FROM PLEDGES TO PRACTICE

POLITICAL INCLUSION AND DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY

BANGLADESH'S POLLS 2026

cgs Centre for Governance Studies

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Political Inclusion and Democratic Accountability

Bangladesh's Polls 2026

February 2026
www.cgs-bd.com

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As Bangladesh moves toward the 13th National Parliament Election, questions about fair elections, safety and inclusion have become especially important for minority and marginalized communities. Although the Constitution promises equal rights for all citizens, minority communities continue to face fear, exclusion, and limited political opportunity, particularly during election periods. This study focuses on how religious minorities, Indigenous minorities from the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the plains, socio-economic minorities, and transgender and gender-diverse populations experience elections, political participation, representation, and access to justice. The principal purpose of the study is to understand their everyday realities, concerns, and expectations and to turn these experiences into practical recommendations which can help make the upcoming national parliamentary election 2026 more inclusive, safe, and credible.

The study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining numbers with real-life stories. A nationwide survey was conducted with 505 respondents from different minority communities to capture broad trends in voting behavior, political awareness, safety concerns, and representation. To better understand the reasons behind these trends, 10 Key Informant Interviews (KII) were held with human rights defenders, civil society members, journalists, academicians, legal practitioners, religious minorities representatives, transgender rights activists, indigenous community representatives and socio-economic minorities representatives. In addition, 4 regional roundtable discussions in Dhaka, Sylhet, and Rangpur gave all the participants a safe space to openly share their experiences, observations and expectations. By bringing together the survey data, expert insights, and community voices, the study presents a balanced and grounded picture of minority participation in the upcoming national parliamentary election.

The study findings show that minority communities in Bangladesh have a long history of voting and civic participation. Most respondents have voted in past elections, often multiple times. However, this experience has not created confidence about the future. Only a small portion feel

fully committed to voting in the upcoming election, while many remain undecided or say they will vote only if conditions feel safe and fair. Fear of violence, distrust in election outcomes, and disappointment with past representatives are major reasons for this hesitation.

The study also finds a gap between general awareness and practical knowledge. While most respondents know their basic voting rights and are aware of election-related misconduct, many do not know enough about the candidates in their own constituencies or their political ideologies and beliefs. Representation is another major concern. A large majority believe that political parties do not nominate enough minority candidates, leaving their communities without a real voice in decision-making. For the transgender community specifically, this exclusion is two-fold: they face systemic barriers to running for office and often encounter harassment or identity verification issues at polling stations due to rigid gender norms. The finding further reveals a strong "culture of silence" where people avoid political discussions and reporting problems because of their fear of retaliation, as they do not believe institutions will protect them.

One of the outstanding barriers to minority participation is insecurity. Very few respondents feel completely safe during elections. Other barriers include weak access to justice, lack of trust in the neutrality of state institutions, poor knowledge of complaint mechanisms, and long-standing underrepresentation in politics. Social stigma also plays a critical role, particularly for transgender voters who often face public humiliation or confusion regarding queueing in male or female lines. Economic hardship and social dependence on local power holders also limit minority people's ability to participate freely.

At the same time, the study identifies some opportunities. Minority communities are politically aware, care deeply about their rights, and clearly express what they need for an inclusive election. Ongoing discussions on democratic reform has created space for change, and some civil society organizations continue to play a strong role in supporting minority voices. If safety, fairness, and accountability improve, many respondents indicate that they are willing to engage more actively in the electoral process.

Based on these findings, the study emphasizes the need to move beyond promises and ensure real protection and inclusion. Priority should be given to guaranteeing the safety of minority communities before, during, and after elections. Election authorities, law enforcing agencies, and

local administration must act in a visibly neutral and fair manner to rebuild trust. Special measures, such as sensitization training for polling officers and inclusive queueing systems, are essential to ensure transgender voters can exercise their franchise with dignity. Clear and confidential complaint mechanisms should be made accessible at the community level so people can report threats or irregularities without fear. Political parties should nominate more minority candidates and include minority concerns clearly in their election manifestos. Finally, strong action is needed to prevent hate speech and identity-based campaigns that increase fear and division. Together, these steps can help ensure that minority citizens participate in the upcoming elections with confidence, dignity, and equal political rights.

INTRODUCTION

As Bangladesh approaches its 13th national election, it is essential to examine the perceptions, experiences, and expectations of minority communities. This analysis is vital for assessing the credibility of the electoral process and the inclusiveness of political progress in the democratic journey of Bangladesh. In this paper, the term "minorities" is used in a broad, context-specific sense, encompassing religious minorities (including Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian communities), ethnic and indigenous minorities (particularly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the plains), as well as socio-economic marginalized groups including transgender and gender-diverse populations who face structural exclusion in terms of political participation and getting justice. Minority communities in Bangladesh often enter election periods with heightened concerns about security, intimidation, and local power dynamics. The question is, whether political commitments will translate into protection and participation in practice, rather than remaining rhetorical assurances.

At the demographic level, official data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) Population and Housing Census 2022 reveals that Bangladesh remains predominantly Muslim, with minorities constituting a significant portion of the population: 91.04% Muslim, 7.95% Hindu (≈ 13.1 million), 0.61% Buddhist (≈ 1 million), 0.3% Christian (≈ 0.5 million), and 0.12% other religions (≈ 0.2 million).[1] In addition, the census records 1.65 million people under the category of ethnic groups (covering both CHT and plain indigenous communities) and 12,629 persons under the hijra/transgender category, equivalent to ≈0.013 million. However, communities such as dalits, tea garden workers, punji workers and other socio-economic minorities are not separately identified or disaggregated in national census data. Taken together the maximum minority population

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[1] Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Population and housing census 2022: Preliminary report* (English version). Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Retrieved from PHC_Preliminary_Report_(English)_August_2022.pdf

identifiable from BBS 2022 data amounts to approximately 17.36 million people. These minority communities are spread across the country, with notable concentrations of Hindus in various divisions, including parts of Khulna, Rangpur, and Sylhet. Indigenous populations are primarily concentrated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (Rangamati, Khagrachari, and Bandarban), as well as in northern and northwestern districts among plains groups.

In addition to these groups, several socio-economically marginalized communities are central to discussions on electoral inclusion. These include tea garden workers and their families, an estimated 300,000 people, with around 75 percent being women, mostly residing in the tea estates of Sylhet and Moulvibazar.[2] Indigenous "Punji" communities in greater Sylhet, with approximately 85 Punjis and a population of around 30,000, many of whom rely on betel-leaf cultivation for their livelihoods.[3] Furthermore, the Bede (Bedey) community, a historically nomadic and socially excluded group, is frequently estimated at 75,000 people in government social welfare surveys, though broader estimates in various studies and reports vary significantly.

The transgender and Hijra community also represents one of the most severely marginalized segments of the electorate. BBS 2022 officially records 12,629 individuals as "third gender,"[4] Rights groups and unofficial estimates suggest the actual population is significantly higher, potentially exceeding 100,000.[5] Although the government granted them "third gender" recognition

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[2] Rapid. (2022). *Policy Brief: The social protection challenges of tea garden workers in Bangladesh*. Rapid Bangladesh. Retrieved from Policy Brief

[3] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2022). *Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) in South Asia: A study on the indigenous people of Bangladesh*. Retrieved from

https://www.climateandforests-undp.org/sites/default/files/resources/NDC%20South%20Asia%20April2022-digital.pdf

[4] Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Population and housing census 2022: Preliminary report* (English version). Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Retrieved from PHC_Preliminary_Report_(English)_August_2022.pdf

[5] *Bandhu Social Welfare Society. (2022). Annual Report 2022*. Retrieved from https://www.scribd.com/document/706170420/Bandhu-Annual-Report-2022

in 2013 (officially gazetted in January 2014),[6] they continue to face extreme social stigma, family rejection, and exclusion from formal education and employment, often forcing them into begging or sex work for survival. This marginalization is deeply reflected in electoral data; despite their legal recognition, the final voter list for the upcoming election records only 1,234 third-gender voters nationwide.[7] This stark gap between the estimated population and registered voters underscores the systemic barriers—including harassment at polling centers, difficulties in obtaining identification due to a lack of permanent addresses, and deep-seated discrimination— that prevent them from exercising their democratic rights.

The study seeks to bridge the information gap regarding the political status of marginalized groups by providing a data-driven analysis of their experiences, concerns, and expectations ahead of the upcoming national election. By investigating the specific barriers to safe and equal participation, the research aims to transform these lived realities into actionable policy insights. The methodology relies on a mixed-methods framework, integrating a nationwide survey of 505 respondents with 10 in-depth key-informant interviews featuring experts, community leaders, and rights activists. These findings are further grounded in regional realities through four focused roundtables conducted in Dhaka, Sylhet, and Rangpur.

This study provides a comprehensive evaluation of electoral behavior, political representation, and access to justice, supported by data visualizations and analytical commentary. The goal is to move beyond symbolic inclusion toward a democratic environment where every citizen, regardless of their ethnic, religious, or socio-economic background, can participate in the electoral process with safety and dignity.

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[6] Ministry of Social Welfare. (2014). *Gazette Notification: Recognition of Hijra as Third Gender*. Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Registered No. DA-1. Retrieved from https://www.dpp.gov.bd/bgpress/index.php/document/get_extraordinary/6851?fbclid=IwAR2FlAKchkr9jQaHXgpsy MqsoN6E6OBtB-HJ1YwazaMq26tYutls_813Xa0

[7] Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS). (2025, November 18). *EC publishes final voter list of 12.77 crore voters*. Retrieved from https://www.bssnews.net/news-flash/333219

CONCEPTUAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

DEFINING MINORITIES IN THE BANGLADESHI CONTEXT

In the Bangladeshi context, minorities refer to communities that are smaller in number within the country's overall demography minor in terms of religion and ethnicity—constituting approximately 9% of the total population according to the BBS 2022 census; among them are culturally distinct groups who identify themselves as indigenous, having historical ties to specific regions and identities different from the Bengali majority, though the Government of Bangladesh does not officially recognize or use the term *indigenous*, instead adopting *"small ethnic groups"* or *"ethnic minorities"* in state documents.

Minorities have historically faced structural disadvantages in political life and social inclusion.[8] Before the Partition of India in 1947, what is now Bangladesh had a much larger share of non-Muslim populations. According to historical census data, the Hindu population alone was around 28 percent of the region's total population just before partition, with some estimates suggesting it was close to 30–31 percent at that time.[9]

By the time of Bangladesh's first census in 1974, Hindus accounted for about 13.5 percent of the population, and their share has continued to decline in subsequent decades. In the most recent census (BBS 2022), minorities together make up less than 10 percent of the population, with

[8] Amin, A., Al Amin, M., & Hossain, Z. (2016). *Bangladesh: State of minorities report – 2016*. Nagorik Uddyog. Retrieved from https://nuhr.org/uploads/files/Minority_report_2016.pdf

[9] Census of India. (1941). *Report on the population by religion and province: Bengal* (Vol. IV). Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India. Retrieved from Census of India 1941 archive: https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/28411

Muslims at 91.04 percent, Hindus at 7.95 percent, Buddhists at 0.61 percent, Christians at 0.30 percent, and other religions at 0.12 percent.

For the purposes of this study, the term 'minorities' is operationalized as a multidimensional construct encompassing groups whose demographic status, cultural identity, or economic standing has resulted in systemic marginalization within the national political landscape. This definition moves beyond mere numerical representation to address the structural and historical constraints that impede equitable civic engagement.

CATEGORIZATION OF MINORITY COMMUNITIES

To reflect the diversity of minority communities and their political experiences, the study organizes analysis across four categories:

1. **Indigenous Peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)** This category includes indigenous communities from the CHT region, where political participation is closely linked to concerns around identity recognition, land rights, local governance, and security. The CHT context is treated as distinct because of its geographic, cultural, and historical characteristics and its specific patterns of political vulnerability.
2. **Indigenous Peoples of the Plains** Indigenous communities of the plains are included to capture experiences outside the CHT, particularly where political participation is shaped by social discrimination, land insecurity, limited representation, and unequal access to state services and justice. This category reflects that indigenous exclusion is not limited to one region and varies across districts and local political conditions.
3. **Religious Minorities** Religious minority communities are included in this study to assess their participation and inclusion in the electoral process, with a focus on citizenship equality, safety, and political trust, particularly during election periods. This category also allows for an analysis of how religious identity intersects with local power dynamics and political competition.
4. **Socio-economic Minorities** This category includes communities that experience exclusion largely as a result of long-standing economic vulnerability, social stigma, and inadequate political protection. Such groups include tea estate workers, communities dependent on betel-leaf cultivation, trans and other socially marginalized populations. The political

participation of these communities is often shaped by factors such as insecurity, limited access to essential services, and a lack of influence over public decision-making processes. These hinder their ability to fully engage in the political sphere, reinforcing their marginalization within society.

THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

The analytical framework is built around four interconnected concepts: political participation, electoral engagement, representation, and access to justice. Each concept is understood through measurable and experience-based indicators.

Political Participation Political participation encompasses the involvement of individuals and communities in various dimensions of the political system, including representation in elections, national parliament, and vocal representation in public discourse. It also involves active engagement in decision-making processes that influence governance and policy outcomes. Political participation is a comprehensive concept that captures both formal and informal means through which citizens express their political preferences, advocate for their interests, and contribute to shaping the direction of political and social systems. As a key component of democratic functioning, political participation is an important indicator of the degree to which citizens, including minority groups, are able to influence and engage with political processes.

Electoral Engagement Electoral engagement refers specifically to participation in the electoral process, with a focus on voting behavior and the conditions that enable or restrict voter turnout. This includes individuals' interest in voting, the perceived barriers to participation (such as fear of violence, lack of trust in the system, political pressure, or administrative hurdles), and the overall perception of the electoral process in terms of fairness, competitiveness, and meaningfulness. Electoral engagement is a critical aspect of evaluating the inclusivity of elections, particularly for minority communities, and offers insights into how citizens view the electoral process as a space for democratic expression or as one marked by uncertainty and risk.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Access to justice refers to whether minority citizens can seek help and protection when they face discrimination, threats, violence, or political intimidation. It includes factors such as experiences of harassment or exclusion during political participation, trust in the police, administration, and legal system, and whether citizens feel safe reporting incidents and believe that justice will be served. Access to justice is a key condition for equal political participation because elections cannot be fair or meaningful if rights violations are not addressed. Ensuring access to justice helps create a political environment where all citizens, especially minorities, can participate without fear of harm or discrimination.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the perceptions, lived experiences, and expectations of minority communities in Bangladesh ahead of the upcoming national election. This chapter outlines the systematic framework employed to investigate the political engagement, perceptions, and systemic barriers faced by the minority and marginalized communities in Bangladesh. By utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study ensures that broad quantitative trends are grounded in the nuanced, lived experiences of minority groups, providing a comprehensive analysis of the electoral landscape.

Research Design: A Mixed-Methods Approach

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies to capture a holistic view of the electoral environment for minority communities. The quantitative component was designed to identify large-scale patterns, trends, and statistical correlations across various demographic groups. Conversely, the qualitative component provided the necessary depth to interpret these trends, exploring the "why" behind voter hesitation, institutional distrust, and social silence.

To ensure the study was grounded in national realities, secondary data analysis was incorporated into the design. This involved a thorough review of the BBS census. These national statistics informed the sampling logic and site selection, ensuring that the study focused on areas with high concentrations of religious, ethnic, and socio-economic minorities.

Rationale for Methodological Triangulation

The complexity of minority participation in a transitional political climate necessitates a multi-layered approach. While a nationwide survey can quantify the scale of a problem, such as the fact that only 23.4% of respondents feel completely safe during elections; it cannot fully capture the emotional or historical weight of that fear.

By combining the Survey, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and Roundtable discussions, the study achieved "methodological triangulation." This allowed the study to cross-verify findings: The survey provided the measurable data, the KIIs offered expert structural analysis of human rights and democratic

gaps, and the multi-party dialogues provided a real-time assessment of how political promises align with community expectations.

Survey Methodology and Sampling Strategy

Conducting a survey of minority populations in Bangladesh presents a unique methodological challenge: demographic dispersion. While groups like the Chakma or Garo have geographic concentrations, others, such as urban Dalits or Christians, are dispersed or hidden within larger majority populations. Consequently, a Simple Random Sampling (SRS) method would be statistically inefficient; It would likely yield a sample dominated by the Bengali Muslim majority, failing to capture enough minority respondents to run meaningful regression analyses or comparative studies.

To overcome the above constraints, the study adopts a Stratified Purposive Sampling design. This approach deliberately selects specific geographic "clusters" (districts and divisions) where minority populations are historically and demographically concentrated. Within these purposely selected sites, a Snowball Sampling technique is employed to access "hard-to-reach" respondents such as those living in tea garden enclaves or urban slums or who might have been absent from official voter lists.

The total sample of 505 respondents is stratified into four distinct categories:

1. **Socio-Economic Minorities** (n=100)
2. **Indigenous Communities: Chittagong Hill Tracts** (n=115)
3. **Indigenous Communities: Plains** (n=125)
4. **Religious Minorities** (n=165)

Why Stratified Purposive Sampling?

Stratification was applied to reflect differences in political context across regions and communities. Indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts operate under a distinct administrative and historical framework compared to plains indigenous groups. Similarly, the political experiences of religious minorities vary between urban centers and rural districts, and

socio-economic minorities often face constraints linked to employment conditions and residential segregation.

By structuring the sample around these distinctions, the study aimed to capture variation in electoral experiences without assuming uniformity within or across minority groups.

The Role of Snowball Sampling

Many of the target populations in this study are socially marginalized or geographically isolated.

- **The Problem:** There are no reliable, publicly available lists of "Dalit voters" or "Tea Garden laborers" or "trans population" that can serve as a sampling frame. Furthermore, marginalized groups often fear persecution and may be suspicious of strangers asking about political affiliations.
- **The Solution:** Snowball sampling (chain-referral) solves this by using community insiders. The research team identifies initial "seeds" such as a community elder, a church leader, or a labor union representative. These seeds then refer the researchers to other members of their community. This method is the gold standard for accessing "hidden" populations, ensuring we reach the most vulnerable individuals (e.g., a female tea picker) rather than just the vocal elite.

Rationale for Target Distribution

The following sections provide the justification for each stratum, explaining why specific districts were chosen and how the sample size reflects both demographic reality and research importance.

Total Target Respondents (Division)

■ Sylhet ■ Khulna ■ Barisal ■ Dhaka ■ Rangpur ■ Rajshahi ■ Mymensingh ■ Chattogram

Respondent Distribution by Minority Group (n=505)

- Religious Minorities: 165
- Indigenous (plain) Minorities: 125
- Indigenous (CHT) Minorities: 115
- Socio-Economic Minorities: 100
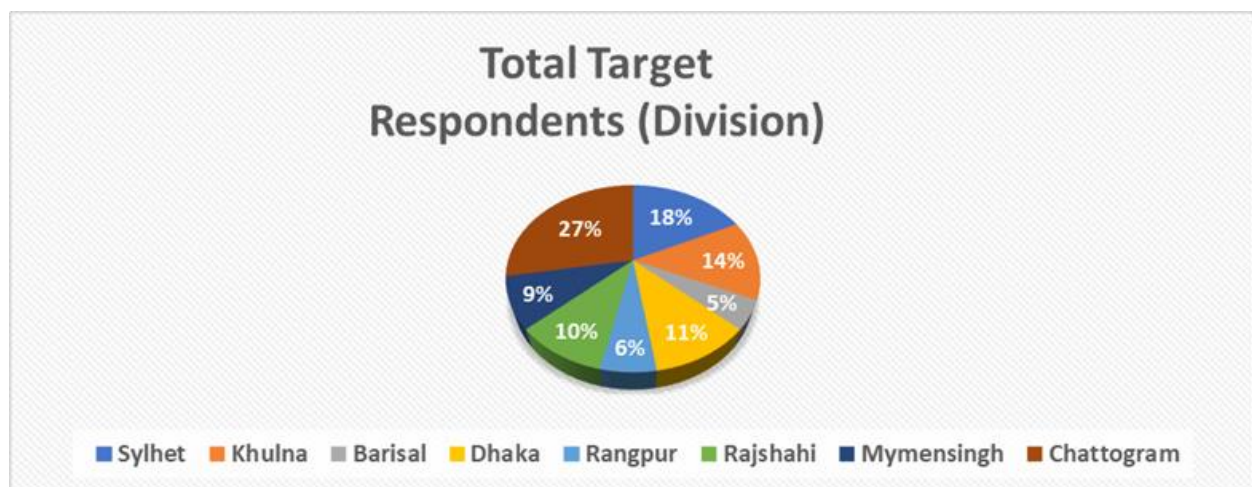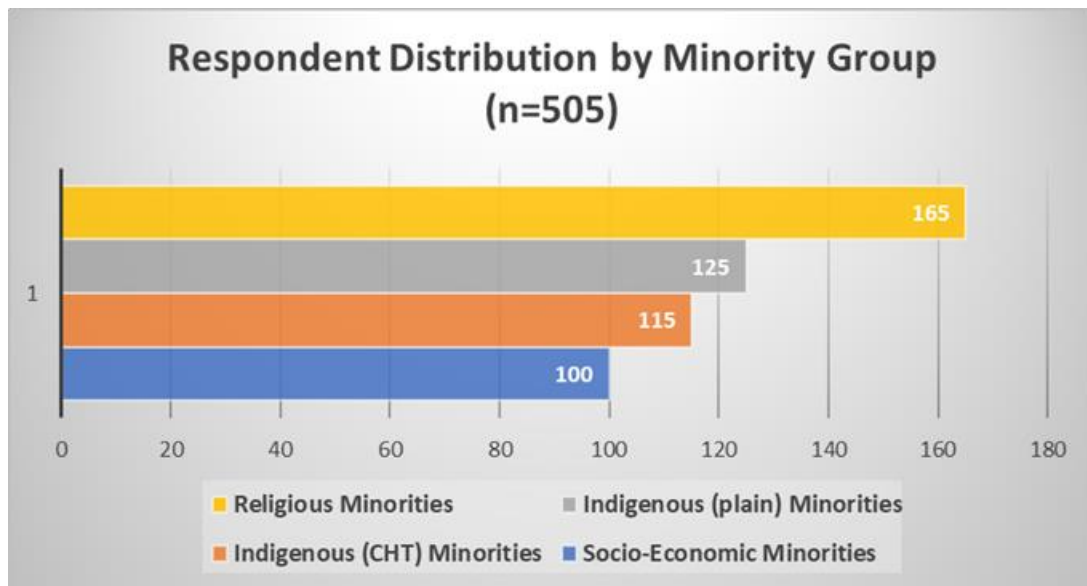
Stratum A: Socio-Economic Minorities (Target: 100)

Definition: This category encompasses groups whose political marginalization is primarily defined by their occupation, caste, and class status. It focuses on the "labor colonies" of the tea and betel leaf industries and the marginalized Hindu castes.

- **Sylhet Division (n=90): The Plantation Economy**

    - **Moulvibazar (n=35):** This district is the epicenter of Bangladesh's tea industry, hosting 91 of the country's ~160 tea gardens. We have allocated the highest number of socio-economic respondents here to study the "Tea Garden Vote Bank" phenomenon. Tea workers, approximately **440,743**, live in isolated lines (colonies) provided by management.[10] Their voting behavior is often collective, decided by panchayat leaders or influenced by garden owners (Al-Amin et al., 2017; Zaman & Abir, 2017). A large sample here allows us to test hypotheses about voting and political illiteracy.

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[10] Al-Amin, M., Hossain, M. I., & Parveen, S. S. (2017). *Social exclusion and poverty among tea garden workers in Bangladesh*. **The Indian Journal of Industrial Relations, 53**(1), 21–36.

- **Sylhet Sadar (n=30):** This site focuses on workers in peri-urban gardens and the **Hindu** minority living in close proximity to tea estates. It provides a comparative context: do tea workers closer to the city (Sylhet) have higher political agency than those in remote Moulvibazar?

- **Sunamganj (n=25):** This district targets the **Khasi** and **Betel Leaf Workers**. Unlike tea workers, the Khasia people live in *punjis* (clustered hill villages) and are engaged in betel leaf cultivation. With an estimated **20 million** people involved in the broader betel leaf sector, this subgroup faces unique political battles regarding forest land rights and crop price syndicates. Their inclusion ensures the study covers agro-labor politics beyond just tea.

- **Khulna Division (n=10): Caste-Based Exclusion**
  - **Jessore (n=10):** Including respondents here diversifies the socio-economic sample, ensuring it is not entirely Sylhet-centric. It allows the study to explore how caste associations function as political pressure groups in the southwest.

Stratum B: Indigenous Communities – CHT (Target: 115)

Definition: The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is the only region in Bangladesh with a dedicated administrative system (Regional Council) It also has a history of armed conflict. Political participation here is often revolving around the implementation of the 1997 Peace Accord.[11]

- **Chattogram Division – The Hill Tracts**

  - **Rangamati (n=45):** As the administrative headquarters of the CHT, Rangamati is the center of indigenous politics. It is home to **98.38%** of the nation's **Chakma** population (483,726 total). The Chakma are the most politically dominant indigenous group, and high sampling here is mandatory to understand the mainstream indigenous political narrative.

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[11] **The Daily Star.** (2025, December 1). *28 years of CHT accord: Disappointment, frustration keep growing.* The Daily Star. Retrieved from https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/28yrs-cht-accord-disappointment-frustration-keep-growing-4048496

- **Bandarban (n=40):** This district is ethnically distinct, home to the **Marma** (202,974) and smaller, more marginalized tribes like the **Mro**, **Bawm**, and **Tanchangya**. The Mro and Bawm often feel excluded by both the Bengali state and the Chakma-dominated regional parties.[12] Allocating 40 respondents here allows us to capture these "minorities within minorities," ensuring the study reflects the internal diversity of the CHT (Uddin, 2010).

- **Khagrachhari (n=30):** This district has a highly mixed population of Tripura, Chakma, and Bengali settlers. It is a hotspot for land disputes.[13] Surveying here provides data on how direct competition with settlers influences indigenous voting behavior and political trust.

Stratum C: Indigenous Communities – Plains (Target: 125)

Definition: Plains indigenous groups (Adivasis) are dispersed across the northwest and north-central regions. Unlike the CHT, they lack a peace treaty or reserved governance seats, making their political struggle one of survival and recognition.

- **Rajshahi Division (n=50): The Barind Tract Context**
  - **Rajshahi (n=25) & Naogaon (n=25):** These districts are the ancestral heartland of the **Santal** (129,049) and **Munda** (64,869) communities. **44.16%** of all Santals live in Rajshahi Division. The region has a history of peasant uprisings (e.g., Tebhaga) but currently faces severe land alienation. The sample here is evenly split to capture a broad cross-section of the Santal community, examining whether their historical legacy of resistance translates into modern voting power.
- **Mymensingh Division (n=45): The Matrilineal Context**

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[12] Uddin, N. (2010). *Politics of cultural difference: Identity and marginality in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. South Asian Survey, 17*(2), 283–294.

[13] Partha, R. S. (2016). *The consequences of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Accord at the village level: A case study of Khagrachari Hill District in Bangladesh*. **Journal of International Development and Cooperation, 22**(1), 1–14. Retrieved from: 222955767.pdf

- **Mymensingh (n=45):** This division is home to **87.77%** of the country's **Garo** population (100,223). The Garo are unique due to their matrilineal social structure. This site is critical for the study's gender dimension: the impact of matrilineal culture results in political participation for indigenous women compared to the patriarchal societies of the Gaaro.

- **Rangpur Division (n=30): The Northwest Frontier**
  - **Dinajpur (n=30):** This district hosts significant **Oraon** (85,858) and Santal populations. It serves as a geographic counterbalance to Rajshahi, ensuring that the Plains sample covers the entire northwestern belt.

Stratum D: Religious Minorities (Target: 165)

Definition: This stratum investigates the "religious minority vote." While often assumed to be a monolith (e.g., "Hindus vote for Party X"), this study seeks to unpack the nuances of regionalism, security, and representation.

- **Dhaka Division (n=55): The Urban & Dalit Nexus**
  - **Dhaka City (n=55):** This is the most complex and strategically vital site. It targets three distinct groups:
    1. **Urban Dalits:** An estimated **35,000–40,000** Dalits live in Dhaka's colonies (e.g., Ganaktuli, Hazaribagh). They are often invisible in national politics.
    2. **Christians:** Only **0.30%** of the national population, 25.46% of Christians live in Dhaka. They represent an educated, urban minority voice.
    3. **Buddhists:** Middle-class professionals who differ significantly from the rural Buddhists of the CHT.

This mix allows the researcher to analyze the effect of urbanization on political agency. Do urban minorities feel more empowered than their rural counterparts?

- **Khulna Division (n=60): The Hindu Heartland**
  - **Gopalganj (n=30):** Famous as a political stronghold, this district has a massive Hindu population. Surveying here tests the "Safe Seat Hypothesis": Do minorities

in areas where their party is guaranteed to win actually receive better public services, or are they taken for granted?

- **Khulna (n=30):** With **15.27%** of the division being Hindu, Khulna allows for a study of minority politics in a major industrial and port region. It serves as a control variable for the rural-centric data from other divisions.

- **Barishal Division (n=25): The Southern Coast**
  - **Barishal (n=25):** This area has a notable concentration of both Hindus (**5.71%**) and Christians (**0.49%**). The political dynamics here are influenced by local patronage networks, offering a distinct context from the north.

- **Chattogram Division (n=25): The Buddhist Center**
  - **Chattogram (n=25):** While CHT has indigenous inhabitants, the plains of Chattogram are the religious center for Bengali Buddhists (Barua community). Since **96.77%** of all Buddhists live in Chattogram Division, this site is highly noted to represent the religious interests of the Buddhist community separate from the ethnic interests of the hill tribes.

Analytical Dimensions and Weighting

The distribution of the **505 respondents** is not merely a reflection of population census numbers; it is a strategic allocation designed to maximize analytical power.

1. **Identity Intersectionality:** By separating "Indigenous CHT" from "Indigenous Plains," the study acknowledges that ethnicity is not enough to define political reality- geography and legal status matter. By separating "Religious Minorities" from "Socio-Economic Minorities" (like tea workers, who are often also Hindu), we can isolate the variable of *poverty* from *religion*.

2. **Regional Balance:** The survey covers **6 Divisions** (Dhaka, Chattogram, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Khulna, Sylhet). This ensures that the findings are not biased toward one specific region (e.g., only Dhaka-centric views).

3. **The "Critical Mass" Theory:** If the survey followed the BBS Population and Housing Census 2022, where Christians account for about 0.3 percent of the population, the sample would include only one or two Christian respondents, making meaningful analysis impossible. Therefore, the study set a minimum sample threshold for the Christian

community to ensure a sufficient critical mass for statistically valid and analytically useful findings.

Thematic Focus of the Survey

The survey instrument was structured around four pillars essential to democratic health:

- **Electoral Behavior:** Tracking historical turnout (found to be **86.7%**) versus current interest levels (**18.5% very interested**) in the national parliament election.
- **Political Awareness:** Measuring the gap between general rights awareness (**88.7%**) and specific candidate knowledge.
- **Representation:** Evaluating the perceived sufficiency of minority candidates (where 67.7% reported an insufficiency).
- **Access to Justice:** Documenting experiences of discrimination and the "culture of silence" regarding reporting harassment to the police.

5. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

To gain a structural perspective on the findings, the study conducted in-depth KIIs with **10 experts**. This cohort included human rights defenders, senior academics, civil society members, representatives from minorities and investigative journalists.

These interviews were instrumental in identifying the institutional "bottlenecks" that prevent minority inclusion. Informants provided critical commentary on the efficacy of the Election Commission, the impact of exclusionary nationalist narratives, and the historical lack of sincere representation in the National Parliament. Their insights helped transform the survey's raw numbers into a narrative of systemic reform needs.

6. Dialogues and Roundtable Discussions

Recognizing that political participation is a two-way process, Thus the study organized several interactive platforms:

- **Regional Roundtables:** Four roundtables were conducted in **Dhaka, Sylhet, and Rangpur**. These sessions served as safe spaces for community members to voice region-specific grievances—such as land rights in the CHT or labor rights in Sylhet's tea gardens—directly to civil society and political actors.

7. Data Collection and Quality Control

The field operation was managed by a team of **50 trained enumerators**.

- **Training:** Enumerators underwent specialized training to handle sensitive topics with empathy and neutrality.
- **Data Analysis:** Quantitative data was processed using statistical software to identify correlations between variables (e.g., the relationship between education levels and political awareness). Qualitative data from KIIs and dialogues was analyzed through **thematic coding**, identifying recurring issues such as "fear of violence" and "institutional distrust."

8. Ethical Considerations and Participant Protection

The study adhered to the highest ethical standards, prioritizing the "Do No Harm" principle.

- **Informed Consent:** Every respondent was briefed on the purpose of the study and participated voluntarily.
- **Confidentiality:** Given that **55.8% of respondents** fear physical or psychological harm if they speak out, strict anonymity was maintained. Content Fetch Id-linked data was encrypted to ensure that no individual respondent could be identified by external parties.
- **Sensitivity:** Research sites were selected and interviews were conducted in a manner that minimized the risk of retaliation or social stigma for the participants.

Historical and Political Context

Minority political participation in Bangladesh must be understood within a longer political history marked by frequent changes in power, election related violences, and repeated concerns about public safety and political rights. Although the Constitution formally guarantees equality and citizenship rights, minority communities have often experienced political participation as unequal in practice, shaped by local power structures, discrimination, and the risk of targeted violence.[14] During election periods, these pressures often become stronger, affecting not only whether people vote, but also whether they feel safe to express political views, engage in campaigns, attend meetings, or speak publicly. The continued exposure of religious minorities, women, and other marginalized groups to fear, harassment, and insecurity (especially during times of political tension) has been highlighted in recent media and policy discussions as a major barrier to participating freely and confidently in democratic life.[15]

At the same time, ongoing political transition and debates on democratic reform have created new expectations for political accountability, inclusion, and equal citizenship. The July mass uprising in Bangladesh was a major step toward a better democracy, but the transition that followed has been criticized for leaving out minority communities. While the interim government established several reform commissions to restructure state institutions, these bodies largely lacked diversity. Aside from the Women's Reform Commission, there was a notable absence of representatives from religious or ethnic minority groups within the initial commission structures. This pattern

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[14] Amnesty International. (2024, August). *Bangladesh interim government must take immediate actions to protect Hindu and other minority communities*. Amnesty International. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/08/bangladesh-interim-government-must-take-immediate-actions-to-protect-hindu-and-other-minority-communities

[15] Human Rights Watch. (2026, January 14). *Bangladeshi women, girls, minorities face rising violence*. Human Rights Watch. https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/01/14/bangladeshi-women-girls-minorities-face-rising-violence

continued during the National Consensus Commission dialogues. For several months, the commission held high-level meetings to shape the country's future, but representatives from minority communities were not invited to any of those sessions.

The exclusion in these reform commissions highlights a gap between the movement's "anti-discrimination" slogan and the practical reality of state-building. Prominent voices from the hills and civil society leaders noted that the total absence of indigenous groups and religious minorities in these 50-member bodies tarnished the image of a government ostensibly committed to universal rights.

Furthermore, the National Consensus Commission, tasked with drafting the "July National Charter 2025," prioritized political focus over social inclusion. The dialogues primarily involved 33 political parties and coalitions, including major parties like the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, while independent minority rights organizations were sidelined. This omission suggests that the "National Consensus" risked becoming a negotiation between political elites rather than a truly inclusive national project. By excluding the very groups that participated in the July uprising, the commission threatened to produce a charter that overlooks the specific structural reforms needed to protect those outside the majority.

Ultimately, these progresses suggest that while the transition has been framed as a "new beginning," it has mirrored the faults of previous administrations where democratic rhetoric was often undermined by the practical exclusion of marginalized voices. The institutional absence of these communities from reform bodies underscores a persistent flaw in the democratic process. True reform requires that equal citizenship moves from a theoretical concept to a practical reality, ensuring that the foundational stages of a reformed state do not repeat the historical mistake of ignoring its most vulnerable citizens.

6.2 Legal and Constitutional Framework

Bangladesh's legal and constitutional framework (**Article 27** and **Article 28)** formally guarantees equality and non-discrimination, and it provides the foundation for political rights, including

voting and civic participation.[16] However, the gap between written laws and lived reality remains a central concern in discussions on minority participation. In practice, minority communities often report that protection depends heavily on local political conditions rather than consistent institutional safeguards.[17]

6.3 Current Trends in Minority Representation

Minority representation in Bangladesh remains a contested and sensitive issue within the country's evolving democratic framework. Minority representation in Bangladesh remains contested not only because of seat counts in Parliament, but because representation is shaped upstream by how parties recruit, promote, and nominate candidates. Party practices show that candidate selection is highly centralized and often driven by leader discretion, loyalty networks, and informal power, rather than transparent internal competition.[18] This kind of nomination structure tends to disadvantage communities that have less access to party elites, campaign finance, and "winnable" constituency bargaining, even when local leaders exist and communities have sizable voter bases. Although these groups constitute a significant portion of the population, analysts and community leaders maintain that they are structurally underrepresented in elected institutions and high-level leadership positions.[19] Across religious and indigenous minorities, the underrepresentation problem is also tied to the absence of meaningful affirmative mechanisms. A major international assessment of minority rights in Bangladesh noted that minority MPs have remained few relative to population share, and highlighted the lack of measures designed to increase minority

[16] **Constitution of Bangladesh**. (1972). *The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh*. Government of Bangladesh. The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

[17] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2025). *Human rights violations and abuses in Bangladesh: Report by the OHCHR fact‑finding mission* (OHCHR). Human Rights Violations and Abuses related to the Protests of July and August 2024 in Bangladesh

[18] Mahiuddin, K.M. (2010). "Candidate Selection Process in the Ninth Parliamentary Elections in Bangladesh", in Al Masud Hasanuzzaman and Shamsul Alam (eds), Political Management in Bangladesh, Dhaka: A H Development Publishing House,pp.193-210

[19] United Nations Human Rights Council. (2025). *A/HRC/59/44* (Report of the Human Rights Council). United Nations. https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/59/44

representation in Parliament.[20] For indigenous communities, rights-focused reporting has similarly emphasized that while there are reserved seats for women, there are no reserved mechanisms specifically designed to ensure indigenous women's representation, reinforcing a wider gap in who reaches national decision-making spaces.[21] This deficit is not limited to Parliament but extends to political party hierarchies, nomination patterns, and the general capacity of minority voices to influence national decision-making.

6.4 Insights from Secondary data and Media Analysis

Research and media analysis show that minority participation in Bangladesh is shaped by their daily living conditions and political safety, not just by how they vote. Four main themes stand out from recent studies and reports.

First, security remains a major concern.[22] Many reports show that minorities still feel afraid to participate in public life due to local threats and violence. Even after the 2024 transition, targeted attacks have made these communities feel that their safety is not guaranteed, which keeps them away from politics.

Second, political inclusion often feels like a symbolic gesture.[23] Analysts point out that while minority groups are often asked for their votes during elections, they are usually ignored once the

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[20] Minority Rights Group International. (2016). *Under threat: The challenges facing religious minorities in Bangladesh* (PDF). Minority Rights Group International. https://minorityrights.org/app/uploads/2023/12/mrg-rep-ban-oct16-online.pdf

[21] Kapaeeng Foundation, Bangladesh Indigenous Women Network & International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA). (2016). *State of indigenous women and girls in Bangladesh: Issues and concerns at a glance* (Briefing Paper). https://iwgia.org/images/publications/0753_Briefing_Paper_State_of_indigenous_omen_and_girls_in_Bangladesh_October_2016.pdf

[22] United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. (2025). *2025 Factsheet: Bangladesh*. USCIRF. https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2025-07/2025%20Factsheet%20Bangladesh.pdf

[23] European Union Agency for Asylum. (2024). *Bangladesh – Country Focus: Country of Origin Information Report* (EUAA). https://www.euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2024-07/2024_07_EUAA_COI_Report_Bangladesh-Country_Focus.pdf

government is formed. This creates a cycle where they participate in the system but have no way to hold leaders accountable for their specific needs.

Third, although the recent reform debates created hope, they also brought uncertainty. Experts argue that real change requires strong laws and institutional fixes, not just promises. The fact that the "July National Charter 2025" lacked clear rules to protect minority rights is seen as a major gap in the national plan for the future.[24]

Finally, structural barriers are the biggest reason for this exclusion. Minority communities are often kept out of leadership networks and have a harder time getting the government to listen to them.[25] This suggests that for a "New Bangladesh" to be truly fair, it must move beyond simple promises and fix the deep-seated problems that keep people out. To build a better country, the government needs to ensure that every citizen, no matter their religion or background, has a real voice in making decisions. Democracy requires moving from "symbolic" inclusion (where people are just for show) to a system where minority communities become part of the authority to influence laws and hold leaders accountable.

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[24] July National Charter: Does it fall short of reform hopes? (2025, October 18). *The Business Standard*. https://www.tbsnews.net/features/panorama/july-national-charter-does-it-fall-short-reform-hopes-1263761

[25] European Union Agency for Asylum. (2024). *Bangladesh – Country Focus: Country of Origin Information Report* (EUAA). https://www.euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2024-07/2024_07_EUAA_COI_Report_Bangladesh-Country_Focus.pdf

SURVEY FINDINGS

1. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The demographic foundation of this study is built upon a diverse sample of 505 respondents, providing a broad lens through which to view the political landscape of CHT indigenous, plains indigenous, religious and socio-economic minority communities. The survey mostly captures the perspectives of the younger generation; the largest demographic segment consists of individuals aged 18-30, representing 42.9% of the total sample. When combined with the 29% of respondents aged 31-45, it becomes clear that the survey captures the perspectives of a generation currently in their peak productive and civic-engagement years. In terms of gender distribution, the sample is relatively balanced, though it tilts slightly male at 55%, with females accounting for 45%. The religious and ethnic composition of the respondents is particularly significant for this study's focus on inclusivity. Nearly half of the participants (48.8%) identify as Hindu, while Christians (31%) and Buddhists (16.7%) also maintain substantial representation. Ethnically, the sample is dominated by Plains Indigenous Peoples (29.0%) and Hill Indigenous Peoples (25.8%), followed by a notable presence of Tea Garden workers (6.3%) and Dalit communities (4.8%). Educationally, the group demonstrates a high level of academic attainment, with 37.5% holding a Bachelor's or Master's degree. However, it's heartbreaking to see that nearly 28% had to quit school early, not because they wanted to, but because their families simply couldn't afford it. This tells us right away that we are talking to a group that values progress but faces real-life struggles.

Figure 1: Age of the Respondents
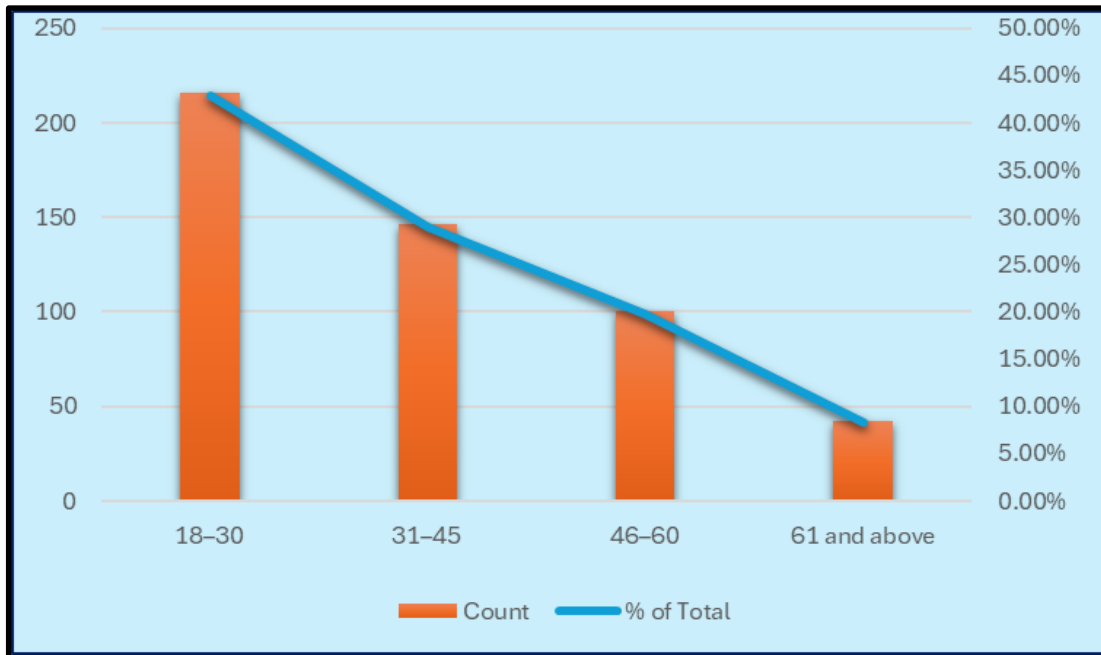
(Source: Compiled from CGS Survey Findings-2026)

Figure 2: Gender of the Respondents*
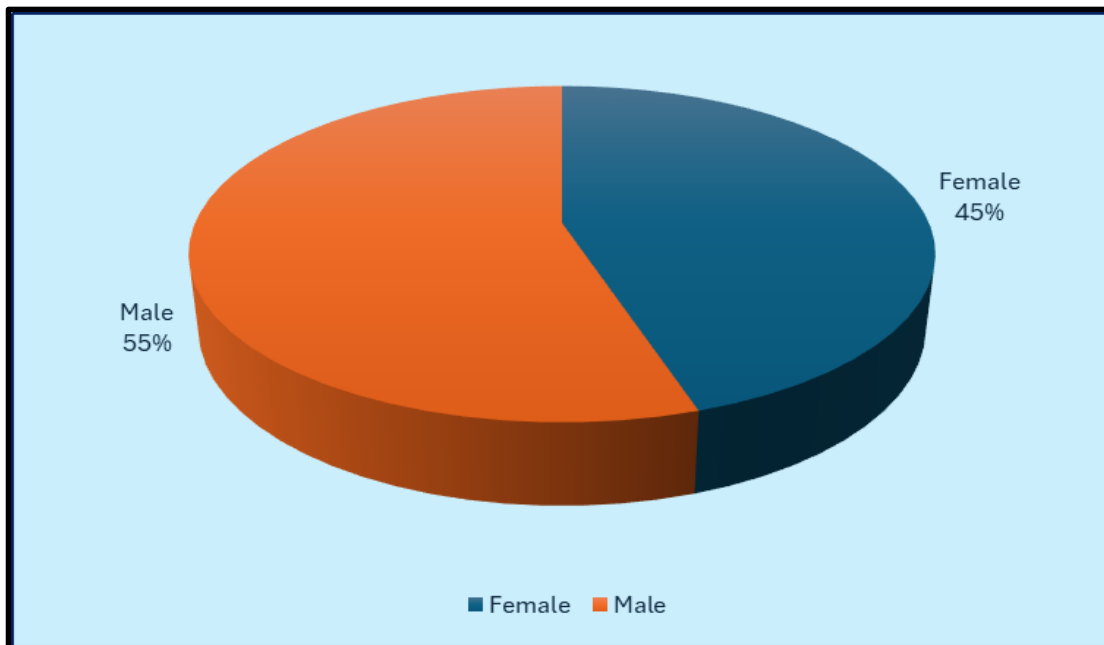
(Source: Compiled from CGS Survey Findings-2026)

Figure 3: Community / Ethnicity of the Respondents

	Community / Ethnicity
■	Other
■	Tea Garden Workers
■	Scheduled Communities
■	Dalit
■	Panjum Workers
■	Hill Indigenous Peoples
■	Plains Indigenous Peoples
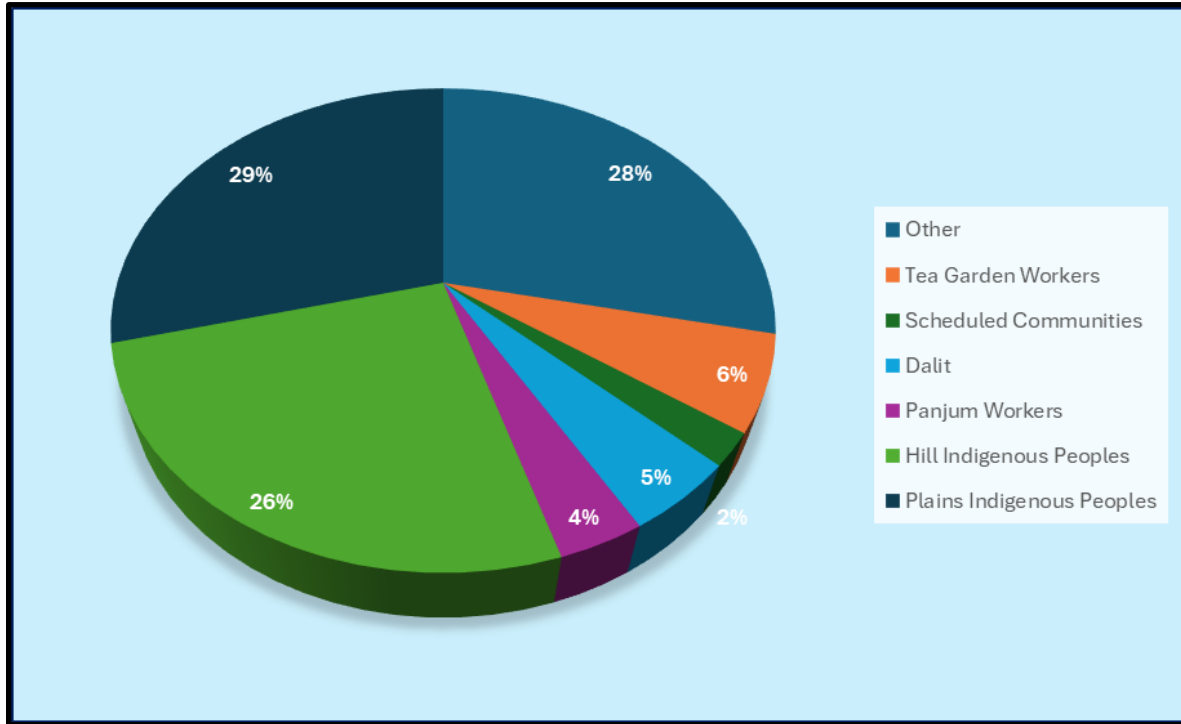
(Source: Compiled from CGS Survey Findings-2026)

Figure 4: Religious Composition of the Respondents

■ **Hindu** ■ **Buddhist** ■ **Christian** ■ **Others**
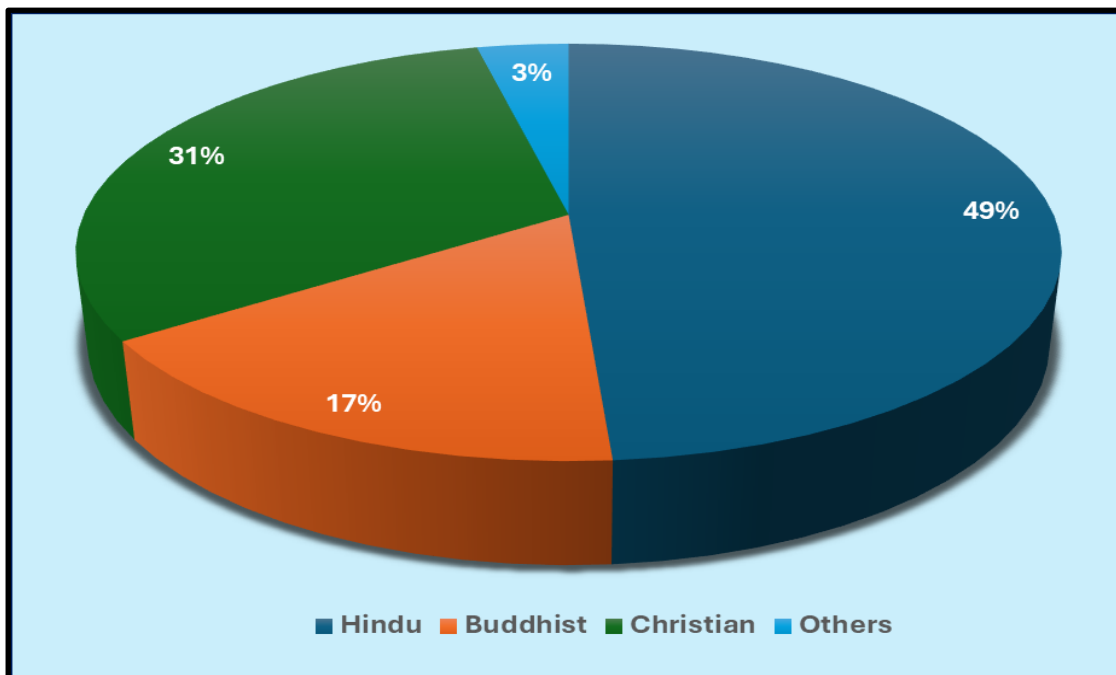
Figure 5: Educational Qualification of the Respondents
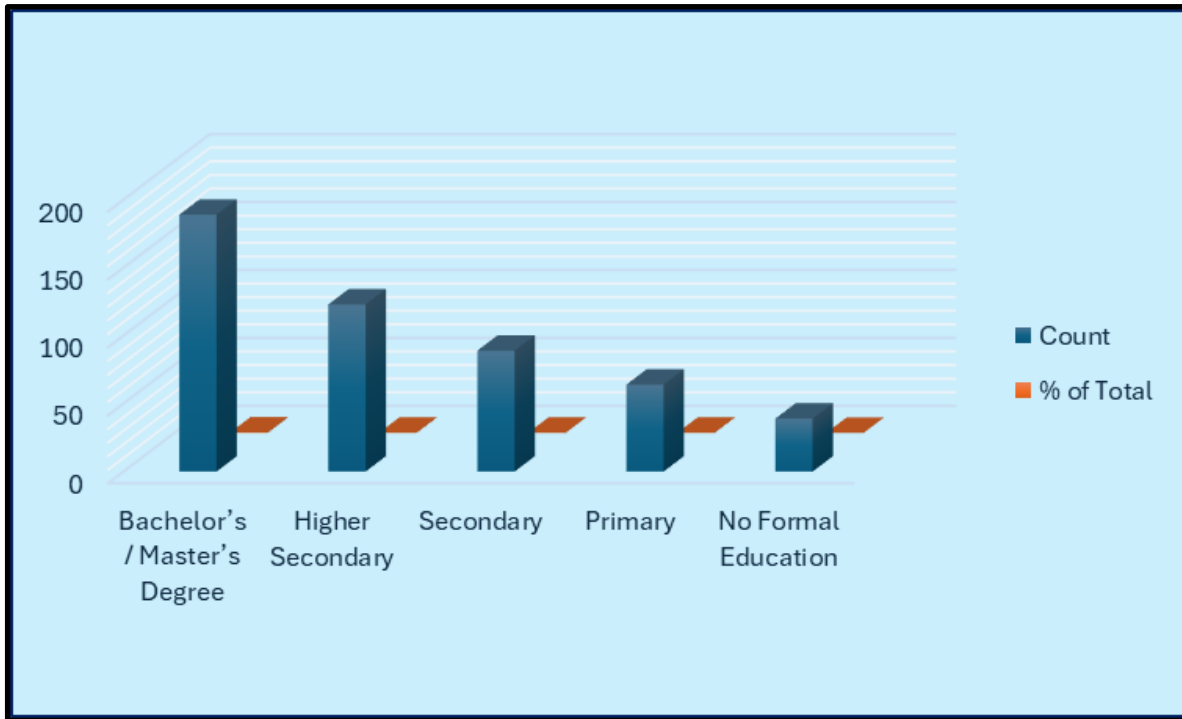
2. Geographic Distribution and Socio-Economic Background

The survey's geographic reach was designed to ensure that the findings were not localized to a single region but reflected a broad, national perspective of minority and indigenous experiences. Data was collected across multiple administrative divisions, with the **Chattogram division** providing the highest density of participants at 28.0%. This was followed by significant representation from the **Sylhet (17.9%)** and **Khulna (14.9%)** divisions. At the more granular district level, the study captured concentrated voices from **Rangamati (10.7%)**, **Dhaka (8.9%)**, and **Bandarban (8.7%)**, ensuring that both hill-tract regions and urban centers were well-represented.

Figure 6: Division of the Respondents
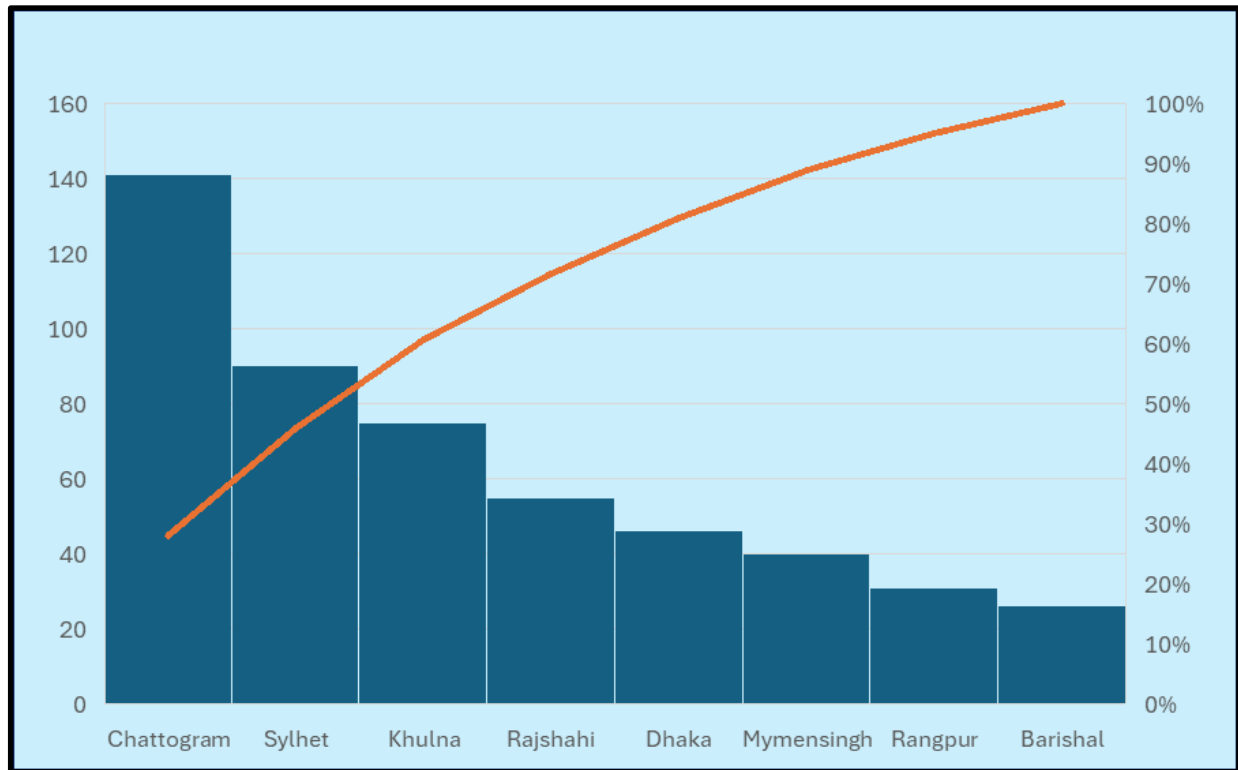
This geographic variety is matched by a complex socio-economic landscape. The professional backgrounds of the respondents provide a cross-section of both urban and rural economic realities. **Students** represent the single largest professional group at 17.7%, highlighting a high level of civic interest among the youth. They are followed closely by **housewives (15.5%)** and employees within the **private sector or NGOs (11.7%)**. The inclusion of **farmers (9.9%)**, **small business owners (6.5%)**, and **laborers (5.8%)** further ensures that the data reflects the perspectives of those working in the primary and secondary sectors of the economy. A critical socio-economic finding is the intersection of education and economic status. While the cohort is relatively well-educated—with **37.5% holding a Bachelor's or Master's degree**—there is a stark underlying vulnerability. Nearly **27.7% of all respondents reported dropping out** of the formal education system specifically due to **poverty**. This highlights a "double reality" where academic achievement exists alongside significant financial insecurity, a factor that likely influences the community's political priorities and their focus on practical development over abstract ideology.

Figure 7 : Profession of the Respondents
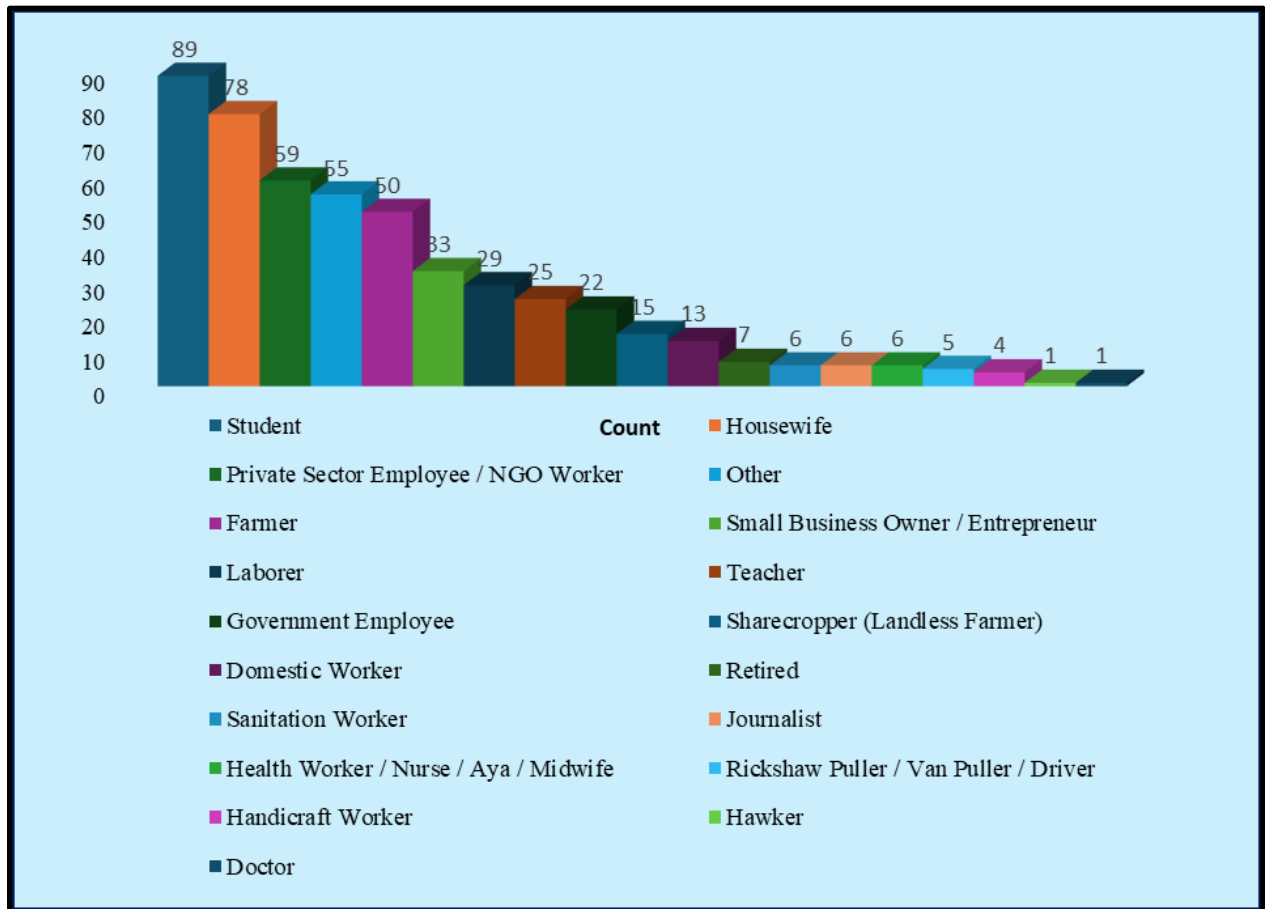
(Source: Compiled from CGS Survey Findings-2026)

The findings show that educational discontinuity is a notable concern among respondents from minority communities, as a majority (50.4 percent) reported having dropped out of the formal education system at some point, compared to 45.5 percent who never experienced dropout, while only 4.1 percent were able to return to formal education after dropping out. This indicates that once interrupted, educational trajectories are difficult to resume for most respondents. Among those who dropped out, the reasons were predominantly structural rather than individual, with poverty being a major driver, forcing many to discontinue education due to financial hardship, alongside family-related reasons such as household responsibilities, caregiving duties, or family decisions that deprioritized formal schooling. These patterns highlight the intersection of economic vulnerability and familial constraints in shaping educational outcomes for minority populations, suggesting that dropout is closely linked to broader socio-economic marginalization rather than lack of interest in education.

Figure 8: Distribution of Respondents by Education Status
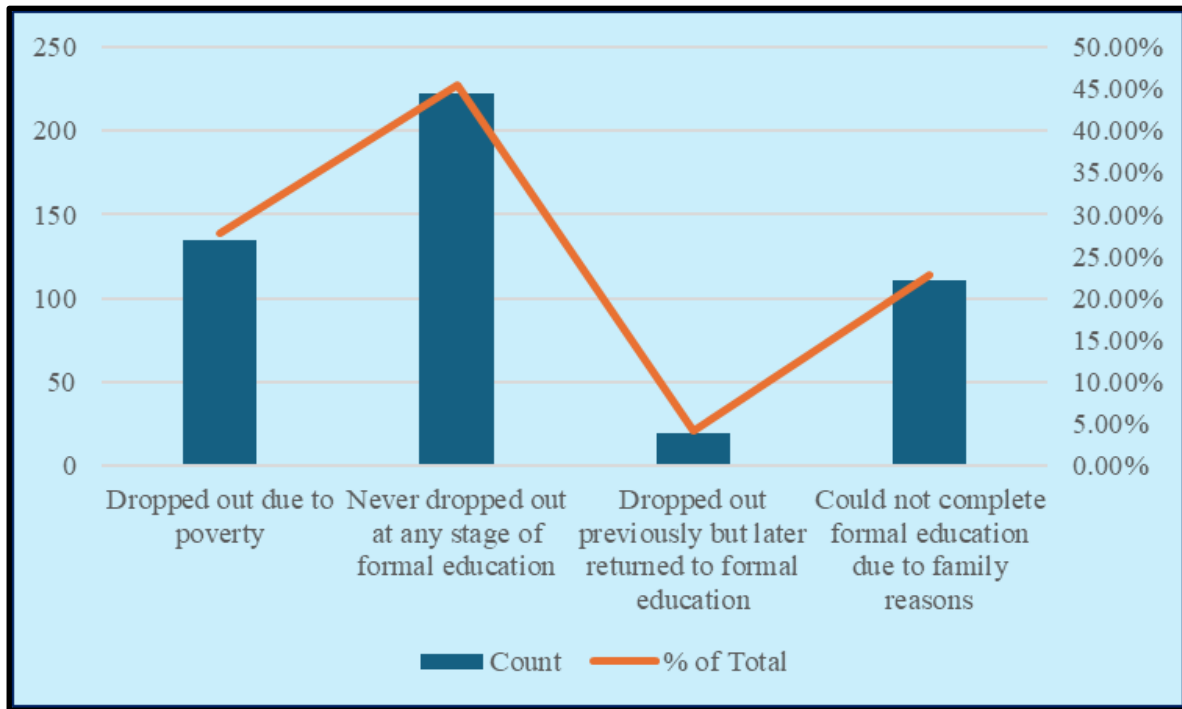
3. Electoral Participation Patterns: How They Feel About Voting

The data reveals a population that is deeply familiar with the act of voting but remains psychologically distanced from the formal political process. This "participation-engagement gap" is one of the most striking findings of the survey. On the surface, the community shows a robust history of civic duty; an overwhelming **86.7% of respondents** have participated in an election at some point in their lives. This is not a group of first-time or occasional voters, but rather a seasoned electorate. Experience levels are remarkably high, with **36.7%** having cast their ballots in more than three national parliamentary elections. This consistency extends to the local level as well, where **38.1%** have voted in local government elections more than three times, and another **39.8%** have participated at least twice. These figures suggest that voting is a deeply ingrained habit within the community.

Figure 9: Election Participation: Yes or No?
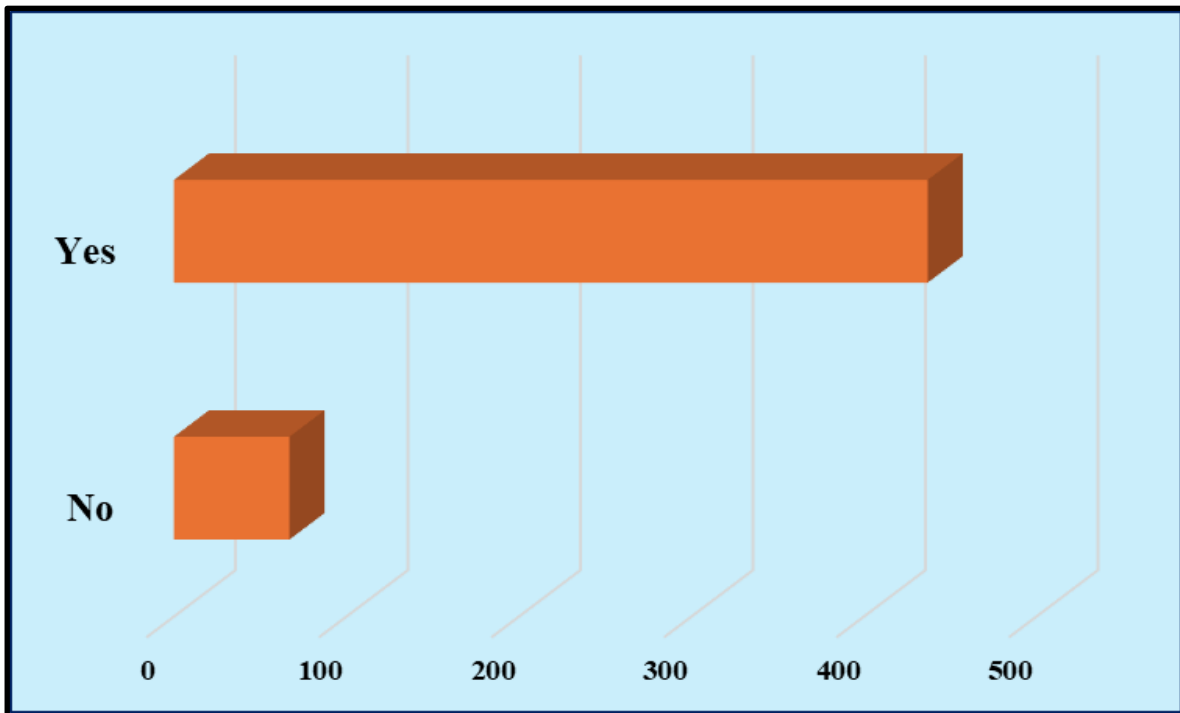
(Source: Compiled from CGS Survey Findings-2026)

Figure 10: Number of Times Voted in National Parliamentary Elections
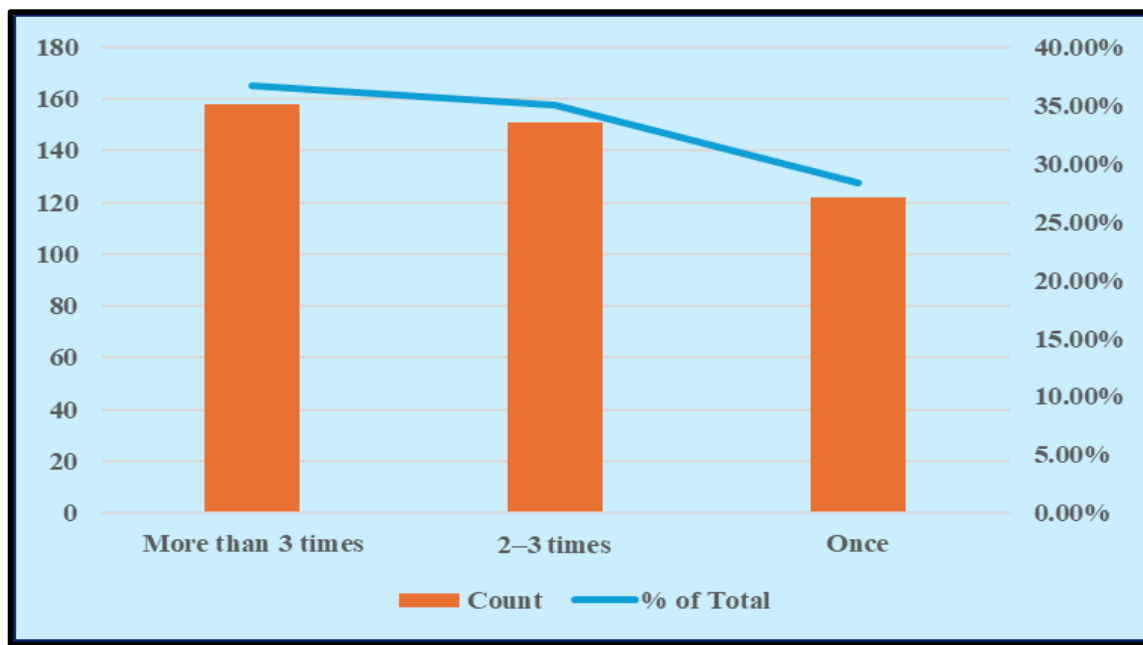
(Source: Compiled from CGS Survey Findings-2026)

Figure 11: Number of Times Voted in Local Government Elections

■	2–3 times
■	More than 3 times
■	Once
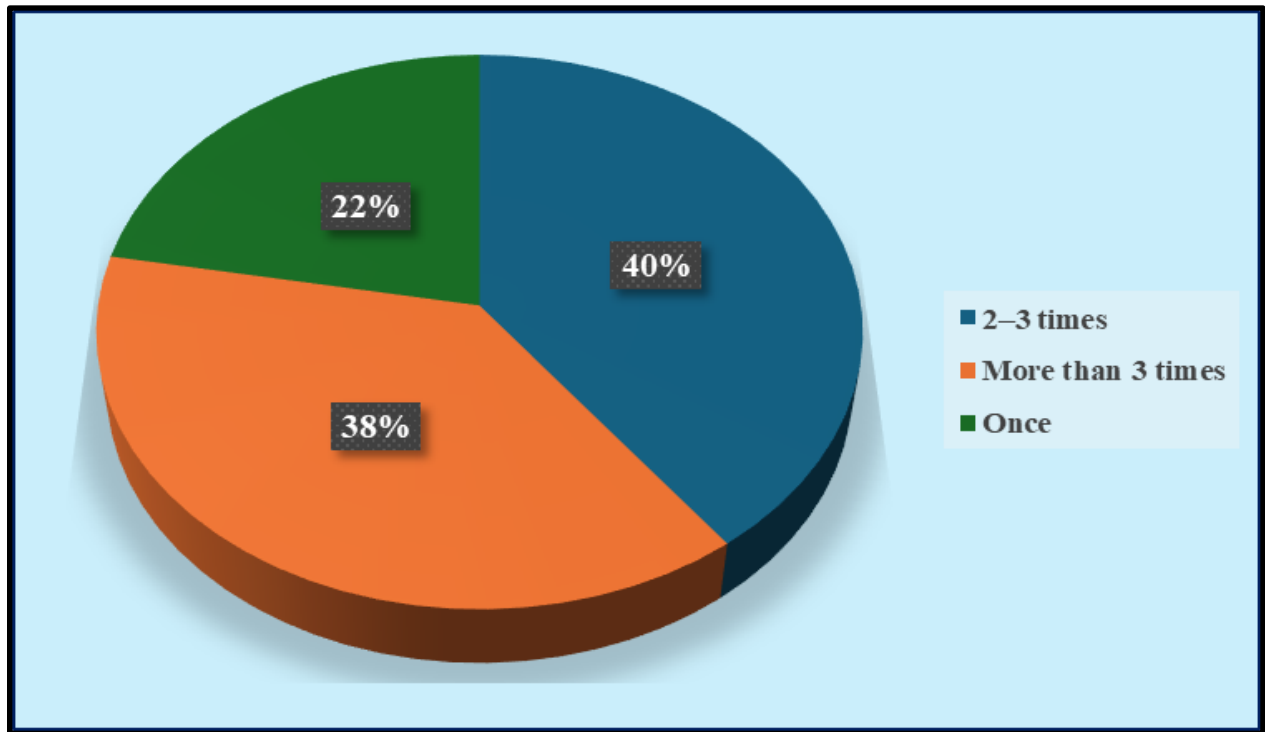
(Source: Compiled from CGS Survey Findings-2026)

The survey findings show that a minority of respondents faced difficulties during the voter registration process, with 15.3 percent reporting that they encountered problems while becoming a voter, compared to a large majority (84.7 percent) who reported no such difficulties. Among those who reported facing challenges (n = 76), respondents were asked to specify the nature of the problems and were allowed to select multiple responses. Within this subgroup, long distance and transportation difficulties emerged as the most frequently cited challenge, reported by 43.2 percent of respondents, indicating physical and infrastructural barriers to voter registration. Administrative complexity was reported by 39.2 percent, reflecting procedural and bureaucratic hurdles. Security-related fear or threats were cited by 21.6 percent of respondents, highlighting concerns over personal safety, while 16.2 percent reported experiencing political pressure during the registration process. Additionally, 13.5 percent reported encountering bribery or other unethical demands, 12.2 percent identified language barriers, and 10.8 percent cited family or social pressure. As respondents could report more than one challenge, the findings illustrate that voter registration difficulties among minority communities are multifaceted, involving overlapping logistical, administrative, and socio-political constraints that affect a segment of the population despite overall high voter inclusion.

Figure 12: Difficulties Faced During the Voter Enrollment Process
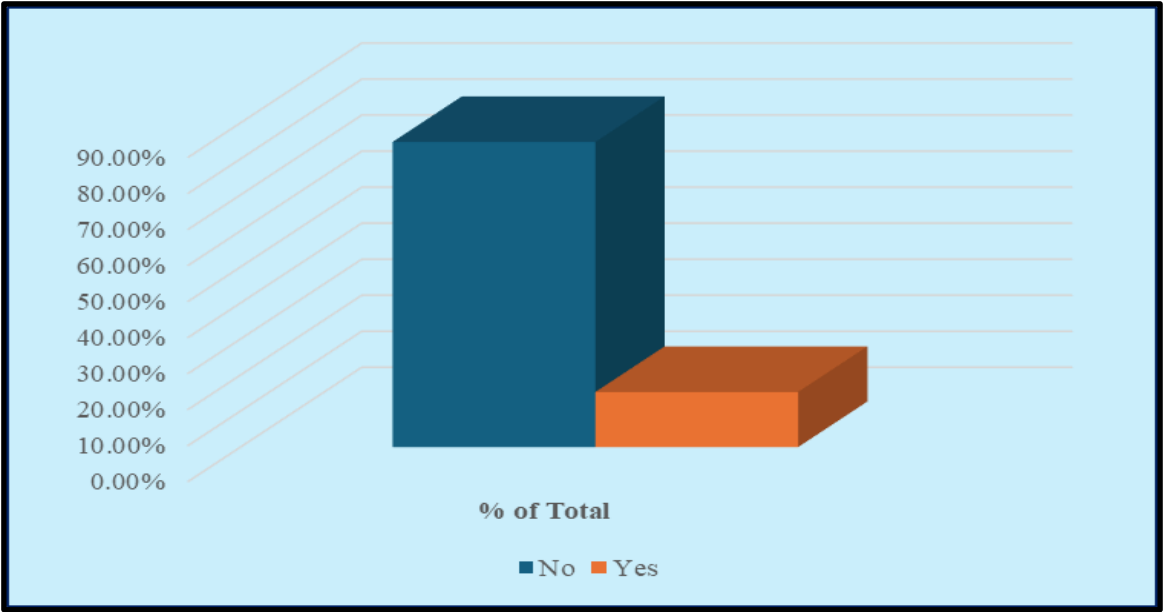
Figure 13: Types of Problems Faced During Voter Registration
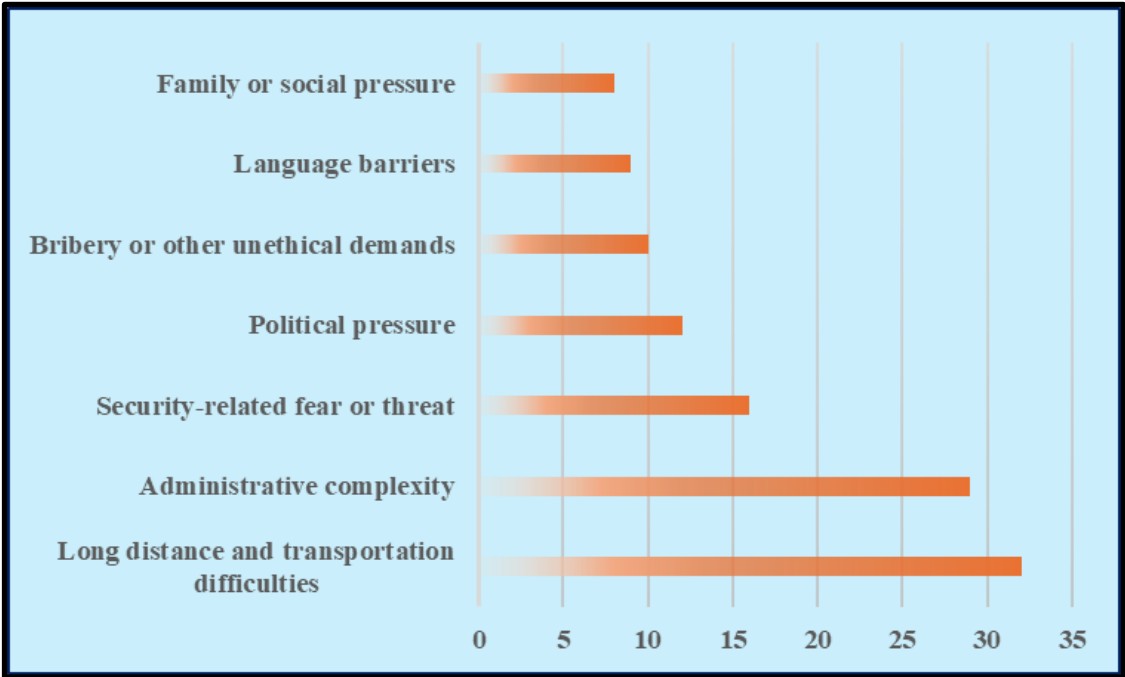
The "Wait-and-See" Approach to Upcoming Elections

However, this high historical turnout does not translate into current political enthusiasm. Interest in the upcoming national election is characterized by a cautious "wait-and-see" approach, signaling a profound sense of uncertainty or skepticism. Only a small minority—**18.5% of respondents**—identified as "very interested" or certain to vote regardless of the circumstances. Instead, the plurality of the population (**30.8%**) is only "somewhat interested," indicating that their participation is conditional on favorable environmental and security conditions. Furthermore, nearly **one-third (30.4%)** remain completely undecided, choosing to observe the evolving political situation before committing to participate.

Figure 14: Level of Interest in the Upcoming National Election
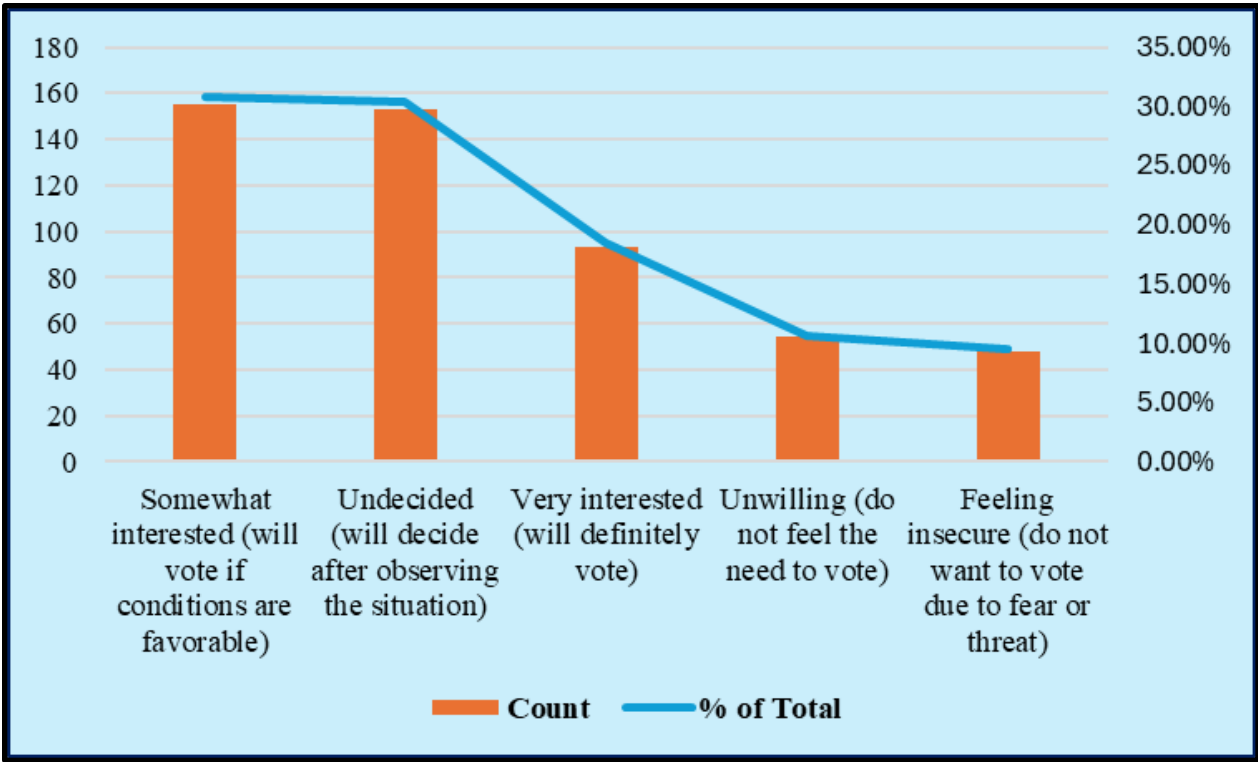
(Source: Compiled from CGS Survey Findings-2026)

Most tellingly, a significant portion of the community expressed total hesitation: **10.7%** are currently unwilling to vote because they feel it is unnecessary, while **9.5%** are deterred by a palpable sense of insecurity and fear.

Figure 15: Reasons for Lack of Interest in the Upcoming National Election

100%

50%

0%

■ Disappointment due to vote-buying or unethical practices
■ Dislike or lack of confidence in any competing candidate
■ Preferred political party is not participating in the election
■ Past representatives did not keep promises
■ I feel that voting will not impact the result (The result is predetermined)
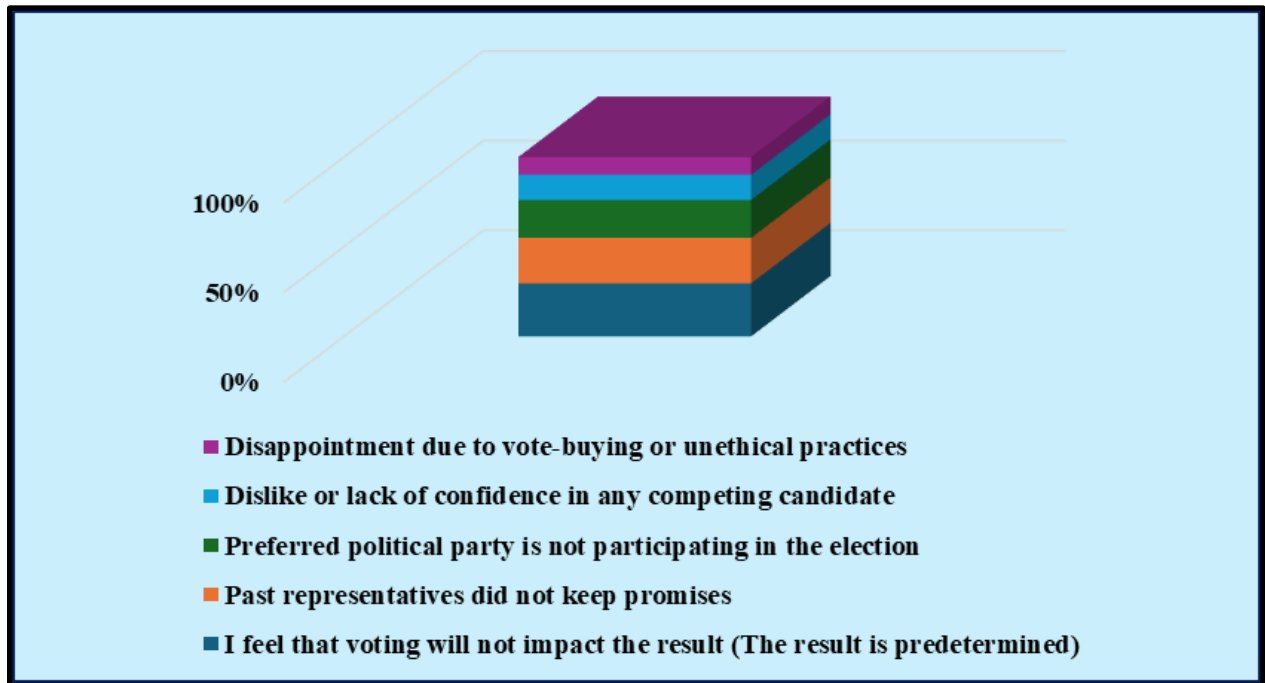
(Source: Compiled from CGS Survey Findings-2026)

The Social "Culture of Silence"

The findings reveal a predominantly cautious and passive approach to political engagement among respondents. While a small minority (3.4%) actively initiate and debate political issues, the vast majority either avoid participation altogether (35.1%) or listen without expressing their views (28.1%). Another segment engages selectively, discussing politics only with trusted individuals (16.8%) or occasionally sharing opinions while primarily listening (16.6%). These patterns suggest that, despite a strong history of electoral participation, many members of minority communities remain hesitant to voice their political opinions publicly, reflecting a culture of caution and selective engagement shaped by social, cultural, and possibly security-related considerations.

Figure 16: Frequency of Engagement in Informal Political Gatherings

Chart legend:
- **Detached: I avoid political discussions altogether**
- **Passive: I listen to discussions but avoid expressing my own views**
- **Cautious participant: I discuss politics only with trusted or close individuals**
- **Active listener: I like to listen and occasionally share my opinion**
- **Active speaker: I initiate political discussions and actively debate with others**
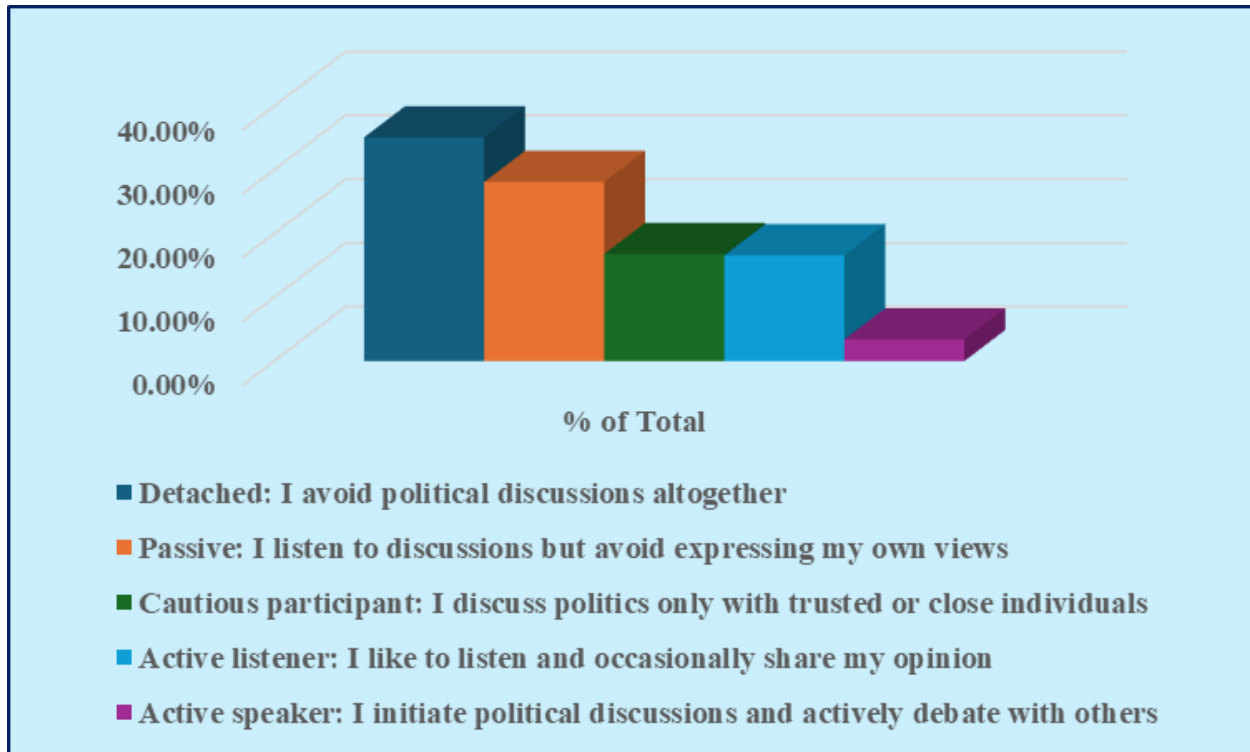
(Source: Compiled from CGS Survey Findings-2026)

Perceptions of Previously Elected Public Representatives

The data indicates a significant gap between the expectations of minority communities and the performance of their elected representatives. A plurality of respondents (32.5%) felt that representatives were aware of their issues but lacked sincerity, taking little initiative to address them, while another 27.5% perceived them as only partially aware, engaging superficially with community concerns. Combined, this shows that nearly 60% of respondents experienced inadequate responsiveness from public officials. Smaller segments reported more positive or extreme experiences: 14.2% believed representatives were fully aware and genuinely sincere in addressing problems, whereas 14.6% experienced complete disconnection, and 11.2% felt their representatives were entirely unaware of local issues. These findings underscore a persistent sense of mistrust and limited accountability among minority populations toward their elected officials, reflecting structural gaps in political representation and responsiveness.

Figure 17: Assessment of Previous Representatives Regarding Community Issues
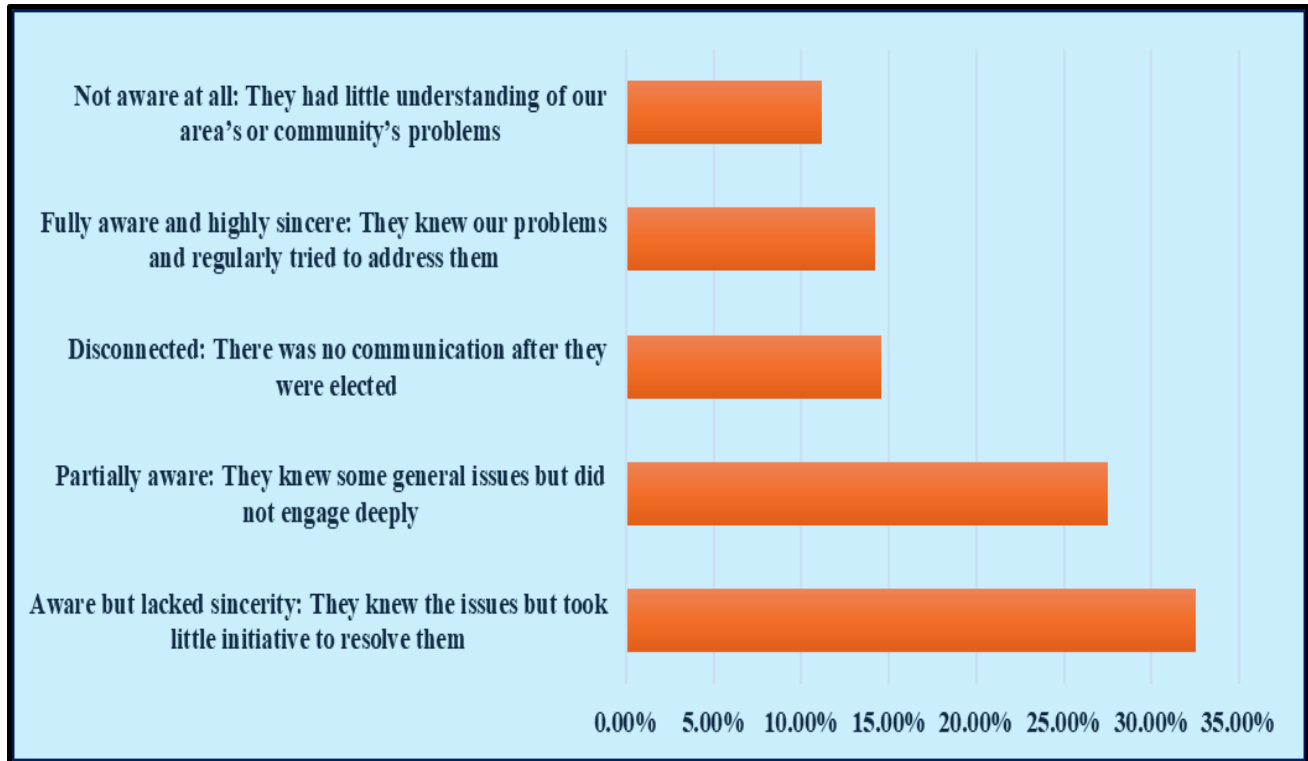
Prioritization of Local Problems in Election Campaigns

The responses show that most participants felt their representatives paid only limited attention to the pressing issues affecting their communities. A plurality, 35.9%, reported that candidates discussed these issues superficially without concrete plans, while 33.7% said some major problems were addressed but many important concerns were ignored. Only 15.4% believed that representatives fully prioritized the main problems during their campaigns, whereas 15.0% felt that candidates did not prioritize these issues at all, focusing more on political rivalry or personal achievements. Overall, the data indicates that while some acknowledgment of local concerns occurred, the majority of campaigns failed to meaningfully engage with the real needs and priorities highlighted by respondents.

Figure 18: Respondent Views on Campaign Priorities of Public Representatives
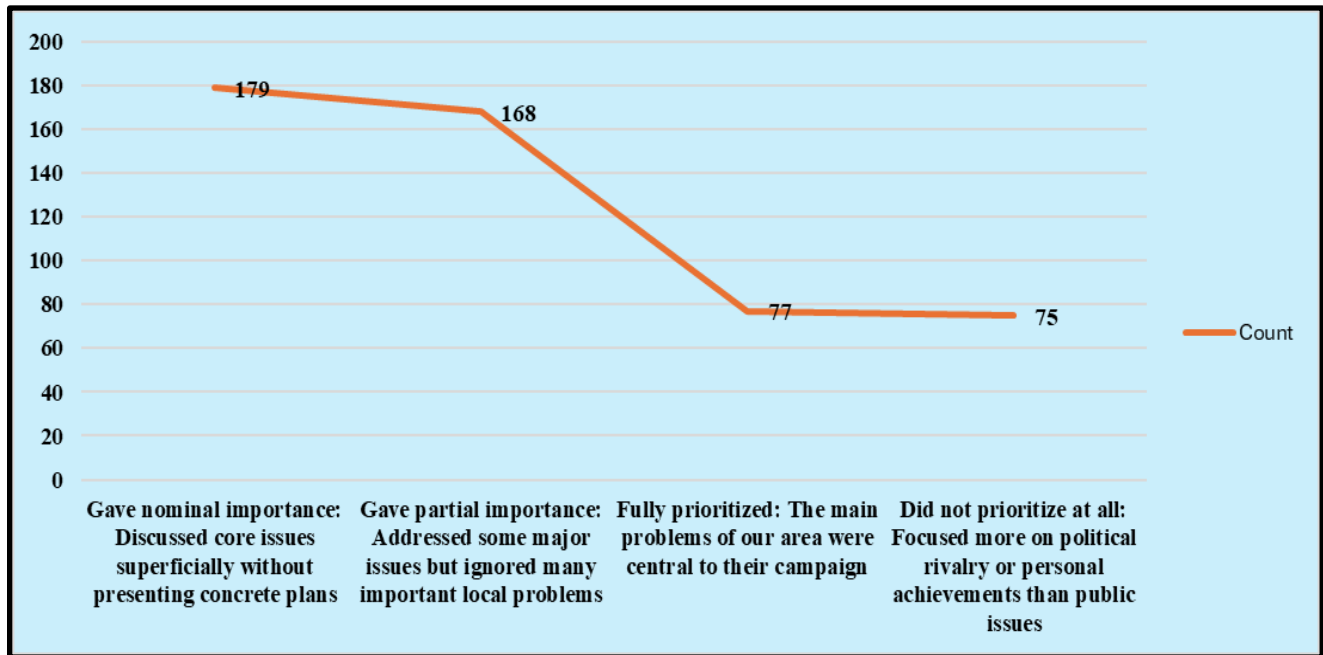
(Source: Compiled from CGS Survey Findings-2026)

Together, these factors paint a picture of an electorate that is experienced in the mechanics of voting but deeply wary of the risks and rewards of the political system.

4. Political Awareness and Information Consumption: What They Know (And What They Don't)

The survey findings highlight a complex paradox within the community: while there is a high level of fundamental civic awareness, it is deeply undermined by a lack of specific, actionable political information. This "knowledge-information gap" suggests that while the electorate understands the *mechanics* and *risks* of democracy, they remain largely disconnected from the *actors* and *ideologies* driving the current political landscape.

Foundational Knowledge and Awareness of Malpractice

At the most basic level, political awareness is quite high. A substantial **88.7% of respondents** stated they are fully aware of their rights as voters. This indicates that the community is not starting from a position of

ignorance regarding their role in a democracy. Furthermore, they demonstrate a sophisticated—and perhaps cynical—understanding of the electoral environment. Approximately **66.1% of participants** are aware of various election irregularities, ranging from unethical financial transactions and vote-buying to more aggressive tactics like capturing polling centers or forcibly preventing citizens from voting. This high level of awareness regarding malpractice suggests a community that is "street-smart" about politics; they are not naive about the challenges of the democratic process in their context.

Figure 19: Level of Awareness Regarding Rights to Cast a Vote

11%

89%

■ Yes, I am aware   ■ No, I am not aware
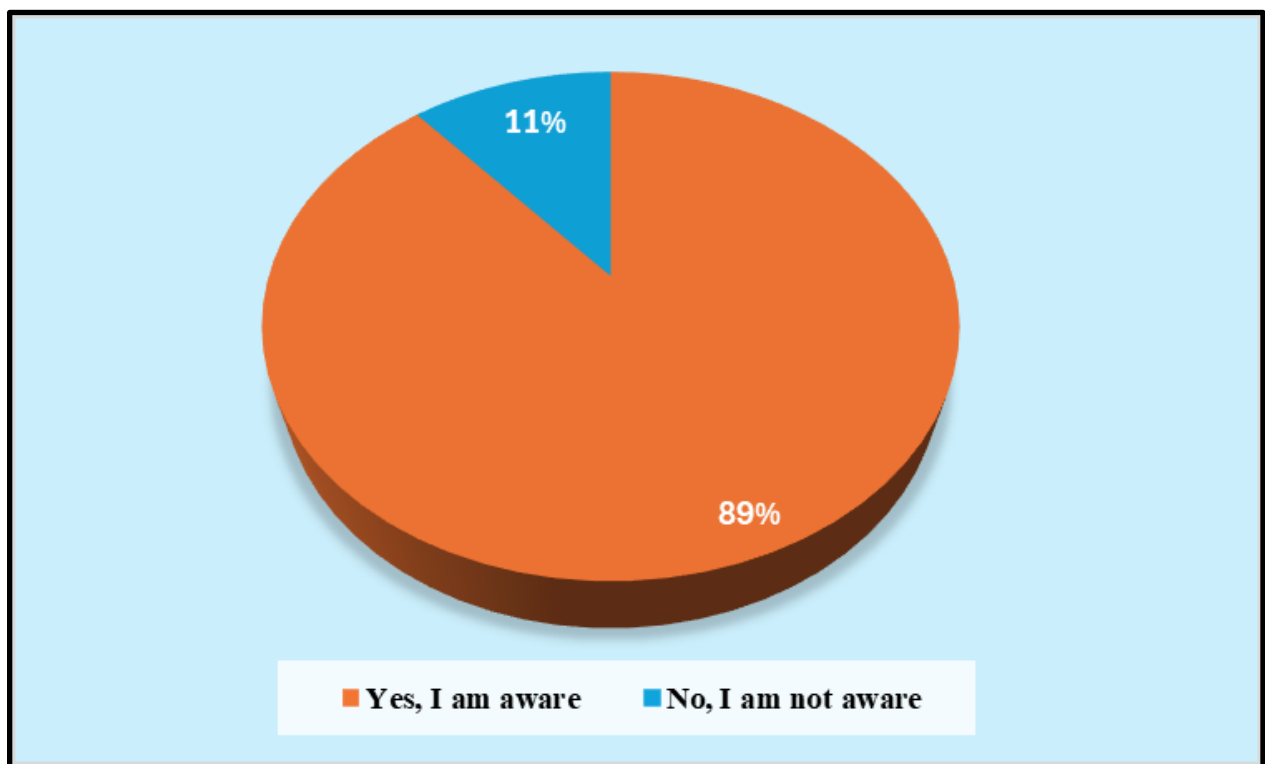
(Source: Compiled from CGS Survey Findings-2026)

Figure 20: Respondent Knowledge of Electoral Malpractice
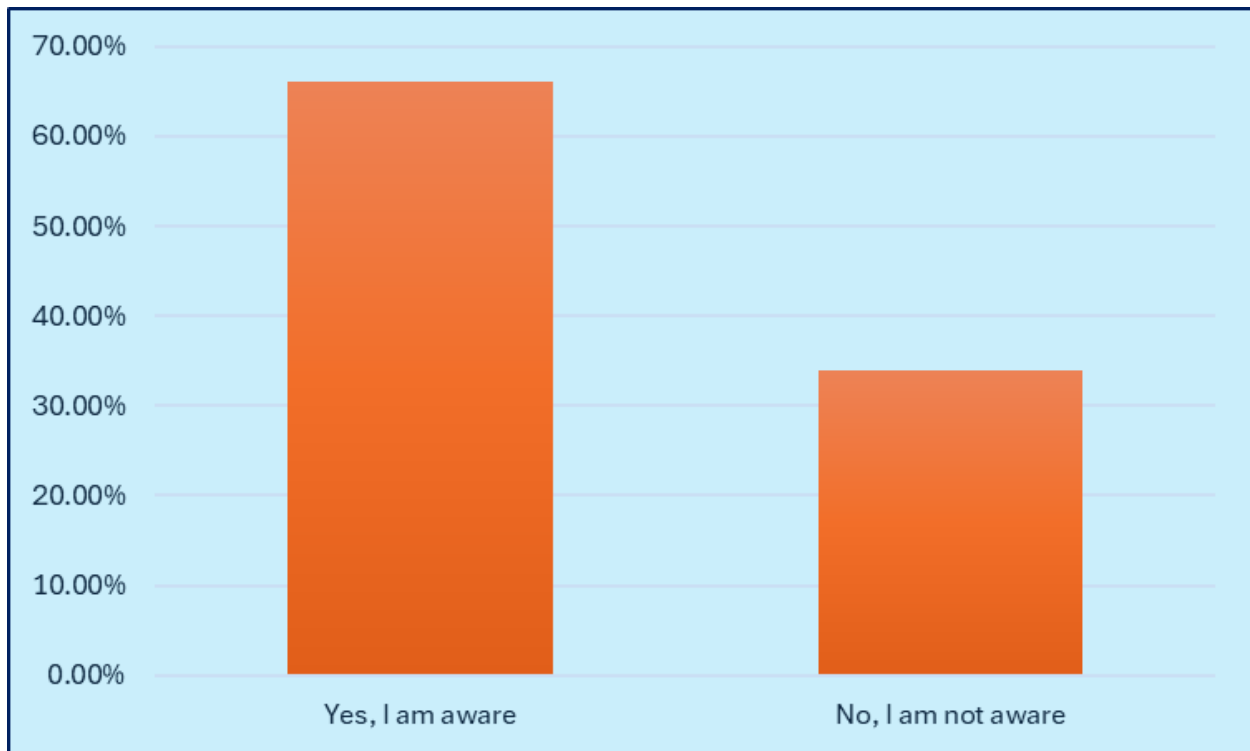
The Specific Information Deficit

Despite this general awareness, there is a profound lack of clarity regarding the specific choices available to them. Nearly **half of the respondents (46.9%)** admitted that they are not familiar with the names of all the candidates running in their own areas, nor do they understand the specific ideologies or platforms of the political parties involved. Only **22.2%** claimed to have a comprehensive understanding of both the candidates and the party ideologies.

Awareness of Candidates and Political Backgrounds Among Minority Communities

The responses indicate that awareness of candidates and their political backgrounds among minority communities is limited. Nearly 47% reported that they were not familiar with all candidates or the political ideologies of parties, while 30.9% knew the parties' positions but not all individual candidates. Only 22.2% felt fully informed about both the candidates and their political backgrounds. These results suggest that, according to the respondents, a significant portion of minority voters do not have complete information about the upcoming national election, which may affect their ability to engage fully in the electoral process.

Figure 21: Respondent Familiarity with Candidate Names and Backgrounds
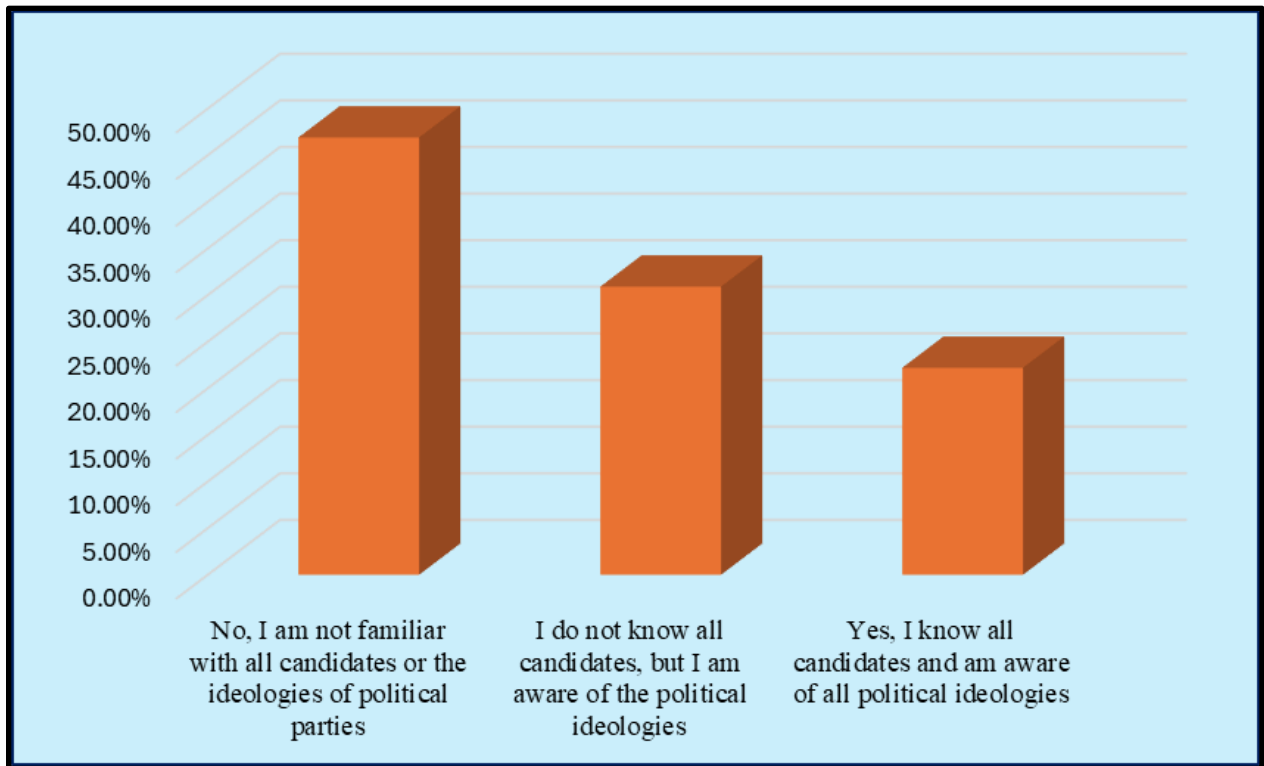
Factors Considered by Minority Voters When Choosing a Candidate

The responses show that minority voters prioritize candidates' practical contributions and personal qualities over party affiliation or political influence. The majority, 61.2%, consider a candidate's plans or role in developing roads, schools, hospitals, and other local infrastructure, followed closely by 55.8% who value accessibility and sincerity toward ordinary people. Ethics and honesty were also important for 51.2%, while 42.8% looked for clear strategies to reduce unemployment and 40.8% assessed how realistic the candidate's promises were. Formal education and knowledge were considered by 38.4%, whereas party affiliation or ideology ranked lower, with 29.5% giving it importance. Factors such as prior political experience, personal qualifications, or familiarity in society were less frequently cited, and aspects like corruption allegations, financial influence, or support from local leaders were considered by only a small minority. Overall, these patterns indicate that respondents evaluate candidates primarily on tangible impact, integrity, and responsiveness, suggesting that minority voters are more focused on candidates' ability to address real community needs than on political alignment or symbolic factors.

Figure 22: Factors Considered by Minority Voters When Choosing a Candidate
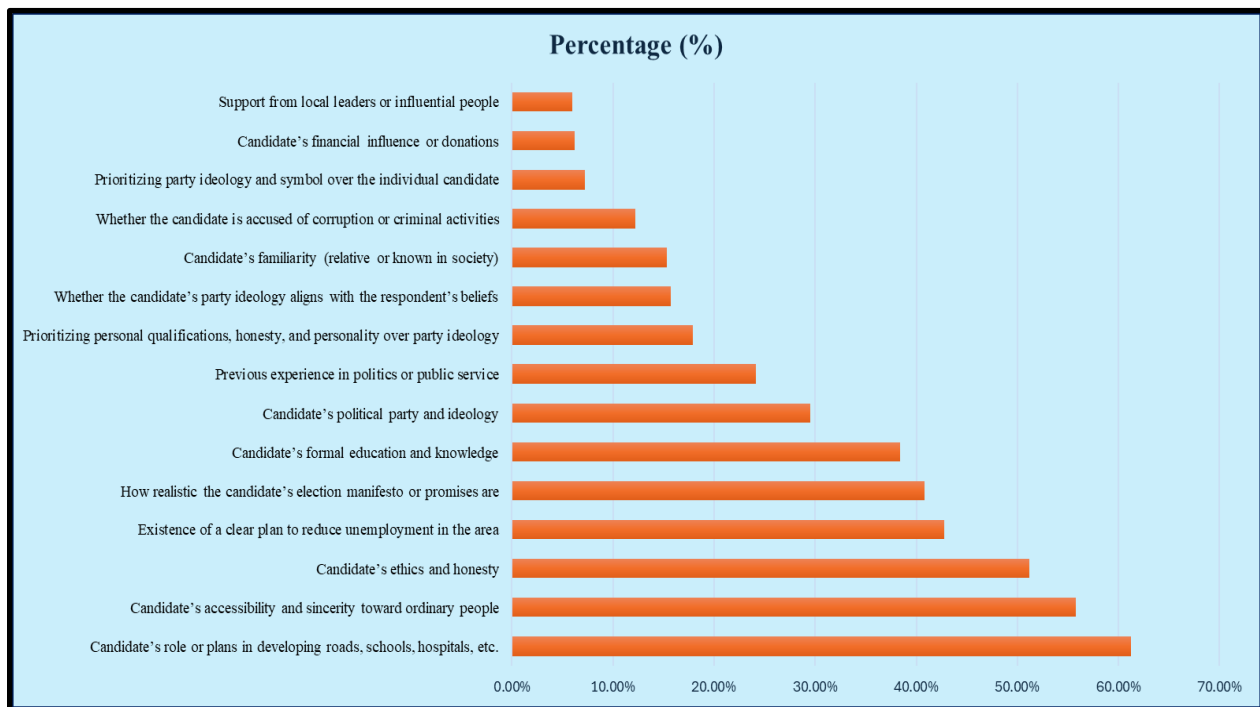
(Source: Compiled from CGS Survey Findings-2026)

This lack of specific information is a significant barrier to informed decision-making. If voters do not know who is running or what they stand for, their ability to hold leaders accountable or vote in their own best interests is severely diminished.

Digital Shift and the "Big News" Culture

The way the community consumes political information has shifted drastically toward digital platforms. Social media—specifically **Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok**—has emerged as the primary tool for information gathering, with **314 respondents** citing it as their main source. While traditional media like television and radio still play a role for **221 respondents**, they have clearly been overtaken by the speed and accessibility of the smartphone. Informal social gatherings at tea stalls or within neighborhoods remain a vital secondary source for **159 respondents**, highlighting the continued importance of oral tradition and community discussion in disseminating news.

However, this digital-first consumption does not necessarily lead to deeper engagement. The data shows that the majority of people are "surface-level" consumers of politics. About **33.9%** described themselves as "moderately aware," meaning they keep up with major headlines but do not engage in any deep analysis

of political events. Another **28.3%** are only "slightly aware," gathering bits of news sporadically from their social media feeds. Only a small fraction—**13.7%**—regularly follow political news in detail or keep track of specific party activities. This suggests that while information is more accessible than ever, it is often consumed in bite-sized, sensationalized formats that may lack the depth required for meaningful political participation.

Figure 23: Primary Sources of Political News
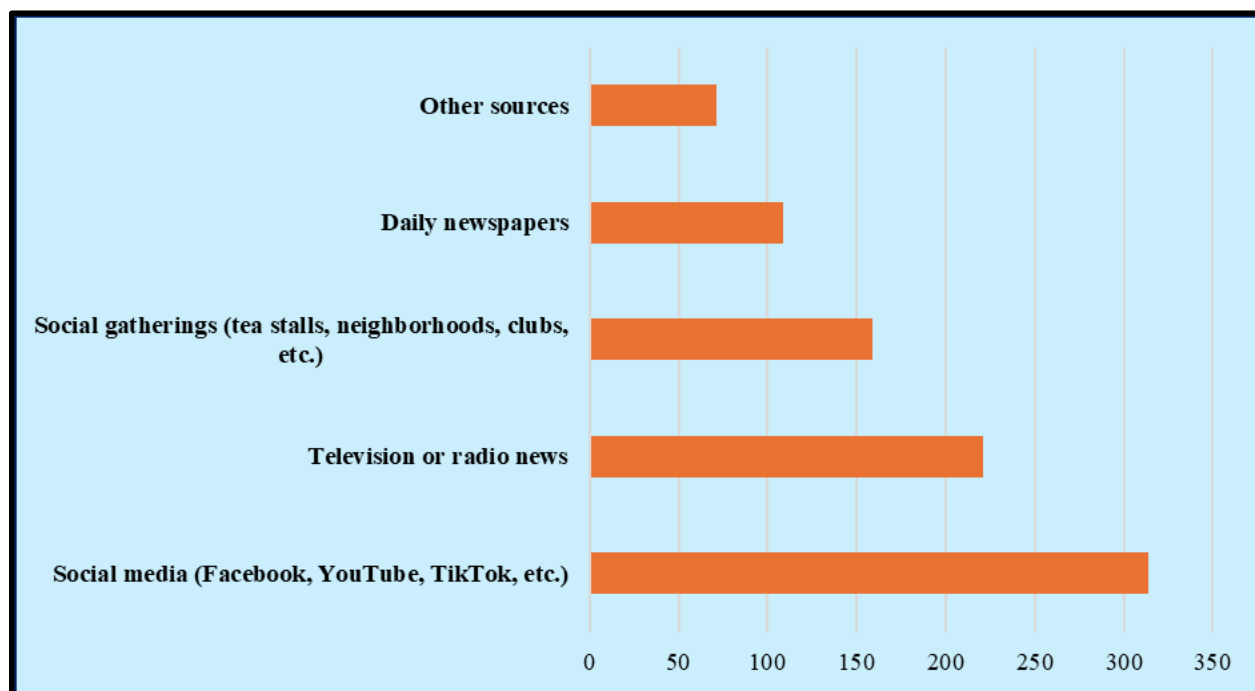
Level of Awareness of National Politics and Political Parties among Minority Communities

The responses suggest that awareness of national politics and party activities among minority communities in Bangladesh is limited to moderate levels for most respondents. A plurality (33.9%) described themselves as moderately aware, familiar with major political events but not engaging in detailed analysis, while 28.3% reported slight awareness, relying mainly on occasional updates or social media. Nearly a quarter (24.1%) indicated minimal or no awareness, highlighting a segment of the population largely disconnected from political developments. Only a small minority (13.7%) identified as very aware, actively following party activities and national political

developments. Overall, these patterns reveal that while some engagement exists, a significant proportion of minority respondents face constraints in accessing detailed political information, which may influence their capacity for informed participation in the electoral and civic process.

Figure 24: Awareness of Bangladesh's Politics and Political Parties
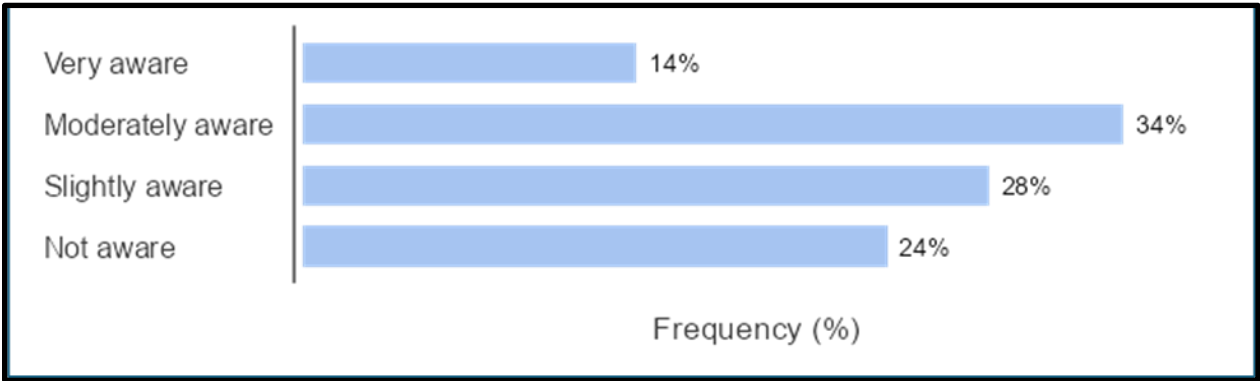
Voter Preparedness and Accountability

This landscape of high general awareness but low specific knowledge creates a vulnerability in the democratic process. While **60.6% of people** know who to complain to if violence or irregularities occur , nearly **40%** remain in the dark about how to seek justice or report issues. This lack of procedural knowledge, combined with the absence of information about candidates, leaves a large portion of the electorate feeling empowered in theory but sidelined in practice. The community possesses the "will" to participate and the "wit" to recognize corruption, but they lack the "tools"—in the form of deep, candidate-specific information—to fully exercise their democratic power.

Figure 25: Awareness of Complaint Mechanisms for Election Irregularities
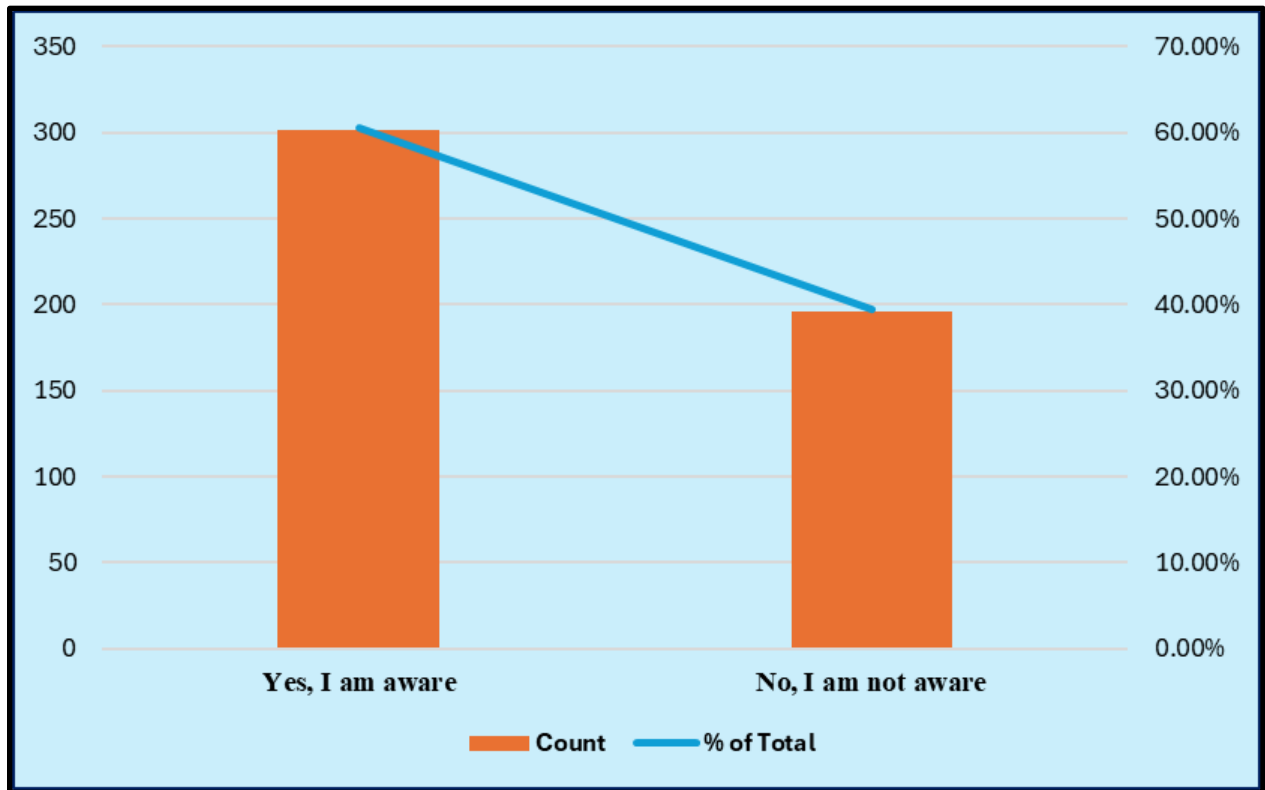
(Source: Compiled from CGS Survey Findings-2026)

5. Do They Feel Represented?

The survey findings reveal a profound sense of political marginalization among the respondents, characterized by a lack of descriptive representation and a deep-seated mistrust of elected officials. This section examines the gap between the community's needs and the responsiveness of the political establishment.

The Crisis of Underrepresentation

A primary concern for the surveyed community is the lack of candidates who share their religious or ethnic background, which many perceive as a barrier to authentic representation. The data shows that approximately **67.7% of respondents** believe that the number of minority candidates in the upcoming election is significantly inadequate. This sentiment is divided into two major categories:

- **Systemic Exclusion:** 35% of respondents feel that despite the presence of qualified individuals within their communities, major political parties have failed to provide sufficient nominations.
- **Symbolic vs. Real Representation:** 32.7% describe the current number of candidates as "very few," arguing that the current levels are too low to ensure any real influence at the policy-making level.
- **Declining Trends:** Furthermore, 22.2% of participants believe that representation has actually worsened, noting fewer minority candidates compared to previous election cycles

Figure 26: Perception of Minority Candidate Representation in the National Election
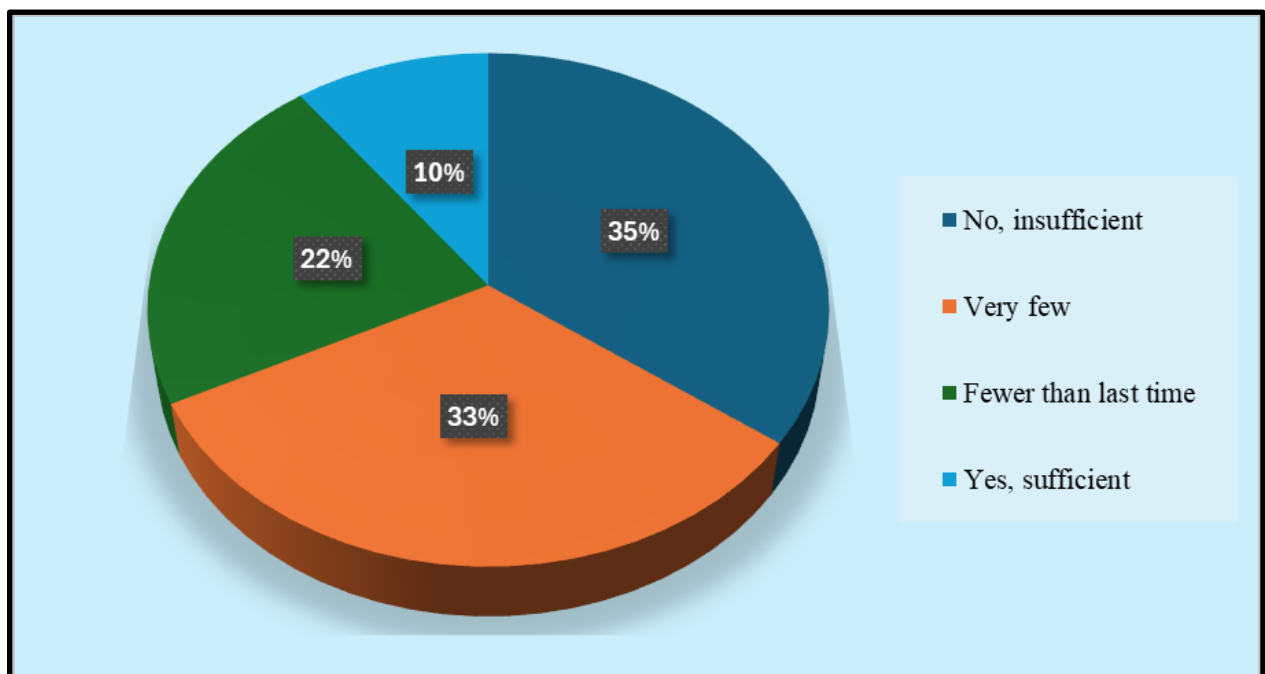
(Source: Compiled from CGS Survey Findings-2026)

Experiences of Discrimination in Political and Electoral Participation

The responses indicate that while some minority communities in Bangladesh perceive political participation as largely accessible, there are notable concerns regarding exclusion and marginalization. A significant portion of respondents (40.6%) chose not to comment, which itself reflects reluctance or hesitation to speak about potential discrimination. Among those who responded, 25.8% reported that their areas maintain strong social harmony and equal rights, and 12.8% felt safe due to administrative neutrality. However, 14.2% stated that their demands are consistently ignored politically, 4.2% faced obstacles in exercising

voting rights or reaching polling centers, and 2.4% experienced discrimination when seeking party nominations. These findings suggest that although a portion of the community experiences inclusive conditions, a meaningful share continues to face structural and social barriers, and the high level of non-response may indicate underlying fear, mistrust, or perceived vulnerability in reporting discrimination.

Figure 27: Experiences of Discrimination in Elections
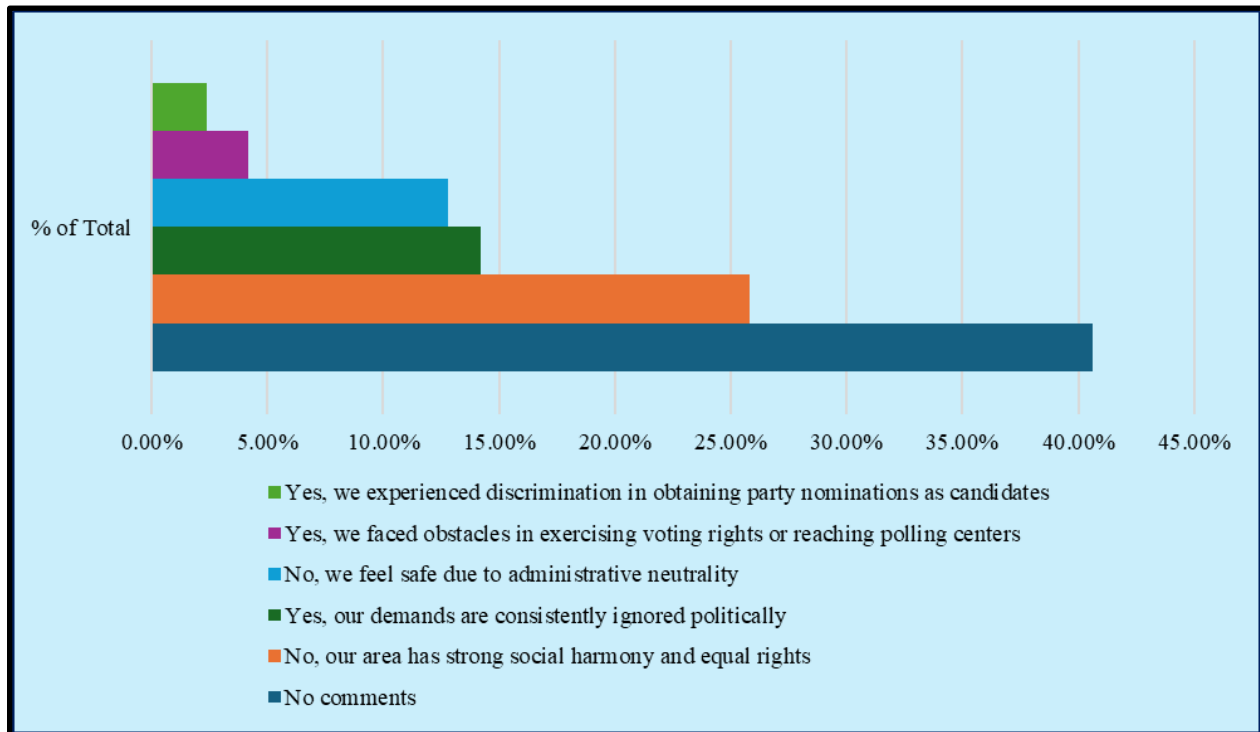
The Pervasiveness of Electoral Anxiety

A critical factor influencing political behavior is the pervasive sense of insecurity felt by the community. Only a small fraction of the population (**23.4%**) feels "completely safe" participating in elections. The majority of respondents (**50.7%**) described themselves as "somewhat anxious," feeling safe only if the surrounding environment remains strictly favorable. More concerningly, a combined **25.8% of participants** categorized themselves as feeling either "unsafe" or "extremely unsafe," with many citing past negative experiences or the current surrounding situation as the

reason for their withdrawal from the process. This anxiety is not merely a personal feeling but a systemic obstacle that directly impacts voter turnout and the exercise of political rights.

Figure 28: Perception of Personal Safety During Elections
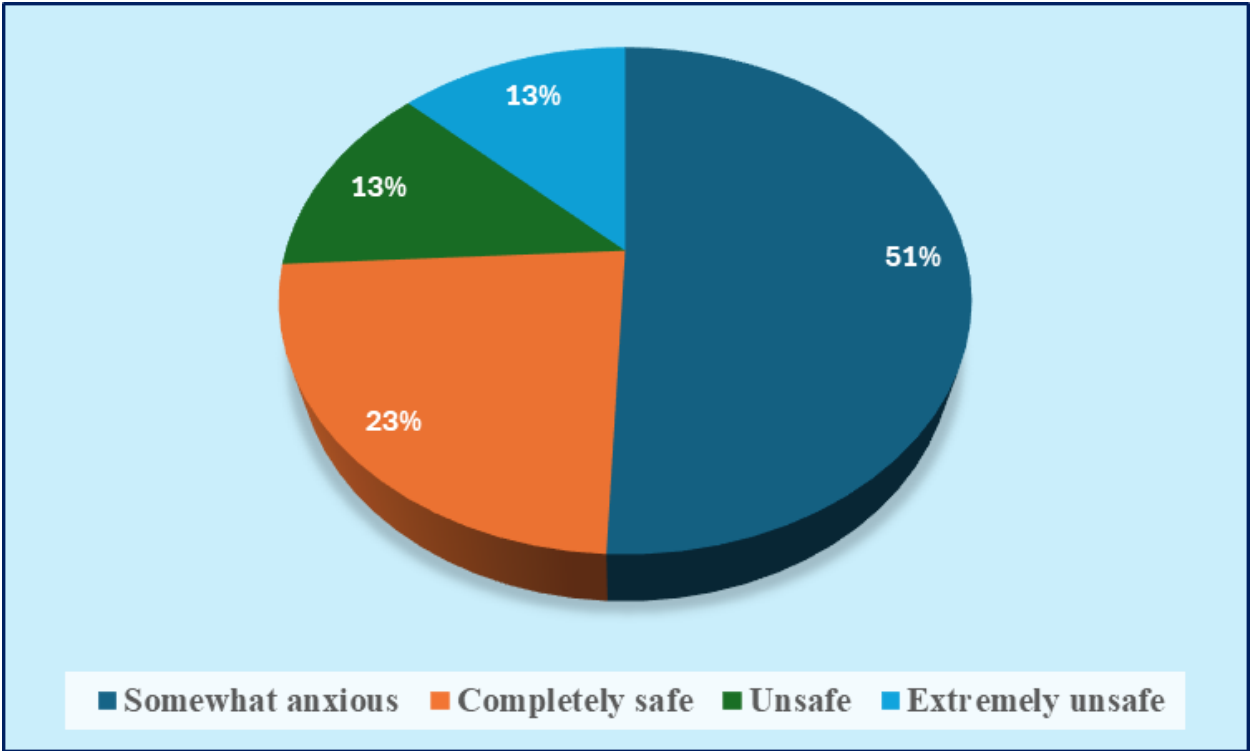
6. Safety, Justice, and Moving Forward

Barriers to Justice: The Culture of Silence

When irregularities occur, there is a clear tendency toward silence rather than reporting, driven primarily by a fear of physical or legal retaliation. Among those who have witnessed irregularities but chose not to act, **55.8%** cited the fear of physical or psychological harm to themselves or their families as the primary reason for their silence. Legal and administrative complications also serve as deterrents; **43.3% of respondents** fear police harassment or legal disputes, while an identical percentage (**43.3%**) simply prefers to maintain personal peace and avoid conflict. This reluctance is further exacerbated by a lack of faith in

the system, as **15.4% of respondents** believe that filing a complaint would not lead to any justice or remedy, and **9.6%** specifically doubt the neutrality of the Election Commission.

Figure 29: Respondent Reasons for Silence
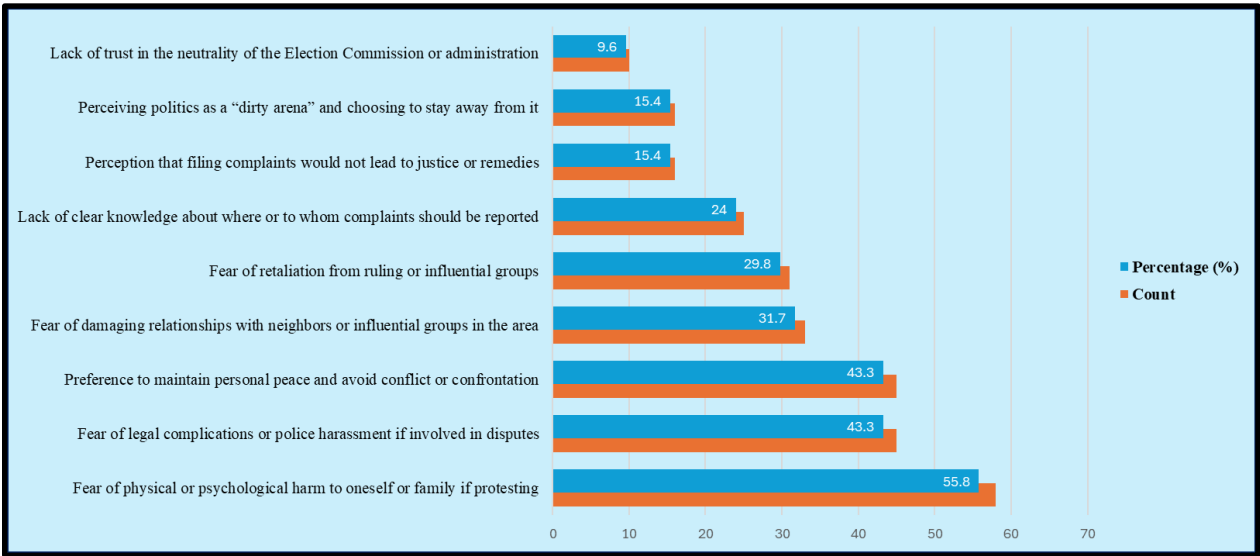
(Source: Compiled from CGS Survey Findings-2026)

Immediate Responses to Electoral Irregularities

As respondents were allowed to select more than one option, the results reflect overlapping and complementary response strategies rather than mutually exclusive choices. The findings show a clear preference among minority respondents for institutional channels in the event of electoral irregularities. A majority indicated they would inform polling station officials (57.2%), while substantial proportions also reported that they would notify the local administration (47.4%) or security forces (42.6%), suggesting that many respondents would pursue multiple formal avenues simultaneously. At the same time, 20.3% stated that they would remain silent, pointing to apprehension or lack of confidence in corrective mechanisms. Comparatively fewer respondents indicated that they would protest (13.7%), inform media personnel (12.5%), or share incidents on social media (11.2%), reflecting limited reliance on public or confrontational responses. Overall, the pattern suggests that while minority communities are inclined to seek resolution through official structures, the coexistence of silence and restraint alongside institutional reporting highlights ongoing concerns related to safety, trust, and perceived effectiveness of electoral accountability mechanisms.

Figure 30: Respondent Actions in the Event of Election Irregularities
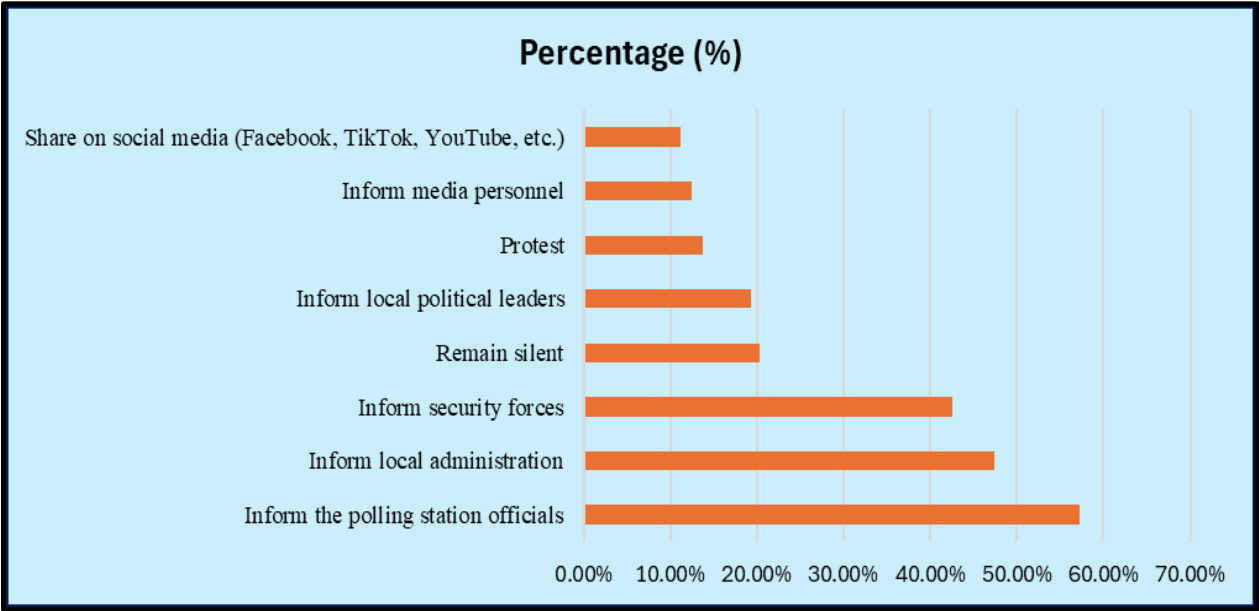
Reporting Patterns and Institutional Gaps

The data on reporting harassment highlights a deep disconnect between citizens and formal law enforcement. A substantial majority of respondents (**70.7%**) stated they have never faced a situation requiring a complaint, but of those who have faced threats or violence, **22.0%** chose to remain silent and avoid the incident entirely. When reports are made, they are more likely to stay within the social sphere rather than reach the authorities; only **1.9%** reported issues to the Election Commission and a mere **1.5%** went to the police. This hesitation to engage with formal institutions is rooted in a perceived lack of security; **48.7% of victims** fear further harm after filing a complaint, and **28.6%** lack trust in the legal system to take effective action. This suggests that current institutional frameworks are not seen as protective shields but as potentially hazardous arenas for minority communities.

Figure 31: Respondent Reporting of Political Harassment or Threats

Legend:
- Yes, I disclosed it through media or online platforms
- Yes, I informed law-enforcement agencies (police or filed a GD/case)
- Yes, I reported to the relevant authorities (Election Commission or local administration)
- Yes, I informed socially or within the family (local elders, councilors, community leaders)
- No, I remained silent and avoided the incident
- No, I have never faced such a situation

Bar value shown: 70.70%

X-axis: 0.00% 10.00% 20.00% 30.00% 40.00% 50.00% 60.00% 70.00% 80.00%

% OF TOTAL

(Source: Compiled from CGS Survey Findings-2026)

Reasons for Not Reporting Political Violence

This question was designed to identify the underlying reasons why individuals chose not to complain after experiencing or witnessing political violence, particularly within minority communities. As respondents were allowed to select multiple reasons, the results capture overlapping and interconnected constraints rather than a single determining factor. The most prominent concern was lack of security, with 48.7% fearing further physical or psychological harm after filing a complaint, indicating that personal safety is the primary deterrent to reporting. Concerns related to social exposure were also significant, as 32.8% feared loss of confidentiality or social stigma if their identity were disclosed. Institutional shortcomings further shaped non-reporting behavior, with 29.7% citing lack of support from family, community, or law enforcement, and 28.6% expressing distrust in the legal system and skepticism about the effectiveness of complaints. Procedural barriers were evident as well, as 27.2% avoided reporting due to anticipated lengthy processes or legal harassment. Additionally, 20.2% pointed to political and social influence, believing that powerful opposing groups would render complaints ineffective. Collectively, these responses illustrate that the decision not to report political violence is driven by a complex interaction of security risks, social pressures, institutional weaknesses, and power imbalances, rather than individual reluctance or indifference.

Figure 32: Reasons for Not Reporting Political Violence

Percentage(%)

- 26% ■ Lack of security: fear of further physical or psychological harm after filing a complaint
- 17% ■ Fear of loss of confidentiality or social stigma if identity was disclosed
- 16% ■ Lack of support from family, community, or law enforcement agencies
- 15% ■ Lack of trust in the legal system and belief that complaints would not lead to effective action
- 15% ■ Avoidance of lengthy procedures and legal harassment
- 11% ■ Political and social influence: belief that the opposing group was too powerful for complaints to be effective

(Source: Compiled from CGS Survey Findings-2026)

Community Demands and Expectations for an Inclusive Election

The demands articulated by respondents underscore a strong emphasis on security, institutional fairness, and protection from identity-based exclusion as core conditions for inclusive electoral participation. The most urgent demand relates to physical safety, as an overwhelming 71.5% of respondents collectively assigned high or highest priority to ensuring the safety of life and property before, during, and after elections, reflecting persistent fears of violence and intimidation. A similarly strong concern is evident regarding hate-driven politics, with 52.2% ranking a strict ban on religious or ethnic hate speech and campaigns as a high or highest priority, highlighting anxiety over identity-based targeting during electoral periods. Institutional neutrality also emerged as a critical expectation, as 42.3% placed high or highest priority on ensuring a fully neutral role by the Election Commission, police, and local administration, indicating widespread concern over bias and misuse of authority. In contrast, demands related to deeper political inclusion received comparatively lower urgency, though they remain significant. Only 39.1%

assigned high or highest priority to ensuring sufficient party nominations for qualified candidates and participation at the policy-making level, while 37.5% emphasized high or highest priority for written commitments in party manifestos addressing community-specific issues. Taken together, these patterns suggest that respondents view safety, neutrality, and protection from divisive politics as immediate prerequisites for participation, whereas structural reforms related to representation and policy influence are perceived as secondary and dependent on the establishment of a secure and impartial electoral environment.

What are the main demands or expectations from your community to ensure an inclusive election?

Figure 33: Assurance of Safety for Life and Property (Before, During, and After Elections)
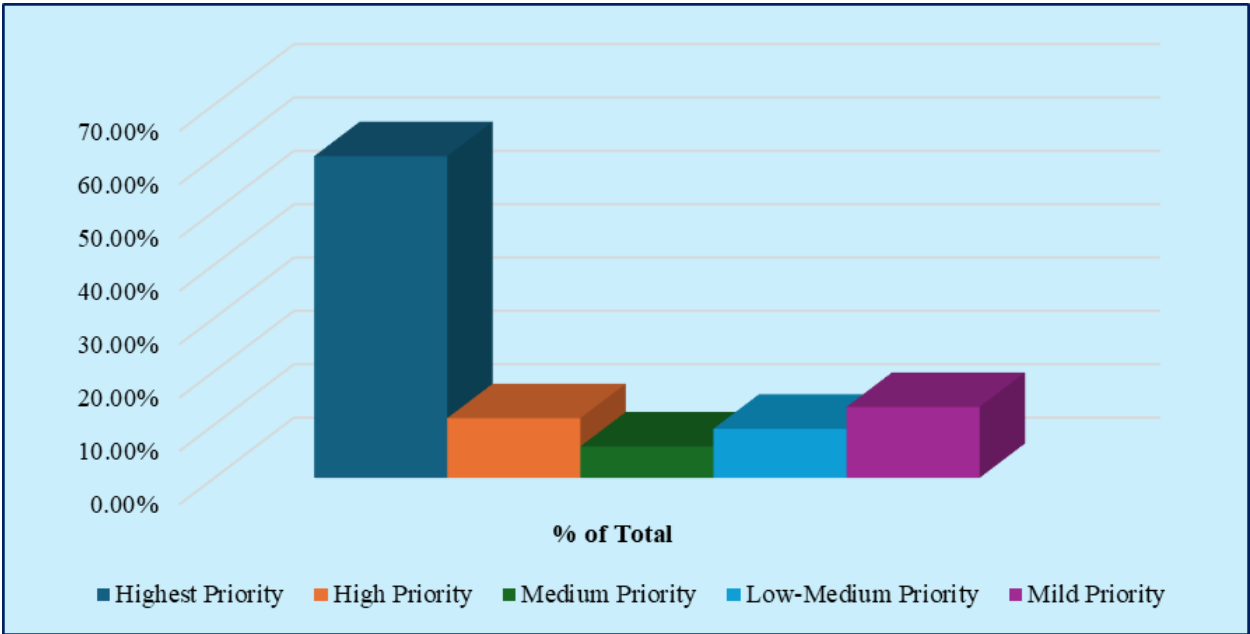
(Source: Compiled from CGS Survey Findings-2026)

Figure 34: Ensuring a Fully Neutral Role by the Election Commission, Police, and Local Administration

% of Total

23%
22%
21%
19%
15%

▪ Medium Priority ▪ Highest Priority ▪ High Priority ▪ Low-Medium Priority ▪ Mild Priority
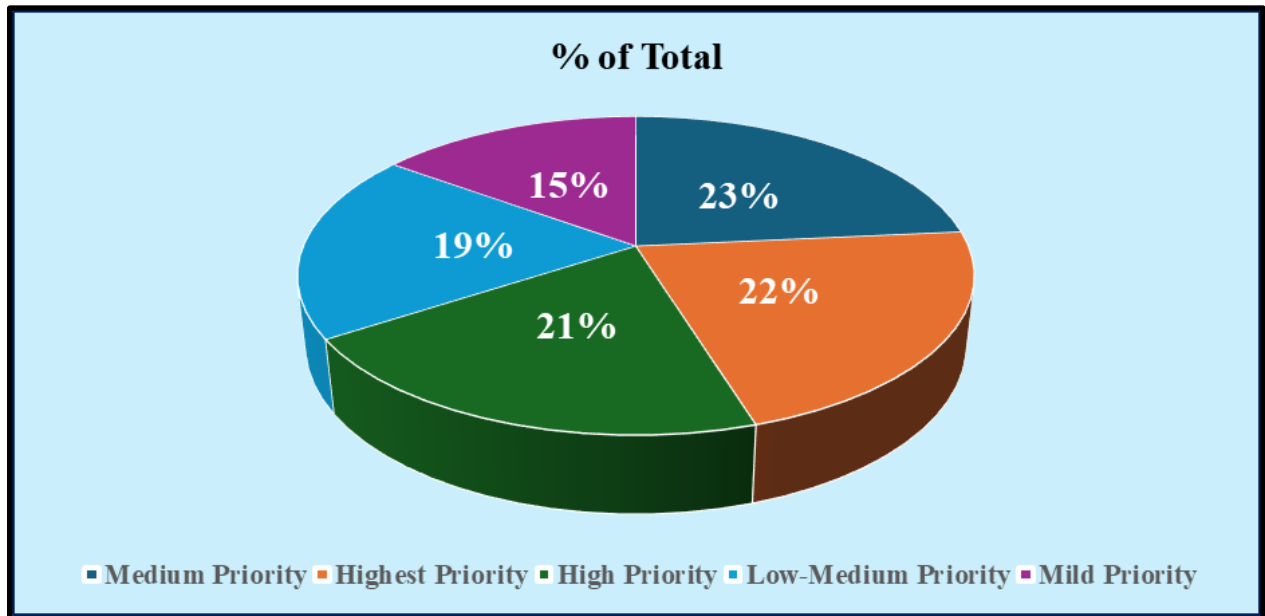
(Source: Compiled from CGS Survey Findings-2026)

Figure 35: Providing Sufficient Party Nominations for Qualified Candidates and Ensuring Participation at the Policy-Making Level

% of Total

Low-Medium Priority

High Priority

Highest Priority

Medium Priority

Mild Priority

0.00%   5.00%   10.00%   15.00%   20.00%   25.00%
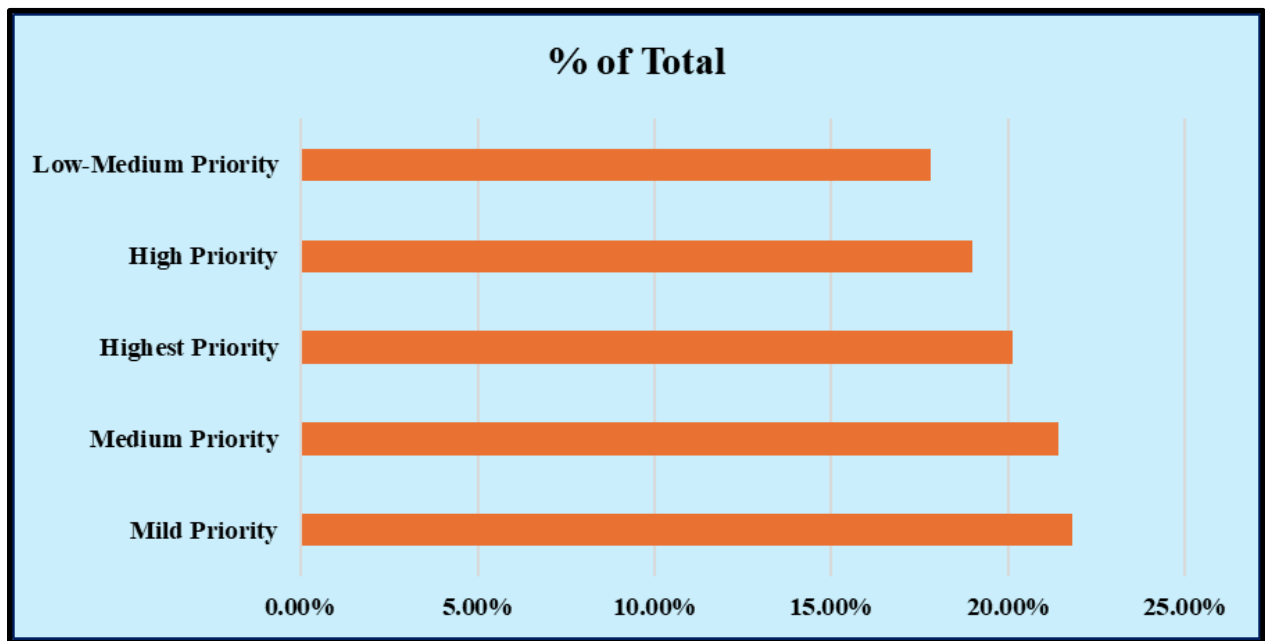
(Source: Compiled from CGS Survey Findings-2026)

Figure 36: Written Commitments in Political Parties' Election Manifestos to Address the Fundamental Issues of Our Community

% of Total
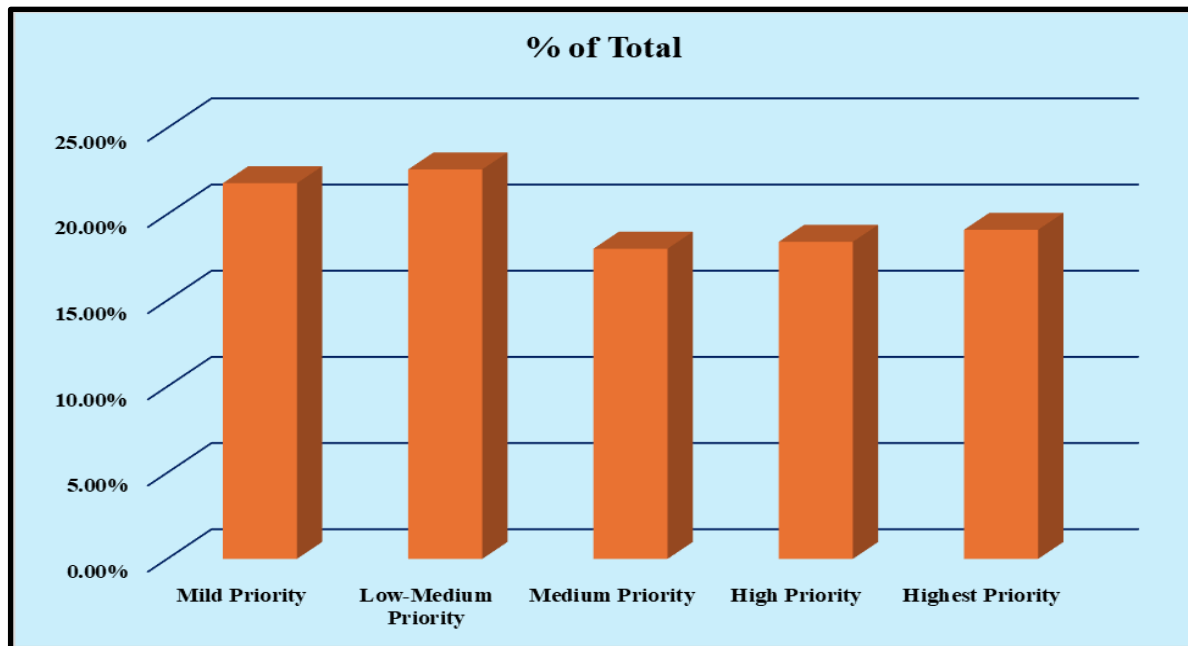
Figure 37: Strict Ban on Statements or Campaigns That Spread Religious or Ethnic Hatred

% of Total

- 21% Mild Priority
- 14% Low-Medium Priority
- 13% Medium Priority
- 15% High Priority
- 37%
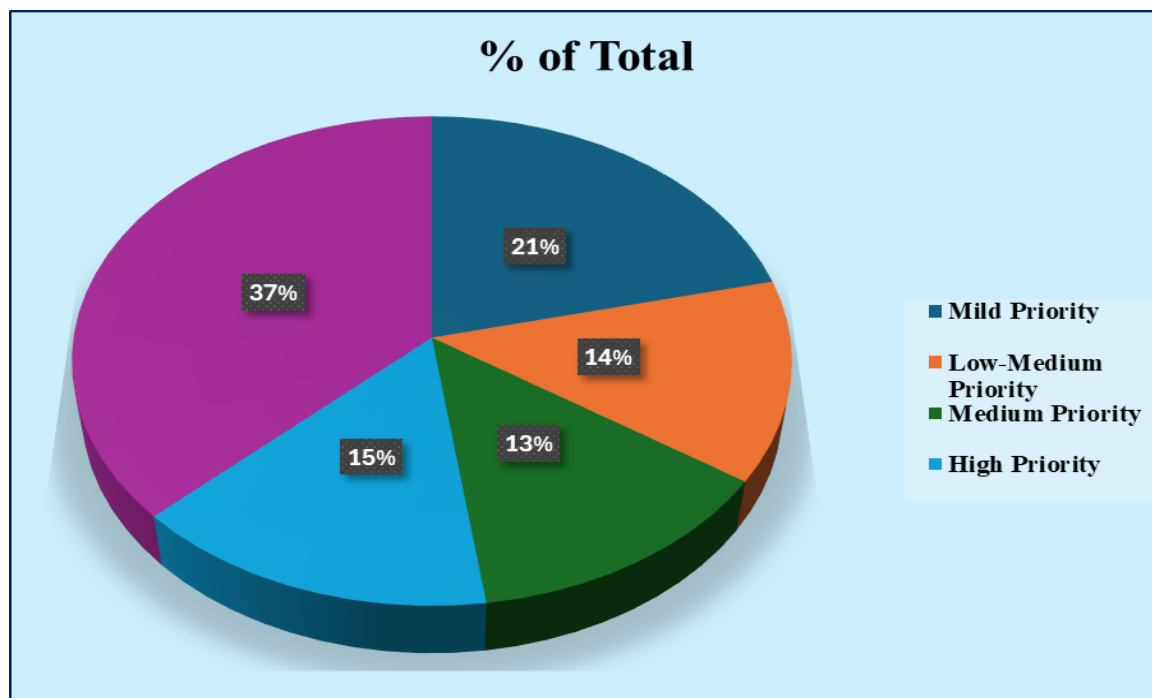
Addressing the Safety-Participation Paradox

The findings of this survey culminate in a critical realization: for minority and indigenous communities, the primary barrier to democratic inclusion is not a lack of civic will, but a pervasive and systemic crisis of safety. This concluding section synthesizes the socio-political implications of the study and outlines the fundamental requirements for a more inclusive electoral future.

The Centrality of Personal Security

The most significant factor weighing on the collective consciousness of the respondents is the issue of physical and psychological safety. Quantitative data confirms that only 23.4% of participants—essentially two out of every ten individuals—reported feeling "completely safe" to participate in the election process. The remaining majority exists in a state of heightened vulnerability, with 50.7% experiencing significant anxiety and more than a quarter of the sample feeling outright scared or extremely unsafe. This high level of apprehension indicates that for these marginalized groups, the act of voting is not merely a civic exercise but a calculated risk to their personal well-being.

The "Muzzling Effect" and Institutional Disconnect

This climate of fear exerts a profound "muzzling effect" on the electorate, effectively stifling transparency and accountability. When irregularities or malpractice occur at polling stations, a significant portion of the community opts for silence as a survival strategy. The fear of reprisal against oneself or one's family creates a barrier that formal complaint mechanisms have failed to bridge. This is evidenced by the stark reality that even in cases of direct harassment or threats, victims rarely seek assistance from the police or the Election Commission. The prevailing sentiment is one of institutional distrust; many respondents believe that reporting a grievance will either result in no meaningful action or, worse, provoke further retaliation from local power structures.

A Human-Centric Approach to Inclusion

The demands voiced by the community are remarkably fundamental and human-centric. Rather than seeking complex political concessions, their primary requirements center on the basic duty of the state: protection. The data shows that the absolute priority for the community is a government guarantee that their lives and property will remain secure throughout the electoral cycle. This is accompanied by a demand for institutional integrity, specifically a plea for law enforcement and election officials to operate with strict fairness and neutrality. Furthermore, there is a clear call for the cessation of political rhetoric that utilizes religious or ethnic hate speech, which is seen as a direct precursor to physical violence.

Final Comments

In conclusion, these findings depict a community that is deeply invested in the country's future and possesses a robust history of participation, yet is currently holding back due to a lack of safety, representation, and institutional responsiveness. The "participation-engagement gap" observed throughout this study is a direct consequence of an environment where the costs of voting often outweigh the perceived benefits. Moving forward, true electoral inclusivity can only be achieved if the state shifts its focus from the mere mechanics of polling to the guaranteed protection of its most vulnerable citizens. Ultimately, the community is not asking for special status, but for a fair and equitable opportunity to exercise their democratic rights without the shadow of fear.

FINDINGS- round table

To provide a clear understanding of the political landscape ahead of the 2026 National Parliament Election, this study brings together the voices and stories shared during several regional roundtable discussions. These conversations took place in key areas like Rangpur, Sylhet, and Dhaka, connecting a wide range of people, including religious and ethnic minorities, Indigenous groups, Dalit and Harijon communities, tea garden workers, and gender-diverse individuals. By listening to their personal experiences and hopes, the study looks closely at the everyday challenges that make it difficult for these communities to feel truly included in the country's democratic progress.

The information gathered points to a deep "crisis of confidence" in the election process. Instead of feeling hopeful about a fair and inclusive future, they are now filled with a deep sense of fear and worry. In the current social and political environment, many people no longer view elections as a simple way to vote; instead, they see them as periods of great personal risk and constant worry about their safety. This study highlights a painful gap between the government's official promises of equity and the reality of discrimination and neglect that many still face. These struggles are made worse by a system that often ignores these problems, allowing those who cause harm to go unpunished. Ultimately, this study shows that the health of a democracy is best measured by how it treats its most vulnerable citizens. Their ability to participate safely and with dignity is the true test of whether the national election process is fair and legitimate for everyone

The Current Context: A Crisis of Democratic Inclusion

The dialogues took place during a period of intense political transition and deep-seated public anxiety. While the 2024 mass uprisings initially offered a vision of a "New Bangladesh" rooted in right and justice, the reality for minority communities has been a "crisis of confidence."

- **Existential Insecurity:** For many, the 2026 election is not viewed as a routine democratic exercise but as a "flashpoint" for danger. Participants described a persistent fear that any political shift could lead to their homes and businesses being targeted.
- **The Gap in Protection:** A strong consensus emerged that the state regardless of which political party is in power has historically failed to uphold its constitutional promise of equality. This has

created a vast "chasm" between the government's official words and the daily discrimination experienced by marginalized groups.

- **A Culture of Impunity:** The lack of justice for past crimes has created a sense of lawlessness. When those who commit violence are not punished, it sends a message that minorities are "soft targets," leading to a pervasive atmosphere of fear that discourages people from participating in public life

2. Key Issues: Structural Barriers and Systemic Vulnerability

The roundtable discussions highlighted that the core challenges facing the 2026 national election are not merely technical, but are deeply embedded in the country's social and legal structures. These issues-violence, power imbalances, and legal invisibility form a complex web that often traps marginalized communities in a state of permanent vulnerability.

Detailed Analysis of Structural Issues and Systemic Vulnerability

1. Normalization of Electoral Violence

In Bangladesh, violence against religious and ethnic minorities has transitioned from an occasional crisis to a predictable, "normalized" feature of the election cycle.

- **Historical Trauma as a Political Tool:** Fear is not abstract; it is built on a history of arson, looting, and physical assault. For many, the memory of 2001 or 2014- when minority households were targeted for their perceived political affiliations- serves as a warning. The mere announcement of an election date triggers what participants called "anticipatory trauma," leading families to stockpile food or plan for temporary relocation rather than engaging in civic debate.
- **Safety as "Borrowed Time":** Because the state rarely prosecutes those who commit election-related crimes against minorities, a sense of lawlessness prevails. Victims feel they are living in a state of temporary peace, knowing that the next political transition could instantly strip them of their security. This lack of accountability emboldens perpetrators, creating a "culture of impunity" where violence is seen as an effective way to suppress minority influence.

2. Power vs. Vulnerability: The Concentration of Control

The discussions identified the central democratic failure as the concentration of political and economic power within a small, elite circle.

- **Architecture of Exclusion:** This concentration creates a system where "institutional connections"-having a political "godfather" or vast wealth are the only ways to secure protection or resources. For the roughly 17.3 million marginalized people in Bangladesh (including Dalits, trans population, Harijan and tea garden workers), this means they are systematically locked out of the rooms where decisions are made.
- **Elections as Managed Outcomes:** When power is so concentrated, elections stop being a fair competition of ideas and start becoming a tool for the powerful to legitimize their control. Marginalized communities find themselves treated as "appendages" to the national narrative useful for the numbers they provide at polling stations, but invisible when it comes to crafting national policy or receiving equal protection under the law.

3. Constitutional and Legal Ambiguity: The Identity Crisis

A major hurdle discussed was the state's failure to provide a truly inclusive definition of "national identity," which has direct legal consequences for representation.

- **Invisibility in Law:** The Constitution identifies the people of Bangladesh as "Bengalis" as a nation (Article 6). For the more than 50 different Indigenous groups and other non-Bengali minorities, this creates a sense of being "strangers in their own land." When the supreme law of the land does not fully acknowledge their distinct identity, it becomes much harder to demand special status, such as land protection or cultural preservation.
- **The Problem of "Party Proxies":** Because there are no robust mechanisms for independent minority representation, those who do enter government often do so through major political parties. These individuals frequently become "party proxies" they are forced to prioritize the party's agenda to survive politically, often at the expense of their own community's needs. This leads to a form of "tokenism" where a minority face is present in power, but the minority voice remains unheard.
- **Legitimacy and the State:** This ambiguity creates a sense of second-class citizenship. Participants noted that as long as the state uses "Islamic characters" or "Bengali-centric" narratives in its constitutional documents, other communities will feel like their inclusion is a matter of government "charity" rather than an inherent constitutional right.

Institutional Denial and Selective Law Enforcement

In the roundtable discussions, participants described a profound and systemic breakdown in the relationship between state institutions and marginalized communities. This trust deficit is not based on isolated incidents but is the result of long-standing patterns of behavior by law enforcement and administrative bodies.

1. Selective Policing and the Architecture of Inequality

The concept of "selective policing" was identified as a primary driver of fear. Participants argued that the police and other security agencies often operate under the influence of local political "godfathers" or the economic elite.

- **Reactive vs. Proactive Protection:** Law enforcement is often seen as reactive arriving only after an attack has occurred or, in some cases, standing by while violence unfolds. This creates a perception that the state's primary role is to protect the status quo of the powerful rather than the safety of the vulnerable.
- **The Deterrent of Harassment:** Many from minority groups reported that attempting to seek help from the police can backfire. There is a fear that filing a General Diary (GD) or a First Information Report (FIR) will lead to retaliatory harassment from local powerbrokers, often with the silent consent of the authorities. This makes "justice" feel like an expensive and dangerous luxury that only those with political connections can afford.

2. Institutional Denial: The Erasure of Lived Experience

A particularly damaging issue discussed was "institutional denial", the state's tendency to downplay or mischaracterize violence against minorities.

- **The "Local Dispute" Narrative:** When communal or targeted attacks occur, official state narratives and police reports frequently redefine these events as "land disputes" or "unrelated criminal acts." By removing the communal or political motive from the record, the state avoids the responsibility of addressing systemic discrimination.
- **Silencing the Victim:** This mislabeling effectively "erases" the suffering of the victims. When an attack on a minority household is treated as a simple neighborhood quarrel, the victims feel that their specific identity and the fact that they were targeted *because* of that identity is being ignored by the law.
- **Undermining Legitimacy:** This practice of denial deeply undermines the "institutional legitimacy" of the state. If citizens believe that the government is actively hiding the truth about

the violence they face, they lose all incentive to engage with the legal system or participate in the democratic process.

3. The Politicization of Law Enforcement

The dialogues revealed that law enforcement is often viewed as an extension of the ruling political apparatus rather than a neutral protector of all citizens.

- **Administrative Inaction:** In many cases, participants noted a pattern of "administrative inaction," where government officials delay necessary interventions during communal tensions. This delay is often perceived as a deliberate move to allow certain political interests to play out on the ground.
- **The Culture of Impunity:** Together, selective policing and institutional denial create a "culture of impunity." When criminals see that the state will either ignore their actions or redefine them as minor offenses, they are emboldened to strike again. For the marginalized, this means living in a constant state of "high alert," knowing that the very agencies designed to protect them may, in fact, be indifferent to their fate.

3. Lived Experiences of Political Exclusion

Betrayal of the "Vote Bank"

Minority groups expressed deep frustration at being treated as "vote banks." Mainstream parties court them with promises of protection during campaigns but abandon them as soon as the election is over. This creates a "no-win" situation where participating in the political process can actually increase their risk of being targeted by the opposing side.

Social Dehumanization and Spatial Exclusion

For Dalit, Harijon, and gender-diverse communities, exclusion is a physical and social reality.

- **Segregated Living:** Many are confined to overcrowded "colonies" with poor services. "Spatial exclusion" means they are often barred from renting homes or living in mainstream neighborhoods because of their caste or identity.
- **Daily Ostracization:** From being denied entry into public spaces like restaurants to facing social "untouchability," these daily indignities make the idea of participating in national policy-making seem impossible and distant.

The Psychological Toll of Invisibility

The roundtable discussions highlighted that political exclusion is not just about the inability to vote; it is a deeply personal and daily experience that erodes a person's sense of belonging and safety. Participants detailed how this exclusion manifests through political betrayal and social segregation.

Detailed Analysis of Lived Experiences of Political Exclusion

1. The Betrayal of the "Vote Bank" Strategy

Minority communities—including religious minorities and ethnic groups expressed deep-seated resentment toward being treated as a "vote bank." This term refers to the practice where mainstream political parties view these communities as a collective block of votes to be secured through empty rhetoric rather than genuine policy reform.

- **Cycles of Exploitation:** During the lead-up to elections, political candidates frequently visit minority neighborhoods, offering lofty promises of secular protection, land rights, and safety. However, once the ballots are cast and power is secured, these promises often vanish.
- **The "No-Win" Predicament:** Participants noted a dangerous paradox: if a minority community is seen as supporting a specific party, they become targets of physical violence and property destruction from the opposing side if that party loses. Conversely, the party they supported rarely provides protection during the aftermath. This leaves these groups in a state of constant vulnerability where their democratic participation is used against them as a pretext for retribution.

2. Social Dehumanization: The Weight of Daily Indignity

For groups like the Dalit and Harijon (often referred to as "untouchables" in a derogatory sense) and gender-diverse (Hijra/Transgender) individuals, exclusion is not an occasional event—it is "woven into the fabric of life."

- **Daily Ostracization:** Members of these communities shared stories of "social invisibility." In many rural and peri-urban areas, Dalit and Harijon individuals are still denied entry into local restaurants or are forced to use separate utensils. This social dehumanization creates a psychological barrier; when a person is told daily that they are not fit to sit in a public space, the idea of standing for office or influencing national policy feels like a distant, impossible dream.

- **The Struggle for Dignity:** For gender-diverse individuals, dehumanization often involves public harassment and the denial of basic respect. This atmosphere of constant ridicule makes it difficult for them to engage in political organizing or even attend public town hall meetings.

3. Spatial Exclusion and Segregated Living

The physical landscape of Bangladesh also reflects this exclusion. Marginalized groups are often restricted to specific geographic areas, a phenomenon described as "spatial exclusion."

- **The Colony System:** Many Dalit and Harijon families are confined to "colonies"—overcrowded, high-density settlements that often lack basic sanitation, clean water, and electricity. These colonies are frequently located near waste dump sites or in undesirable low-lying areas.
- **Housing Discrimination:** Even when individuals from these communities gain the financial means to move, they face a "invisible wall." Landlords in mainstream neighborhoods often refuse to rent to them once their caste or gender identity is revealed.
- **Isolation from Power:** By being physically pushed to the outskirts of society, these communities are also moved away from the centers of political influence. This physical distance reinforces the feeling that they are not equal stakeholders in the nation's future, but rather "appendages" to a system that only notices them during an election year.

4. Perceived Barriers to Participation

For many minority communities, the act of voting is weighed against the literal survival of their household.

- **The "House Burning" Threat:** Fear of retaliation is a major reason for low voter turnout among minority communities. Participants explained that in many rural areas, local powerholders issue indirect threats, warning that if a particular candidate loses in a minority-dominated area, the community may face attacks. These threats often involve the risk of arson or the destruction of homes, livestock, and crops. To protect their families and property, many people choose not to vote.
- **Rational Disenfranchisement:** Choosing to stay home on election day becomes a "rational" survival strategy. When the state cannot guarantee that a person's house will still be standing the morning after an election, "abstaining" is not a lack of interest in democracy, but a necessary tactic to protect one's family.

2. Economic and Geographic Hurdles: The Distance of Democracy

Participation in elections requires resources that many in the tea gardens or Indigenous territories simply do not have.

- **The Burden of Poverty:** For tea garden workers, voting often comes with a real financial cost rather than a lack of interest in politics. Because they earn very low daily wages (≈ BDT 170 daily per head), missing even one day of work to vote can mean losing money needed for food and other basic needs. This loss becomes heavier when travel costs and long waiting times at polling centers are added, especially when the polling centers are far from where they live. In families already struggling to manage daily expenses, the combined cost of lost wages and transport can feel equal to several days' worth of food. As a result, voting becomes a difficult choice between exercising a civic right and meeting immediate survival needs.
- **Unsafe Journeys:** Polling centers are often placed far from Indigenous settlements or tea labor colonies, usually in areas dominated by the majority population. Reaching these centers requires traveling long distances, sometimes through places where workers and Indigenous voters feel unsafe, especially during times of political tension. The fear of harassment, intimidation, or violence along the way makes voting a physical risk, leading many to avoid the journey altogether.

3. Administrative Filters: Identity as an Obstacle

The technical process of registration often acts as a gatekeeper that excludes those with the least institutional influence.

- **The NID Crisis:** National Identity (NID) cards are mandatory for voting, yet participants reported widespread errors in the documentation of marginalized groups. These errors—such as misspelled names, incorrect birth dates, or the omission of specific community titles—are often the result of untrained officials who are unfamiliar with minority languages or cultural naming conventions.
- **Bureaucratic "Dead Ends":** Correcting an error on an NID card requires navigating a complex, expensive, and often discriminatory bureaucracy. Many from the Dalit or rural Indigenous communities lack the digital literacy or the "middlemen" connections needed to fix these documents, effectively "filtering" them out of the voter list before the election even begins.
- **Invisibility of the Nomadic and Landless:** For nomadic groups or those living in temporary settlements (like the Harijon colonies), the lack of a "permanent address" often makes registration impossible, rendering an entire segment of the population legally invisible.

5. Community-Driven Suggestions

1. Proactive Security: Moving from Reaction to Prevention

The most immediate and urgent demand is for a fundamental shift in how the state manages security in minority-dominated areas.

- **Early Deployment:** Participants argued that security forces—including the Police, Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), and the Army—must be visibly deployed well before the official election schedule is even announced. This "proactive" presence is designed to deter local powerbrokers from issuing threats of arson or violence.
- **Sensitive Area Designation:** There is a strong call to officially designate minority-heavy voting blocks as "sensitive areas." This would trigger mandatory high-level surveillance and the establishment of temporary security camps to ensure that residents feel safe leaving their homes to vote and, more importantly, safe returning to them after the results are declared.
- **Post-Election Protection:** Historical data shows that violence often peaks *after* the election. Consequently, communities are demanding that security remain in place for at least 15 to 30 days after the polls close to prevent retaliatory attacks by losing or winning factions.

2. Legal Protections: The Institutional Safety Net

To combat the "culture of impunity," participants proposed three key institutional pillars to provide dedicated government oversight:

- **Minority Protection Act:** This proposed law would specifically criminalize communal violence, hate speech, and targeted property destruction with fast-track trial provisions. It aims to ensure that "selective policing" is replaced by mandatory legal action.
- **National Minority Commission:** A permanent, independent body with the power to investigate human rights violations against minorities, summon officials, and

provide legal aid to victims. This commission would serve as a watchdog, ensuring that the state cannot simply "erase" or downplay communal incidents.

- **Ministry of Minority Affairs:** Similar to models in other South Asian nations, this ministry would provide a direct cabinet-level voice for marginalized groups, overseeing development budgets and ensuring that policy rhetoric is translated into lived reality.

3. Official Recognition: Identity as a Right

Indigenous leaders emphasized that their current constitutional status, often referred to under the umbrella terms of "tribes" or "small ethnic sects" is a form of "legal dehumanization."

- **From "Tribal" to "Indigenous":** The demand for official recognition as "Indigenous" (Adivasi) is about more than semantics; it is a demand for the rights established under the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.
- **Self-Determination and Land Rights:** Correct nomenclature is seen as the vital first step toward securing ancestral land rights. Without being recognized as "Indigenous," these communities find it legally difficult to protect their territories from land-grabbing and "spatial exclusion" by powerful state or private actors.

4. Binding Promises: Accountability Beyond Rhetoric

Participants expressed deep skepticism of political manifestos, which they viewed as "wish lists" that are ignored after the election.

- **Enforceable Manifestos:** The community is demanding that political parties include specific, measurable pledges regarding minority rights—such as the return of "Vested Property" or the establishment of a Land Commission for the plains in their official platforms.
- **Punitive Measures:** There is a call for a legal mechanism where political parties can be held accountable, or even penalized by the Election Commission, if they fail

to implement the "protection pledges" made in their manifestos. This move is intended to end the "vote bank" exploitation where parties use minority support without offering any tangible results in return.

The roundtables revealed a significant shift in thinking: marginalized groups are no longer asking for pity as victims; they are demanding their full rights as citizens with dignity. Protecting the margins of society is not just a moral choice-it is a structural necessity. If the state cannot protect its most vulnerable, the entire democratic process is compromised. The success and legitimacy of the 2026 National Election will depend on moving these marginalized voices from the edges to the very center of the national conversation.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW (KII) INSIGHTS

The study finds that marginalized communities in Bangladesh (including tea workers, the Bede, Dalits, and religious and indigenous groups) are trapped in a system that consistently excludes them. Based on in-depth interviews with experts and community leaders, it is clear that the obstacles to their participation are not accidental but are built into the country's legal, economic, and social structures. The research highlights a deep lack of trust in political institutions and an urgent need for reforms that go beyond simple promises to ensure actual safety and representation.

Structural Barriers to Minority Participation

The structural barriers that hinder the political participation of socio-economic minority communities in Bangladesh are deeply entrenched, especially for the Bede (gypsies), tea workers, and Dalit communities. These communities face common challenges that limit their engagement in the political process according to our interviewees. Marginalized groups like the Bede and waste cleaners in the informal sector are excluded from the July Reform Commission discussions; so do the Tea workers and the people of Dalit Communities. They are recognized first based on either their religion or occupation and later as a citizen.

Socio-Economic Disenfranchisement

For socio-economic minorities (specifically the Bede, Dalit, and tea worker communities) barriers to entry are foundational. Interview data indicates that these groups are often viewed through the lens of occupation or caste rather than citizenship.

- **Bede Community:** The Bede people are neither recognized as full citizens nor are their occupations. One Interviewee with extensive experience in working for the Bede Communities stated, Marginalized groups like Bede people are unable to meet basic needs like health, education or living resources which limits their participation in the democratic process. Because of their Nomadic lifestyle and difference from the Plainland people they are socially excluded which is followed by economic exclusion.
- **Tea Workers:** A former Union Leader of the Tea workers stated that the fate of tea workers has remained same discriminatory and deprived even after the July Movement. Often from marginalized ethnic backgrounds, they lack the economic resources to form political parties or run campaigns. Due to their economic powerlessness, are excluded from political participation and remain invisible in reform efforts.
- **Dalit Exclusion:** The community faces a similar plight. They are discriminated against based on their occupation or lower caste, often relegated to degrading jobs like sanitation

or leatherwork. Dalits, due to their low socio-economic status and lack of support, are excluded both politically and economically, denying them access to rights guaranteed in the constitution, such as education, housing, and fair representation.

Constitutional and Religious Constraints

Religious minority communities in Bangladesh continue to experience structural exclusion from meaningful political participation, shaped by constitutional arrangements, reform processes, and evolving state narratives. Longstanding engagement by minority advocates indicates that the constitutional declaration of Islam as the state religion has contributed to the symbolic and practical marginalization of non-Muslim citizens, reinforcing perceptions of unequal citizenship. This framework has constrained the ability of religious minorities to articulate distinct political concerns within formal state institutions and reform initiatives.

Following the July uprising, the formation of multiple reform commissions was widely viewed as a critical opportunity to address longstanding governance deficits. However, religious and ethnic minority representation within these bodies remained minimal. Where minority individuals were included, their participation was largely confined to commissions with limited influence over core political and constitutional reforms. As a result, minority perspectives were largely absent from key decision-making arenas, weakening the inclusiveness and legitimacy of the reform process.

Interviews further suggest a broader ideological shift in the state's political discourse. While the 1972 Constitution articulated secularism as a foundational principle aimed at ensuring equal rights across religious communities, subsequent constitutional amendments and political practices have diluted this commitment. Contemporary narratives increasingly emphasize pluralism in abstract terms, without substantively engaging minority experiences of discrimination, insecurity, and exclusion. This shift has effectively sidelined secularism as a protective framework for equal citizenship, contributing to heightened vulnerability and uncertainty among minority communities.

Taken together, these dynamics illustrate how constitutional symbolism, institutional design, and reform practices intersect to limit minority political voice in Bangladesh. The persistence of these barriers underscores the need for more deliberate inclusion of religious minorities in constitutional debates and reform mechanisms if political participation is to be genuinely equitable and representative.

Indigenous Rights and the CHT Crisis

Structural barriers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) are characterized by the non-implementation of the **1997 Peace Accord**.

- **Militarization and Governance:** Informants from the Khumi and other ethnic groups highlighted that despite a transition to civil governance, a "military-style rule" persists psychologically and operationally. The failure to empower District and Regional Councils

has left indigenous populations vulnerable to land dispossession, often allegedly supported by state apparatuses.

- **Legal Limbo:** The case of the Bawm ethnic group was cited as a stark example of structural failure; an entire community has faced custodial detention and legal isolation, allegedly due to the actions of a few, dismantling their capacity for local defense or community leadership.

Role of Political Parties and Institutions

The relationship between minority groups and political institutions is characterized by a deficit of trust and a crisis of representation.

The Rise of Right-Wing Influence

A prevailing anxiety among all interviewed groups is the resurgence of right-wing political entities.

- **Sectarian Citizenship:** In relation to the right-wing party's sectarian definition of citizenship based on religion A social activist for Bede Community expressed concern whether nomadic Muslim Bede people would be able to meet the idealized "Muslim citizen" criteria, as they are often illiterate and do not conform to traditional Sunni or Shia classifications. Overall, the combination of a weak and corrupt administration and the rise of right-wing politics have left marginalized communities feeling increasingly hopeless about their integration into the political system.
- **Political Pawns:** One Interviewee from the tea workers' community, highlighted their vulnerability as economically powerless and voiceless, making them easy pawns in political maneuvering. They recalled how, during the Awami League regime, tea workers were accused of being BNP sympathizers whenever they protested for land rights or fair wages. As the upcoming elections approached, they expressed little hope of fair representation. They believe they remain marginalized within the political parties. Moreover, during the Interim Government's regime, many innocent tea workers were unjustly labelled as allies of the former ruling party, further deepening their sense of exclusion.
- **Dalit Representation:** The community spokesperson shared a somewhat mixed perspective. They acknowledged that some individuals from their community have received nominations, albeit in very limited numbers. However, their concerns mirrored those of the tea workers regarding the rise of right-wing parties. She pointed out the unjust imprisonment of the poor and powerless from the Harijan Community, such as those

involved in the Chinmoy Prabhu case, who have no means to hire legal representation or gain support.[26]

Institutional Failures and Article 70

All our interviewees from religious marginalized groups agreed about the lack of representation in the parliament and political support. Their primary concern is the growing influence of right-wing parties, which exacerbate religious and ethnic divisions. They said that right-wing politics, characterized by religious fanaticism and communalism, directly threatens minority communities. They also said that these forces do not believe in equal rights and free thought, instead targeting the weak and vulnerable. One expert provided a more detailed description of how political participation of Minority Community is constitutionally flawed:

"When a minority or indigenous person is nominated by a political party to go to parliament, they become bound by that party's decisions and discipline. Article 70 of our constitution presents a major obstacle. If they go against the party's decision, their membership can be revoked. As a result, there is virtually no opportunity for them to speak up for the interests of their community. As a result, minority representatives cannot raise issues regarding their community's rights or discrimination outside their party's stance. If they are elected as independent candidates, they may have a bit more freedom to speak. However, in our reality, it is extremely difficult for minorities to get elected as independents. Due to political power, financial resources, and party influence, this path is almost closed."

The experts collectively underscore that the rise of right-wing politics and the failure of political institutions to address their concerns have left minority communities feeling increasingly vulnerable and excluded from the political mainstream.

Demographic Engineering in CHT

Historically, the CHT were overwhelmingly inhabited by ethnic minority communities. In 1872, these groups constituted approximately 98 percent of the population, while Bengalis accounted for only about 2 percent. Even during 1951–1956, ethnic minorities still made up around 90 percent of the region's population, with Bengalis comprising most of the remaining 10 percent. By 1991, the proportion of Hill peoples had declined sharply to roughly 51.4 percent, while the Bengali population rose dramatically to 48.5 percent. More recently, according to the 2022 census, the share of indigenous populations in the CHT has further declined to around 50 percent, indicating a continuing demographic shift in the region.

Media Narratives and Minority Visibility

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[26] *[Note: This concern aligns with widespread media reports documenting the crackdown and denial of bail for protesters in Chattogram following the arrest of Hindu leader Chinmoy Krishna Das in late 2024].*

Media coverage of minority issues is described as sporadic, crisis-driven, and devoid of nuance.

The Invisibility of the Tea Workers: A representative of tea workers explained that, given the current security situation, many workers are not interested in running as election candidates. While there are no formal barriers to seeking nominations, workers feel discouraged because of social and political insecurity and believe that political parties are unlikely to nominate them. Tea workers are often kept out of public view, and their struggles receive little attention, even from the media. In recent years, many tea gardens have closed, leaving workers without income and, in some cases, without enough food, yet these conditions drew little response from either major political parties. One reason for this silence is the lack of strong organizations representing tea workers. They lack a strong organizational presence, with no national-level office and few effective local groups to represent their interests. As a result, individuals who might otherwise speak out or try to organize often hesitate due to concerns about their own safety and the safety of their families, further reducing public visibility and meaningful political participation.

Negative Impacts of Social Media: Since July, violence against Dalits has definitely increased. In the past, such incidents were not as visible. Even if something happened, it wouldn't spread widely. But now, with platforms like Facebook and X handle, these incidents spread quickly, and people can see what is happening. For example, the Bundel colony incident in Chittagong, where Dalit community members were taken into custody. They weren't involved in the conflict, but they were still taken. Just because a few were involved, they all were targeted. Now, many of the men from that colony are in jail, and no one is speaking on their behalf. There is no lawyer standing up for them. As for the ones in jail, there hasn't even been any news coverage about them.

Security, Discrimination, and Intimidation

The security landscape for minorities is defined by a "Culture of Impunity" and economic predation.

Economic Discrimination as Violence: Violence against minorities is often economic in nature.

- **The Bede** people experience social exclusion from the broader society, primarily due to their nomadic lifestyle. They are often deprived of access to traditional education and healthcare, particularly women. According to one expert working with the Bede community, the government must establish inclusive policies that address their specific needs, as current efforts, such as providing a small stipend for Bede children to attend school, fail to integrate them into society meaningfully. Their highest contribution in politics is they can sell their vote for 500 or 1000 taka on the day of election. The security and discrimination dimension of Bede people are different from the other marginalized groups such as tea workers as they already live with the plainland people.
- **Wage Theft:** Tea workers are trapped in a cycle of poverty. Our interviewee said that their daily wage of 170 taka is grossly inadequate in the face of rising inflation. The wage Board, formed in 2019, declared that the wage will increase by 5% every year but the price

inflation in Bangladesh is rising by 9% to 12%. This economic vulnerability leaves them easy targets for repression, especially during election times. He shed light on these issues by going further: those workers around the country can form a Union with just 20 people but tea workers have to form a Union with all the tea workers around the country which in most cases is impossible. This systematic barrier coupled with economic discrimination is making tea workers invisible in society.

- **Land Grabbing:** In both the plainlands and CHT, communal violence is frequently a smokescreen for land appropriation. When minority families flee violence, their property is often seized or sold at distressed rates.

The Post-July Security Vacuum Religious minorities reported a sharp deterioration in security following the July uprising.

- **Administrative Bias:** Over the past 17 months, they have observed that minority recruitment has practically reached zero, and most of those already employed have been dismissed without any reason, promotions have completely stopped. We saw that even during the recruitment process by the Public Service Commission, although they were included initially, in the end, they did not receive jobs. Various labels have been attached to them. As a result, we are extremely disappointed with the recruitment happening so far. Furthermore, they are not following any proportional representation. For example, nearly 48 judges were appointed to the high court in two phases, one in the first phase and that too was based on political affiliation, while in the second phase, no appointments were made.
- **Electoral Violence:** Almost all of our interviewees opined that the current Interim Government keeps the same mentality as the previous government. They all are perpetrators of the culture of Denial. Thousands of houses have been burnt, abuse of women, false allegations in the name of religious blasphemy- all are denied by the interim government. The culture of impunity is the founding reason which perpetrates this kind of violence over the years. This has created the belief that attacking minorities will have no consequences. In the Language of research, minorities have become soft targets. Their land, homes, and jobs are taken, and little to no justice is provided. Another reason is economic interests. In many cases, behind the attacks is the political rivalry and the desire to grab land and property. When a family is forced to leave the area in fear, the opportunity arises to buy land at a low price.

    During elections, the situation for minorities becomes extremely precarious. Whether they vote or not, they are attacked. If they vote, they are questioned about whom they voted for; if they do not vote, they are asked why. In both scenarios, they face looting, attacks, land grabbing, and even sexual violence. This is why election-related violence keeps recurring. As a result, there is tremendous fear within the minority communities. Many women have publicly stated that even if their names are removed from the voter list, they will not object, as long as they can stay safe. One interviewee pressed that- "This is a deeply shameful

reality for a democratic state. Every election, minorities live in fear, and with the upcoming election, this same fear has returned".

- **CHT Instability:** The post-July period has been associated with a visible deterioration in security conditions in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), particularly across Bandarban, Rangamati, and Khagrachari. Interviewees described this phase as one of renewed instability, marked by localized violence, intimidation, and heightened uncertainty for residents and community leaders. Within these accounts, incidents such as the Rakhachhera violence (September 2024), Guimara and Rangamati arson attack (2025) were repeatedly referenced as illustrative moments that signaled the fragility of public order in the region.*

From the perspective of respondents, these events reflect more than isolated law-and-order failures. Rather, they were interpreted as evidence of deeper governance and political constraints, including inconsistent enforcement and a perceived reluctance to uphold neutrality among law enforcement agencies. Several interviewees argued that the interim government has not demonstrated sufficient political will to ensure impartial security administration, allowing competing local interests and informal power dynamics to shape policing outcomes. This perceived absence of neutral enforcement has, in turn, reinforced insecurity and weakened confidence in state protection mechanisms during a politically sensitive transition.

Expert's Perspectives on Reform and Inclusion

Experts provided concrete recommendations to dismantle these barriers, emphasizing that performative secularism is insufficient without structural guarantees.

Political Quotas and Proportional Representation : "If political parties adopt a culture of proportional representation and commit to giving 10% of the candidates from minority communities, it would mean that each party would have to field about 30 minority candidates. This commitment would ensure that some of them are elected. When a minority candidate is elected

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[27]* On **September 18, 2024**, violent clashes erupted in Pankhaya Para, Khagrachhari, following the mob killing of a Bengali man. In the subsequent unrest, clashes between Bangalee settlers and Indigenous groups led to the deaths of four indigenous people. **At least 37 homes and shops belonging to Indigenous communities were looted and burned down** during the fighting in Khagrachhari and Rangamati. The violence extended to Rangamati town on **September 20, 2024**, where shops and properties in Indigenous areas such as Kalindipur, Bijon Sarani, Dewan Para, and Tridip Nagar were set on fire, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council office was vandalized and torched. On **September 28, 2025**, unrest in Guimara upazila, Khagrachhari, erupted during protests following allegations of sexual violence against a schoolgirl. The violence spilled into widespread property damage the following day. Journalists reported that **many homes and shops owned by Indigenous Marma community members were looted and burned** during the chaos, with security forces unable to prevent or stop the arson over several hours. At least three civilians were killed in the broader unrest around this period.

with such a commitment, they will see themselves as a representative of the minorities. However, currently, many see themselves as political affiliates rather than minority representatives, and the law on floor crossing creates further barriers for them".

"In the future, if the upper chamber of parliament has a policy where the deputy speaker or the head of important parliamentary committees is from the opposition, this could be considered a form of quota. We could also introduce a quota for the chairperson of the upper chamber to be from the minority community. If a party is dominant, they should take responsibility for ensuring that minorities are included and feel secure".

Economic and Social Empowerment Policies

- **Tea Workers:** To improve the situation of tea workers, interviewees emphasized the need to grant them the right to form unions at the company, upazila, and even individual garden levels. They also stressed that meaningful change requires long-term investment rather than short-term relief. According to them, training and capacity-building for tea workers would take at least five years to develop leadership, skills, and organizational strength, enabling workers to become self-reliant. The core message was clear: instead of one-time assistance, tea workers need sustained support that helps them build the ability to stand on their own and advocate for their rights independently.
- **Dalit Community** : Anti-discrimination policies must be a priority, and political leaders, regardless of their party affiliation, should push for the passing of anti-discrimination laws. The budgets allocated for minority welfare, particularly for women and girls, are often insufficient, and there is a need to allocate funds based on the number of people in these communities.
- **Bede Community:** Our interviewee, who is an expert and social worker for the Bede Community, recommended that the government should take inclusive policy to integrate the Bede people to mainland life, culture and workforce. The development policy for the Bede people should be tailored according to their specific needs. He suggested a mobile school for Bede children, an expert teacher trained for living in Bede Bohor and teaching them. In the question of employment, the Bede Community can be an excellent sell force in the village areas. Many Bede people now want to live in the mainland because they need education, health and living support. Inclusive and specific tailored policy according to their Nomadic lifestyle can be beneficial for this marginalized people.
- **Indigenous Representation:** Experts demanded reserved Vice-Chairman positions in local government councils (Union Parishads) in areas with significant indigenous populations (e.g., Sylhet, Mymensingh), noting that despite large populations of Garo and Khasia people, no indigenous Chairman has been elected in 15-20 years due to financial barriers.

Institutional Overhaul : There is a shared view that minority issues related to identity, culture, and protection require focused institutional attention beyond general social welfare measures. At the same time, political representatives from minority communities often lack the confidence to raise these concerns openly in Parliament, particularly when doing so may conflict with their party's official position. Existing constitutional and party practices have traditionally discouraged members from speaking against the government line, as dissent could lead to the loss of parliamentary membership. This environment has limited the ability of minority representatives to independently voice concerns or criticize policies affecting their communities, reinforcing silence even on issues of clear public interest.

Conclusion of Findings: The interviews collectively suggest that the future democratic government will uphold the rule of law, human rights, and justice, reflecting the core values of our independence struggle: equality, human dignity, and social justice. These three elements were incorporated into the constitution, but they have not been properly implemented, which has led the state into crisis today. We hope the next democratic government will not lead the country astray, and that we can move forward.

INTEGRATED ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The findings combine evidence from the nationwide survey, key informant interviews, and regional roundtable dialogues to reflect the experiences of minority and marginalized communities in Bangladesh. Examining these sources together highlights both common patterns and important differences, and shows how daily realities, social conditions, and concerns about safety shape political participation.

1. Triangulation of Findings: Bringing the Evidence Together

The nationwide survey provides a broad, quantitative picture of attitudes, experiences, and behaviors. The KIIs add depth by explaining why these patterns exist, drawing on expert knowledge and long-term engagement with marginalized communities. The roundtable dialogues ground both of these in lived experience, capturing collective fears, expectations, and demands voiced directly by community members.

Across all three sources, one central reality emerges clearly: minority communities in Bangladesh are not disengaged from democracy by choice.Their participation is shaped and often constrained by fear, structural exclusion, and a lack of trust in political and state institutions. While each method highlights different dimensions of this problem, together they paint a unified picture of a democracy where formal rights exist, but safe and meaningful participation remains uncertain for many groups

2. Dialogues, Survey Data, and KIIs: How the Evidence Connects

Survey Findings as the Broad Pattern

The survey shows that minority and indigenous communities in Bangladesh have a long history of electoral participation. More than four out of six respondents have voted at least once, and many have participated in multiple national and local elections. This confirms that these communities understand the importance of voting and are familiar with the electoral process.

At the same time, the survey reveals a sharp decline in confidence about future participation. Large portions of respondents are undecided, hesitant, or unwilling to vote in the upcoming national election, mainly due to fear of violence, lack of trust in outcomes, and disappointment with past representatives. Feelings of insecurity, silence in political discussions, and reluctance to report irregularities are widespread. These findings show a clear gap between past participation and present willingness.

Insights from Key Informant Interviews
The KIIs help explain why this gap exists. Informants consistently describe political exclusion as structural rather than accidental. According to them, poverty, discriminatory legal frameworks, weak protection mechanisms, and majoritarian political practices combine to keep minority communities on the margins.

Experts working with tea workers, Dalits, Bede communities, religious minorities, and Indigenous peoples stress that economic insecurity and social stigma directly limit political agency. When daily survival is uncertain, political participation becomes risky or secondary. Informants also highlight how constitutional arrangements, party control mechanisms, and weak enforcement of laws reduce the ability of minority representatives to speak independently or advocate effectively for their communities.

Voices from the Roundtable Dialogues
The roundtable discussions confirm and humanize these findings. Participants repeatedly describe elections not as moments of hope, but as periods of anxiety. Many view election time as a trigger for threats, attacks on homes or livelihoods, and social tension. The dialogues also reveal deep frustration at being treated as "vote banks," where communities are approached during campaigns but ignored afterward.

Participants emphasize that fear is not abstract. It is based on past experiences of violence, arson, displacement, and lack of justice. This lived memory shapes current behavior, including decisions to stay silent, avoid political discussion, or abstain from voting altogether.

3. Common Patterns Across All Methods

Several themes appear consistently across the survey, KIIs, and dialogues:

Fear and Insecurity as Central Barriers All three sources identify personal and collective safety as the most important factor influencing political participation. Whether measured quantitatively or expressed in personal narratives, fear of violence before, during, or after elections stands out as the primary reason for hesitation and withdrawal.

A Crisis of Trust in Institutions There is widespread distrust in political parties, law enforcement agencies, and sometimes even electoral institutions. Many respondents believe that reporting violence or irregularities will not bring justice and may instead lead to further harm. This perception discourages engagement and reinforces silence.

Participation Without Influence Minority communities often vote but feel that their participation does not translate into meaningful representation or policy change. Survey data shows dissatisfaction with elected representatives, while KIIs and dialogues explain this through party dominance, tokenism, and the limited autonomy of minority MPs.

Silencing and Self-Censorship Across methods, there is evidence of a "culture of silence." People avoid political discussions, public expression, and formal complaints as a survival strategy. This silence is not apathy, but a response to perceived risks.

4. Contradictions and Tensions in the Findings

While the findings are largely consistent, some important tensions also emerge:

High Awareness vs. Low Confidence Survey data shows that most respondents are aware of their voting rights and election irregularities. However, this awareness does not translate into confidence or action. KIIs and dialogues help explain this contradiction by pointing to repeated experiences where knowledge did not lead to protection or justice.

Willingness to Participate vs. Conditional Engagement Many respondents express a desire to vote, but only if conditions are safe and fair. This conditional participation reflects hope mixed with caution. It suggests that participation can increase if credible guarantees of security and neutrality are provided.

Formal Equality vs. Lived Inequality While constitutional promises of equality exist, lived experiences described in the KIIs and dialogues show persistent discrimination and exclusion. This gap between law and reality is a key source of frustration and mistrust.

5. Group-Specific Challenges and Cross-Cutting Issues

Group-Specific Challenges

Different communities face distinct barriers:

- **Tea garden workers** face extreme economic vulnerability, geographic isolation, and dependence on employers, which limits political organization and mobility.
- **Dalit and Harijon communities** experience caste-based stigma, segregated living conditions, and social exclusion that undermine dignity and political voice.
- **Bede and other nomadic groups** struggle with legal invisibility due to lack of permanent addresses and documentation, which restricts voter registration and access to services.
- **Transgender communities** face deep social stigma, widespread discrimination, and exclusion from formal employment, education, and housing, which severely limit their economic security and political participation. In addition, difficulties in obtaining accurate identification documents and frequent harassment in public spaces restrict their ability to register as voters, move freely, and engage safely in the political process.
- **Indigenous communities**, particularly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, face land dispossession, militarization, and the long-term effects of unimplemented agreements.
- **Religious minorities** report fear of targeted violence and a sense of second-class citizenship, especially during political transitions.

Cross-Cutting Challenges

Despite these differences, several challenges cut across all groups:

- Fear of electoral violence
- Weak access to justice
- Limited representation within political parties
- Distrust in institutions
- Economic vulnerability affecting political choices

These shared challenges create a common experience of marginalization, even as they manifest differently across communities.

6. Opportunities for Inclusive Political Participation

Despite the challenges, the findings also point to clear opportunities for improvement:

Strong Civic Awareness and Past Engagement The high rate of past voting shows that minority communities are not disengaged from democracy. This existing civic foundation can be strengthened if safety and trust are restored.

Clear and Practical Community Demands Across surveys and dialogues, communities articulate concrete expectations: security before and after elections, neutral administration, fair party nominations, and protection from hate-based campaigns. These demands are realistic and actionable.

Potential for Conditional Re-engagement Many respondents indicate they would participate if conditions improve. This suggests that policy reforms and credible enforcement could have an immediate positive impact on participation.

Role of Dialogue and Representation The roundtables themselves demonstrate the value of inclusive dialogue. When spaces are created for minorities to speak collectively, they articulate informed and constructive proposals for reform.

7. Synthesis and Conclusion

The survey data, KIIs, and roundtable dialogues present a consistent and compelling narrative. Minority and marginalized communities in Bangladesh value democratic participation and have a long history of engagement. However, their current hesitation is rooted in fear, exclusion, and repeated experiences of neglect.

The integrated analysis shows that the main barrier to inclusive political participation is not a lack of interest or awareness, but a lack of safety, trust, and meaningful representation. Addressing these issues requires moving beyond symbolic inclusion toward structural reforms that guarantee protection, accountability, and genuine political voice.

Ultimately, the health of Bangladesh's democracy will be measured by whether these communities can participate without fear and with dignity. The findings of this study make clear that inclusive political participation is both a democratic necessity and an achievable goal, provided that the concerns raised across all three sources are taken seriously and acted upon.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations reflect the lived fears and barriers identified by marginalized communities, prioritizing prevention, protection, and accountability. They assign clear responsibilities to all stakeholders and are essential for protecting minority participation, restoring trust in democratic institutions, and ensuring that political engagement does not endanger safety, dignity, or rights.

A. Recommendations for Policy-makers

Policy-makers should treat the safety of minority voters as a fundamental responsibility of democratic governance. This requires a targeted set of measures, including preventive security planning, trusted and confidential complaint mechanisms, timely legal action, and longer-term institutional reforms. The objective is to ensure prevention, protection, and accountability, so that participation in elections does not place marginalized communities at risk.

1. Ensure election-period protection for minority and marginalized communities: Adopt a mandatory Election-period Protection Protocol from the pre-election phase through at least 15–30 days after polling, with clear duties for police, local administration, and election officials focused on early warning, prevention, and rapid response in risk areas.

2. Establish a rapid response and victim support mechanism: Create a publicly funded mechanism that combines legal aid, emergency shelter or relocation, medical referrals, and hotline-based support so victims can seek help without facing retaliation.

3. Strengthen confidentiality and protection for complainants and witnesses: Make confidentiality real in practice through anonymous reporting options, secure complaint points, controls against information leaks, and penalties for breaches that expose complainants to stigma or reprisals.

4. Introduce minimum service standards for election-related complaints: Mandate uniform, time-bound complaint handling with acknowledgment deadlines, case tracking numbers, escalation pathways, and named accountability to reduce distrust, delay, and procedural harassment.

5. Improve truthful recording and accountability for targeted violence: Apply a truthful recording standard so communal, election-related, or politically retaliatory motives are recorded and reported, preventing misclassification as "ordinary disputes."

6. Fast-track justice for communal and election-related crimes: Introduce fast-track investigation and prosecution for targeted arson, property destruction, hate speech, and communal attacks to counter impunity through swift, visible accountability.

7. Enact and enforce a comprehensive anti-discrimination law: Pass an Anti-Discrimination Law covering religion, ethnicity or Indigenous identity, caste or occupation, and gender, with clear complaint procedures, victim protection, enforceable remedies, and mandatory timelines for investigation and prosecution.

8. Establish strong institutional oversight for minority rights: Establish or strengthen an independent National Minority Commission with investigative authority, legal aid capacity, and budget autonomy, and require regular public reporting beyond election periods.

9. Create a high-level coordinating mechanism for minority affairs: Create a cabinet-level ministry or equivalent body with budget authority to move from welfare-style approaches to rights-based governance on protection, participation, and cultural rights.

10. Reduce administrative and language barriers to voter participation: Institutionalize multilingual and accessible voter services in minority-dense areas (translated forms, helpdesks, hotline scripts, and targeted outreach) to reduce exclusion from language and administrative complexity.

11. Reform voter registration and service eligibility for mobile communities: Revise voter ID and service eligibility rules for mobile and address-less groups (e.g., Bede communities) using flexible verification, mobile registration teams, and community attestations.

12. Institutionalize minority-area risk mapping before elections: Require systematic pre-election risk mapping in minority-populated areas to identify hotspots, intimidation patterns, logistical barriers, and safe transport needs so action is preventive, not reactive.

13. Address economic barriers that suppress political participation: Recognize economic exploitation as structural violence; review wage-setting mechanisms, especially in tea sectors, and ensure regular, inflation-linked adjustments to reduce election-period vulnerability.

14. Remove legal barriers to labor organization for tea workers: Amend labor laws so tea workers can form unions at the garden or Upazila level and receive enforceable protections against intimidation by owners or intermediaries.

15. Reduce geographic and cost-related barriers to voting: Lower the cost and risk of voting for tea workers and remote Indigenous settlements through safer access routes, nearer polling facilities where feasible, and subsidized transport during elections.

16. Prevent land grabbing and post-violence dispossession: Create fast-track legal and administrative measures to prevent land grabbing after communal violence, including emergency legal aid, protection of land records, and restitution support for displaced families.

17. Implement time-bound action on the CHT governance crisis: Address the Chittagong Hill Tracts governance crisis and partial implementation of the 1997 Peace Accord through time-bound, publicly monitored action plans with milestones, stronger local councils, and regular progress reporting to reduce militarization and land dispossession.

18. Promote proportional inclusion in public institutions: Introduce transparent reporting and inclusion targets for recruitment and promotion of religious and ethnic minorities in public service and the judiciary to address under-representation and stalled recruitment.

19. Address structural silencing within parliamentary politics: Review the impact of Article 70 through constitutional or parliamentary reform so MPs can raise community rights issues without party retaliation, enabling meaningful representation.

20. Prevent collective punishment and custodial abuse: Enforce accountability rules against collective punishment, arbitrary detention, and custodial abuse, including due process safeguards, independent review mechanisms, and rapid access to legal assistance.

B. Recommendations for Election Authorities

Election authorities must demonstrate neutrality through accessible complaints, secure reporting, transparent enforcement, and targeted safeguards. Risk mapping, logistics support, and early security deployment are vital to reduce fear and ensure participation.

1. Ensure administrative neutrality during elections: Publish and enforce a neutrality assurance plan covering postings, transfers, chain of command, and disciplinary consequences to address mistrust that fuels silence and disengagement.

2. Establish a unified, accessible complaint system: Create a single public system (hotline, SMS and online portal, and physical complaint desks) and publicize it widely so people know where and how to report.

3. Guarantee safe and independent complaint handling: Provide anonymous reporting and protected channels for minority complainants, and separate complaint handling from local power networks to reduce fear of retaliation and legal harassment.

4. Build trust through transparent enforcement: Enforce rules against intimidation and irregularities visibly, and publish weekly election-period enforcement statistics (complaints received, actions taken, referrals) to restore confidence.

5. Coordinate with media and civil society for incident verification: Formalize safe coordination so incidents can be documented, verified, and escalated without exposing individuals to retaliation, turning silent witnessing into credible evidence.

6. Deliver practical, candidate-specific voter education: Provide practical information beyond generic voter education, including candidate-specific integrity, accessibility, and local development commitments aligned with voter decision criteria.

7. Improve election logistics in hard-to-reach areas: Deploy targeted logistics in remote and marginalized areas (mobile information teams, transport facilitation partnerships, closer service points) to reduce distance-related barriers.

8. Guarantee registration access for address-less and mobile communities: Use mobile registration units and flexible verification for nomadic and address-less populations, and publish clear rules to prevent discretionary exclusion.

9. Resolve the pre-election NID correction crisis: Run pre-election NID correction drives using mobile teams, minority-language support, and simplified grievance procedures for common errors that exclude eligible voters.

10. Introduce an election-time minority protection protocol: Adopt a formal protocol with rapid response, dedicated hotlines, mandatory incident logging, and public transparency, recognizing targeted intimidation regardless of voting choice.

11. Treat gender-based threats as election integrity offenses: Classify threats against women voters as election integrity violations; train field officials to record such threats, coordinate protection responses, and provide safe reporting channels.

12. Implement targeted safeguards in conflict-sensitive regions: Deploy enhanced monitoring, neutrality safeguards, and coordination mechanisms in conflict-prone regions, especially the Chittagong Hill Tracts, where concerns are documented.

13. Ensure polling access in isolated labor settlements: Provide tailored voter education, transport support, and protection measures in isolated labor settings (e.g., tea gardens) where coercion risks are higher.

14. Use pre-election risk mapping to prevent violence: Develop risk maps identifying land-related and communal violence triggers; coordinate preventive action with civil administration and law enforcement; protect property and land records after incidents.

15. Declare and secure minority-heavy areas as sensitive zones: Designate minority-concentrated blocks as sensitive areas and require resourced security and monitoring plans for safe travel to and from polling centers.

16. Deploy security early and maintain post-election protection: Deploy security well before election schedules are announced and maintain protection for 15–30 days after results to address both anticipatory and post-election risks.

17. Establish rapid response for arson and retaliation threats: Combine hotlines, field verification, and immediate protective action for credible arson or retaliation threats so the perceived cost of voting decreases.

18. Improve polling center placement and safe access planning: Place polling centers and plan routes to avoid hostile or majority-dominated areas; if relocation is not possible, provide transport support and safe corridors.

19. Enforce accountability for party-linked intimidation: Monitor and penalize intimidation by party-linked local powerholders, including indirect threats and pressure tactics in minority-dominated areas.

C. Recommendations for Political Parties

Political parties should prove inclusion through rules and numbers, not slogans. The core actions are transparent nominations, a binding minority threshold, real decision-making roles, enforceable anti-hate discipline, practical campaign support for minority candidates, and clear post-election protection commitments.

1. Institutionalize transparent and accountable nomination processes: Adopt transparent nomination criteria for minority candidates and publicly disclose constituency-level reasons when they are not nominated; publish nomination statistics each election cycle.

2. Move beyond symbolic inclusion to meaningful representation: Place minority candidates in competitive constituencies and include minority representatives in core decision-making bodies so influence is real, not only visible.

3. Adopt a binding minority nomination threshold: Commit publicly to a binding nomination threshold (a minimum share of total nominations) with independent tracking, implemented as formal party policy across cycles.

4. Invest in minority leadership development and campaign support: Build leadership pipelines that provide training, campaign support, legal assistance, and targeted financing so candidacy is not limited to wealthy or politically connected actors.

5. End vote-bank politics through year-round constituency engagement: Replace election-only outreach with permanent minority liaison mechanisms, scheduled consultations, grievance follow-up, and regular community engagement.

6. Strengthen internal protection for minority representatives: Create safeguards so minority representatives can raise rights violations without retaliation; ensure party discipline does not override rights advocacy.

7. Enforce zero tolerance for hate-based campaigning: Commit to and enforce zero tolerance for hate speech, sectarian mobilization, and identity-based intimidation through internal disciplinary action.

8. Establish internal complaint and response mechanisms for election violence: Set up accessible party complaint desks to document violence, intimidation, and harassment, with referral pathways to legal aid and support organizations.

9. Issue measurable and trackable manifesto commitments: Include clear, time-bound, measurable commitments on minority rights, safety, non-discrimination, and local development, and publish post-election implementation trackers.

10. Improve voter information and candidate visibility: Run local-language candidate information campaigns (leaflets, verified social media, community meetings) to improve candidate awareness and informed voting.

11. Protect communities from post-election retaliation: Commit publicly to protect minority supporters regardless of outcomes and discipline party actors involved in intimidation or reprisals to end the "no-win" risk of participation.

12. Make Chittagong Hill Tracts commitments specific and enforceable: In CHT constituencies, include concrete, time-bound steps to implement the Peace Accord and strengthen local governance, with clear benchmarks.

D. Recommendations for Civil Society

Civil society should focus on legal support, safe reporting, and low-risk participation, backed by year-round civic literacy and public monitoring. Targeted land and livelihood support can reduce political vulnerability. The media must replace rumor with verified, practical guidance and consistent, multilingual reporting to rebuild trust and deter intimidation.

1. Strengthen access to complaints, justice, and legal support: Run targeted "Know Where to Complain" initiatives in minority-dominated areas using local-language community meetings and materials, and provide confidential legal aid and accompaniment for GD filing, case initiation, follow-up, and administrative navigation.

2. Establish community-based incident documentation and early warning systems: Train community documentation teams with protocols on confidentiality, consent, evidence preservation, and referrals; link them in a Minority Election Safety and Documentation Network, and build early warning mechanisms with trusted local actors to detect threats before escalation.

3. Reduce administrative and economic barriers to electoral participation: Operate mobile information and help clinics for voter registration and NID correction guidance, assist with documentation and referrals, and advocate for transport support, simplified procedures, and accessible election information where poverty and distance block participation.

4. Design inclusive and safe political engagement mechanisms: Use low-risk formats such as small trusted-group discussions, women- and youth-only safe spaces, and confidential feedback channels to reduce fear, stigma, and exposure in retaliation-prone areas.

5. Expand civic and legal literacy beyond election cycles: Deliver year-round civic and legal literacy on voting rights, citizenship entitlements, protections, complaint mechanisms, and representative roles, with focus on Dalits, Bede communities, tea workers, and others framed as "occupational" or "caste-based" rather than full citizens.

6. Institutionalize monitoring, transparency, and accountability: Develop structured monitoring and public tracking of intimidation, arson, displacement, voter suppression, and post-election retaliation through shadow reports and briefings; create inclusion scorecards on minority representation in public recruitment and the judiciary.

7. Address structural drivers of violence and political exclusion: Support land-violence and dispossession cases through documentation and legal assistance, protect land records, advocate restitution, and expand livelihood and resilience programs to reduce dependency on exploitative structures.

8. Promote political and institutional inclusion of marginalized groups: Advocate enforceable inclusion measures in local government (reserved leadership roles, reduced financial barriers to candidacy, fair access to forums) and push for consultation platforms that include minorities in reform commissions and policy dialogues.

9. Strengthen the role of media in election safety and accountability: Provide service-oriented reporting on safe reporting options, evidence preservation, and complaint processes; track not only incidents but also institutional responses, enforcement actions, and case outcomes, supported by journalist safety protocols, legal support, and risk assessment.

10. Improve information integrity, representation, and public trust: Strengthen trust through multilingual candidate information, robust fact-checking, and accurate reporting on violence and exclusion. Media should amplify community voices, investigate intimidation, and collaborate with civil society while maintaining editorial independence.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study acknowledges several limitations related to data collection, methodological design, and representation. These limitations are important for understanding the scope of the findings and for situating the results within their appropriate analytical context.

Methodological Constraints

The quantitative component of the study relied exclusively on the Kobo Toolbox platform for survey administration and data collection. While Kobo is a widely accepted digital data collection tool, its structured format imposes certain constraints. Survey questions, by design, require predefined response options or concise open-ended inputs. As a result, complex emotions, deeply personal experiences, and context-specific feelings expressed by respondents could not always be fully articulated or captured in their intended depth. In several instances, respondents' lived realities extended beyond the available response categories, which may have led to a partial representation of their actual perceptions and emotional experiences related to political participation, safety, and exclusion.

The study initially aimed to collect 500 valid survey responses. During field implementation, the total number of submissions increased to 505 due to overlapping field timelines and methodological adjustments during data collection. However, during the data validation and verification process, one response was found to be missing because of a technical limitation within the Kobo system. Consequently, the final cleaned and verified dataset consisted of 504 survey responses. All survey data underwent a rigorous cleaning process, including the identification of inconsistencies, removal of incomplete entries, and verification of logical coherence, before being analyzed using the Jamovi statistical software. While these steps strengthened data reliability, minor data loss due to technical limitations remains a constraint.

Representation Gaps

Despite efforts to ensure geographic and demographic diversity, representation gaps may persist. Some minority and marginalized communities, particularly those residing in remote areas or in politically sensitive environments, may have been underrepresented. Factors such as limited access, security concerns, fear of retribution, and mistrust toward research initiatives may have discouraged full participation. Additionally, individuals with lower literacy levels or limited familiarity with digital survey tools may have faced challenges in responding, which could have affected the inclusiveness of the sample.

Data Limitations

A number of respondents skipped specific survey questions, either due to discomfort with sensitive topics, survey fatigue, or uncertainty about particular issues. This resulted in missing values for certain variables, limiting the robustness of some statistical comparisons and cross-tabulations. Although these missing responses were addressed during data cleaning and analysis, they nonetheless reduce the completeness of certain quantitative findings.

In the qualitative components of the study, including key informant interviews and roundtable discussions, the questions were designed to be focused and issue-specific to guide structured analysis. However, participants frequently extended their responses to discuss broader political, social, and historical contexts. While these expansive narratives provided rich and valuable insights into the lived experiences of minority communities, they also introduced challenges in terms of comparability and thematic consistency across interviews and discussions. Not all perspectives could be systematically coded or quantified, and some insights remain illustrative rather than generalizable.

Overall, these methodological, representational, and data-related limitations do not diminish the significance of the study's findings. Rather, they highlight the complexity of researching politically sensitive issues among marginalized communities and underscore the need for cautious interpretation of the results, particularly when generalizing beyond the study sample.

CONCLUSION

This study explores how minority and marginalized communities in Bangladesh experience elections and political participation by combining survey data, interviews, and regional discussions. Taken together, the evidence presents a clear and consistent picture of how participation is shaped by everyday realities rather than formal rights alone.

Across communities, voting and political engagement are often influenced by concerns about safety, social pressure, and trust in institutions. Many participants described elections not simply as an opportunity to express political choice, but as a period of uncertainty where participation can carry personal or collective risk. Fear of violence, harassment, or later reprisals discourages open political involvement and limits public expression of preferences, particularly during tense election periods.

The findings also show that marginalization works in different but connected ways. Religious and ethnic minorities frequently experience insecurity and a lack of confidence that state authorities will provide protection if problems arise. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, political participation is closely linked to long-standing issues of governance, land, and security, where communities feel that their voices are constrained by coercion and limited civic space. For socio-economically disadvantaged groups such as tea garden workers, poverty, isolation, and dependence on employers restrict political mobility and reduce opportunities to engage meaningfully in electoral processes. Gender-diverse communities face additional barriers related to documentation, recognition, and administrative practices, which can lead to exclusion even when legal rights formally exist.

One key finding is the gap between voting and influence. Most respondents have voted many times in both national and local elections, yet many are unsure about participating in the next election. Their decision to vote often depends on whether they feel safe and whether the process seems fair.

Many people also avoid talking about politics or reporting problems. This silence does not mean they do not care. It reflects fear of retaliation and a belief that complaints will not lead to justice.

The importance of this study lies in showing these realities clearly and in simple terms. By focusing on religious minorities, Indigenous communities from both the hills and the plains, and socio-economic minorities, the study shows that exclusion happens in different ways but leads to similar results. Across all groups, people feel underrepresented in politics, ignored by elected leaders, and unsafe during elections. At the same time, minority voters are not driven mainly by party loyalty. They care more about honesty, accessibility, and real plans to improve daily life.

The path toward inclusive democracy must focus on real change, not just promises. First, the safety of minority communities must be ensured before, during, and after elections. Without security, free participation is not possible. Second, people need clear and safe ways to report threats or irregularities without fear. Third, political parties must nominate more capable minority candidates and take minority concerns seriously in their policies. Election authorities and state institutions must also act fairly and neutrally so people can trust the system.

In the end, democracy cannot work if people participate out of fear or stay silent to protect themselves. This study shows that minority communities in Bangladesh understand their rights and want to take part in democratic life. If safety, fairness, and accountability are ensured, they are ready to engage. Building an inclusive democracy means turning equal rights from words on paper into real experiences for all citizens.

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Annex I: Survey Questionnaire

Survey Questionnaire

Research Name: The Barriers and Opportunities for Minority Political Participation in Bangladesh

The main objective of this study, conducted by the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS), is to review in detail the experiences of Bangladesh's minority populations in political and electoral processes, the existing barriers, and their expectations regarding this process.

- Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary, and it will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.
- During the survey, you may skip answering any question or have the full right to withdraw your participation at any time without providing a reason.
- All information provided by you and your personal identity will be kept strictly confidential.
- The collected data will be used solely for this research by CGS, which will play a significant role in increasing the political participation of minority populations and formulating effective policy recommendations.

Date: _____

Consent:

I certify that I have read and understood the information above with attention. I am participating in this survey voluntarily and can withdraw my participation at any time without citing any reason.

☐ I consent to participate in this survey

☐ I do not consent to participate in this survey

Personal Information

Name: _____

Age: _____

Gender:

□   Male

□   Female

□   Others

Division:

□   Barishal

□   Chattogram

□   Dhaka

□   Khulna

□   Mymensingh

□   Rajshahi

□   Rangpur

□   Sylhet

District: _____

Community/Ethnicity:

□   Hill Indigenous

□   Plains Indigenous

□   Tea-garden worker

□   Panjum worker

□   Dalit

□   Scheduled Caste

□   Others

Religion:

- ☐ Hindu

- ☐ Buddhist

- ☐ Christian

- ☐ Others

Educational Qualification:

- ☐ Primary

- ☐ Secondary

- ☐ Higher Secondary

- ☐ Graduate/Postgraduate

- ☐ Did not receive formal education

Did you drop out of the formal education system?

- ☐ I dropped out of formal education due to poverty

- ☐ I did not drop out at any stage of my formal education life

- ☐ I could not finish formal education due to family reasons

- ☐ I dropped out of the formal education system previously; later, I returned to formal education

Profession: (Select one)

- ☐ Sharecropper (Landless farmer)
- ☐ Farmer
- ☐ Laborer
- ☐ Health Worker/Nurse/Aya/Midwife
- ☐ Hawker
- ☐ Small Businessman/Entrepreneur
- ☐ Handicraft Worker
- ☐ House Help
- ☐ Cleaner
- ☐ Rickshaw Puller/Van Puller/Driver
- ☐ Government Employee
- ☐ Private Employee/NGO Worker
- ☐ Housewife
- ☐ Student
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Journalist
- ☐ Doctor
- ☐ Others

Election & Political Participation

Have you ever voted in a national or local election?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If you have voted, how many times have you voted in the National Parliament election?

- ☐ 1 time
- ☐ 2-3 times
- ☐ More than 3 times

If you have voted, how many times have you voted in the Local Government election?

- ☐ 1 time
- ☐ 2-3 times
- ☐ More than 3 times

Did you face any problems while becoming a voter?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, what kind of problems occurred? (You can select one or more)

- ☐ Administrative complexity
- ☐ Due to long distance and transportation inconvenience
- ☐ Language problems
- ☐ Facing demands for bribes or other unethical claims
- ☐ Fear or apprehension regarding security
- ☐ Political pressure
- ☐ Family or social pressure

How much do you participate in political discussions or gatherings in your area?

- ☐ Active Speaker: I initiate political discussions myself and argue/debate with others
- ☐ Active Listener: I like to listen to discussions and give my opinion if necessary
- ☐ Cautious Participant: I only talk about politics with trusted or close people
- ☐ Passive: I listen to discussions but refrain from expressing my own opinion
- ☐ Isolated: I avoid these discussions

How interested are you in participating or voting in the upcoming national election?

☐ Extremely Interested: (I will definitely vote)

☐ Somewhat Interested: (I will vote if the situation is favorable)

☐ Have not decided yet: (I will decide observing the situation)

☐ Unwilling: (I do not feel the need to vote)

☐ Suffering from insecurity: (I do not want to vote due to fear or apprehension)

If the answer is negative, what are the probable reasons? (You can select one or more)

☐ I apprehend fighting or attacks on election day or afterward

☐ My supported or favorite political party is not participating in the election

☐ I feel that voting will not impact the result (The result is predetermined)

☐ I do not like any of the contesting candidates or do not consider them qualified for the area

☐ Despair due to vote-buying or unethical activities

☐ Past representatives did not keep their words, so I have no interest in voting anew

Political Awareness

How is your awareness regarding Bangladesh's politics and political parties?

☐ Very Aware: I keep regular track of political news and know in detail about the parties' activities

☐ Moderately Aware: I know about important political events, but do not analyze deeply

☐ Slightly Aware: Occasionally get news or know what I see on social media

☐ Not Aware: I do not keep track of politics or have no interest in this subject

From which medium do you collect political news? (You can select one or more)

☐ From social media (Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, etc.)

☐ From daily newspapers

☐ From television or radio news

☐ Social gatherings (Tea stalls, neighborhood, clubs, etc.)

☐ Others

Are you aware of the names of all candidates in your area and about them for the upcoming national election?

☐ Yes, I know all candidates, and I have an idea about all political ideologies

☐ I do not know all candidates, but I have an idea about all political ideologies

☐ No, I do not have an idea about all candidates and the ideologies of political parties

Which factors regarding the candidate do you consider while voting? (You can select one or more)

☐ How realistic the candidate's election manifesto or promises are

☐ The candidate's financial influence or donations

☐ The candidate's familiarity (Relative or known in society)

☐ The candidate's political party and ideology

☐ The candidate's formal education and knowledge

☐ Support from local leaders or influential people

☐ The candidate's role or plans in developing roads, schools, hospitals, etc.

☐ The candidate's ethics and honesty

☐ Their past experience in politics or public service

☐ Prioritizing party ideology and symbol over the individual candidate

☐ Prioritizing the candidate's personal qualification, honesty, and personality instead of the party's ideology or symbol

☐ How accessible and sincere he/she is to the common people

☐ Accused of corruption or criminal activities

☐ Which political party the candidate belongs to and if that party's policy matches your beliefs

☐ Whether he/she has any specific plan for eliminating unemployment in the area

Are you aware of your rights (in voting) as a voter?

    ☐   Yes, I am aware

    ☐   No, I am not aware

Are you aware of election irregularities (unethical money transactions, forcibly stopping from voting, capturing polling centers, etc.)?

    ☐   Yes, I am aware

    ☐   No, I am not aware

Are you aware of where/to whom to complain if any irregularity or violence occurs during the election?

    ☐   Yes, I am aware

    ☐   No, I am not aware

If any irregularity occurs during the election, what will be your immediate reaction? (You can select one or more)

    ☐   Will inform the local administration

    ☐   Will inform the relevant officer of the polling center

    ☐   Will inform the security forces

    ☐   Will inform local leaders

    ☐   Will publish on social media (Facebook, TikTok, YouTube)

    ☐   Will inform media workers

    ☐   Will protest

    ☐   Will observe silence

If you observe silence, what are the main reasons behind it? (You can select one or more)

☐   Fear of physical or mental attacks on self or family if protested

☐   Fear of falling under the wrath of the ruling or influential quarters

☐   Fear of legal complications or police harassment if involved in any trouble

☐   The idea that no remedy or justice will be received even if a complaint is made

☐   Lack of trust in the neutrality of the Election Commission or administration

☐   Maintaining personal peace and not wanting to get involved in any kind of dispute or argument

☐   Fear of ruining relationships with neighbors or influential groups while living in the area

☐   Keeping oneself away from any political matter considering politics a 'dirty place'

☐   Not having a correct idea about where or to whom to complain if irregularities are seen

Political Representation

Were the previously elected public representatives aware of and sincere about your community's problems?

☐   Fully aware and extremely sincere: He knew our problems and regularly came to the area to try to solve them

☐   Were aware but lacked sincerity: He knew the problems but did not take much initiative to solve them

☐   Partially aware: He only knew about some general problems but did not work in depth

☐   Were not aware at all: He did not have much of an idea about the problems of our area or community

☐   Were disconnected: We had no communication with him after being elected

Did the public representatives of your area give importance to the main problems of your area in their election campaigns?

☐ Fully gave importance: The main problems of our area were the main subject of their campaign

☐ Partially gave importance: Even if they talked about some big problems, they avoided many important small problems

☐ Nominally gave importance: Discussed main problems only superficially, showed no specific plan

☐ Did not give importance at all: They spoke more about political animosity or personal achievements than public importance issues

Do you think there are an adequate number of candidates from minority communities in this national election?

☐ Yes, adequate: The number of candidates is sufficient in proportion to the population of the minority community

☐ No, inadequate: Despite having qualified candidates, adequate nominations were not given by the main parties

☐ Very negligible: The number of candidates is so low that it does not ensure true representation

☐ Less than previous times: Compared to previous elections, the number of minority candidates has decreased this time

Discrimination & Justice

Have you or your family ever faced any kind of discrimination while participating in political or electoral processes? (You can select one or more)

☐ No, excellent harmony and equal rights exist in our area

☐ No, we feel safe in the neutrality of the administration

☐ Yes, faced obstacles in exercising voting rights or going to the polling center

☐ Yes, felt discrimination in getting nominations as a candidate

☐ Yes, our demands are always politically ignored

☐ No comments

In your experience, what was the nature of that discrimination? (You can select one or more)

- ☐ Insult/Abuse
- ☐ Threats or intimidation
- ☐ Physical attack
- ☐ Police harassment/False cases
- ☐ Had to leave the area
- ☐ House was attacked
- ☐ Social deprivation (Community, Gender, Age, etc.)
- ☐ Attacks on movable/immovable property

How safe do you feel participating in the election?

- ☐ Completely Safe: I can go to the polling center without any fear
- ☐ Somewhat Apprehensive: I feel safe if the environment is good, but I remain apprehensive
- ☐ Unsafe: I feel risk due to past experiences or surrounding circumstances
- ☐ Absolutely Unsafe: I refrain from participating in the election due to a lack of security

Have you ever complained about political harassment or threats?

- ☐ Yes, informed relevant authorities: I made a written or verbal complaint to the Election Commission or local administration
- ☐ Yes, informed law enforcement agencies: I tried to file a GD/Case with the police or police station
- ☐ Yes, informed socially or globally: I informed local dignitaries or Panchayat/Councilor about the matter
- ☐ Yes, published in media or online: I highlighted the matter in news media or social media
- ☐ No, avoided the incident by observing silence
- ☐ No, I have never fallen victim to such a situation

If you did not complain after being a victim of or witnessing political violence in the past, what are the probable reasons? (You can select one or more)

☐ Lack of security: There was a fear of greater physical or mental harm later if a complaint was made

☐ Lack of trust in the legal system: Thought no effective measure would be taken even if a complaint was made

☐ Social and political influence: Complaining seemed futile as the opponent was politically very influential

☐ Fear of maintaining privacy: Did not complain for fear of identity being revealed or social loss of honor

☐ Avoiding procrastination or hassle: Avoided the matter to avoid the hassle or harassment of the legal process

☐ Lack of cooperation: There was no guarantee of receiving necessary support from family, society, or law enforcement agencies

Have you been a victim of harassment again after complaining about political violence/harassment/threats? (You can select one or more)

☐ Yes, harassment increased further after complaining

☐ Yes, pressure was put on me to withdraw the complaint

☐ Yes, physical or mental molestation: I was physically attacked or socially humiliated

☐ Yes, legal harassment: False counter-cases or police harassment were done against me

☐ Yes, economic or professional damage: Attempts were made to harm my business, job, or workplace

☐ No, authorities gave protection: Administration or law enforcement agencies gave me security after complaining

☐ No, there was no adverse reaction: The situation improved after complaining, and no new problems occurred

☐ The complaint was not even accepted: Authorities refused to accept the complaint due to fear or pressure

☐ I am still in apprehension: Even if nothing happened directly, I always remain terrified of re-harassment

Do you think you have any impediments or barriers in exercising political rights or participation?

☐   Yes, we directly face insecurity and threats

☐   Yes, we face unwritten barriers in coming to political leadership

☐   No, there are no barriers to our participation, and we receive equal rights

☐   No direct barriers, but the social environment is not conducive to political practice

☐   I do not want to make any comment on this subject

If there are any impediments or barriers, what are the main barriers to your community's political participation? (You can select one or more)

☐   Lack of personal security or fear of violence

☐   Lack of neutrality of administration or law enforcement agencies

☐   Excess of election expenses or economic crisis

☐   Pressure from local influential quarters or use of muscle power

☐   Discrimination due to social or communal outlook

☐   Shortage of correct information about political rights or electoral processes

☐   Being stopped from going to polling centers or not being able to vote for the candidate of one's choice

Expectations

What are the main demands or expectations from your community to ensure an inclusive election?

Instruction: Write 1 in the box next to the demand which is most important to you among the 5 demands below. Write 2 where it is the second most important—thus determine Priority by giving numbers from 1 to 5 according to your preference.

Demands / Expectations	1	2	3	4	5
Ensuring full security of life and property of our community before, during, and after the election	○	○	○	○	○
Playing a completely impartial role by the Election Commission, Police, and local administration	○	○	○	○	○
Giving adequate party nominations to qualified candidates and opportunities to participate at the policy-making level	○	○	○	○	○
Written promises to solve the fundamental problems of our community in the election manifestos of political parties	○	○	○	○	○
Strictly stopping speeches or propaganda that spread religious or ethnic hatred	○	○	○	○	○

Annex II: List of Key Informant Interviews

Key Informant Interview (KII) Questions

Overview of the KII Process

As part of the research and advocacy framework for the 2026 National Election, a series of Key Informant Interviews (KII) were conducted to gather expert insights on the structural and systemic challenges facing minority and indigenous communities in Bangladesh. These interviews targeted subject matter experts, community leaders, and policy analysts to supplement the findings from the roundtable series.

Methodology & Participants

The KIIs were designed to capture nuanced perspectives on whether current parliamentary representation serves the interests of the political parties or the specific needs of the minority and indigenous communities they represent.

The participants included:

- Policy Analysts and Researchers
- Minority Community Leaders
- Human Rights Advocates and Legal Experts

Key Discussion Themes

The interviews were structured around five core thematic areas to assess the current political landscape and the efficacy of democratic reforms:

No.	Questions
1	Post-July Reform Commissions: To what extent have the issues of minority and indigenous communities been evaluated and addressed in the reports of the post-July reform commissions?

2	Rights Protection and Demographics: Given that the minority population has decreased from 21% to 9% since independence, what specific initiatives are necessary to protect their rights within a democratic system?
3	Political Climate: What is the impact of the rise of right-wing forces in Bangladesh on the security and social fabric of minority communities?
4	Electoral Violence: Why do the electoral experiences of minorities and indigenous communities remain consistently negative, and why does violence repeatedly emerge during election cycles?
5	Political Representation: How can the criticism be addressed that minority representation in Parliament is limited to party loyalty, preventing representatives from effectively advocating for their communities' rights?

Annex III: Dialogue Agenda

Roundtable Discussion Series on Minority Rights and the 2026 National Election

Overview of the Roundtable Series

As part of a comprehensive assessment of the 2026 National Election, a series of regional and national roundtables were conducted to explore the theme of "Democracy for All" with a specific focus on minority rights, representation, and democratic accountability. These events brought together a diverse range of stakeholders, including representatives from civil society, lawyers, teachers, journalists, minority communities, and other marginalized groups.

Schedule of Events

Date	Location	Discussion Theme
Sunday, 18 January 2026	Dhaka, Bangladesh	Democracy for All: Minority Rights, Representation, and the 2026 National Election
Wednesday, 21 January 2026	Rangpur, Bangladesh	Margins to Mainstream: Minority Participation and Democratic Accountability
Thursday, 22 January 2026	Dhaka, Bangladesh	An Inclusive Election: Minority Rights, Representation, and Democratic Credibility
Monday, 26 January 2026	Sylhet, Bangladesh	Counting Every Voice: Minority Participation and the Future of Bangladesh's Democracy

Participant Demographics

The insights captured in this report are based on the collective contributions of:

- Civil Society Representatives
- Legal Professionals (Lawyers)
- Academicians
- Media Professionals (Journalists)
- Representatives from Religious Minority Communities
- Representatives from Indigenous (CHT & Plain) Minority Communities
- Representatives from Religious Minorities
- Representatives from Socio-economic Minorities
- Political Representatives

Key Discussion Questions

The roundtable series aimed to address several critical inquiries regarding the inclusion of minority and indigenous populations in the electoral process:

- **Overcoming Challenges:** How can the specific challenges faced by minority and indigenous communities during the election process be overcome, and what specific policy support is required for their effective participation?
- **Constitutional and Land Issues:** What initiatives should be undertaken to address the constitutional recognition of indigenous peoples and resolve ongoing land and property disputes?
- **Political Accountability:** To what extent can the commitments made by political parties in their electoral manifestos be effective in safeguarding minority rights?
- **Security and Non-Discrimination:** What measures are necessary to ensure electoral security and prevent violence, intimidation, or discrimination against minority groups during the election period?

Annex IV: Additional Tables and Figures

SURVEY RESULTS BY QUESTION

2.   Age

Age Range (Years)	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
18–30	216	42.9%	42.9%
31–45	146	29.0%	71.9%
46–60	100	19.8%	91.7%
61 and above	42	8.3%	100.0%
			504 out of 505 respondents answered this question

3.   Gender

Gender	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Female	227	45.0%	45.0%
Male	277	55.0%	100.0%
			504 out of 505 respondents answered this question.

4. **Division**

Division	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Barishal	26	5.2%	5.2%
Chattogram	141	28.0%	33.1%
Dhaka	46	9.1%	42.3%
Khulna	75	14.9%	57.1%
Mymensingh	40	7.9%	65.1%
Rajshahi	55	10.9%	76.0%
Rangpur	31	6.2%	82.1%
Sylhet	90	17.9%	100.0%
			504 out of 505 respondents answered this question.

5. **District**

District	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Bandarban	44	8.7%	8.7%
Barguna	4	0.8%	9.5%
Barishal	10	2.0%	11.5%
Bhola	2	0.4%	11.9%
Brahmanbaria	1	0.2%	12.1%
Chapainawabganj	13	2.6%	14.7%
Chattogram	9	1.8%	16.5%

Cox's Bazar	1	0.2%	16.7%
Dhaka	45	8.9%	25.6%
Dinajpur	28	5.6%	31.2%
Gazipur	1	0.2%	31.3%
Jashore	16	3.2%	34.5%
Jhalokati	5	1.0%	35.5%
Khagrachhari	32	6.3%	41.9%
Khulna	32	6.3%	48.2%
Moulvibazar	35	6.9%	55.2%
Mymensingh	33	6.5%	61.7%
Naogaon	21	4.2%	65.9%
Netrokona	7	1.4%	67.3%
Patuakhali	1	0.2%	67.5%
Pirojpur	4	0.8%	68.3%
Rajshahi	21	4.2%	72.4%
Rangamati	54	10.7%	83.1%
Rangpur	3	0.6%	83.7%
Satkhira	27	5.4%	89.1%
Sunamganj	15	3.0%	92.1%
Sylhet	40	7.9%	100.0%
			504 out of 505 respondents answered this question.

6.   **Community / Ethnicity**

Community / Ethnicity	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Other	143	28.4%	28.4%
Tea Garden Workers	32	6.3%	34.7%
Scheduled Communities	11	2.2%	36.9%
Dalit	24	4.8%	41.7%
Panjum Workers	18	3.6%	45.2%
Hill Indigenous Peoples	130	25.8%	71.0%
Plains Indigenous Peoples	146	29.0%	100.0%
			504 out of 505 respondents answered this question.

7.   **Religion**

Religion	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Hindu	246	48.8%	48.8%
Other	18	3.6%	52.4%
Christian	156	31.0%	83.3%
Buddhist	84	16.7%	100.0%
			504 out of 505 respondents answered this question.

8. **Educational Qualification**

Educational Qualification	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Bachelor's / Master's Degree	189	37.5%	37.5%
Higher Secondary	123	24.4%	62.0%
Secondary	89	17.7%	79.7%
Primary	64	12.7%	92.4%
No Formal Education	39	7.7%	100.0%
Educational Qualification	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
504 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (1 were without data.)			

9. **Have You Dropped Out of the Formal Education System?**

Have You Dropped Out of the Formal Education System?	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Dropped out due to poverty	135	27.7%	27.7%
Never dropped out at any stage of formal education	222	45.5%	73.2%
Dropped out previously but later returned to formal education	20	4.1%	77.3%
Could not complete formal education due to family reasons	111	22.7%	100.0%
488 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (17 were without data.)			

10. **Profession**

Profession	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Student	89	17.7%	17.7%
Housewife	78	15.5%	33.1%
Private Sector Employee / NGO Worker	59	11.7%	44.8%
Other	55	10.9%	55.8%
Farmer	50	9.9%	65.7%
Small Business Owner / Entrepreneur	33	6.5%	72.2%
Laborer	29	5.8%	78.0%
Teacher	25	5.0%	82.9%
Government Employee	22	4.4%	87.3%
Sharecropper (Landless Farmer)	15	3.0%	90.3%
Domestic Worker	13	2.6%	92.9%
Retired	7	1.4%	94.2%
Sanitation Worker	6	1.2%	95.4%
Journalist	6	1.2%	96.6%
Health Worker / Nurse / Aya / Midwife	6	1.2%	97.8%
Rickshaw Puller / Van Puller / Driver	5	1.0%	98.8%
Handicraft Worker	4	0.8%	99.6%
Hawker	1	0.2%	99.8%
Doctor	1	0.2%	100.0%
504 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (1 were without data.)			

11.   **Have You Ever Voted in a National or Local Election?**

Have You Ever Voted in a National or Local Election?	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
No	67	13.3%	13.3%
Yes	437	86.7%	100.0%
504 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (1 were without data.)			

12.   **If You Have Voted, How Many Times Have You Voted in National Parliamentary Elections?**

If You Have Voted, How Many Times Have You Voted in National Parliamentary Elections?	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
More than 3 times	158	36.7%	36.7%
2–3 times	151	35.0%	71.7%
Once	122	28.3%	100.0%
431 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (74 were without data.)			

13.   **If You Have Voted, How Many Times Have You Voted in Local Government Elections?**

If You Have Voted, How Many Times Have You Voted in Local Government Elections?	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
2–3 times	171	39.8%	39.8%
More than 3 times	164	38.1%	77.9%
Once	95	22.1%	100.0%
430 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (75 were without data.)			

14.   **Have You Faced Any Problems While Becoming a Voter?**

Have You Faced Any Problems While Becoming a Voter?	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
No	421	84.7%	84.7%
Yes	76	15.3%	100.0%
497 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (8 were without data.)			

15.   **If yes, what kind of problems occurred? (You can select one or more)**

If yes, what kind of problems occurred? (You can select one or more)	Total Appearances in Responses
Long distance and transportation difficulties	32
Administrative complexity	29
Security-related fear or threat	16
Political pressure	12
Bribery or other unethical demands	10
Language barriers	9
Family or social pressure	8
74 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (431 were without data.)	

16. **How Actively Do You Participate in Political Discussions or Informal Gatherings in Your Area?**

How Actively Do You Participate in Political Discussions or Informal Gatherings in Your Area?	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Detached: I avoid political discussions altogether	176	35.1%	35.1%
Passive: I listen to discussions but avoid expressing my own views	141	28.1%	63.3%
Cautious participant: I discuss politics only with trusted or close individuals	84	16.8%	80.1%
Active listener: I like to listen and occasionally share my opinion	83	16.6%	96.7%
Active speaker: I initiate political discussions and actively debate with others	17	3.4%	100.0%
501 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (4 were without data.)			

17. **How Interested Are You in Participating or Voting in the Upcoming National Election?**

How Interested Are You in Participating or Voting in the Upcoming National Election?	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Somewhat interested (will vote if conditions are favorable)	155	30.8%	30.8%
Undecided (will decide after observing the situation)	153	30.4%	61.2%
Very interested (will definitely vote)	93	18.5%	79.7%
Unwilling (do not feel the need to vote)	54	10.7%	90.4%
Feeling insecure (do not want to vote due to fear or threat)	48	9.5%	100.0%
503 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (2 were without data.)			

18.   If the answer is Unwilling or Feeling insecure, what are the probable reasons? (You can select one or more)

If the answer is negative, what are the probable reasons? (You can select one or more)	
Reason	**Total Appearances in Responses**
Fear of violence or attacks on election day or after	38
I feel that voting will not impact the result (The result is predetermined)	21
Past representatives did not keep promises	18
Preferred political party is not participating in the election	15
Dislike or lack of confidence in any competing candidate	10
Disappointment due to vote-buying or unethical practices	7
78 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (427 were without data.)	

19.   **How Aware Are You regarding Bangladesh's politics and political parties?**

How Aware Are You regarding Bangladesh's politics and political parties?	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Moderately aware: I know about major political events but do not engage in deep analysis	170	33.9%	33.9%
Slightly aware: I occasionally get information or know what I see on social media	142	28.3%	62.2%
Not aware: I do not follow political news or have no interest in politics	121	24.1%	86.3%
Very aware: I regularly follow political news and know party activities in detail	69	13.7%	100.0%
502 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (3 were without data.)			

20. **From which medium do you collect political news? (You can select one or more)**

From which medium do you collect political news? (You can select one or more)	Total Appearances in Responses
Social media (Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, etc.)	314
Television or radio news	221
Social gatherings (tea stalls, neighborhoods, clubs, etc.)	159
Daily newspapers	109
Other sources	71
496 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (9 were without data.)	

21. **Are You Aware of the Names of All Candidates in Your Area and Their Political Backgrounds for the Upcoming National Election?**

Are You Aware of the Names of All Candidates in Your Area and Their Political Backgrounds for the Upcoming National Election?	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
No, I am not familiar with all candidates or the ideologies of political parties	235	46.9%	46.9%
I do not know all candidates, but I am aware of the political ideologies	155	30.9%	77.8%
Yes, I know all candidates and am aware of all political ideologies	111	22.2%	100.0%
501 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (4 were without data.)			

22. **Which factors regarding the candidate do you consider while voting? (You can select one or more)**

Rank	Factor	Count	Percentage (%)
1	Candidate's role or plans in developing roads, schools, hospitals, etc.	307	**61.2%**
2	Candidate's accessibility and sincerity toward ordinary people	280	**55.8%**
3	Candidate's ethics and honesty	257	**51.2%**
4	Existence of a clear plan to reduce unemployment in the area	215	**42.8%**
5	How realistic the candidate's election manifesto or promises are	205	**40.8%**
6	Candidate's formal education and knowledge	193	**38.4%**
7	Candidate's political party and ideology	148	**29.5%**
8	Previous experience in politics or public service	121	**24.1%**
9	Prioritizing personal qualifications, honesty, and personality over party ideology	90	**17.9%**
10	Whether the candidate's party ideology aligns with the respondent's beliefs	79	**15.7%**
11	Candidate's familiarity (relative or known in society)	77	**15.3%**
12	Whether the candidate is accused of corruption or criminal activities	61	**12.2%**
13	Prioritizing party ideology and symbol over the individual candidate	36	**7.2%**
14	Candidate's financial influence or donations	31	**6.2%**
15	Support from local leaders or influential people	30	**6.0%**
	502 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (3 were without data.)		

23.   **Are You Aware of Your Rights as a Voter (Regarding Casting Your Vote)?**

Are You Aware of Your Rights as a Voter (Regarding Casting Your Vote)?	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Yes, I am aware	439	88.7%	88.7%
No, I am not aware	56	11.3%	100.0%
495 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (10 were without data.)			

24.   **Are you aware of election irregularities (unethical money transactions, forcibly stopping from voting, capturing polling centers, etc.)?**

Are you aware of election irregularities (unethical money transactions, forcibly stopping from voting, capturing polling centers, etc.)?	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Yes, I am aware	328	66.1%	66.1%
No, I am not aware	168	33.9%	100.0%
496 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (9 were without data.)			

25.   **Are you aware of where/to whom to complain if any irregularity or violence occurs during the election?**

Are you aware of where/to whom to complain if any irregularity or violence occurs during the election?	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Yes, I am aware	301	60.6%	60.6%
No, I am not aware	196	39.4%	100.0%
497 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (8 were without data.)			

26. **If any irregularity occurs during the election, what will be your immediate reaction? (You can select one or more)**

	If any irregularity occurs during the election, what will be your immediate reaction? (You can select one or more)		
Rank	**Immediate Reaction**	**Count**	**Percentage (%)**
1	Inform the polling station officials	287	**57.2%**
2	Inform local administration	238	**47.4%**
3	Inform security forces	214	**42.6%**
4	Remain silent	102	**20.3%**
5	Inform local political leaders	97	**19.3%**
6	Protest	69	**13.7%**
7	Inform media personnel	63	**12.5%**
8	Share on social media (Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, etc.)	56	**11.2%**
	480 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (25 were without data.)		

27. **If you observe silence, what are the main reasons behind it? (You can select one or more)**

Reasons	**Count**	**Percentage (%)**
Fear of physical or psychological harm to oneself or family if protesting	58	55.8
Fear of legal complications or police harassment if involved in disputes	45	43.3
Preference to maintain personal peace and avoid conflict or confrontation	45	43.3
Fear of damaging relationships with neighbors or influential groups in the area	33	31.7
Fear of retaliation from ruling or influential groups	31	29.8
Lack of clear knowledge about where or to whom complaints should be reported	25	24.0

Perception that filing complaints would not lead to justice or remedies	16	15.4
Perceiving politics as a "dirty arena" and choosing to stay away from it	16	15.4
Lack of trust in the neutrality of the Election Commission or administration	10	9.6
103 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (402 were without data.)		

28.   Were the previously elected public representatives aware of and sincere about your community's problems?

Were the previously elected public representatives aware of and sincere about your community's problems?	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Aware but lacked sincerity: They knew the issues but took little initiative to resolve them	162	32.5%	32.5%
Partially aware: They knew some general issues but did not engage deeply	137	27.5%	60.0%
Disconnected: There was no communication after they were elected	73	14.6%	74.6%
Fully aware and highly sincere: They knew our problems and regularly tried to address them	71	14.2%	88.8%
Not aware at all: They had little understanding of our area's or community's problems	56	11.2%	100.0%
499 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (6 were without data.)			

29. **Did the public representatives of your area give importance to the main problems of your area in their election campaigns?**

Did the public representatives of your area give importance to the main problems of your area in their election campaigns?	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Gave nominal importance: Discussed core issues superficially without presenting concrete plans	179	35.9%	35.9%
Gave partial importance: Addressed some major issues but ignored many important local problems	168	33.7%	69.6%
Fully prioritized: The main problems of our area were central to their campaign	77	15.4%	85.0%
Did not prioritize at all: Focused more on political rivalry or personal achievements than public issues	75	15.0%	100.0%
499 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (6 were without data.)			

30. **Do You Think There Are Sufficient Numbers of Candidates from Minority Communities in the Upcoming National Election?**

Do You Think There Are Sufficient Numbers of Candidates from Minority Communities in the Upcoming National Election?	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
No, insufficient: Despite having qualified candidates, major parties did not nominate enough minority candidates	172	35.0%	35.0%
Very few: The number of candidates is so low that it does not ensure real representation	161	32.7%	67.7%
Fewer than last time: Compared to previous elections, the number of minority candidates has decreased	109	22.2%	89.9%
Yes, sufficient: The number of candidates is adequate relative to the minority population	50	10.2%	100.0%
492 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (13 were without data.)			

31.   **Have You or Your Family Ever Faced Any Form of Discrimination While Participating in the Political or Electoral Process?**

Have You or Your Family Ever Faced Any Form of Discrimination While Participating in the Political or Electoral Process?	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
No comments	203	40.6%	40.6%
No, our area has strong social harmony and equal rights	129	25.8%	66.4%
Yes, our demands are consistently ignored politically	71	14.2%	80.6%
No, we feel safe due to administrative neutrality	64	12.8%	93.4%
Yes, we faced obstacles in exercising voting rights or reaching polling centers	21	4.2%	97.6%
Yes, we experienced discrimination in obtaining party nominations as candidates	12	2.4%	100.0%
500 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (5 were without data.)			

32.   **How Safe Do You Feel When Participating in Elections?**

How Safe Do You Feel When Participating in Elections?	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Somewhat anxious: I feel safe if the environment is favorable, but remain worried	251	50.7%	50.7%
Completely safe: I can go to the polling center without fear	116	23.4%	74.1%
Unsafe: Due to past experiences or the surrounding situation, I feel at risk	64	12.9%	87.0%
Extremely unsafe: Due to lack of security, I refrain from participating in elections	64	12.9%	100.0%
495 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (10 were without data.)			

33.   **Have You Ever Filed a Complaint Regarding Political Harassment or Threats?**

Have You Ever Filed a Complaint Regarding Political Harassment or Threats?	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
No, I have never faced such a situation	341	70.7%	70.7%
No, I remained silent and avoided the incident	106	22.0%	92.7%
Yes, I informed socially or within the family (local elders, councilors, community leaders)	14	2.9%	95.6%
Yes, I reported to the relevant authorities (Election Commission or local administration)	9	1.9%	97.5%
Yes, I informed law-enforcement agencies (police or filed a GD/case)	7	1.5%	99.0%
Yes, I disclosed it through media or online platforms	5	1.0%	100.0%
482 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (23 were without data.)			

34.   **If you did not complain after being a victim of or witnessing political violence in the past, what are the probable reasons? (You can select one or more)**

Reason	Count	Percentage (%)
Lack of security: fear of further physical or psychological harm after filing a complaint	174	48.7
Fear of loss of confidentiality or social stigma if identity was disclosed	117	32.8
Lack of support from family, community, or law enforcement agencies	106	29.7
Lack of trust in the legal system and belief that complaints would not lead to effective action	102	28.6
Avoidance of lengthy procedures and legal harassment	97	27.2
Political and social influence: belief that the opposing group was too powerful for complaints to be effective	72	20.2
357 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (148 were without data.)		

35. **Do You Think There Are Any Barriers or Obstacles in Your Political Participation or Practice of Political Rights?**

Do You Think There Are Any Barriers or Obstacles in Your Political Participation or Practice of Political Rights?	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
I do not wish to comment on this matter	182	36.5%	36.5%
No, there are no barriers to our participation, and we receive equal rights	84	16.8%	53.3%
There are no direct barriers, but the social environment is not conducive to political engagement	152	30.5%	83.8%
Yes, we face unwritten barriers to entering political leadership	47	9.4%	93.2%
Yes, we face direct insecurity and threats	34	6.8%	100.0%
499 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (6 were without data.)			

36. **What are the main demands or expectations from your community to ensure an inclusive election?**

Ensuring Full Safety of Our Community's Life and Property Before, During, and After the Election	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Highest Priority	295	60.3%	60.3%
High Priority	55	11.2%	71.6%
Medium Priority	29	5.9%	77.5%
Low-Medium Priority	45	9.2%	86.7%
Mild Priority	65	13.3%	100.0%
489 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (16 were without data.)			

Ensuring a Fully Neutral Role by the Election Commission, Police, and Local Administration	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Medium Priority	113	23.5%	23.5%
Highest Priority	104	21.7%	45.2%
High Priority	99	20.6%	65.8%
Low-Medium Priority	92	19.2%	85.0%
Mild Priority	72	15.0%	100.0%
480 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (25 were without data.)			

Providing Sufficient Party Nominations for Qualified Candidates and Ensuring Participation at the Policy-Making Level	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Mild Priority	103	21.8%	21.8%
Medium Priority	101	21.4%	43.2%
Highest Priority	95	20.1%	63.3%
High Priority	90	19.0%	82.3%
Low-Medium Priority	84	17.8%	100.0%
473 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (32 were without data.)			

Written Commitments in Political Parties' Election Manifestos to Address the Fundamental Issues of Our Community	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Mild Priority	104	21.8%	21.8%
Low-Medium Priority	108	22.6%	44.4%
Medium Priority	86	18.0%	62.4%
High Priority	88	18.4%	80.8%
Highest Priority	91	19.1%	100.0%
477 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (28 were without data.)			

Strict Ban on Statements or Campaigns That Spread Religious or Ethnic Hatred	Count	% of Total	Cumulative %
Mild Priority	102	21.2%	21.2%
Low-Medium Priority	64	13.3%	34.5%
Medium Priority	64	13.3%	47.8%
High Priority	73	15.1%	62.9%
Highest Priority	179	37.1%	100.0%
482 out of 505 respondents answered this question. (23 were without data.)			