

# Religious Identity and Electoral Choice in Bangladesh's 13th Parliamentary Election: A Study of Voting Behavior in Northern Bangladesh

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**Abstract:** Political behavior is often influenced by religious identity, especially in societies where religion continues to play an influential role in social and political life. Bangladesh provides a significant context for investigating this relationship. This study used a qualitative survey method to explore impact of religious identity on the electoral choice in Bangladesh's 13<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election held on 12 February 2026. A quantitative survey was conducted among 200 voters from five northern districts of Bangladesh. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to find electoral participation, voting preferences, religious influence on vote choice, as well as the role of religious institutions in political communication. The findings indicate a high level of electoral participation, with 74% of respondents reporting participation in every or most national elections. More than half of the respondents (55.9%) acknowledged that religion remained a moderate to very high influence on their electoral voting decisions. The findings also suggest that the religious ideology of political parties was the most influential religious factor which influenced their voting behavior. Candidates' religious practices and religious identity gets second priority. Although religious institutions were not the primary source of political information among most respondents, Wazz Mahfils continued to play a significant role in religious-political communication. The results further indicate that voters evaluate both political parties and candidates when making electoral decisions. The study concludes that religious identity continues to affect voting behavior in Bangladesh by shaping indirect factors namely ideological beliefs, moral values, and perceptions of political parties and candidates. Its influence is driven more by these indirect factors than by direct religious teaching. These findings contribute empirical evidence to the literature on religion and electoral behavior and thus provide insights into the continuing role of religion in Bangladesh's democratic politics.

**Keywords:** Religious identity, Voting behavior, Electoral politics, Political participation, Bangladesh.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Voting behavior has long been recognized as a complex phenomenon shaped by social, economic, psychological, and political factors. Among these determinants, religion occupies a distinctive position because it functions not only as a personal belief system but also as a source of social identity, moral values, and political orientation. Religious identity influences how individuals perceive political parties, evaluate candidates, and interpret public policies. Consequently, religion continues to play an important role in electoral politics across both developed and developing democracies, despite expectations that modernization would reduce its political significance (Norris & Inglehart, 2004).

The relationship between religion and politics is particularly significant in countries where religion forms an integral component of national identity and public life. In such societies, religious values often shape political discourse, influence policy debates, and affect electoral competition. Identity-based theories of political behavior argue that voters frequently rely on enduring social identities, including

religion, to simplify political choices and evaluate competing political actors (Campbell et al., 1960). Similarly, religion may influence voting indirectly by shaping moral attitudes, ideological preferences, perceptions of leadership, and evaluations of party credibility rather than solely through formal religious institutions or leaders (Wald & Calhoun-Brown, 2018).

Bangladesh provides an important context for examining the relationship between religious identity and electoral behavior. Since independence in 1971, the country's political development has reflected a continuing interaction between secular constitutional principles and the growing visibility of religion in public politics. Although the Constitution originally emphasized secularism, subsequent constitutional amendments and political developments increased the prominence of religion within the political arena. Major political parties have frequently incorporated religious symbols, narratives, and commitments into their electoral campaigns, while religion-based political parties have continued to participate in national elections with varying levels of electoral success. Historical election results demonstrate that although explicitly religious political parties

have generally secured a relatively small share of the national vote compared with the major mainstream parties, they have maintained a consistent electoral presence over successive parliamentary elections. This persistence suggests that religion continues to constitute an important dimension of political competition even when it is not the sole determinant of electoral outcomes.

The 13th National Parliamentary Election represents another important stage in Bangladesh's democratic process and provides an opportunity to examine whether religious identity continues to influence voters' electoral choices. While previous studies have extensively discussed religion and politics in Bangladesh from historical, constitutional, or ideological perspectives, comparatively limited empirical research has investigated how religious identity affects individual voting behavior using primary survey data. Existing studies have often focused on political parties or religious movements rather than on voters' own perceptions and decision-making processes. Consequently, there remains a need for empirical evidence that examines the extent to which religion influences electoral participation, vote choice, candidate evaluation, and political preferences among Bangladeshi voters.

This study addresses that gap by investigating the impact of religious identity on voting behavior among voters in the 13th National Parliamentary Election of Bangladesh. Specifically, the study examines the extent to which religion influences electoral decision-making, identifies the religious factors that shape vote choice, and explores the channels through which religious information reaches voters. By providing survey-based evidence from Bangladeshi voters, the research contributes to the broader literature on voting behavior, political sociology, and religion and politics. The findings are expected to enhance understanding of the continuing role of religious identity in electoral politics and provide useful insights for scholars, policymakers, and political actors interested in democratic participation and political behavior in Bangladesh.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **Religious Identity and Voting Behavior in Bangladesh**

Voting behavior is influenced by a wide range of social, economic, cultural, and political factors. One of the most important sources of social identity and political orientation among this is still religion. People's morals, perceptions of leadership, views on public policy, and attitudes toward political parties are frequently influenced by their religious beliefs. Consequently, religion has a big impact on how people vote and participate in politics. Although modernization and globalization have broadened the factors affecting voting behavior, religion continues to remain relevant in many societies, particularly in developing democracies like Bangladesh. Research has shown that religious identification often acts as a social and political variable that helps

individuals in understanding political issues and developing party preferences (Norris & Inglehart, 2004). Similarly, Wald and Calhoun-Brown (2018) argue that religion influences political behavior by providing moral frameworks and value systems through which citizens evaluate political candidates, political parties, and public policies.

Bangladesh provides a unique setting for studying the interplay between religion and politics. Since independence, the country has attempted to balance constitutional secularism with the social and cultural importance of Islam. Islam continues to hold a significant place in the political and social life of the country, even though secularism is still a fundamental constitutional principle. As a result, religious language, symbols, and narratives are regularly employed by political parties to engage voters and strengthen political support.

Recent analyses indicate that religious appeals are still prevalent in the political landscape of Bangladesh, reflecting the ongoing importance of religion on political attitudes and electoral behavior. International IDEA (2023) notes that both of main political parties in Bangladesh have incorporated religious themes into their political discourse to mobilize electoral support, despite differences in their ideological orientations. Furthermore, Hossain (2026) contends that religious symbolism and references to Islamic principles have increasingly become important components of election campaigns.

### **Religion and Political Participation**

Voting remains the most widespread form of political participation in Bangladesh, with electoral turnout consistently surpassing participation in other forms of civic and political engagement (Baldersheim et al., 2001; Haque & Hossain, 2019). Citizens from various social, religious, and demographic backgrounds participate actively in elections in Bangladesh, although the factors motivating participation vary across individuals and contexts (Haque & Hossain, 2019; Morium, 2024). Religious identification and participation in religious communities can strengthen social networks, civic norms, and feelings of community belonging, which may encourage greater political participation among citizens (Sarker & Islam, 2017; Huq et al., 2025).

The significance of political identity, party allegiance, and ideological orientations in influencing voting behavior has been widely documented in studies of Bangladeshi politics. Party attachment and partisan loyalty often influence electoral decision-making, while voting preferences are also shaped by social identities, political beliefs, candidate evaluations, and personal experiences (Jahan & Shahan, 2013; Haque & Hossain, 2019). Additionally, religion still has a significant impact on public discourse, political attitudes, and collective identities in Bangladesh. However, its influence on voting behavior often interacts with more general partisan and ideological factors rather than acting independently (Riaz, 2013; Islam & Islam, 2018).

### **Religious Identity and Electoral Choice**

A growing body of recent literature emphasizes that voters' perceptions of political parties and candidates are influenced by their religious identification. Voters in Bangladesh often consider whether a political party or candidate aligns with their religious beliefs and moral standards. Therefore, religious identity not only serves as a personal belief system but also as a framework for understanding and assessing electoral choices.

Recent research by Hossain (2026) demonstrates that religion plays a significant role in electoral campaigns in Bangladesh. Political parties and candidates frequently use religious symbolism, narratives, and references to Islamic values to attract support from voters. The study claims that religion is commonly used to appeal to voters who strongly connect with religious beliefs and to establish political legitimacy. The study also contends that political actors portray themselves as defenders of religion in order to increase their electoral appeal.

Similarly, Hajjaj (2022) observes that Islamic political parties continue to remain prominent in the electoral landscape of Bangladesh despite fluctuations in their electoral performances. Although these parties may not always achieve considerable electoral success, their continuous existence shows that religion is still an important consideration for some voter segments.

### **Political Parties, Ideology, and Religious Appeals**

Political competition in Bangladesh has historically involved a combination of secular and religion-based political narratives. Despite having different ideological foundations, both major political parties have regularly used religious sentiments in their campaigns. According to International IDEA (2023), Bangladesh's main political parties often include religious issues into their political messaging because they understand how important religion is to voters.

Recent research also indicates that voters are influenced more by the religious values and ideological positions of political parties than by direct religious instructions. Rather than voting solely on the counsel of religious leaders, many voters evaluate how well a party's policies and political vision connect with their religious beliefs and social values. This finding suggests that religion influences voting behavior primarily through ideological congruence between voters and political parties, rather than through direct religious appeals.

Ruhullah and Ushama (2023) further argue that Islamic values continue to influence political discourse and governance in Bangladesh. Their research shows that religion is still embedded within public institutions, policy discussions, and political debates, contributing to the continued relevance of religious factors in electoral politics.

### **Religious Institutions and Political Information**

In Bangladesh, religious institutions have traditionally served as important platforms for interpersonal

communication and community engagement. Mosques, madrasas, waz mahfils, and other religious gatherings often provide forums for discussing social issues, moral concerns, and occasionally political matters (Stille, 2020; Huq et al., 2025). These gatherings constitute significant spaces within the country's public sphere where religious, social, and political discourses frequently intersect (Riaz, 2013). Because religious leaders generally enjoy considerable public trust and social authority, their views can significantly influence public attitudes toward social and political issues (Islam & Islam, 2018).

However, recent developments suggest that the role of religious institutions in political communication is changing. The sources of political information that citizens can access have become more diversified due to the quick growth of social media platforms, internet news sources, and television. For political knowledge and opinion formation, young voters in particular are depending more on digital media rather than conventional religious settings.

The Asia Foundation's Survey of the Bangladeshi People 2022 suggests that digital communication platforms and social media are becoming increasingly important for political communication, public discussion, and civic engagement (The Asia Foundation, 2023). At the same time, studies on Bangladesh's religious public sphere indicate that religious gatherings such as mosques and waz mahfils continue to serve as important venues for the dissemination of social and political messages, particularly among communities with strong religious participation (Riaz, 2013; Stille, 2020).

### **Research Gap**

Although recent studies have examined religion, political participation, democratic governance, and party politics in Bangladesh, relatively few have explicitly explored the influence of religious identity on individual voting behavior. Most existing research concentrates on broader political engagement, the role of religious political parties, or the interaction between religion and governance. Because of this, there remains limited empirical evidence regarding how religious identity directly shapes voting choices among Bangladeshi voters.

Furthermore, earlier studies have paid less attention to identifying which specific religious factors, such as religious identity, religious practices, party ideology, religious leadership, and religious institutions, have the biggest impact on electoral outcomes. A thorough comprehension of these elements is crucial given the ongoing importance of religion in Bangladesh's political landscape. Therefore, the present study seeks to address this gap by examining the extent to which religious identity affects voting behavior and by identifying the specific religious factors that shape electoral decision-making among Bangladeshi voters.

### **3. Methodology**

This study used a qualitative survey method to explore impact of religious identity on the electoral choice in Bangladesh's 13th parliamentary election held on 12 February 2026. A total of 200 voters were selected from the 5 northern districts, namely, Rajshahi, Natore, Chapainawabganj, Pabna and Naogaon, in the study to determine whether religious identity of a political party can influence electoral choice or not. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire containing question on factors behind voting decisions, religious influence, and candidate's religious identity. To encourage honest responses, the confidentiality of the identities of all voluntary participants was assured. The collected data were coded and analyzed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS. Descriptive statistics, percentages, charts, and regression analysis were employed to identify patterns and relationships among variables. The use of a systematic survey design and appropriate statistical analyses enhanced the reliability and credibility of the study's findings.

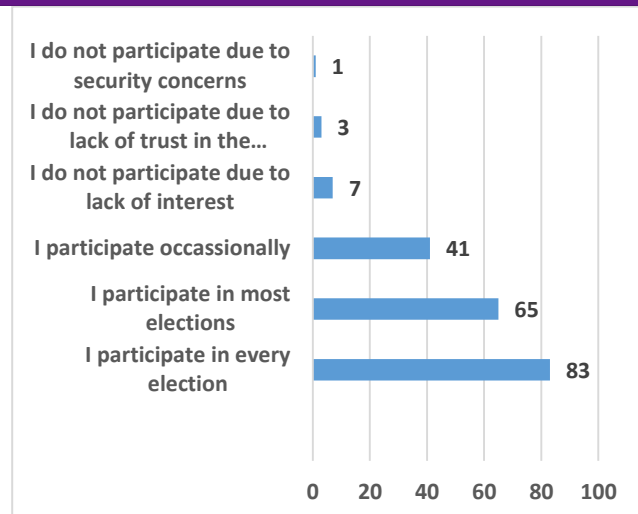
#### 4. Results and discussion:

##### Voting Participation in National Elections

The findings suggest that electoral participation is generally high among the respondents, indicating that many view voting as an important civic responsibility. The fact that most respondents reported participating in every or most national elections reflects a strong level of political engagement. It also suggests that they are actively involved in the democratic process and are likely to develop clear political preferences through regular electoral participation.

Chart 1 shows the voting participation of respondents in national elections. Out of the 200 respondents, 41.5% reported that they vote in every election, while 32.5% said they participate in most elections. Another 20.5% mentioned that they vote occasionally. In contrast, only a small number of respondents reported not participating in elections, citing reasons such as lack of interest (3.5%), lack of trust in the electoral process (1.5%), and security concerns (0.5%). Overall, the findings suggest that electoral participation is relatively high among the respondents, as nearly three-quarters (74.0%) reported voting in every or most national elections. This indicates a generally positive level of engagement in the country's electoral process.

**Chart 1: Voting Participation**



In the context of religious identity, this high level of participation is particularly relevant. Individuals who are actively involved in religious communities are often encouraged to contribute to society and take part in public affairs. As a result, they may be more likely to consider voting not only as a civic duty but also as a moral responsibility shaped by their religious beliefs and values. This connection makes it more likely that religious identity plays a role in influencing political choices.

These findings are consistent with the Civic Voluntarism Model developed by Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995), which emphasizes that social institutions, including religious organizations, can encourage and mobilize citizens to participate in politics. Likewise, Norris and Inglehart (2004) argue that religion continues to influence political behavior, particularly in societies where religious identity remains an important part of public life. Viewed in this light, the high level of electoral participation found in this study provides a useful foundation for examining the relationship between religious identities and voting behavior.

##### Basis of Electoral Choice

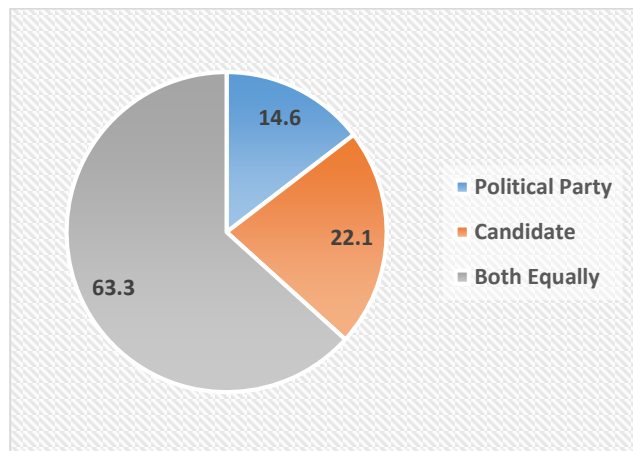
The findings suggest that respondents do not base their voting decisions solely on either political parties or individual candidates. Instead, most respondents consider both factors together, indicating that they take a more balanced approach when making electoral choices. This pattern suggests that voters pay attention to both the credibility of a political party and the qualities of the candidate before casting their vote.

Chart 2 presents the main factors that influence respondents' voting decisions. The findings show that most respondents (63.3%) consider both the political party and the individual candidate when deciding whom to vote for. Meanwhile, 22.1% reported that the candidate is the most important factor in their decision, whereas 14.6% indicated that they primarily base their vote on political party affiliation. Overall, the results suggest that respondents tend to evaluate



both party and candidate rather than relying on a single factor when making electoral choices.

**Chart 2: Electoral Choice Criteria**



This is particularly important when examining the role of religious identity in voting behavior. Religious beliefs may shape how voters perceive both political parties and individual candidates. For example, voters may consider whether a party's policies and ideology are compatible with their religious values while also assessing a candidate's personal character, ethical conduct, and commitment to religious principles. In this way, religious identity can influence electoral decisions through more than one pathway.

These findings are in line with the work of Campbell et al. (1960), who argued that political preferences are shaped by a combination of social identities, party attachments, and evaluations of candidates. Similarly, Dalton (2018) noted that contemporary voting behavior is increasingly influenced by both party- and candidate-centered considerations, rather than by a single factor alone. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that the influence of religious identity on voting behavior is likely to be complex, affecting how voters evaluate both political parties and individual candidates.

### Timing of Electoral Decision

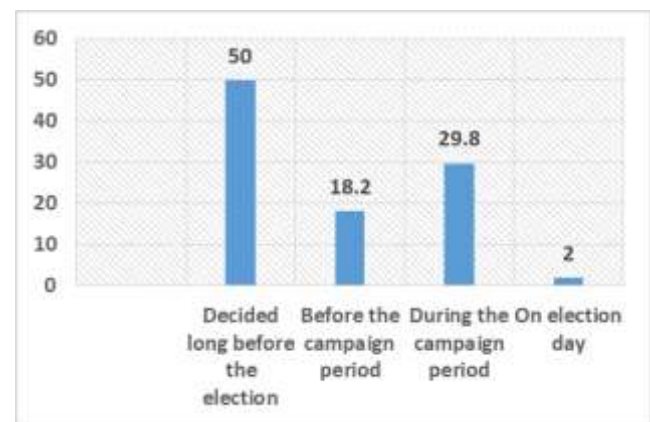
The findings suggest that many respondents make their voting decisions well before the election campaign begins. Since more than two-thirds (68.2%) had already chosen their preferred party or candidate before the campaign period, it appears that their political preferences are shaped over time rather than being driven mainly by campaign activities. This indicates that election campaigns may reinforce existing preferences for many voters instead of fundamentally changing them.

Chart 3 shows when respondents decide whom to vote for in national elections. Among the 200 respondents, 50.0% said they make their voting decision well before the election, making it the most common response. Another 18.2% reported deciding before the election campaign begins, while 29.8% said they make their choice during the campaign period. Only

2.0% indicated that they wait until Election Day to decide. Overall, the findings suggest that most respondents form their voting preferences well in advance, with relatively few relying on last-minute decisions.

Religious identity may be one of the factors contributing to these early decisions. Religious beliefs and affiliations often form an important part of an individual's social identity and can influence political attitudes over a long period. People who place a high value on their religious beliefs may assess political parties and candidates through the lens of those values, even before election campaigns begin. As a result, their voting decisions may be relatively stable and less influenced by campaign messages or last-minute political events.

**Chart 3: Timing of Electoral Decision**



These findings are consistent with the work of Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948), who argued that voting decisions are often shaped by long-standing social and psychological influences rather than by election campaigns alone. Likewise, Converse (1964) emphasized the importance of stable belief systems in shaping political attitudes and electoral choices. Viewed together, these perspectives suggest that religious identity may serve as a long-term influence on voting behavior, helping to shape political preferences well before the election period.

### Religious Influence on Electoral Choice

The findings indicate that religion continues to influence the voting behavior of a significant number of respondents. While the largest single group stated that religion does not affect their voting decisions, the overall results show that more than half of the respondents believe that religion has at least a moderate influence on how they vote. This suggests that, for many people, religious identity remains an important consideration when making electoral choices.

One reason for this may be that religion helps shape people's values, beliefs, and views about society. These values often influence how voters judge political parties, candidates, and public policies. Rather than directly telling people whom to vote for, religion may guide the way they think about leadership, honesty, justice, and social responsibility. As a

result, many voters may feel more comfortable supporting parties or candidates whose beliefs and positions are consistent with their own religious values.

**Chart 4: Religious Influence on Electoral Choice**

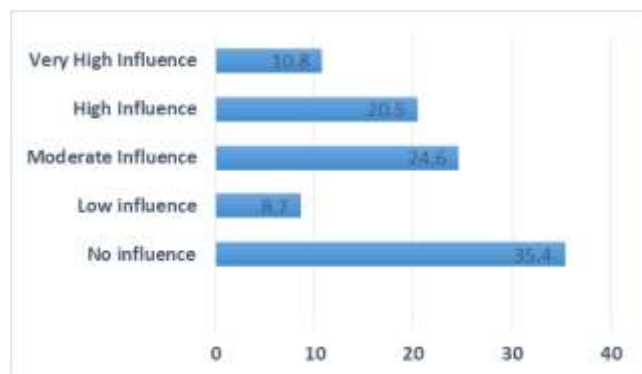


Chart 4 illustrates the extent to which religion influences respondents' voting decisions. The findings show that 35.4% of respondents reported that religion does not influence their voting behavior. At the same time, a considerable proportion acknowledged that religion plays a role in their electoral choices. Specifically, 24.6% reported a moderate level of influence, 20.5% indicated a high level of influence, and 10.8% stated that religion has a very high influence on their voting decisions. In contrast, only 8.7% perceived religion as having a low level of influence. Overall, 55.9% of respondents reported that religion has a moderate to very high influence on how they vote, suggesting that religious considerations remain an important factor in the electoral decision-making process for many respondents.

The findings are in line with previous research on voting behavior. Layman (2001) argues that religious commitment continues to shape political preferences, while Norris and Inglehart (2004) point out that religion remains politically important even in societies experiencing modernization and secularization. Similarly, Wald and Calhoun-Brown (2018) explain that religious beliefs influence politics by providing people with a way of understanding political issues and evaluating political leaders.

Overall, the findings suggest that religion continues to play a meaningful role in electoral decision-making. Although voting decisions are influenced by many different factors, religious identity remains one of the important considerations for many respondents. Instead of influencing voters through direct religious instruction, religion appears to shape political choices by influencing the values and beliefs that people bring to the voting process.

#### Religious Factors in Vote Choice

The findings suggest that ideological and value-oriented dimensions of religion exert a greater influence on voting behavior than direct religious authority. Respondents appear more concerned with whether political parties and candidates

embody religious values than with explicit guidance from religious leaders.

Table 1 presents the specific religious factors that respondents consider when making their voting decisions. The findings show that the religious position or ideology of a political party was the most frequently mentioned factor, with 81 respondents selecting it. This was followed by the candidate's religious practices (58 responses) and the candidate's religious identity (38 responses). Other factors, such as the expectation of protecting religious values (25 responses), support for religion-based political parties (24 responses), and the expectation of implementing religion-based laws (16 responses), were mentioned less frequently. At the same time, 65 respondents reported that none of these religious factors influenced their voting decisions

**Table 1: Religious Factors in Electoral Choice**

| Components                                                | Frequency |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Candidate's religious identity                            | 38        |
| Candidate's religious practices                           | 58        |
| Religious position/ideology of the political party        | 81        |
| Influence of religion-based political parties             | 24        |
| Advice from religious leaders                             | 7         |
| Discussion or campaigning in mosques/religious gatherings | 9         |
| Expectation of protecting religious values                | 25        |
| Expectation of implementing Sharia or religion-based laws | 16        |
| Accountability in the afterlife/religious rewards         | 4         |
| Views regarding religious majority/minority issues        | 7         |
| Position on religious issues (Blasphemy, morality, etc.)  | 1         |
| No religious factor influenced me                         | 65        |
| Other                                                     | 2         |

The prominence of party religious ideology indicates that religion operates as a political value system influencing broader evaluations of governance and public policy. Voters seem particularly interested in how political actors position themselves on issues related to religion, morality, and cultural identity. Similarly, the relatively high importance of candidates' religious practices and identities suggests that

personal religiosity serves as a criterion for assessing trustworthiness and moral character.

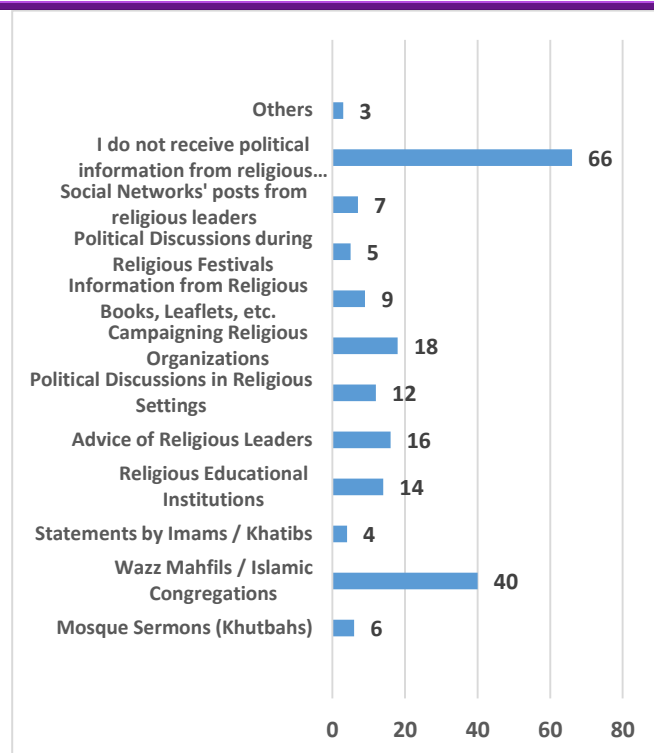
Interestingly, direct religious influences such as advice from religious leaders, discussions in religious gatherings, and accountability in the afterlife received comparatively little support. This finding implies that contemporary voters may be exercising independent political judgment while still incorporating religious values into their decisions. In other words, religion appears to influence voting indirectly through value formation rather than direct clerical instruction.

These findings are consistent with Fox (2018), who argues that religion often shapes political attitudes through ideological and cultural frameworks. Likewise, Wald and Calhoun-Brown (2018) emphasize that religious identity influences political behavior by shaping voters' value systems and worldviews rather than simply directing electoral choices through religious authority.

### Religious Channels of Political Information

Chart 6 shows the main sources through which respondents receive political information from religious institutions and religious leaders. The findings reveal that the largest group of respondents (66) reported that they do not receive any political information from religious institutions or religious leaders. Among those who do, Wazz Mahfils (Islamic religious gatherings) were the most commonly mentioned source, with 40 responses. This was followed by political campaigning by religious organizations or Islamic political parties (18 responses), political opinions expressed by religious leaders (16 responses), and discussions held in madrasas or other religious educational institutions (14 responses). Overall, the findings suggest that while many respondents do not rely on religious institutions for political information, Wazz Mahfils remain the most common religious setting through which political messages are communicated.

**Chart 5: Religious Channels of Political Information**



The findings suggest that religious institutions are not the primary source of political information for most respondents. However, among those who do receive political messages through religious channels, informal religious gatherings appear to play a more influential role than formal religious institutions.

The relatively strong influence of Wazz Mahfils indicates that these gatherings serve as important spaces where people discuss not only religious matters but also social and political issues. Since such events often attract large audiences, they provide opportunities for political ideas and messages to be communicated within a religious setting. In addition, the influence of political campaigning by religious organizations and political statements made by religious leaders suggests that religion continues to have a place in public and political discourse.

At the same time, the largest proportion of respondents reported that they do not receive political information from religious institutions. This implies that many people rely on other sources of information, such as social media, television, newspapers, or conversations with family and friends, when forming their political opinions. Therefore, while religion remains one of the influences on political decision-making, it operates alongside a range of other information sources rather than serving as the dominant one.

These findings are consistent with Putnam and Campbell (2010), who argue that religious communities shape political behavior through social networks and community interactions. Similarly, McClendon and Riedl (2019) found that religious messages can influence political participation, particularly

when they are shared through community-based religious gatherings. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that although religious institutions may not be the main source of political information, they continue to play a meaningful role in shaping the political attitudes and preferences of many voters.

## **5. Key Findings of the Study**

### **High Level of Electoral Participation**

The findings indicate that respondents show a strong commitment to participating in elections. Most respondents reported voting in every election or in most elections, while only a small number said they did not vote because of a lack of interest, distrust in the electoral process, or security concerns. These results suggest that electoral participation is generally high among the study population, reflecting an active level of engagement in the democratic process.

### **Combined Importance of Party and Candidate in Voting Decisions**

Most respondents reported that they consider both the political party and the individual candidate when deciding how to vote. In comparison, fewer respondents said that their decision is based solely on the candidate or only on the political party. This suggests that voting behavior is shaped by a combination of party ideology and candidate characteristics, rather than by any single factor alone.

### **Early Formation of Electoral Preferences**

The study found that most respondents had already decided whom to vote for well before the election, with many making their decision even before the campaign period began. In contrast, only a very small proportion reported deciding on Election Day. This suggests that voting preferences are generally formed in advance and are influenced more by long-term political attitudes and beliefs than by short-term campaign activities.

### **Significant Influence of Religion on Voting Behaviour**

The study found that religion remains an important factor in electoral decision-making. Although the largest single group of respondents reported that religion does not influence their voting decisions, more than half indicated that it has a moderate, high, or very high influence on their voting behavior. This suggests that religious identity continues to play a meaningful role in shaping the political preferences and electoral choices of many respondents.

### **Religious Ideology of Political Parties Is the Most Influential Religious Factor**

Among the different religious factors considered, the religious position or ideology of the political party emerged as the most influential in shaping respondents' voting decisions. The religious practices and religious identity of individual candidates were also important considerations for many respondents. In contrast, relatively fewer respondents reported

being influenced by advice from religious leaders, discussions in religious gatherings, or expectations of religious rewards in the afterlife. These findings suggest that voters are more likely to be influenced by shared religious values and ideological compatibility than by direct religious guidance.

### **Limited Reliance on Religious Institutions for Political Information**

The findings show that many respondents do not receive political information from religious institutions or religious leaders. However, among those who do, Wazz Mahfils (Islamic religious gatherings) were identified as the most common source of political information, followed by religious organizations, religious leaders, and religious educational institutions. This suggests that although religious institutions continue to play a role in raising political awareness and shaping political opinions, they are not the main source of political information for most respondents.

### **Religious Identity Influences Voting Primarily Through Values and Ideology**

Overall, the findings suggest that religious identity shapes voting behavior primarily by influencing how respondents think about political parties and candidates. For many respondents, religion appears to provide a set of values and moral beliefs that guide their political judgments rather than directly determining whom they should vote for. Instead of relying on advice or pressure from religious leaders, respondents seem to draw on their own religious values when evaluating electoral choices. These findings indicate that religious identity continues to play a meaningful role in the voting decisions of the respondents, even if its influence is often indirect rather than explicit.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study examined the influence of religious identity on voting behavior among voters participating in Bangladesh's 13th National Parliamentary Election. The findings demonstrate that religion continues to play a meaningful role in electoral decision-making, although its influence is neither uniform nor absolute. While a considerable proportion of respondents reported that religion had little or no effect on their voting decisions, a majority acknowledged that religious identity influenced their electoral choices to varying degrees. These findings indicate that religion remains an important component of political behavior in Bangladesh alongside other determinants such as party affiliation, candidate characteristics, and political ideology.

The study further reveals that religious identity primarily influences voting through ideological and value-based considerations rather than through direct religious authority.

Respondents placed greater importance on the religious ideology of political parties, candidates' religious practices, and their perceived commitment to religious values than on direct guidance from religious leaders or religious institutions. Moreover, although Wazz Mahfils and religious organizations



continue to function as channels of political communication for some voters, most respondents reported relying on alternative sources of political information, suggesting that religion operates within a broader and increasingly diversified information environment.

The historical electoral performance of religion-based political parties also provides an important context for interpreting these findings. Despite maintaining a continuous presence in Bangladesh's electoral politics since independence, religious political parties have generally received a limited share of the national vote. This suggests that while religious identity remains politically relevant, Bangladeshi voters evaluate political parties and candidates through multiple considerations rather than religion alone. Consequently, religious identity appears to function as one of several interacting influences shaping electoral behavior instead of serving as the sole determinant of vote choice.

Overall, the findings support theories of identity-based voting by demonstrating that religion continues to influence political attitudes through values, ideology, and perceptions of political legitimacy. The study contributes empirical evidence to the literature on religion and electoral behavior in Bangladesh by focusing on voters' perspectives rather than party strategies alone. Given the limited number of survey-based studies on this subject, the research offers valuable insights into the continuing interaction between religion and democratic politics in Bangladesh.

Future research should expand the geographical coverage and sample size to improve the generalizability of the findings and should compare religious influences across different regions, demographic groups, and electoral contexts. Longitudinal studies examining changes in religious voting behavior over successive elections would also provide a deeper understanding of whether the influence of religious identity is increasing, declining, or transforming within Bangladesh's evolving democratic landscape.

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