

Evaluating the Impact of Political Factors on Higher Education: A Study at the University of Rajshahi

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Abstract: *This research explores the influence of political interference on higher education at the University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh. Using a mixed-method design, data were gathered from 200 students to examine the impacts of political relations on academic practices, governance and institutional quality. The results suggest that most students regard political factors as important influences on the academic and administrative systems. Political volatility and student politics were noted to undermine class learning, academic time table and general quality of education. Thereby, political interference in administrative matters, appointments and promotion or allocation of resources has become suspect with implications for merit-based governance and autonomy of institutions. Although a limited number of students recognized some positive influences of political leadership, they mentioned the necessity for clear and consistent policies with a focus on education. On the basis of the findings, the study argues that minimizing excessive political intervention, enhancing organizational autonomy, and fostering meritocracy are crucial to promoting academic quality and governance in higher education institutions in Bangladesh.*

Keywords: Higher Education, Student Politics, Academic Environment, Institutional Governance, Student Satisfaction

Introduction

Institutions of higher learning have a pivotal role to play in national development and democratic consolidation, as well as being the sources from which knowledge emanates. Universities claim to be based on academic freedom, meritocratic principles of governance, and institutional autonomy, but are also the product of wider political and policy dynamics. As Murray (1992) observes, it is an exception to the rule of governmental/socio-political decision-making in universities. Such is the case with policy statements from such organizations as the American Association of University Professors (2024) and the Council of Europe (2025), which additionally warn that political intervention in leadership appointments, funding priorities, and academic matters can ultimately compromise institutional integrity and academic freedom. These are particularly pertinent issues in the developing world where state intervention is often significant in higher education systems.

Public universities in Bangladesh have traditionally close ties with national politics. Words to this effect have been voiced,

in other languages, on many occasions throughout history (Kabir, 2011), and the claims may still be valid that structural reform has more often entailed changes in policy serving to further consolidate central control than constituting truly an alternative path of autonomy. Kabir and Greenwood (2016) also raise political contestation and campus dynamics with broader ideological and economic shifts. The student politics, which used to be part of the nationalist and democratic struggles, is gradually coming under the sway of different political parties. Nasrin and Rahman (2019) report this eclipse of the past; student politics at present still has implication to political culture, but often at the expense of academic stability (Mukherjee, 2024). Available evidence from various studies, such as Shahjamal (2007), Shiddike and Bockarie (2020), indicates that the involvement of partisan politics in universities may interfere with academic work leading to questioning people's perception of educational quality.

Comparative studies have shown that these are not Bangladesh specific phenomena, reports show negative

effects of political interference in university performance in Uganda, whereas Mohammad et al. (2025) observe the same phenomenon for Pakistan. Indeed, Naz et al. (2023) illustrate that national political instability could have an immediate impact on students' learning experience as well. On a domestic level, governance and quality is still perceived as problematic within Bangladesh. Ferdous and Foyjul-Islam (2019), as well as Hossain (2025), highlight weaknesses in quality assurance and policy coherence. Student outcome is also influenced by social, economic and political factors as indicated by Rahman et al. (2023), Afroz and Tirno (2022), as well as in Alam et al. (2025).

However, the level of both attention and personal relevance for most students leads to a demand for institutional empirical studies that capture students' perceptions of political influence in specific universities. The University of Rajshahi is a significant public university in Bangladesh and serves as an important context through which to assess political influences on academic work, administrative decision-making and access to institutional resources. Accordingly, this research attempts to assess the influence of political considerations upon higher education at the University of Rajshahi in Bangladesh, providing evidence-based knowledge for current discourses around governance reform, institutional autonomy and academic standard.

Methodology:

Research is a systematic investigation, discovery and study of applicable materials, facts and feelings of transformational facts with attendant innovation (Arafat, 2024). This research has been conducted with the help of a mixed-data collection strategy, convenience sampling, over three weeks covering 200 students at the University of Rajshahi. The data-collection tool was a research instrument with close-ended questions rated on 5-point Likert scales and open-ended items designed to collect both quantifiable patterns as well as opinions about political influences in higher education. Descriptive statistics, percentages and graphs were used to capture the quantitative data from the structured items, reflecting patterns, trends, and overall significance of political factors on academic performance and governance of the campus. Thematic analysis and coding were applied to qualitative data from open-ended questions. This interpretation allowed further insights into students' lived politics, administrative actions and the effects of government policies on higher education. Ethical considerations were closely monitored throughout the study. The identity of the respondents was anonymous and participation was voluntary. There was no compulsion to generate the data, and respondents were free in expressing their experiences as well as perceptions. On the whole, the approach yielded comprehensive knowledge of how political factors affected government. It evaluated how student politics, administrative pressures and policy interventions shape the academic climate. This method aggregated numerical opinions to form a complete insight into the problem.

Literature Review

The influence of politics on higher education has been widely studied in the areas of governance, autonomy, academic freedom, quality assurance and student activism, with consistent claims that universities are embedded within wider political and socio-economic forces. Foundational analyses like Murray (1992) frame university governance as a site of struggle where institutional norms about collegiality and autonomy war with political conditions in shaping what would become later debates on interference and accountability. Normative policy frameworks of the American Association of University Professors (2024) and the Council of Europe (2025), for example, make clear that political interference in leadership appointments, curriculum development and research priorities constitutes not only a violation of academic freedom but also challenges demonstrates disregard for democratic governance in higher education. Within the South Asian region, these political tensions are also intensifying with structural reform. Kabir (2011) locates the Bangladeshi higher education sector within neoliberal policy changes that have increased central control over the universities and their ties to political influence, while Kabir and Greenwood (2016) argue for a tightening of campus regulations through campus violence brought about by student activism as part of a reshaping of university cultures linked to neoliberalism. The historical politicization of students is examined by Nasrin and Rahman (2019), who track the shift from anti-colonial activism in student movements to party politicking but note the ways patronage networks have entrenched party politics on campuses; this trajectory has even been analyzed by Mukherjee (2024) as an application of the idea that student politics shapes political culture, where it also deepens polarization. The earlier empirical contribution from Shahjamal (2007) connects the regular political duty of Dhaka University to second rate academic environment and reduces quality perceptions alongside the argument made by Shiddike and Bockarie (2020) about the larger effects of partisan quests in higher institutions in Bangladesh. Outside of Bangladesh, comparative evidence supports problematic governance scenarios; political control negatively influences corporate performance in Ugandan public universities (Moya, 2012) and significantly molds administrative and academic environments in Pakistani colleges (Mohammad et al., 2025). Equally, Naz et al. (2023) posit that national political dynamics affect student learning experiences through erosion and policy reversals - hence the argument that political milieu has direct implications on academic outputs. In the context of Bangladesh, Ferdous and Foyjul-Islam (2019) report systemic quality issues, including governance failures and insufficient attention to quality, while Hossain (2025) highlights inconsistent policy implementation and a lack of autonomy. Chakrabarty (2025) describes the issues and opportunities facing higher education in Bangladesh, noting the crucial role of sound governance arrangements. The socio-economic aspect makes this picture more complex; it

can be inferred from the studies of Rahman et al. (2023) that socio-economic stress is a critical contributor to academic performance, whereas Afroz and Tirno (2022) and Sharmin and Tirno (2022) both note how economic challenges as well as social and political aspects interplay in determining student outcomes. Further consideration of poverty-related barriers is led by Alam et al. (2025), who investigate the lives of poor students at the University of Rajshahi, and show how economic vulnerability combines with governance and policy problems. The ethical issues of research and institutional practice, as considered by Arafat (2024), also underpin the necessity for transparency and accountability in politically sensitive environments. Literature on governance reform increasingly suggests that institutional autonomy is a protective shield as Painsi et al. (2025) report positive relationships between autonomy and good governance in Europe's universities, while Teshome (2025) theorizes about autonomy across administrative, academic and financial axes. Models of organizational change developed by Garcia et al. (2026) posit the need for balanced governance systems that interconnect accountability and independence. Salmon (2025), in conclusion, provides a review of how government policy frameworks influence funding models, leadership appointments, and research priorities, with the warning that politically driven or transient policies can sometimes detract from sustainable development. Taken together, the literature suggests that political dynamics affect higher education through interrelated pathways of student activism, partisan mobilization involvement, administrative appointment processes, policy-making operations, economic-based pressures and governance models leading to separating influences and compromised institutional performance, thereby warranting place-based research activity to unpack these dynamics in institutions such as the University of Rajshahi.

Results and Discussion

Significance of Political Factors in Higher Education Institutions

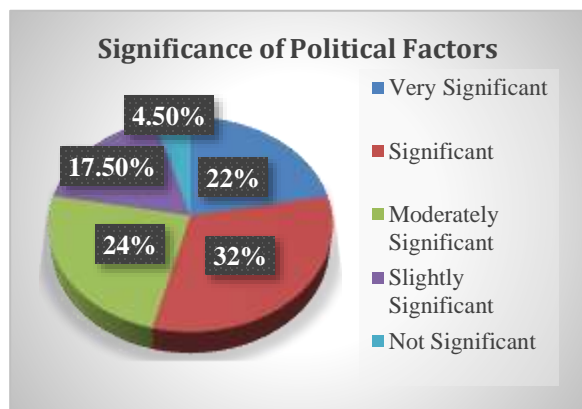


Figure 1, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data

From these data, we demonstrate respondents' perception of the influence of political factors on higher education institutions at the University of Rajshahi. 32% of the respondents said political reasons are significant, while 22% said very significant. This indicates that more than half of the respondents strongly recognize political influence in higher education, meaning that most students feel politics plays an important role in the university. A further 24% rated political factors as being of moderate significance, meaning the influence that political forces have is not inconsiderable. By contrast, 17.5% saw political factors as having little relevance. Only a few respondents, around 4.5%, said that the political factor is not significant at all. Taken together, the results indicate that politics is significantly affecting the academic and administrative situation at the University of Rajshahi.

Impact of Political Stability on the Quality of Higher Education

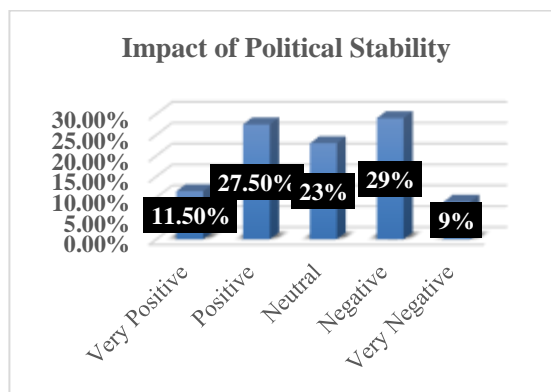


Figure 2, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data

The attitudes of the respondents show how stability in politics influences the quality of higher education at the University of Rajshahi. 27.5% (55 participants) thought the impact was positive, while 11.5% (23 respondents) rated it very positive, perhaps due to having experienced good working conditions for academics and administrators. On the negative, 29% (58 respondents) perceived these to be negative and 9% (18 respondents) very negative due to possibly being affected by disruptions or hurdles related to political uncertainty. Meanwhile, 23% (46 respondents) said they didn't know or they had mixed experiences and felt neutral about the overall impact. These findings show that the level of political stability significantly affects higher education quality, although the perception of students varies. In general, stability is valued, but it's experienced differently by each participant.

Disruption of Academic Activities Due to Political Instability

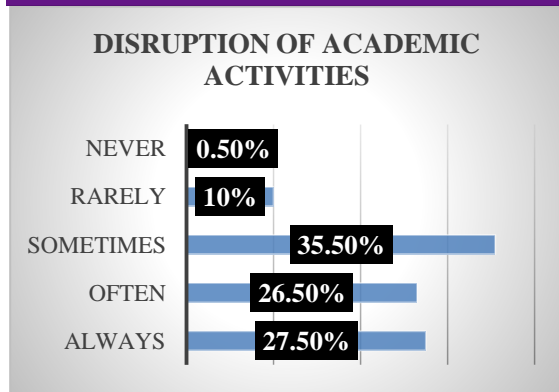


Figure 3, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data

The data represent the views of respondents on the deprivation of academic events due to political disturbance at the University of Rajshahi. Political violence always causes disruption to 27.5% and often causes disruption to 26.5% of the respondents. This shows that political instability frequently interferes with students' academic lives. Moreover, 35.5% of the respondents reported that academic work is sometimes interrupted. This indicates that a substantial number of students suffer from interference in classes or exams under unstable political circumstances. Conversely, 10% of the respondents thought political instability had little impact on academic pursuits. May this perspective be shared by dozens/hundreds of students who did not have to suffer the harsher impacts, such as serious disruption or an altered class schedule. A tiny proportion of respondents (0.5%) reported that they never face challenges with political unrest and academic work support programs. The results presented here, therefore, indicate that political instability is destroying the usual academic environment of the University of Rajshahi.

Influence of Student Politics on the Academic Environment

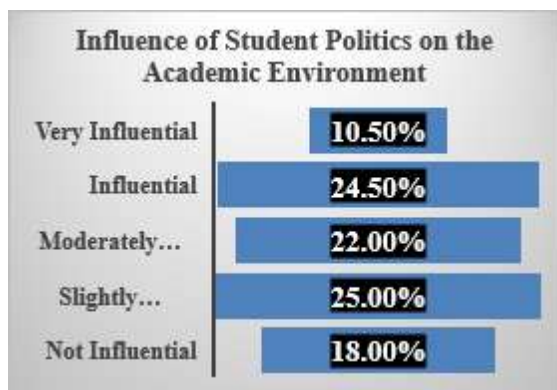


Figure 4, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data

Nearly one-fourth of the respondents (24.5%) said that student politics is influential as they often face class disruptions and even campus-related problem links to political associations. Just over 10.5% felt it to be very influential, as student politics greatly influences the academic calendar, examinations and daily learning routine. In comparison, 22% of the students regarded student politics as moderately influential, since politics affect academic life in some ways and not always result in serious disruptions. For that matter, 25% think that student politics is slightly influenced because they have scarce contact with campus political action. In addition, 18% of those surveyed say student politics is not influential at all, as they carry on with their academic routines without political disruption. Taken together, the results indicate that student politics has an impact on the academic climate; however, students are shaped by its consequences in varying ways depending on individual circumstances.

Effects of Student Politics on Classroom Learning and Academic Performance

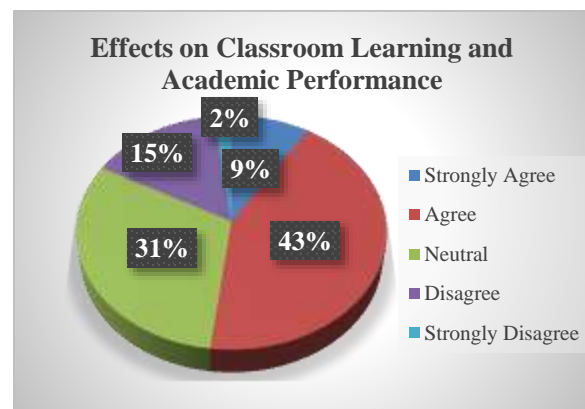
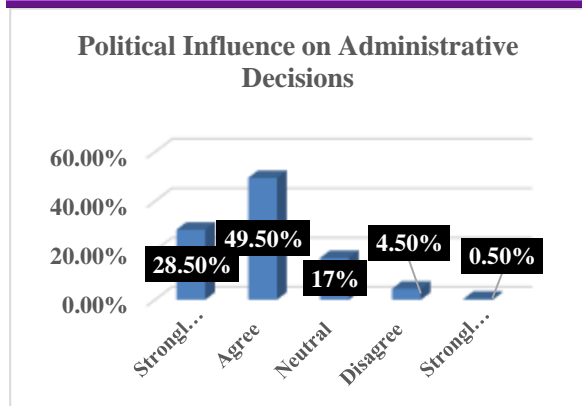


Figure 5, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data

In total, 43% agreed and 15% disagreed that student politics influences classroom learning and academic performance. This demonstrates that there are more students who feel student politics influences their studies as compared with those who think it does not. Likewise, 9% strongly agreed and 2% very strongly disagreed. This implies that a limited number of students have very strong feelings on this matter and those opinions are overwhelmingly positive. At the other end, 31% of poll takers were neutral. This indicates that perhaps some students are uncertain or have not personally deeply experienced student politics in their classrooms. In sum, students do see student politics as affecting classroom learning and academic performance, but they experience it differently.

Political Influence on Administrative Decisions



The data illuminates the ways in which political backing influences administrative decisions at a higher education institution, from hiring and promotions to the academic calendar. 28.5% of the participants strongly agreed, while 49.5 % agreed to see an influence on these decisions, which means that a slight majority sees the impact as a strong one. At the same time, 17% of students were neutral, 4.5% disagreed and only half (0.5%) strongly disagreed. This indicates that the majority of the students imagine that political consideration has an influence on administrative decisions in the University of Rajshahi.

Government Support for Higher Education Governance

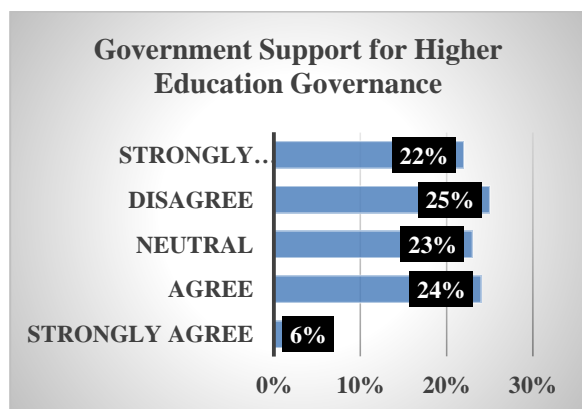


Figure 7, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data

Here is what the data tell us about students' views on whether the government is making higher education better. Just 6% of students strongly agreed and 24% agreed, meaning fewer than a third believe government policies are beneficial. This is why most students believe that the government does not support bringing about change in higher education governance. Some 23% of students say neutral, meaning unsure about government support. 25% disagreed and 22% strongly disagreed, suggesting that a lot of students do not believe that the help is sufficient. Finally, the findings demonstrate that a number of students would consider that

existing policies are not adequate to improve higher education management at the University of Rajshahi.

Role of Political Leadership in Higher Education Policy

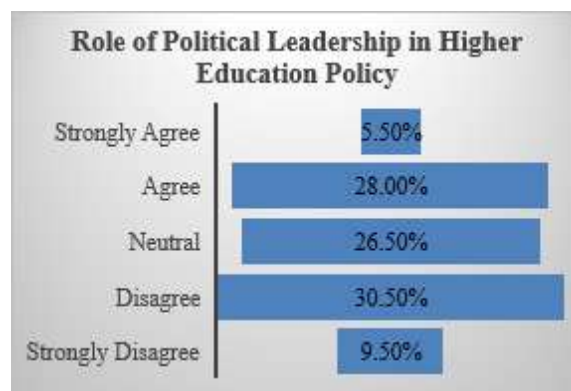


Figure 8, Developed by the Authors Based on the Collected Data

This subsection presents students' views on how political leaders influence higher education policies and university growth. Only 5.5% strongly agreed and 28% agreed that political leaders have positive contributions, and certainly not a significantly supported activity by their representatives. On the other hand, 30.5% level of disagreement and 9.5% strong levels of disagreement indicate that many students do not perceive political leadership as constructive or efficacious in policy making and in institutional growth. Meanwhile, 26.5% were neutral, being undecided or not informed on political engagement. In general, the results also indicate that political leadership, although it has some positive effect on improving higher education in the University of Rajshahi but not enough to have strong effectiveness.

Major Political Factors Affecting Higher Education in Bangladesh

Included are qualitative data that summarize what providers feel about the key political drivers of higher education in Bangladesh. Many cited political machinations in administrative matters, including appointments of vice-chancellors, teachers and other important officials that tend to be politically rather than merit-based. They were speaking on student politics and campus issues, including an unsafe learning environment and disruptions to the academic calendar. Some interviewees also pointed out policy uncertainty and the frequent intervention of the government, which does not enable long-term planning, allocation of resources and budgeting. Institutional efficiency was also supposedly obstructed by the allocation of funds and political favors in recruitment. Participants described how these features are detrimental to academic freedom, teaching quality, research productivity and the position of the institution. Some identified nepotism, concentration of

power and corruption as further challenges. Indeed, political factors that range from campus-level student activism to national instability have a great impact on governance, educational quality and institutional standards more generally. Several others mentioned merit-based appointments, decreased partisan student involvement, and protection from political influence as crucial areas for improvement.

Managing Political Influence to Improve Higher Education

In this issue This section features the thoughts of the students on how to keep political influence better managed so that the academic atmosphere and, in general, the higher education system works better. The overwhelming response was that universities ought to be more autonomous and that administrative decisions should be transparently based on merit! Student politics should be managed to allow democratic inclusion of students without violence or academic disturbance. Some of the responses stressed that government policies have to be long-term and consistent, guided by the quality of education rather than political considerations. Leadership positions, vice-chancellors and academic posts, for example, need a merit-based adherence to avoid favoritism. Some recommended enhancing institutional governance, accountability and ethical leadership to prevent unnecessary political interference. Funding and resources should be allocated in an equitable manner, and campus safety should be protected. Non-politicized student organizations that will motivate for constructive issue-based participation were also shared by respondents. In general, ensuring political neutrality through autonomous operation, transparency and ethical practice was regarded as a prerequisite for the secure, functional and high-quality academic environment.

Conclusion

The paper establishes that Politics plays a crucial role in higher education at the University of Rajshahi. Results show that student politics, administrative meddling, and bureaucratic biases are disrupting classroom teaching, creating inefficient administration and unequal access to institutional resources. Evidence about politicized recruitment, campus conflict and lack of institutional autonomy is consistent with these challenges. How to control political interference in the universities can only be done by ensuring institutional autonomy, practicing meritocracy-based governance, constructive regulation of student politics and stable and long-term education policies. These interventions can lead to an environment that is safe, academically centered, and inclusive, which benefits both student satisfaction and institutional effectiveness. These results can act as an edifice to develop policies that will enhance the quality and governance of higher education in the University of Rajshahi.

Recommendations

Several practical measures can be outlined based on the findings to mitigate the negative impact of political patronage in higher education at the University of Rajshahi. First, leaders should reinforce institutional autonomy by formally codifying those administrative appointments and promotions, as well as major policy determinations are conducted based solely on merit-based, transparent criteria rather than partisan attachment. Independence oversight (or search) committees for leadership positions might also increase credibility and fairness. Student politics, second, should be regulated so that democratic student participation is maintained yet acts of violence, intimidation and disruptions to academic life are not tolerated. Explicit rules and strong enforcement to keep the academic atmosphere safe. Third, higher education-related government policies should be long-term and stable, with emphasis on education itself, so that sudden political turnovers bring less abrupt differences. Lastly, systems of accountability and governance should be strengthened by means of routine audit, stakeholder involvement, and transparent allocation of resources. These acts would be crucial for a more stable, inclusive and academically-oriented campus.

Limitation

This research makes contributions to the understanding of political influences on the University of Rajshahi but suffers from the following limitations. The study is limited to one university and as such the generalizability of results may be constrained. Information is primarily dependent on students' self-reported perceptions, which may be influenced by personal prejudice or current experiences. The limited size of the sample may have prevented it from being able to account for diversity amongst students in the respective Schools and Departments. Secondly, the qualitative dimension was relatively small which may limit richer insights into students' perceptions. In addition, outside triggers during the data collection might have affected the responses as well. These are important variables which need to be taken into account when interpreting the results.

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Conflict of interest

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