, and economic reform. The FPRI's research demonstrated the complexity and ambiguity that ensued after the reform.

International Affairs

International Affairs analyzed the evolution and ramifications for the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in the future. The study analyzed the impact of the student-led movement on fostering a more equal political and social framework in Bangladesh. The press coverage focused on the major political developments and the challenges of navigating a new political terrain.

Portrayal of Bangladesh revolution 2024 by international media

The Bangladesh Revolution of 2024 has garnered significant international media attention, with major outlets like CNN, BBC, and The New York Times providing extensive coverage. Here's an analysis of how each of these media giants has portrayed the revolution:



CNN

CNN's coverage has focused on the transformation of peaceful protests into a full-blown anti-government movement due to state violence. They highlighted key instances where state actions escalated the situation, leading to the resignation and flight of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. CNN reported on the tragic loss of lives, emphasizing the human cost of the revolution (CNN, [2024](#)).

BBC

The BBC provided a detailed account of the political upheaval, emphasizing the dramatic resignation of Sheikh Hasina and the subsequent dissolution of the parliament. Their coverage highlighted the uncertainty and chaos that followed, including the looting and disorder in Dhaka. The BBC also focused on the demands of the student protest leaders and the promise of an interim government to hold new elections (Drury & Whitehead, [2024](#)).

The New York Times

The New York Times offered a comprehensive analysis of the revolution's impact on Bangladesh's political landscape. They discussed the constitutional crisis triggered by Hasina's resignation and the challenges faced by the interim government. The New York Times also covered the broader implications of the revolution, including public disorder and the role of the military in restoring order (Hasnat & Das, [2024](#)).

United States Institute of Peace (USIP)

Although not a Bangladeshi newspaper, the USIP's analysis is worth noting for its comprehensive overview of the revolution's unfinished business. The publication discussed the need for sustained political reform and the challenges the interim government faces in maintaining stability and achieving democratic progress. The USIP's perspective provided a broader context for understanding the revolution's implications for Bangladesh's future.

Al Jazeera

Al Jazeera highlighted several key aspects of media portrayal of the Bangladesh revolution. The articles emphasized youth involvement and its impact on the overall movement. Al Jazeera stressed the significant role of Bangladesh's youth, particularly Gen Z, in driving the revolution. Their protests and activism were pivotal in toppling the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The coverage underscores the widespread public support for the revolution, with large-scale protests and demonstrations. The media highlighted the unity and determination of the protesters. The articles detail the government's response to the protests, including clashes between protesters and government supporters. The media portrayed the government's attempts to suppress the movement and the resilience of the protesters. The revolution garnered significant international attention, with media outlets like Al Jazeera providing extensive coverage. This helped bring global awareness to the situation in Bangladesh (Chughtai & Ali, [2024](#); Borges, [2024](#)).

Social media played a pivotal role in both the Bangladesh Revolution and the 2024 Quota Reform Movement, acting as a catalyst for mobilization, communication, and awareness.

Mobilization and Organization

Social media platforms like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, and YouTube were instrumental in organizing protests and rallies. These platforms allowed activists to quickly disseminate information, coordinate activities, and mobilize large groups of people. The ease of sharing event details and updates helped maintain momentum and ensure widespread participation. To spread their message and mobilize supporters, activists utilised hashtags like #QuotaReform and #FairJobs. It was easier to look up information about the movement because of these hashtags.

Amplifying Voices

Social media gave a voice to the youth and other marginalized groups, enabling them to share their grievances and demands on a global stage. Hashtags and viral content helped amplify their messages,

drawing attention from both national and international audiences. This visibility was crucial in garnering support and putting pressure on the government to address the protesters' demands.

Real-Time Communication

During revolution protests, social media helped youth and supporters to communicate in real-time among themselves through hashtags and to get their message across the public and government. These channels allowed activists to distribute live news, movies, and front-line front-line photos, therefore maintaining the movement's vitality and flexibility. This quick communication guaranteed that people were updated about happenings and made demonstrations possible to keep cohesiveness.

Countering State Narratives

The argument of state-owned narratives included social media as a major and dynamic component. Bangladeshi traditional media occasionally suffered censorship and restrictions. Still, social media helped planners spread their message free from these obstacles. This was especially important in stressing events involving violations of human rights and state harshness.

International Attention

The great availability of social media channels enabled thorough coverage of the protests. Leveraging the social media trend, multinational news organizations attracted major interest and support from businesses and governments all around. The international censure of the response of the Bangladeshi government to the demands of the protestors aggravates its problems.

Conclusion

Bangladesh's 2024 Quota Reform Movement highlights the need to empower young people and the ways in which the media may support political movements in expansion. Though it comes with many moral issues that need to be addressed to safeguard their safety and privacy, many argue it is unjust for the media to present the opinions of juvenile activists. The Bangladesh Revolution of 2024, which reveals how convoluted the event was, has been covered in several well-known Bangladeshi and international news sources. The media has honestly and totally covered various issues during this highly significant period in Bangladeshi history, including intellectual networks, student demonstrations, state opposition, and foreign opinions. Many news sources have investigated the complex and significant events of the Bangladesh Revolution of 2024 closely. A substantial population of young Bangladeshis engaged in actions that fundamentally altered the political climate in their nation. Social media has constraints even so, despite its potential for political application. Limitations on access to the internet and social media curtailed people's freedom of movement. Those organizing the event were quite concerned about possible use for spying and dissemination of misleading information. It was applied in the Bangladesh Revolution and the 2024 Quota Reform Movement notwithstanding the issues we have already discussed. People were allowed more liberty; organizational systems were strengthened; and many points of view were properly appreciated. It also generated issues that demanded discussion in order to be resolved.



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