

COALITION-BUILDING AND ISLAMIST PARTICIPATION IN POPULAR UPRISINGS: EVIDENCE FROM JULY 2024 IN BANGLADESH

FORMAÇÃO DE COALIZÕES E PARTICIPAÇÃO ISLAMISTA EM LEVANTAMENTOS POPULARES: EVIDÊNCIAS DE JULHO DE 2024 EM BANGLADESH

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Mohammad Amimul Ahsan*

*International Islamic University Chittagong, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5770-4891>
amim.ahsan@iiuc.ac.bd

Saber Ahmad*

*International Islamic University Chittagong, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1907-8545>
saberahmad1970@gmail.com

H. M. Ataur Rahman Nadwi*

*International Islamic University Chittagong, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-0389-656X>
ataurrahmannadwi@gmail.com

Shaikhul Azam Abrar*

*International Islamic University Chittagong, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-3256-8022>
shaikhulabrar@iiuc.ac.bd

Nishat Tasnim*

*International Islamic University Chittagong, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-5744-4516>
nishat111194@gmail.com

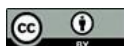
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Abstract

The July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh marked a major episode of mass mobilization, as student-led protests against government job quota reforms rapidly evolved into a nationwide challenge to the Awami League. This study investigates the role of Islamist actors—including Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh Islami Chhatrashibir, Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh, and Islami Andolan Bangladesh—in shaping the movement's trajectory. Using a qualitative research design, the study triangulates data from in-depth interviews with student leaders, political party representatives, journalists, human rights workers, government officials, law enforcement personnel, political scientists, legal advocates, and Islamic scholars, alongside media reports, organizational statements, and relevant scholarly literature. The analysis explores how Islamist groups navigated the interplay between religious ideology, political opportunity structures, and

Resumo

A revolta de julho de 2024 em Bangladesh marcou um importante episódio de mobilização em massa, com protestos liderados por estudantes contra as reformas das cotas de emprego do governo evoluindo rapidamente para um desafio nacional à Liga Awami. Este estudo investiga o papel de atores islamistas — incluindo Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh Islami Chhatrashibir, Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh e Islami Andolan Bangladesh — na formação da trajetória do movimento. Utilizando uma abordagem qualitativa, o estudo triangula dados de entrevistas em profundidade com líderes estudantis, representantes de partidos políticos, jornalistas, ativistas de direitos humanos, funcionários do governo, agentes da lei, cientistas políticos, advogados e estudiosos islâmicos, juntamente com reportagens da mídia, declarações de organizações e literatura acadêmica relevante. A análise explora como os



grassroots mobilization during a rapidly shifting political crisis. Findings indicate the emergence of strategic coalitions among Islamist organizations, secular opposition parties, and student networks, demonstrating how coalition-building enhanced the political visibility and legitimacy of Islamist actors within the broader protest movement. Islamist participation proved instrumental in sustaining protest momentum, expanding geographic reach, and reframing the uprising as a wider struggle against authoritarianism and structural injustice. The study contributes to scholarship on social movements, Islamist politics, and coalition dynamics in hybrid political contexts.

Keywords: Islamist Politics. Coalition-Building. Mass Mobilization. July 2024 Uprising. Bangladesh Politics.

grupos islamistas lidaram com a interação entre ideologia religiosa, estruturas de oportunidade política e mobilização popular durante uma crise política em rápida transformação. Os resultados indicam o surgimento de coalizões estratégicas entre organizações islâmicas, partidos seculares de oposição e redes estudantis, demonstrando como a formação de coalizões aumentou a visibilidade política e a legitimidade dos atores islamistas dentro do movimento de protesto mais amplo. A participação islâmica mostrou-se fundamental para sustentar o ímpeto dos protestos, expandir o alcance geográfico e reformular a revolta como uma luta mais ampla contra o autoritarismo e a injustiça estrutural. O estudo contribui para a área de pesquisa sobre movimentos sociais, política islâmica e dinâmicas de coalizão em contextos políticos híbridos.

Palavras-chave: Política Islâmica. Formação de Coligações. Mobilização em Massa. Levante de Julho de 2024. Política de Bangladesh.

1 INTRODUCTION

The July 2024 revolution in Bangladesh is a historic phenomenon in the history of the nation, as it continues to fight against undemocratic practices, social injustices, and political irresponsibility. The movement grew very fast and expanded its original aim of employment policy to a wider concern of fighting against authoritarian rule, institutional corruption and socio-economic inequalities, following the Supreme Court restoration of an unpopular quota system that favored descendants of liberation war fighters. The peculiarity of this uprising is that it is a multi-actor formation with the involvement of student mobilization and the political parties, civil society organizations, and Islamist groups.

The role of Islamist actors and religious networks in the uprising is very significant and under-researched. Though the traditional approach to scholarship has rendered Islamic extremist groups as obstructive or purely sectarian, new developments have indicated that in its efforts to shape the direction of the protests, it became tactical and used networks of organization, moral prestige, and grassroots mobilization to shape the direction of these protests. It is this interplay of ideological commitment and pragmatic political involvement that illustrates how coalition politics has complex

interactions in hybrid regimes in the interplay between state repression, mobilization of resources, and political opportunity structures.

This paper explores the strategic value of Islamist involvement in the July 2024 uprising, with a focus on the role of coalition-building in facilitating the mobilization of more people and sustenance in the face of repression. The paper aims at filling an important vacuum in the body of knowledge on the role of religious actors in the development of pluralistic protest movements by incorporating the insights of social movement theory, political opportunity frameworks, and interpretations of the Islamist organization strategies in a hybrid democratic setting. The results are expected to shed light on the delicate interplay between ideology, organizational potential and strategic alliances to determine the results of mass unrests and to make both theoretical and practical contributions to the political mobilization study in South Asia.

2 LITERATURE REVIEWS

The scholarly study of popular uprisings in hybrid regimes underscores the intricate interplay between structural grievances, political opportunity structures, and the strategic behavior of collective actors. The theory of social movement proves to be particularly useful in studying the case of the July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh, particularly in terms of the Islamist organizations. Relative deprivation theory is a theory that is explained by Gurr according to which unrest among actors occurs due to their perception of an increasing discrepancy between expectations and available opportunities (Gurr, 2015). The theoretical lens assists in explaining the first spur of the 2024 uprising: job quotas of descendants of freedom fighters were reinstated by the Supreme Court, which created acute perceptions of distributive injustice in students who wanted to secure a job based on their merit. The quotas debate became more of a general feeling of systemic marginalization, which preconditioned the mass mobilization.

Resource Mobilization Theory also sheds some light on the importance of organizational capacity, social networks, and strategic communication that promote contentious movements (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). The Bangladeshi situation is no exception as the Islamist actors, such as Jamaat-e-Islami, Hefazat-e-Islam, and smaller religious platforms, used the already established religious, educational, and charity facilities to organize the protest attendance, relay the messages, and coordinate the

supporters. Their capacity to mobilize the mosque nets, madrassa networks and digital communication networks illustrate how religiously based set ups may act as mobilizing centers, and hence the clarifying strength of resource-based theories of protest.

The connection between repression and intensification of protests by states also has an extensive literature, and scholars like Tilly and Davenport have proposed that coercive reactions may have a paradoxical expansion and deepening collective opposition (Tilly, 1978; Davenport, 2007). The ubiquitous cases of police brutality, kidnapping, and extrajudicial killings were reported in July 2024, not only spurring student activism, but also initiating a procession of other participants in the scene- political parties, civil society organizations, Sufi-oriented groups, and ultimately more general members of the population. Such dynamics can be compared to the available theoretical reasoning, which suggests that repression may lead to the illegitimization of state authority, moral outrage, and broader mobilization coalitions.

Political Opportunity Theory (Tarrow, 1998) and Framing Theory (Snow & Benford, 1988) illuminate how structural openings and narrative strategies shape mobilization. The quota problem became a political door open and the activists repositioned the protests as a wider movement against authoritarianism, which drew various alliances, such as secular parties, civil society, and religious groups.

Recent scholarship has been particularly interested in considering the participation of Islamist actors in the July 2024 insurgency in Bangladesh in order to confront traditional images of Islamists as obstructionary or destabilizing. Chowdury (2024) emphasizes the positive and frequently disregarded roles of Sufi-based Islamist movements which enabled mobilization on the grassroots level, promoted cross-ideological collaboration, and helped to maintain the momentum of the protests when they were cruelly suppressed by the state. Their normative focus on the common good, moral responsibility and social righteousness allowed them to make significant convergence with the majorly secular movements of students in South Asia shedding light on ethical and moral aspects of political mobilization. This view highlights the tactical abilities of the Islamist actors to act in the context of the civic movements and negotiate between ideological demands and pragmatic interactions.

Continuing on this, Reza and Bhuiyan (2024) theorize the July 2024 uprising as the turn in the wider demand of Bangladesh to hold its democratic leaders accountable. They focus on multi-actor composition of the movement, i.e. government institutions,

civil society, political organizations and foreign actors. Although the demonstrations were originally provoked by the reinstatement of job quotas, the use of violence by the state quickly caused the whole population to mobilize and the entire world to reconsider the benefits of authoritarian rule. What started as a policy-related conflict, therefore, turned into a nationwide question of the established power frameworks, the example of which the mobilized civil action can bring.

Prama et al. (2025) build upon this insight by analyzing the comments of YouTube users in bulk, showing that the general happiness of the population drops drastically when violence occurs and briefly increases when people stand together. Their emotion analysis reveals a fear, grief and suppression dual world together with never ending hopes, moral belief and power. The tendency of the topics was relevant to the significant events, with the themes of political power, media flow, and justice demand being popular. Sentiment indicators were also characterized by cautious optimism even in the face of communication disconnects, allotaxonomic analysis showed adaptive discursive strategies and digital resilience. These results support the idea that affect, narrative framing and peoples discussion is central to mass mobilization.

Greater academic literature also contextualizes these processes: Wiktorowicz (2004) demonstrates that Islamist movements are multidimensional, whereas Roy (2004) and Masoud (2014) opine that they tend to demonstrate pragmatic flexibility during the emergence of strategic opportunities.

The example of Bangladesh shows that Islamist groups, which are well established in terms of political, social and educational systems, take part in institutional politics, as well as street demonstrations. In July 2024, the fast growth made it possible to engage in it with the aid of endorsements, rallies, and moral framing. The examples of coalition-building with secular parties and student organizations indicates that the ideological difference can be subordinated with the common goal, which is to resist repression and promote democratic reform, indicating the significance of understanding Islamist politics using strategy, capacity, and opportunity.

Although the current body of literature on Bangladesh has studied the long-term political functions of Islamist parties and popular protests that are organized by students, there are limited studies about the involvement of Islamist actors in short-term popular protests at the tactical level. The July 2024 rebellion provided a special situation in which Islamist groups, secular student movements, and opposition parties were able to organize

but there is little research on how this was possible, the mechanisms, strategies, and organizational networks that made this possible. In addition, the Islamists have frequently been viewed as a homogenous group by scholarship, which ignores Sufi-oriented groups, conservative parties, and madrassa networks. The present study helps to fill the gaps in the current understanding of Islamist coalition-building, tactical participation, and heterogeneity in the context of the July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

The present research is based on the interpretivist qualitative research paradigm to explore the experiences, perceptions, and practices of meaning-making used by the participants of the uprising in Bangladesh in July 2024. Interpretivism is quite appropriate in the analysis of complex sociopolitical events like the building of coalitions and the strategic involvement of Islamist actors in popular mobilizations. This paradigm enables the study to address how different parties maneuvered around the political, cultural and historical wig of the uprising by focusing on the subjective interpretation and contextualized understanding of the whole issue. The qualitative orientation is more depth-oriented than breadth-oriented and as such they allow an analysis of the complex relationship of political strategy, intergroup negotiation, and discursive and framing processes that cannot be easily studied using quantitative methods.

3.2 Data sources

Consistent with this paradigm, the research was based majorly on deep semi-structured interviews, purposive sampling, and thematic analysis. The sample was chosen purposely by direct participation in the events of July 2024 or informed observation. The sample consisted of the general students, student leaders, representatives of the political parties, journalists, human rights activists, government officials, law enforcers, political scientists, law practitioners, and Islamic academics. The semi-structured format gave consistency through the interviews as well as flexibility to enquire on emergent themes. The interviews produced first hand and rich data on the dynamics of the coalition,

strategic decision-making, mobilization pathways, and ethical issues facing different actors.

Table 1

Profile of key informants:

SL	Code	Designation	Organization	Category	Academic Qualification	Sex	Age
1	GS-01	Student	University of Chittagong	General Students	BA Honors	F	27
2	GS-02	Student	University of Dhaka	General Students	Honors 3 rd year	F	24
3	GS-03	Student	International Islamic University Chittagong	General Students	Honors	M	26
4	GS-04	Student	Hathazari Madrasah	General Students	Dawra Hadith	M	28
5	SL-01	Student	Islami Chattara Shibir	Student Leaders	BSC	M	25
6	SL-02	Student	Chattra Dal	Student Leaders	BA	M	30
7	SL-03	Student	BAGCHUS	Student Leaders	BA	M	24
8	SL-04	Student	Bangladesh Islami Chattra Andolon	Student Leaders	Dawra Hadith	M	28
9	RPP-01	Teacher	Bangladesh Jamaat Islami	Representatives of Political Parties	PhD	M	55
10	RPP -02	Business	Bangladesh Nationalist Party	Representatives of Political Parties	BA	M	50
11	RPP -03	Khatib of a Masjid	Bangladesh Islamic Andolon	Representatives of Political Parties	Daurae Hadith	M	55
12	RPP -04	Business	Amar Bangladesh Party	Representatives of Political Parties	MA	F	45
13	J-01	Special Correspondent	National Daily	Journalists	MA	M	42
14	HRW-01	Executive Member	Odhikar	Human Rights Workers	MA	F	48
15	GO-01	UNO	Upozilla Parishad	Government Official	MA	M	48
16	LEP-01	OC	CMPC	Law Enforcement Personnel	MA	M	45
17	PP-01	Teacher	University of Chittagong	Professor of Political Science	PhD	M	56
18	LP-01	Advocate	Chittagong District Bar Council	Legal Practitioner	LLM	F	43
19	IS-01	Teacher	International Islamic University	Islamic Scholar	PhD	M	57

Triangulation of the primary data and the place of individual narratives within the wider structural contexts were achieved with the help of secondary sources such as scholarly publications, human rights reports, policy documents, and previous research on the subject of Islamist politics and social movements in Bangladesh. This integration improved the contextual grounds and rigor of analysis of the findings.

3.3 Data collection

The data was collected in the period between August and October 2024 via a mixture of face-to-face interviews and secure online meetings in case the face-to-face meetings were not possible. Interviews were either 45 to 90 minutes long and were recorded with the agreement of the participants. All of the transcripts and field notes were anonymized in a way that would be kept confidential. The interview protocol targeted four fundamental areas, which include: (1) perceptions of the uprising and the reasons that prompted the participants to join or stay out of the protest; (2) reasons why the participants joined or did not join the protest; (3) the processes involved in building coalitions, and (4) the strategic and symbolic role of Islamist actors within the overall protest space.

3.4 Data analysis

The data were analyzed with the help of thematic coding and pattern analysis. This method helped to determine the recurrent themes, inconsistencies and relationship pattern between the actors, strategies and political opportunities. The triangulation of interviews and secondary data boosted the reliability, credibility and depth of the analysis. The thematic framework was founded around three main aspects; the negotiation of Islamist participation in the demonstrations dominated by the secularist aspects, the construction and sustenance of cross-ideological alliances, and the effect of state repression on the process of mobilization. This is the analytic approach that allowed developing the holistic view of the micro-level decision-making and structural forces that influence collective action.

3.5 Theoretical analysis

The theoretical frameworks in the literature on collective action, contentious politics and Islamist mobilization inform the analysis of the study. The relatively deprivation theory (Gurr, 2015) clarifies that the reinstatement of job quotas increased the sense of injustice among students, which then triggered a wider political dissatisfaction. The Resource Mobilization Theory (McCarthy and Zald, 1977) is used to describe the use of religious, educational and charity structures by Islamist organizations, eg, Jamaat-e-Islami and Hefazat-e-Islam, to maintain involvement. This expansion of the protest coalition can be explained by the repression-mobilization nexus (Tilly, 1978; Davenport, 2007). Lastly, Political Opportunity Theory (Tarrow, 1998) and Framing Theory (Snow and Benford, 1988) can explain how activists exploited the political opportunities and put the problem of quotas into a new perspective of struggle against authoritarianism to build cross-ideological coalitions and allow Islamists to enter a broader movement.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Genesis of the Mass uprising: from quota reform mobilization to nationwide political contention

A long history of mobilization by the students based on the quota reform movement and driven by the popular dissatisfaction culminated in the mass uprising that finally overthrew the Awami League government on August 5, 2024. Starting with the June 5 decision of the High Court to reintroduce quotas in government employment, the students of Dhaka University started a series of demonstrations, quickly gaining momentum in universities and colleges, schools and madrasas all over the country. The movement intensified and by June 9, students gave an ultimatum and blocked Shahbagh, Jahangirnagar, railway lines and national highways. As the movements gained momentum the student community made an announcement of a Bangali Blockade that put the entire city on hold on July 7 and on July 8 the formation of a central coordination committee was made to organize the growing movement. The situation was aggravated as on July 14, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina described students as sons and daughters of

Razakars, sparking a frenzy all over the country. The slogan "Who are you? Who am I? Razakar, Razakar!" so quickly was it turned into a rallying cry, working students on campuses and causing the student wing of the ruling party to shudder. These events marked the beginning of the change of a policy-oriented protest into the mass anti-authoritarian movement (Saifullah, 2025).

This changed direction with the murder of Abu Sayeed on July 16 at Begum Rokeya University, and several murders in Chittagong on the same day. Videos of police shooting unarmed students circulated across the nation causing the kind of sympathy never witnessed before and sparked the movement into a full scale uprising. When the government stepped up its oppression by enforcing curfews, cutting off internet access, and sending army forces to suppress protests on July 18, students nonetheless managed to protest and had their way aided by expatriate Bangladeshis who offered technical advice to bypass digital prohibitions. The violence reached its peak when over two hundred protesters were allegedly murdered on July 19, among them a child, Riya, who was allegedly shot by a helicopter. The methods of dividing used by state, including the prohibition of Jamaat-e-Islami on July 29, did not help to divide the people. Instead, students adopted rebellious symbolism: they refused to observe state-proclaimed mourning, wrapped their faces in red cloths, held mass outpourings, and proclaimed, I want Her Hasina to resign as the one demand that would start August 2. These occurrences were indicative of the brutality of state violence as well as the ability of the students to turn the tragedy into some kind of resistance (Saifullah, 2025).

On August 5, 2024, the July 2024 uprising reached its climax, as the protesters achieved a demonstration of hundreds of thousands with the March to Dhaka. Although it led to casualties as a result of police shooting, the inability of the army to fire indicated the presence of cracks in the state apparatus. By mid afternoon, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, with her sister, fled into India, and she resigned. In the evening, the head of the army declared a period of interim government leading to the swearing of Dr. Muhammad Yunus on August 8 together with an advisory council to bring back democracies in the country. The rebellion was based on fifteen years of authoritarian consolidation, such as enforced disappearances, extrajudicial murders, opposition suppression and political manipulation of elections in 2014, 2018 and 2024. The August 5 scenes that showed a crowd of people entering Ganabhaban, people prostrating, sweets being distributed, tears of joy and sorrow, and all that, the emotional and the political meaning of the day. The

martyrs like Abu Sayeed, Tamim, and Riya Gop were the people who were sacrificed to create a new political awareness (Saifullah, 2025).

4.2 Historical role and reputation of islamist parties

In each of the interviews, the participants have repeatedly emphasized the sense that the historical script of Islamist parties in Bangladesh, specifically Jamaat-e-Islami one, is a decisive factor defining their present legitimacy. Secular and state-based respondents (GO-01, LEP-01) have pointed out that the legacy of the Liberation War of 1971 still has a restraining effect on reputation and creates a distrustful attitude towards these groups. In contrast, GS-02-03, SL-01, PP-01, RPP-01, IS-01 states that in the past, the process of political labeling and selective state discourse has been an obstacle to objective assessments of their role in these national politics and civic participation.

Interviewees further highlighted the enduring influence of historical narratives on public perceptions of Islamist organizations. SL-01 stated,

“Jamaat Shibir demonstrated remarkable discipline and organizational capacity throughout the history following the Liberation War of 1971. Although Jamaat opposed the Liberation War, they were not supporters of the 1971 genocide. We strongly believe that Jamaat Shibir, after the Liberation War, has maintained a strong pro-Liberation and pro-state sovereignty stance. From the Liberation War onward, Jamaat and Shibir were not involved in any acts that betrayed public interest.”

RPP-01 corroborated this perspective, asserting,

“The party’s structured mobilization and adherence to democratic principles made it a key actor in sustaining protests; historically, Jamaat Shibir has consistently respected democracy and the law and order of the country.”

In contrast, SL-02 offered a critical appraisal:

“Jamaat and Chhatrashibir have a long history of divisive politics; their involvement often destabilizes movements rather than contributing constructively.”

The majority of the interviewees observed that Islamic groups like Hefazat-e-Islam and Islami Andolon have stayed out of the debate concerning their position on the 1971 Liberation War. They are not popularly criticized as the Jamaat-e-Islami is in terms

of historical allegiance and anti-liberation movements. A number of respondents (GS-01, PP-01, SL-01, SL-03, HRW-01) however raised their concerns on their sociopolitical orientations especially gender policies, the methods of education and even their tolerance of pluralism. The opponents said that these groups tend to take conservative stances that can often limit the rights of women and provide exclusive education, which causes contradictions in the wider mobilizations but does not jeopardize overall social validity. According to SL-02, SL-03, and HRW-01, the Hefazat leaders recently engaged in the use of abusive language at a conference of Women Affairs Reform Commission, and therefore a legal notice under the provisions of 499 and 500 of Penal Code of offensive speech was filed (Prothomalo Staff Writer, 2025).

4.3 The role of islamist in july 2024 revolution

Majority of the study respondents also maintained that the key role in the uprising of July 2024 in Bangladesh was played by Islamist actors. Participants pointed out that organizations like Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Chhatra Shibir, Hefazat-e-Islam, Islami Andolon Bangladesh, and Qawmi and Alia madrasa student networks played a key role in organizing the grassroots, protest organization, and maintenance throughout the country. Their participation, as a number of key informants put it, surpassed that of a token participation; these organizations offered organizational discipline, organizing leadership and massive networks within the communities, which ensured quick mobilization and coalition-building with the student movements and secular opposition actors. IS-01 noted that Jamaat Shibir exhibited high levels of discipline and organization which was seen through the fact that it was able to organize the actions, support logistics and keep the morale of the people taking part in the uprising. Likewise, RPP-03 observed that the organized existence of these Islamist groups served to maintain the protests high and amplify the scope of demonstrations across the country successfully turning the localized dissatisfaction into a national one.

The secondary sources also testify to the fact that Jamaat-Shibir was one of the participants of the July 2024 revolution. Despite the fact that Jamaat-e-Islami never existed on the surface of the uprising, even at its initial stages, there is evidence that the Jamaat-e-Islami provided support at the back stage, including an interview with the Nayeb-e-Amir of the Jamaat-e-Islami. On 18 July 2024, Jamaat openly supported the

movement but disguised its identity because it thought it would restrict the wide public response (BBC News Bangla, 2025; Reza and Bhuiyan, 2025).

The government ban on Jamaat after that was seen by the party leadership as recognition of their participation albeit indirectly and saw a more blatant political stance following the rebellion. (Chowdury, 2024)

Jamaat student wing Islamic Chhatra Shibir was more active but indirect. Although the ruling party actors alleged that Shibir was violent these are yet to be proved. According to testimonies of Jamaat leadership, Shibir participation was substantial, but party symbols were avoided by the members to keep the non-partisan nature of the mobilization and stay popular with the masses. The fact that Shibir was also restricted after the coup is another indication that the state acknowledged its illegal yet significant presence. (Ali, 2025) (Chowdury, 2024; Reza & Bhuiyan, 2025)

Shibir was one of the major organizational forces on the ground. Since the beginning of the protests on June 5, its leaders, in particular, the central and Dhaka University ones, have collaborated with independent student organizers to plan the activities, logistics, and to expand the movement to large cities, including Chattogram and Rajshahi (Ali, 2025). They organized committees, conducted mobilization in an organized and disciplined way, gave humanitarian aid, such as taking care of the injured, recording casualties, and organizing medical attention, following the attacks on July 15. (Ali, 2025; Chowdury, 2024)

Shibir had also a special strategic role in the form of press release preparation, constant communication with the domestic and international media in spite of the low internet connection, organization of safe houses, and assistance in drafting the central demands including the 9-point charter. They guaranteed continuity in programs in cases where the frontline leaders were not available. Following the resignation of Sheikh Hasina, Shibir resurfaced in the limelight, and this highlights the extent to which Shibir had been involved in the shadowy dealings before. (Ali, 2025)

Secondary sources also confirm that Hefazat-e-Islam, Islami Andolon, and huge masses of Qawmi madrasa students and Alia madrasa students were also involved in the July 2024 revolution in various and substantial ways. The large range of religious actors, including large and well-organized clerical groups and powerful Pirs and decentralized networks of madrasas, contributed decisively to the moral legitimacy to the movement, its organizational scale and its national scope during the July-August uprising. The largest

non-political Ulama organization in the country, Hefazat-e-Islam, also made a set of unprecedented general statements in the face of severe state suppression. The organization issued five large statements between 18 July to 4 August denouncing the murder of students, requesting prayers throughout the nation to the martyrs, and organizing the people to collectively resist the violence of the state. The statements put the movement in a new perspective, not just as a student-led agitation, but as a moral-religious obligation, making it much more supportive across the board and very outside universities. The last call of the uprising on 4 August by Hefazat, which urged the citizens nationwide to march to Dhaka to support the one-point demand, symbolically and materially increased the popular force of the uprising (Khan, 2025; Chowdury, 2024).

At the same time, the Char Monai Pir and his followers became a mobilizing force that was greatly needed at a time when the state was getting more and more violent. Following indiscriminate shooting on demonstrating unarmed demonstrators, the Pir arranged a rally on 3 August in the north gate of Baitul Mukarram and expressed a mass procession to Dhaka. The next day his procession came to Shahbagh, where student coordinators greeted him with flowers and open expressions of sympathetic feelings. This junction point between the religious leadership and the student activists gave the movement a new emotional and symbolic strength. Speaking to the crowd through the temporary stage, the Pir gave a categorical message of resigning the Sheikh Hasina and promising to be involved in all the scheduled programs. His declaration of one point, one demand, was rather a unifying factor among various protest constituencies and led to the wave that ultimately led to the overthrow of the government (Khan, 2025).

Qawmi and Alia madrasa students at the grassroots level contributed in a radical manner towards the maintenance and growth of the uprising. They did not have any direct interest in the quota-reform question, but their involvement took off after mid-July, when the massacre and brutal murders of female students catapulted the movement into a struggle of national opposition to authoritarian violence. By relying on the large networks of major madrasas in key transport routes, Madrasa students blocked the strategic entry points of Dhaka, especially Jatrabari and Uttara. They offered humanitarian aid, food and water, dormitory beds in madrasas and strong opposition in recurrent confrontations, on 16-17, 18-19 and 21-22 July, and during the non-cooperation movement, 3-5 August. Jatrabari became one of the epicenters of violence as testified by those who took part in the incident, more than a hundred deaths took place in that region alone (Uddin, 2025).

Along with resistance, graffiti, murals and calligraphy by the madrasa students helped the revolution in the creative sphere- most famously the much publicized Sunrise of Freedom. The fact that young madrasa students, such as 12-year-old Arafat, died highlighted the size of their sacrifice. Together, the activity of Hefazat-e-Islam, Islami Andolon, and Qawmi and Alia madrasa communities reveals how the religious authority, mobilization under devotionism, and grassroots organizational networks played a great role in increasing the power of the July 2024 revolution to oppose the state authority. (Uddin, 2025; Khan, 2025).

On the contrary, two student informants, SL-02 and SL-03, had a more skeptical or dismissive attitude towards the role of Jamaat Shibir. According to them, the historic scandals and political connections of the organization decreased its credibility, and played down their strategic contribution in the uprising. SL-02 claimed, "Students mobilized to quota reform: Jamaat Shibir role is exaggerated and tends to be polarizing, taking focus away from bigger youth mobilization. A number of secondary sources point out the role of different left-wing groups, some BNP leaders, and shadow actors in the government trying to hide the involvement of Jamaat Shibir and other Islamist groups in the July 2024 Revolution. Islamists had made significant contributions just like they had done in the liberation struggle but this time round they sacrificed their lives individually, were imprisoned, and even more targeted to defend the rights of the people. Another significant expression of this denial is the systematic underestimation of madrasa teachers and students, whose efforts have been long ignored as compared to those made by university students, and this is an expression of long-term marginalization of madrasa actors (Uddin, 2025). Advisor Asif Mahmud Sajeeb Bhuiyan left out Sadiq Qayyum, a Dhaka University Shibir president and the organizer of the anti-discrimination movement, in the initial press conference photograph in his book *July: Motherland or Death*, another example of discrimination in expression (Jaijaidin Online, 2025). Besides, the denial of involvement of Shibir by the leaders of student parties and the fact that Nasir Uddin did not find any records of his involvement, highlight a continuing trend of removal of Islamist contributions to mainstream history (The Daily Inqilab, n.d.; Prothomalo Correspondent, 2025).

Although Islamist actors have been criticized, there is a wide agreement that factions that allied with the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, Shibir, were at the center of the group, momentum, and success of the uprising on July 2024. Jamaat Shibir has been

credited with the contribution of the movement in many scholarly and journalistic reports. Sarjis Alam, the organizer of the National Citizens' Committee, pointed out that Shibir acted as an important partner during the process and served nearly as a central directive and as an organizing body and leader, and most major decisions were made because of their bravery and self-sacrifice (Sambad Online, 2024). On the same note, the information and broadcasting advisor Mahfuz Alam observed that the coordination and mobilization of people power by Shibir did much to develop the movement despite party affiliation and ideological inclination (RTV News, 2025). The demands of the nine points were articulated as a result of the efforts by activists, such as the leaders of Dhaka University, who articulated the demands and communicated them to both domestic and international media at a significant risk, which led directly to the government resigning (Sangbad Online, 2024). Al Jazeera reporter Zulkarnaen Shayer reported on the Sadiq Qayyum, Dhaka University Shibir president, saying he was the play-maker of the revolt and that his leadership and coordination was the key to its success (TDC Report, 2024).

Generally, the interviews indicate that despite the fact that there is a certain degree of perception difference, the data and testimonies of the participants all point to the fact that Islamist organizations supported the movement by providing both structural as well as mobilizational resources, which is a characteristic feature of the movement regarding its direction.

4.4 Islamic ethical foundations and resistance to oppression in the July 2024 uprising

RPP-01, RPP-03, IS-01 put forth the argument that the July 2024 uprising portrays the way of Islamic ethics and moral obligations that led to political participation and mobilization. They claim that the participants of the uprising relied on the many centuries old religious practices that highlight the moral obligation to fight against injustice to defend the downtrodden, and to fight against oppression. The protests were marked by a prominent demonstration of spiritual practice, including fasting, in the demonstrations, prayers in the streets and at home, and this indicated the assimilation of spiritual life with the civic life. Friday sermons, religious meetings, and online communication were tactfully used by scholars and pro-Islamic activists to deliver moral and ethical demands to get people on board the movement. Such framing established a sense of collective aim

and authenticity among the participants, uniting political activism to ethical and spiritual accountability.

RPP-01, RPP-03, IS-01 and SL01 claimed that the Islamic ethical teachings have long been used to address the issue of injustice and protect the weak. At the center of this paradigm is the fact that any act of supporting or being passive to the oppressors is ethically unacceptable but rather the responsibility of defending the weak and marginalized is a religious and ethical duty. The Quranic verses and Hadiths as seen in the SL-01, RPP-01, PP-01 and IS-01 inspired the Islamists and the masses to a very great extent. The Quran explicitly warns against siding with wrongdoers:

“Do not lean towards the wicked, or you will be caught in the flames of Hell, and have none to befriend you other than God, nor will you be given help.” (Quran 11:113).

They understand this to include collaboration, silence or any kind of encouragement to the oppressive actors and this is a moral obligation of believers to take action against injustices.

The Quran further emphasizes the defense of the oppressed:

“What has come upon you that you fight not in the cause of God and for the oppressed, men, women and children, who pray: “Get us out of this city, O Lord, whose people are oppressors; so send us a friend by Your will, and send us a helper.” (Quran 4:75).

The verse has been heavily used by Islamic academics and movements in justification of defensive action taken against systemic oppression to make civic action a moral and god-approved obligation.

Prophetic guidance complements this moral framework. The Prophet Muhammad stated:

“He who amongst you sees something abominable should modify it with the help of his hand; and if he has not strength enough to do it, then he should do it with his tongue, and if he has not strength enough to do it, (even) then he should (abhor it) from his heart, and that is the least of faith.” (Mulsim, Hadith No. 49a).

Additionally, the Prophet (SAW) instructed:

“Help your brother, whether he is an oppressor or he is an oppressed one. People asked, “O Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ)! It is all right to help him if he is

oppressed, but how should we help him if he is an oppressor?" The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "By preventing him from oppressing others." (Sahih Bukhari, Hadith No. 2444),

This is where He stresses the moral duty to curb evil in action. The Hadith also highlights the fact that the prayer of the oppressed goes directly to Allah itself and gives spiritual authority to the oppressed trying to oppose injustice.

One of the main ethical motivations the mobilization can be based on is the Islamic moral thought, especially the prophetic traditions, which announce the truth-telling as the kind of principled political opposition to injustice. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) affirmed that

"The Prophet (ﷺ) said: The best fighting (jihad) in the path of Allah is (to speak) a word of justice to an oppressive ruler." (Abu Dawud 4344; Tirmidhi 2174)

This hadith is provided as a strong discursive tool. In the movement, this hadith was not only a religious maxim but also a normative code that justified dissent, gave more weight to the moral courage, and portrayed political critique as moral responsibility. Its focus on fighting oppression by the truth of the speech hit a chord with the subject of method which, in its turn, became a moral axiom of fighting tyranny using the truth and, thereby, helped the movement to reach the rhetorical and symbolic prominence.

Similarly, traditions concerning martyrdom enhanced the spiritual meaning attached to political sacrifice. The Prophet (SAW) declared Hamza ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib the

"leader of martyrs and extended this honorific to anyone who stands before a tyrannical ruler, enjoins good, forbids evil, and is consequently killed." (Sahih al-Targhib, Hadith 2304)

It gave the participants a theologically based valorization of struggle and demise in the quest of justice. It was through this framing that the movement was able to have a powerful repertoire of spiritual incentive tying modern political opposition to a prophetic model of reverence.

4.5 Islamist participation was tactical, not ideological

This data depicts that the Islamist groups did not join the July 2024 rebellion at its student-led stage. Rather, the participation grew following the expansion of the protests in late July, whereby the political opportunity structure changed in 2 aspects: (a) the increased state repression of the students, which generated popular sympathetic, which lowered the reputational costs associated with further actor recruitment; and (b) secular opposition parties, most notably the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), started to support the movement, which created a politically comprehensible entry point to the religious groups.

Their leadership did not conceive the crisis in a religious predominantly manner, as indicated by GS-02-03-04, SL-01-04, PP-01 and IS-01, that the crisis was a common struggle against authoritarian excess. Islamist actors presented state repression, corruption and governance failure as moral issues and this allowed them to temporarily agree with the secular democratic needs of the movement. This validates prior theoretical anticipations that Islamist organizations will be participants in pluralistic protests when complaints echo and when such participation will be non-compromising in the main constituencies.

PP-01 & J-01 It is worth mentioning here that there are no indications that major Islamist institutions have tried to Islamize the protest agenda. To them instead, Hefazat-linked cleric and student wing statements focused on moral legitimacy, the rule of law, and accountability as opposed to religious reform--the pragmatic and conditional character of their involvement.

4.6 Coalition-building emerged through brokerage by local religious and political networks

The greatest number of participants claimed that there had been no coalition-building in the uprising that took place via formal alliance or negotiated platform. Rather it was mediated by local brokers- the imams of the mosques, madrasa teachers, schools, colleges, universities and neighbourhood organizers and mid-level opposition party activists, who connected fragmented constituencies.

According to PP-01, J-01 & IS-01, there are three types of brokerage emerged as mentioned as follows:

4.6.1 Religious–student brokerage

In some cities (Dhaka, Chattagram, Sylhet), interviews reveal that mosque-based networks were providing support in terms of logistics, including shelter, points of coordination and safe passage through the night in the form of curfew. This sponsorship increased the geographical spread of the protest and offered a safe haven to the runaway students. Such relations were localized, informal, and depended on the will of the local clerics and not the instructions of the regional Islamist groups.

4.6.2 Islamist–opposition party coordination

It is also proven that Islamist participation tended to come on the basis of signs of the secular opposition parties, especially the BNP and related groups, who actively aimed to have a broader anti-government coalition. The BNP lost some of its allies to Islamist groups that started gaining a chance to re-enter controversial politics after years of suppression. This formed parallel and overlapping formations, the student movement retained its independence, and Islamist and BNP activists rallied along its outskirts and intensified the magnitude of the protests without claiming the agenda.

4.6.3 Digital brokerage and frame diffusion

The involvement of Islamists was also supported by online platforms, particularly Facebook and WhatsApp groups that alumni of madrasas and Islamist student organizations run. These platforms leaked protest appeals and spread religiously charged moral frames that did not conflict with the secular appeals of the students. The adoption of these frames shows the use of digital networks as cheap coalition spaces in situations where formal coalitions can be politically dangerous.

4.7 Islamist participation altered the trajectory of the uprising

The arguments based on GS-01-04, SL-01-04, J-01, PP-01 and RPP-01-04, presented the fact that the influence of the entrance of the Islamist actors made some distinguishable impact on the protest cycle and the state strategic calculations. Their findings showed that the level of participation in protests increased significantly in the districts with high levels of madrasa or mosque-based networks. Massive demonstrations in the outskirts and the countryside, where mobilization by students, in most cases, lacks a sizeable scale, were often credited to informal support on the part of local clerics, thus creating the illusion of a nationwide movement and increasing pressure on the government.

These interviewees also argued that the apparent presence of Islamist movements led to a rhetorical change among the representatives of states, as more frequently they had to speak about the extremist infiltration. It was a story that helped excuse increased repression; increased curfews and increased policing; and at the same time diminish student demands by making the movement seem politically unsound. Though not empirically substantiated, these discourses created tension in hold, and revealed weakness of cross-ideological coalition, which prompted some secular organizers to disassociate themselves with religious parties.

On the other hand, PP-01 also highlighted that the strategic value of Islamist presence was also gained. In areas where the clerical leaders publicly supported the protests, the risk of police brutality seemed to be lower, as the government had to face social pressure of the religious leaders. Students questioned in Sylhet and Rajshahi stated that the existence of Islamist actors made them feel a sense of community support and an increased level of moral legitimacy.

4.8 Coalition fragility and post-uprising dissolution

Although there were instances of tactical congruence with the highest mobilization, facts reveal that the coalition was always unstable as stated by PP-01. After the state violence and policy choices guided by quotas were issued, once immediate goals started fading, the Islamist groups and student leaders retreated to their different political

agenda. The revolt did not result in any long-term organization, official coalition document, or central platform.

4.9 Public expectations and aspirations toward islamist actors after the July 2024 revolution

Here, the expectations of the general populace are organized according to the suggestions provided by the participants.

4.9.1 Ethical governance and responsible political conduct

The majority of the respondents proposed the idea that, In the aftermath of the July 2024 Revolution, people are more likely to expect Islamist actors to take part in the formation of the governance system based on the principles of ethics, transparency, and accountability. Their image as advocates of moral politics in the public has created expectations that they can assist in destroying old traditions of administrative corruption, power misuse, and politicized bureaucracies. This is a broader social need of leadership that is characterized by integrity, sound judgment, and sound stewardship in the state affairs.

4.9.2 Social justice, welfare, and educational reform

PP-01, GS-01-02, SL-01-02-03, RPP-03, and IS-01 were some of the propositions that the Public aspirations are also based on the possibility of Islamists to play out against the structural inequities that persist in the country such as poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and vulnerabilities made by the state. Since most Islamic organizations have a large network of welfare in the past, citizens expect Islamists to be able to offer community-based services, mediate local conflicts, as well as provide targeted aid to marginalized communities. Concurrently, students and the youth who were at the frontline of the revolt expect Islamists to promote overall education reform. Such expectations involve depoliticization of universities, cutting down on session delays, correcting discriminatory recruitment systems and enhancing a modern and technology

based and integrated (madrassa-general) form of education that is in tandem with national development.

4.9.3 Democratic moderation, national unity, and rejection of extremism

It was majority of respondents who indicated that there is an intense need among the urban youths, the middle classes, and progressive layers of the society to see Islamist players show signs of political restraint and adherence to pluralistic democratic principles. Islamists are expected to support freedom of expression, minority rights and peaceful politics by the citizens. During a time of institutional ambiguity, Islamists are also anticipated to help bring the country together by shunning the divisive factor, vengeance politics and the politics of expediency. Their capacity to cooperate with other ideological groups in restoring political sanity is crucial in building public faith. Additionally, the society is under significant pressure to push Islamists to dissociate themselves with extremist organizations and external ideological pressures to support a homegrown type of Islamic national political awareness consistent with national sovereignty.

4.9.4 Islamic moderation and inclusive socio-cultural engagement

PP-01, HRW-01, J-01 & IS-01 suggested that A unique expectation in the aftermath of the revolution is the demand in Islamic moderation - the application of considered and contextualised applications of religious principles in political and social life. The citizens are more demanding Islamists to find a middle ground, which does not believe in extreme literalism and politically instrumental use of religion. This involves the promotion of coexistence, cultural diversity, rights of women and interaction with the current social values in a constructive manner. Through their show of balances, fairness and tolerance in their religious and socio-cultural activities, Islamists will be able to build on the trust people have on them, and their legitimacy as responsible players in the process of democracy building of the state.

5 DISCUSSION

The July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh is a manifestation of a complicated relationship between structural grievances, political opportunity and strategic mobilization, especially the influence of Islamist actors in a hybrid political regime. These dynamics are well explained by social movement theories because the uprising is a good example of various mechanisms of collective action and coalition-building.

The first causes of the movement are explained by the relative deprivation theory (Gurr, 2015). The reinstatement of job quotas to descendants of liberation war fighters by the Supreme Court created a perceived disparity between the expectations and opportunities available to the society, especially to university students that hoped to have employment opportunities based on merit. This sense of unfairness triggered the mobilization of the masses, as per the theory which shows that the existence of divergence between expectation and real resources provide fertile grounds towards rebellion. The relative deprivation model assists in understanding why the protests that started as small localized actions of protestors on campuses turned into nationwide movements, as the structural grievances appealed to larger population groups.

The Resource Mobilization Theory (McCarthy and Zald, 1977) also explains how the Islamist organizations were able to maintain participation. Other Islam-related groups like Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Chhatra Shibir, Hefazat-e-Islam, and Islami Andolon used already existing organizational networks, like mosques, madrassas, and community associations, to organize their activities, recruit new members, and communicate strategic messages through social media apps. These organizational strengths helped quickly form coalitions with secular opposition parties and student networks, and showed that resource mobilization is applicable to a religiously-colored social movement environment.

The models used to understand state repression and increase of the protest can be discussed within the framework of Tilly (1978) and Davenport (2007) who argue that the coercive measures tend to reinforce the collective opposition. The bloody crackdown of student demonstrations, including police brutality, blacking of the internet, and detentions helped build solidarity among the participants and justified complaints against the state. Moral authority and the existing grassroots networks were especially useful to Islamist actors to maintain the level and geographical scope of protests when faced with repressive conditions.

The strategic adaptation of the uprising can be explained by Political Opportunity Theory (Tarrow, 1998) and Framing Theory (Snow and Benford, 1988). The cross-ideological support of quota reform was converted by the activists into a broader criticism of authoritarianism, which appealed across ideological lines. The Islamist actors were included in these coalitions and pragmatically aligned with the secular parties with the ideological legitimacy to their constituencies. This coalition-building highlights the two-fold character of the involvement of the Islamists: they were seeking political power and strengthening a sense of ethical and religious authority.

Islamist participation has ethical and moral underpinnings, which indicate the significance of normative and ideological mobilization. The participants used the teachings of Islam that underline the need to defend the oppressed, to speak the truth to the authority, and to resist injustice that are very ingrained in the Quranic instructions and the tradition of the prophets. This can be compared to existing scholarship on frame alignment and resonance that indicates that collective action is more prone to succeed whenever actors frame their political participation in such a way that it resonates within the expectations and values of the participants (Snow and Benford, 1988; Wiktorowicz, 2004). Besides, mobilization of moral imperatives demonstrates the way Islamist actors exploit the religious legitimacy in a strategic manner, as it is in line with the argument that religion can be used as both a motivational tool and a practical instrument in divisive politics (Masoud, 2014; Roy, 2017).

In general, the July 2024 uprising shows that organizational capacity, ethical legitimacy, and strategic coalition-building, Islamist actors can actively influence mass movements in hybrid regimes. It is a combination of relative deprivation, resource mobilization, state repression, political opportunity, and framing theories that give a full account of the factors, the motivation, and the effects of the Islamist involvement in the uprising.

6 CONCLUSION

The demonstrated interplay of ethical, organizational and political factors in controversial politics in the July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh is showing the multidimensional and strategic role of the Islamist actors in mass mobilization. Resources structure and mobilization were offered to the protests by Islamist establishments, such

as Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Chhatra Shibir, Hefazat-e-Islam, madrasa networks, which made the protests extend their geographic scope, ensured organizational discipline, and coordination with student movements and secular opposition parties. Notably, the role played by their involvement was highly tactical and not ideological as Islamist actors identified with the wider democratic and anti-authoritarian aims of the uprising, and did not seek to Islamize the agenda. At the same time, the teaching of Islamethic ethics and prophetic traditions were important to justify participation, define opposition to the oppressions as a moral and spiritual responsibility, and strengthen unity among the protesters. The empirical data prove that the Islamist engagement has the potential to strengthen the effectiveness of movements and maneuver around the moral, political, and social demands of the various constituencies. These results support theoretical viewpoints in the resource mobilization and social movement theory, which emphasizes the intersection of organizational capacity, normative framing and the availability of political opportunity structures to influence the Islamist mobilization in popular uprisings.

7 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this paper provides an in-depth evaluation of the involvement of Islamists in the July 2024 uprising, it is necessary to address a number of shortcomings. First of all, the use of qualitative interviews and accounts of the participants introduces the risk of recall bias, selective perception, and ideology framing. There were limitations regarding access to some Islamist actors and sensitive organizational documents and that curtailed checking of internal strategies. Also, the time frame that the study gives to the uprising limits the interpretation of the sustainability of the Islamist engagement in the long run. Further studies may take a mixed method, which involves, surveys, social network analysis, and longitudinal case studies to consider both short run and long-term consequences of the Islamist participation. The comparative analysis of South Asia or the rest of Muslim world might help clarify how Islamist engagement is determined by political opportunity structures, state repression, and organizational density. In addition, understanding the intersection of ethical-religious framing and pragmatic coalition-building would help more scholars and policy-makers to understand how Islamist actors achieve moral authority and meet political goals, while also informing scholarship and policy.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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