



Original Research

Quota Movements of 2018 and 2024: Assessing Their Impact on SDG Achievements in the Contemporary Context of Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Due to the lack of democratic government in Bangladesh, there was no substantial improvement in the overall condition. In 2024, students staged a 39-day demonstration to challenge and oppose racism. The objective was to collect precise statistics on the student mobilization between 2018 and 2024, taking into account the broader environment of Bangladesh. The study utilized a qualitative research technique. The analysis encompasses both the present state of affairs in Bangladesh and the entirety of the movement. We collected data from both primary and secondary sources. The results suggest that the 36-day undertaking was successful but necessitated substantial sacrifices. The quota movement eventually evolved into a widespread coup d'état that successfully freed the nation from the clutches of fascism. The campaigners successfully accomplished their goal of reforming the quota system. In addition, the government recruited them as consultants to execute the essential reforms required following 15 years of monopolistic control. They embody the upcoming cohort that will assume leadership and governance of Bangladesh's future. After triumphantly overcoming obstacles in their quest for truth, they gained widespread recognition as the trailblazers who would guide the establishment of a government focused on justice in the future.

1. Introduction

Bangladesh, a constitutional democracy, has encountered several contradictions and weaknesses within its democratic framework. Power struggles among political factions have resulted in bloodshed and harm owing to a lack of consensus across nations on critical issues. The nation's history reflects leaders promoting constitutional protection while modifying it seventeen times to further their personal interests or consolidate power (Kabir, 2015; Karim, 2019). This has led to a political crisis marked by efforts to maintain power, military dominance, and the rise of authoritarian regimes. The right to free speech and expression is essential for the proper functioning of a democracy. Autocrats and totalitarian dictators frequently employ the suppression of freedom of expression to reinforce their authority (Yonten, 2024). The present administration has fostered an atmosphere of fear and repression, limiting the freedom of the press and citizen

speech. The EIU indicates that Bangladesh has experienced an authoritarian and flawed democratic system over the last decade, with the BNP and Awami League receiving comparable evaluations. The Awami League, the ruling party, has not reconciled its stance with the opposition about democracy, voting rights, and human rights. The government's history with human rights has elicited global outrage. Educationist Professor Sirajul Islam Chowdhury asserts that the authoritarian regime endures, eroding popular confidence in democracy (**Sunny et al., 2017; Raihan & Bourguignon, 2020**). To cultivate a democratic environment, Bangladesh must solicit citizen participation; yet, this is unfeasible through voting and conventional media. The youth of Bangladesh have registered for the 12th parliamentary election; nevertheless, their excitement for voting has diminished owing to political turmoil and inequitable voting systems. A survey conducted by IRE reveals that 55% of recently arrived persons are disinclined to engage in the next elections. In line with democratic ideals, the nation's political environment is rife with corruption and dissent against the regime, often leading to imprisonment or disappearance, as well as human rights abuses, persecution, and discrimination. The Chhatra League (BCL) has profoundly influenced Bangladesh's political scene, especially in the years 1952, 1966, 1969, and 1970 (**Ifty et al., 2023b; Mithun et al., 2024**). Since achieving independence, the BCL has become known as a controversial organisation, associated with serious crimes like killings, terrorism, extortion, corruption, financial misconduct, bribery, and the murders of Abrar Fahad and Biswajit Das. The Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) has encountered several challenges, including illicit activities within university dormitories and incidents of sexual abuse. The BDR Rebellion (2009), a pivotal occurrence in the nation's history, led to the fatalities of 74 persons, comprising Major General Shakeel Ahmed and 56 army officers (**Choi & Park, 2014; Begum et al., 2023b**).

The governing party's participation in the assault on engineers has resulted in a deficiency of responsibility for their role in the violence. Bangladesh occupies the 13th position on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, which categorises it as one of the most corrupt countries worldwide. The nation confronts difficulties in combating corruption stemming from political dynamics, abuse of power, and criminal activities. In the last 17 years, theft, robbery, and smuggling have escalated, leading to the loss of billions of rupees due to growing rents ((**Sunny et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2024**). In the last 14 years, more than 10 lakh crore rupees have been illegally transferred out of the country with the government's involvement. Economists are apprehensive that Bangladesh's economy may experience heightened pressure in fulfilling foreign debt commitments due to many economic indicators. The government's debt escalated to \$100.63 billion in the final quarter of 2023, imposing a burden on the public (**Ferdous, 2019; Sazzad et al., 2024a**). In 2018, student rallies contested the authoritarian rule and raised concerns over governmental accountability, oversight, bias, and democratic engagement. Student demonstrations in Bangladesh centre around unmet demands and inequalities, predominantly spearheaded by urban students. They have encountered challenges related to democracy, human rights, and freedom of expression. The student movement has significantly influenced society by promoting high-quality, accessible, and widely available higher education. The triumph of the student

movement in Bangladesh parallels a historic transition, resulting in the development of a new system. Security personnel may use graduated force to disperse those participating in public assemblies, processions, or demonstrations. Quotas are specific resource distributions, such as in education and employment, that aim to ensure the participation of marginalised individuals in society. Since 1972, Bangladesh has implemented quotas for job recruitment, allocating 20 percent based on merit for Class I positions and the remaining 80 percent according to district quotas (Ashakin, Bhuyian, Hosain, Deya, & Hasan, 2024).

In 1976, the quota system was revised to provide 40% based on merit, 30% for independence warriors, 10% for women, 10% for women affected by conflict, and 10% on a district basis. In 1985, quotas were broadened to encompass ethnic minorities, instituting a 55% merit-based quota for first- and second-class positions and a 55% district-specific quota. In 1990, alterations were implemented to the quota system for non-gazette posts, although the structure for Class I and II positions remained unchanged (Kuddus et al., 2022; Islam et al., 2023). The government provided employment opportunities to the descendants of freedom fighters in 1997. In 2011, the government expanded the 30% freedom warrior quota to encompass descendants of independence fighters, and in 2012, a one percent disability quota was instituted. In 2018, a movement calling for quota reform formed in Bangladesh, leading to a lowering of the quota system to 10%. The government issued a supporting declaration in October; nonetheless, the agitators advocated for uniform age limits for government employment and restricted eligibility for specialised examinations (Groeneveld, Bakker, & Schmidt, 2020). In 2021, several descendants of freedom soldiers submitted a court petition seeking the revocation of this regulation. The High Court issued a ruling in their favour, which resulted in an anti-quota rally on July 1. Students from many universities and colleges engaged in the campaign, regardless of their political inclinations. The protesting students called for a legislative measure to abolish inequitable and discriminatory quotas in government employment while advocating for a reduction of quotas for marginalised groups and those with disabilities. They instituted social media channels, dormitory and departmental networks, and micro-funds to accelerate the effort. They formed a team of 65 individuals to oversee and administer the national campaign, with 23 coordinators located at various institutions. The objective is to collect precise data about the student movement in 2018 and 2024 and assess its influence on the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (Rahman & Hosen, 2024; Yonten, 2024).

2. Research Methodology

2.1: Research Techniques

This study utilizes qualitative research methodologies to offer a thorough representation of the national movement focused on the quota issue. We selected a qualitative methodology to elucidate the intricacies of the movement through direct observations and diverse data sources.

2.2: Methods of Data Collection

This study included both primary and secondary data sources. We acquired primary data through firsthand observation (both offline and online) and interviews with pivotal persons involved in the movement. These approaches facilitated real-time documentation of occurrences and comprehensive perspectives from participants. Secondary data were gathered from journal publications, web articles, newspapers, and books to contextualize the primary findings and offer historical and analytical insights into the movement.

2.3: Data Analysis

The gathered data was subjected to methodical examination and arrangement to guarantee coherence and analytical precision. The researcher systematically organized the relevant material, discerned critical patterns, and integrated the findings to provide significant results. This method enabled a systematic analysis of the movement's dynamics, consequences, and wider socio-political effects. This methodological approach guarantees a thorough and systematic investigation of the quota movement, utilizing several data sources to enhance the validity and dependability of the study's results.

3. Results and Discussion:

3.1 First Phase of Quota Movement: Year 2018

The Bangladesh General Students' Preservation Movement (BGSP) started in 2013 and intensified in January 2018 when a student from Dhaka University and two journalists urged the government to abolish the quota system for public sector jobs. The quota system, established at 56% since 1972, resulted in highly competent persons vying for 44% of government employment. Two groups orchestrated the demonstration, but officials forbade congregating in the vicinity. Officials formed a committee to facilitate the movement, and from February 17 to 25, a human chain event took place. Protesters called for a modification of the quota system by March 13. On April 9th, riot police were dispatched to the Shahbagh crossroads; nevertheless, the situation intensified brutally owing to attacks by the Bangladesh Civil Liberties Union (BCL). On October 4th, the recruiting quota for Class I and Class II government positions was rescinded, resulting in a decline in movement (**Kuddus et al., 2020; Begum et al., 2022**).

3.2 Second Phase of Quota Movement: Year 2024:

In 2021, a judicial ruling found the Muktijodha quota unlawful, leading students at Dhaka University to organise a demonstration demanding its repeal. A coalition of activists presented a formal declaration to the Attorney General at the Supreme Court, establishing a deadline of June 30 for the government to meet their requests. Students from Chittagong and Barisal universities additionally coordinated events. On July 4, students established a coordinating organisation named

the "Anti-Discrimination Student Movement" to advocate for a conclusive answer to their demands. On July 12, protests erupted across several university and college campuses countrywide, resulting in six deaths and the expulsion of BCL leaders and members from various institutions. The demonstration rapidly escalated, leading the Prime Minister to commence a judicial investigation into the fatalities of six persons and urging residents to exercise patience. On July 18, there were 27 fatalities resulting from persistent resistance, rioting, gunfire, and mayhem nationwide. At least 1500 individuals got injuries in these instances (**Razzaque & Hasan, 2024; Billah & Kabir, 2024**). Students urged the police, BGB, RAB, and SWAT to terminate their violent activities against the nonviolent student movement, which is condemning the deaths, seeking justice for the perpetrators, ensuring a secure campus, and pushing for a reasonable reform of the quota system. The tactical deployment of ballistic grenade launchers (BGBs) nationwide resulted in a minimum of 29 deaths throughout the day's clashes. The 'Complete Shutdown' campaign resulted in extensive unrest on July 19, encompassing brawls, assaults, vandalism, gunshots, arson, and deaths in Dhaka and surrounding regions. The demands encompassed the resignation of cabinet officials, the dismissal of the Deputy Inspector General (DIG), the resignation of the vice chancellors and proctors of Dhaka University, the prohibition of politically affiliated student organisations, the reopening of educational institutions and dormitories, the assurance of protection against academic and administrative harassment, and a public apology to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for his involvement in the deaths of students (**Sunny et al., 2021; DFID, 2000**).

Notwithstanding the enforcement of a nationwide curfew, the mobilisation of military forces, and the proclamation of public holidays, confrontations on July 20 culminated in the deaths of 26 people (**Ahmed & Jahan, 2017**). Three leaders of the movement gave a clear list of eight demands to the three ministries. These demands included starting investigations, catching and prosecuting those responsible, giving money to the families of the deceased, and making sure that student councils are not forced to do anything by the government, the law, or their peers. Several killings in Bangladesh over the course of five days claimed the lives of 174 people. The chiefs of the three military services convened with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, while the United Nations, European Union, and United Kingdom voiced apprehension over the situation (**Moniruzzaman et al., 2023**). The government curtailed the implementation of broadband internet services at night, resulting in communication challenges and a decline in international remittances. On July 26, law enforcement-initiated operations, apprehending 6,000 persons and resulting in 209 fatalities. On July 28, Detective DB arrested six leaders of the student movement against discrimination in Bangladesh, accusing them of halting all activities and instilling a feeling of insecurity among students. The Bangladesh Army (DMP) was determined to ensure the safety of students, leading to the suspension of the march for one week (**BBS, 2014; Sazzad et al., 2023**). The Chhatra League initiated vigorous attacks against the movement, resulting in considerable upheaval in several areas of the country, including the capital. The death toll increased to 211. The Secretary-General of the United Nations called for a comprehensive and transparent investigation into the event (**People's**

Republic of Bangladesh Govt., 2017). The 'March for Justice' event occurred on July 31, promoting justice in reaction to the fatalities. The 'Remembering Our Heroes' program occurred on August 1, commemorating the traumatic experiences faced by the martyrs and the injured, together with the anguish of their families and classmates. The DB released six coordinators and implemented the 'Prayer and Mass March of Students' initiative in 28 districts. Protesters demanded transparency and accountability in the investigation, while government proponents decorated their Facebook profiles with black borders (**Jamil & Baniamin, 2020**). The non-cooperation campaign continued until Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's departure, resulting in the deaths of approximately one hundred individuals during the coup. The quota movement precipitated extensive coups and disruptions, conveying a message from the worldwide youth to those who had historically upheld and abused their power. In a democratic system, no leader can sustain a prolonged monopoly, and their support among the populace wanes (**Sunny et al., 2023; Alam et al., 2023b**).

3.3 Impact on achieving SDG goals:

During the 36-day period of agitation, the tranquil social order was disrupted, resulting in a detrimental consequence. The mortality rates resulting from acts of violence have been seeing a substantial increase, leading to adverse consequences (**Islam, 2021; Hossain et al., 2024**). During the agitation, several individuals were incarcerated without justification, resulting in their family members having to urgently seek their release at the police station. This failed to establish the principle of 'fair access to justice for everyone'. It might be argued that the failure to maintain a peaceful society during the movement, along with an increase in the death rate resulting from violence and lack of justice, has had a detrimental effect on the achievement of the SDG targets (**Begum et al., 2023a; Oliveira, 2024**).

3.4 The slogan of the quota movement:

Legeche Rey Legeche, the blood is on fire. 2. Merit or quota, merit merit 3. One point, one demand: remove the quota of ineligible 3. Who are you? Who am I, Razakar Razakar? 4. Who said, dictatorship dictatorship? 5. Many storms in the chest, getting the chest shooter 6. Shooting movement cannot be closed. 6. Prisoner by doing movement cannot be closed. 7. I gave blood; I will give more blood. 8. Seventy-one tools, in the roar, get up one more time. 9. In my golden Bengal, there is no room for discrimination. 10. By shooting in my chest, eating, and wearing my money, I stand firm. 11. If you stay beside your partner, if you are against militant (**Islam et al., 2018a; Hassan et al., 2024**).

3.5 Songs about the quota movement:

1. The country your father's... 2. Be closed to education... Grandson of a Freedom Fighter 3. Remember, I got the country by fighting... 4. Whose glasses were binoculars? 6. How many tears...

7. Everyone is a king in the king's kingdom... 8. One so-leaked question on top of that Kota's live... 9. Talented brothers and sisters come down to the streets. 10. Kazi Nazrul's rebellious songs and patriotic popular songs.

3.6 Some pictures of Kota Andolan 2024:



Figure 1: Picture Collected from Different Sources During the Movement

4. Conclusion

An authoritarian leader ruled the country for 15 years. The effectiveness of the quota movement serves as compelling evidence that the citizens of Bangladesh no longer find economic advancement acceptable if it comes at the expense of human rights, freedom of expression, and democratic principles. The quota reform campaign rapidly transformed into a momentous student movement. This ultimately led to Sheikh Hasina's resignation and the downfall of her administration. The losses caused by quota shifting will reach their peak in 2024. The movement's broad scope beyond the next Quota propelled the country towards the demise of authoritarian governance. Consequently, the Kota movement achieved triumph by instigating a renaissance and a large-scale coup. In 1990, there was a widespread revolt in Bangladesh aimed at removing the tyrant Ershad from power. The organizers of the quota movement significantly altered the course of the country's 53-year history, leaving an indelible mark on the nation of Bengal. The report provided a concise overview of the current state of affairs in Bangladesh, focusing on the quota movement that took place in both 2018 and 2021. The study primarily examined the time frame between June 5, 2024, and August 6, 2024. We can further investigate this topic by conducting a comprehensive study that independently examines villages and cities, while also

focusing on the experiences of martyrs, injured individuals, and movement participants. After the quota movement's success, one can analyse its state.

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Author Contribution

Author took involved in the creation of the study design, data analysis, fieldwork, and execution stages. Every writer gave their consent after seeing the final work.

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A statement of conflicting interests

The authors declare that none of the work reported in this study could have been impacted by any known competing financial interests or personal relationships.

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