

Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh in the Post-July 2024 Uprising Era: An Analytical Study of Political and Social Challenges

الجماعة الإسلامية في بنغلاديش في مرحلة ما بعد انتفاضة يوليو 2024:
دراسة تحليلية في التحديات السياسية والاجتماعية

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الملخص

تُعدّ جماعة الإسلام في بنغلاديش فاعلاً مهماً، وإن كان مثيراً للجدل، في المشهد الاجتماعي والسياسي في البلاد. فبعد أن تم تهمة إشعالها وحظرها بسبب دورها السليبي في حرب التحرير عام 1971، ومنعها من المشاركة في الانتخابات عام 2013، ثم من العمل السياسي كلياً في عام 2024، عادت الجماعة إلى الساحة السياسية عقب انتفاضة يوليو، حيث استعاد الحزب تسجيله القانوني وسعى إلى إعادة بناء شرعيته. تتناول هذه الدراسة الديناميات السياسية المتغيرة والتحديات التي تواجه الجماعة في السياق السياسي الراهن. وتُظهر النتائج أن جماعة الإسلام، رغم ما تتمتع به من انضباط تنظيمي وقوة أيديولوجية، تواجه قيوداً بنيوية واجتماعية وسياسية متواصلة. وتشمل أبرز التحديات: التهميش السياسي والاجتماعي، والإقصاء الانتخابي، والوصمة التاريخية، والانقسامات الداخلية بين الأحزاب الإسلامية، والصورة السلبية في وسائل الإعلام، والخطابات المعادية للإسلام، والفساد المستشري، وعدم الاستقرار السياسي، والتدخلات الخارجية. وفي مواجهة هذه التحديات، تسعى الجماعة إلى إعادة صياغة صورتها من خلال خطاب شامل يركز على دولة ديمقراطية رفاهية تقوم على القيم الإسلامية. تعتمد الدراسة منهجاً نوعياً يستند إلى بيانات أولية من مقابلات معمقة، وبيانات ثانوية من أبحاث أكاديمية ووثائق رسمية. وتساهم النتائج في فهم استراتيجيات التكيف لدى الأحزاب الإسلامية في جنوب آسيا، وانعكاساتها على التعددية الديمقراطية والاستقرار السياسي في بنغلاديش.

الكلمات المفتاحية: جماعة الإسلام في بنغلاديش، انتفاضة يوليو، الإقصاء السياسي، التداول الإعلامي، رهاب الإسلام.

Abstract

The Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJeI) continues to be a powerful, but a controversial force in the sociopolitical environment of Bangladesh. The role in the 1971 Liberation War, and later its ban on taking part in the 2013 election, were discredited, but the party re-emerged after the July Uprising, and was allowed to re-register itself, and win back its legitimacy. This paper examines the dynamic nature in politics, strategic repositioning and the issues facing BJeI in the fast-evolving political environment. The research finds that BJeI is characterized by high organizational discipline and ideological consistency and by structural and sociopolitical constraints. Key challenges include the political and social marginalization, electoral marginalization, historical stigma, fragmentation among Islamist parties, negative media coverage, Islamophobic discourse, corruption, political instability, and external influence. In its turn, Jamaat has been attempting to recreate its image by the use of inclusive rhetoric, welfare-based discourse, and the demands of a democratic state

based on Islamic principles. Using a qualitative approach, the research is based on primary data represented by in-depth interviews and secondary sources such as academic articles and governmental reports. The study adds to the realization of adaptive strategies of Islam parties in South Asia and the overall consequences of these strategies on the aspect of democratic pluralism and political stability in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, July Uprising, Political exclusion, Media Framing and Islamophobia

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1. Introduction

One of the most disciplined, organized and ideologically oriented Islamic political movements in South Asia is Jamaat-e-Islami that was established in 1941 by Abul Aa'la Maududi. Since its beginning, Jamaat has tried to balance between Islamic values and political involvement to build a moral and just society based on the Islamic principles. Its programs focus on moral reform, social justice and human dignity indicating its desire to turn the political and social life into an Islamized version within a democratic system. Nevertheless, ideological commitments of the party have continued to be in conflict with the reality of the secular and pluralist political order in Bangladesh.

The opposition towards the 1971 Liberation war brought great loss to Jamaat since it took sides with the Pakistani military regime against the war. This historical stand has been one of the greatest barriers to its political legitimacy in post-independent Bangladesh. The Awami league (AL) government outlawed the organization after gaining independence and it was forbidden to conduct any business in the life of people. Jamaat returned in 1976 when Major General Ziaur Rahman came in to power and reinstated political pluralism. Jamaat has been active in the political, religious and the social field since that time. However, its anti-liberation history, internal fragmentation of the Islamic forces, and the frequent conflicts with the secular powers have kept on limiting its power in the state and the society. Although Jamaat is well organized and disciplined political organization, the Jamaat has never had independent power of the state although in 2001, Jamaat shared power with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in coalition politics.

Another difficult time that Jamaat-e-Islami faced from 2009 to 2024. Meanwhile, the AL's discrimination to Jamaat was systematic, depriving it of sociopolitical rights and limiting its activities in society. Extra judicial executions, forced disappearances, politically instigated prosecutions, and unfair imprisonment, became commonplace. In 2011, the government formed the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) which was to prosecute the supposed war criminals of the 1971 uprising, most of whom were the top leaders of Jamaat. Although the government defended the tribunal as an action on historical justice, doubts raised both locally and globally were on its impartiality and due process. The trials were seen by many as political manifestations that were meant to dispose the leadership of the party and not to deliver justice. The killings of some of the high-ranking leaders only worsened the political polarization and solidified the idea of being persecuted by the state. As a result, the organizational foundation and the publicity of Jamaat were reduced, and the chances to become an organization involved in mainstream politics were significantly lowered.

Through continued repression, Jamaat has shown incredible strength. It has not lost its grassroots networks, some degree of underground activism, and still fostered transnational Islamist connections. Though they have been depicted unfavorably by secular and leftist actors, these bonds have aided in keeping it alive in terms of its ideology, and collective identity. Nonetheless, antagonistic secular discourses, and the restrictions that the state enforces, have pushed the party to the fringes of politics. This process of marginalization achieved its peak with the ultimate prohibition of the political activity of Jamaat in 2024.

The political situation in Bangladesh changed as a result of the July 2024 uprising that was organized mostly by the youth under the auspices of the anti-discrimination student movement. The ideas of equality, justice, and human dignity of the movement caused the destruction of the AL government and introduced a new period of political openness. This is a democratic resurgence that gave groups that were once oppressed a chance to reclaim their place in the life of a people such as Jamaat. This has led to a perceived revival of Jamaat in terms of political dynamism and involvement of the populace.

The way ahead of Jamaat is however still a challenge. Its long-lasting identification with the anti-liberation operations, persistent media stigmatization, internal struggles of the Islamic parties, and the overall geopolitical pressures make it difficult to re-enter the mainstream. In

addition, the weak democratic situation in the country, which is full of corruption, polarization, and institutional inefficiency, curtails the chances of making the political reconciliation real.

This paper will look at the way Jamaat-e-Islami is reacting currently to these changing political and social forces following July 24 and how it will realign its tactics to rejoin the democratic process. Finally, the study of adaptive responses of Jamaat adds to the existing discussion on pluralism in politics and democratic coexistence in Bangladesh as well as to the comparison of Islamist movements in South Asia. The gained knowledge of the study is thus important in projecting ways into the future that would give rise to a more accommodative democracy in which Islamic and democratic principles can coexist in a common national space.

2. Literature Reviews

Islamic politics is a complex relationship of religion and politics, aiming at inculcating the Islamic ethics and legal system in the contemporary political framework. It is a model of Muslim involvement in politics and provides moral principles in leadership and policymaking. According to Haikal (2024), Islamic politics affects both the domestic and international political environment by giving Muslims normative frameworks of governance based on justice, accountability and consultation. The issue of Islam and democracy has still been the center stage of political Islam in the modern times. Other researchers believe that the principles of shura (consultation), adl (justice), and mas'uliyah (accountability) reflect the principles of democracy, and it is possible to develop the system of governance that will reconcile divine sovereignty and the involvement of the population (Munawaroh et al., 2024). However, to others, democracy is a menace to the sovereignty of God, and it is considered as a secular order that places human powers above the law of God. (Munawaroh et al., 2024).

Islam is a significant influence in the Muslim societies in cultural and social aspects. It authorizes power, establishes moral order and promotes social cooperation by providing religious common values (Piscatori, 2022). However, extremism has been encouraged by the politicization of Islam. Organizations like the Al-Qaeda and ISIS have used religion to fuel global jihad and twisted Islamic values and strengthened Islamophobic discourse in the global arena (Bonino, 2018). Conversely, moderate Islamist movements pursue political change via democratic participation, which fosters social justice and moral regeneration within the already established political systems (Kubicek, 2015). Political Islam therefore takes its position in a wide range--reformist movements of peaceful democratization versus radical actors of denying

pluralism. Magnetizing the feelings of Islamism against colonialism and Westernization have also created situations of internal polarization and sectarianism among Muslim groups (Ayoob and Lussier, 2020).

The Islamic politics originated in Bangladesh in 1975. Military regimes of Ziaur Rahman and H. M. Ershad officially resurrected Islam in the constitution and other governmental institutions, giving Islamic parties legitimacy again following years of ban. This compromise by non-religious political parties like the AL and Bangladesh Nationalist Party allowed the Islamist parties to acquire political bargaining even when they had low voter turnout (Riaz, 2012).

Since 2009, there has been an emergence of a more centralized political order in Bangladesh under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina. This erosion of the electoral credibility and increased political polarization occurred due to the abolition of the system of a caretaker government by the Fifteenth Amendment in 2011 (Mollah, 2020). The decline in the democratic competition was reflected in 2014 and 2018 elections marked by boycotts by the opposition, voter intimidation and manipulation of the systems (Freedom House, 2015; International Republican Institute, 2019). The Digital Security Act of 2018 also limited civic rights to an even greater extent, criminalizing any dissent and permitting the arrest of reporters, students, and Islamist group members (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Electoral authoritarianism was institutionalized by 2024: the state institutions, judiciary and the media were captured, the opposition politics was dismantled systematically (Hasan, 2025).

BJeI dates its historical origins to the Jamaat-e-Islami movement, which was established in 1941 by Abul A'la Mawdudi. Mawdudi envisaged a religious order (iqamat-e-din) which was based on divine sovereignty (Bahadur, 1975; Ahmad, 1967). Maulana Abdur Rahim and Ghulam Azam regionalized the movement by translating works by Mawdudi into Bengali with the help of Islami Chhatra Sangha (Rahman, 2007; Siddique, 2018).

East Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami had entered into democratic alliances crying foul against military rule in 1960s but had not connected to the Bengali aspirations of nationalism (Bahadur, 1975; Rashiduzzaman, 1970). Its lobbying against the 1971 Liberation War coupled with its military support on the side of Pakistan left a legacy of political stigma on it. This historical baggage has remained influential in the minds of both people of Bangladesh about Jamaat-e-Islami, and

has limited its legitimacy irrespective of its organizational discipline and long-rooted presence at the grassroots (Islam, 2021). The history of Islamic politics in Bangladesh can thus be seen as a larger conflict between ideological rehabilitation, state repression and the pursuit of political inclusion in a weak democratic dispensation.

In 1971 after the independence of Bangladesh, the EPJI was outlawed because it had joined forces with the Pakistani military. In 1976, the party revived itself as Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, and in 2008 it changed its name to BJeI. Even though it was barred from taking part in elections since 2013, BJeI has still practiced political Islam by promoting grassroots activism with help of the Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir (established in 1977). The party made a comeback in electoral politics in 1986 where it won ten parliamentary seats. It secured eighteen seats in 1991 and played an important coalition role to assist the BNP government. Nevertheless, this changed following its boycotting of the February 1996 election and its defeat in only three seats in 1996. BJeI succeeded in securing seventeen seats and cabinet positions as a BNP coalition partner in 2001 but its fortunes plummeted in 2008 because of the war crimes trials, execution of senior leaders, and the 2013 ban on elections (Islam, 2021).

In the 2010s, the BJeI was brutally suppressed by the AL government as the top leaders were repressed by the prosecution over the atrocities in the war (Saidul Islam, 2011). Although Jamaat had denounced militancy, the government propaganda depicted Jamaat as an extremist, further polarizing secular and Islamist camps. After crackdown on Jamaat and its student wing in 2010, the regime intensified its efforts and has since then arrested many Jamaat members, killed dozens of people extrajudicially and tortured scores of others. Amnesty International denounced the prevalent political suppression by the government. (Saidul Islam, 2011).

According to Kumar (2017) the Jamaat-e-Islami led in South Asia fought against the formation of Pakistan as well as the independence of Bangladesh before changing to democratic involvement as a survival measure. Despite the fact that Jamaat emerged as the biggest Islamist Party in Bangladesh, its anti-nationalism in 1971 and its narrow ideological system has destroyed its credibility. Rigidity of the party, conservative perspective and little participation in social reforms limit its mass appeal to middle classes and students in the cities. (Kumar, 2017)

However, Jamaat is still powerful in terms of its organization. Its large socio-economic and educational networks and deep ideological discipline keep its influence on the grassroots level even after the loss of leadership and legal limitations. The covert support of the BNP gives them political leverage and the inability of the ruling party to deal with fundamentalism and corruption in turn gives Jamaat the ability to retain its relevance. BJeI still operates as more than a political group: a movement to the Islamic moral resurgence. This two-fold identity allows it to maintain an ideologically consistent sociopolitical role in Bangladesh, despite years of political repression, and mobilize religious interests (Kumar, 2017).

Most literature analyzed Islamic politics, socio-economic impact, authoritarian rule in Bangladesh, the historical understanding of Jamaat-e-Islami, the ideology of Jamaat, and the challenges it faces. The research also examined Jamaat's position in democratic competition and within the broader social and political context. But no literature has directly shed light on Jamaat's dynamics after the July 2024 uprising and its existing political and social challenges. July 24 is a significant and pivotal date in the country's political transformation. It is essential to analyze academically how much Jamaat will be successful in facing the challenges after the uprising and how it will determine its political position and dynamics. Therefore, the article has been presented to fill that research gap.

3. Methodology

The study used a qualitative approach to research on how BJeI defines its political and socio-economic direction in the changing environment in Bangladesh. The work presents primary and secondary data to gain a deep insight into the ways in which Jamaat manages to overcome its difficulties, among them being the political marginalization, the exclusion in elections, the stigmatization of Muslims throughout history, the internal struggle between the Islamic parties, the media framing, Islamophobia, corruption, and political instability. The study also incorporates the recommendations of the participants on the possible approaches to the political rehabilitation and social reintegration.

The gathering of primary data was done in the form of semi-structured interviews with a variety of different informants based on their knowledge, experience, and organizational position. The informants were Islamic scholars, political analysts, human rights activists, academicians, lawyers, political party's representatives, minority members, and young politicians. The interviews were done in various months and the interactions took a span of about 30 to 60

minutes. Some interviews were done face to face depending on access and preference to the participants whereas others were done through online channels like Google meet and email communication.

The recorded in-depth interviews were transcribed to written responses with the consent of the participants, whereas some of the interviews were transcribed during the interviews. The ethical research issue was observed in all interviews, which involved confidentiality and voluntary involvement. Religious and political issues were addressed sensitively so as not to cause any inconvenience or danger to the participants.

The data on the secondary data were collected based on a broad variety of academic sources, such as scholarly articles, books, reports, and credible media publications, to triangulate and support the results obtained with the primary data.

The profiles of respondents for in-depth interviews are as follows:

SL	Code	Designation	Organization	Category	Academic Degree	Sex	Age
1	IS-01	Muhaddith and Khatib	JamiaIslamiya Hathazari, Chittagong	Islamic Scholar	Dawrae Hadith	Male	55
2	IS-02	Professor and Islamic Public Lecturer	International Islamic University Chittagong	Islamic Scholar	PhD	Male	50
3	PA-01	Freelancer		Political Analyst	BA	Male	42
4	PA-02	Professor of Political Science	University of Chittagong	Political Analyst	PhD	Male	50
5	AC-01	Professor of Business Administration	International Islamic University Chittagong	Academics	PhD	Male	47
6	AC-02	Professor of Philosophy	University of Chittagong	Academics	MA	Male	55
7	HRW-01	Official	Odhikar	Human Rights Workers	MA	Female	40

8	LP-01	Advocate	Chittagong Judge Court	Legal Professionals	MA	Fem ale	43
9	JL-01	Executive Central Member	Bangladesh JamaatIslami	Jamaat Leader	PhD	Male	50
10	JL-02	Local NayebAmeer	Bangladesh JamaatIslami	Jamaat Leader	PhD	Male	50
11	OPL-01	Muhaddith	Bangladesh IslamiAndolon	Other Political Leader	Dawrae Hadith	Male	45
12	OPL-02	Businessman	Bangladesh Nationalist Party	Other Political Leader	BA	Male	45
13	OPL-03	Businessman	Amar Bangladesh Party	Other Political Leader	MA	Male	47
14	MMC-01	Local Leader	Hindu Buddha OkkoParishad	Member of Minority Communities	MA	Male	43
15	YJW-01	Student	International Islamic University	Young July Warrior	Honors 3 rd year	Male	20
16	YJW-02	Student	University of Chittagong	Young July Warrior	Honors 2 nd year	Male	19

Thematic analysis is employed to examine both primary and secondary data, encompassing interview transcripts and documentary sources. A coding framework is developed in alignment with the research questions and preliminary insights, followed by systematic coding to identify recurring concepts and patterns. Subsequently, broad themes are derived, revealing significant cross-source patterns. The analysis culminates in an integrative stage, where findings from interviews and documents are compared and validated through triangulation to ensure interpretive coherence and analytical rigor.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Political Exclusion and Electoral Challenges

IS-02, PA-01, JL-01-02-03 suggest that the political marginalization of Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh is still entrenched within the post-Liberation War sociopolitical situation. The AL administration was methodically marginalizing BJeI by blocking official politics by legal,

institutional, and coercive forces between 2009 and 2024. Many leaders and activists were detained or lost or tried according to politically motivated charges (Hajjaj, 2023). Top leaders were executed after conviction by the international crimes tribunal, allegedly on account of war crimes and crime against humanity. Yet, the large-scale condemnation of these proceedings was based on allegations of the breach of the due process and political impartiality (Jalil, 2010).

IS-02, PA-01, JL-01-02-03, HRW-01, AC-01-02 argued that the AL government attempted to eradicate the institutional underpinnings of Jamaat by holding dominant financial and educational institutions in the country, especially the Islami Bank Bangladesh and the International Islamic University Chittagong, at bay. The political offices of Jamaat were shut down, its operations prohibited, networks disrupted, further weakening the process of delegitimization and organizational repression of Jamaat. The 2013 Supreme Court decision that does not allow Jamaat to participate in election is still a decisive impediment to its integration into mainstream politics.

However, IS-02, PA-01, JL-01-02-03, HRW-01, AC-02, YJW-01-02 argued that the July 2024 uprising provided Jamaat with a minimal political rejuvenation, boosting the media presence and mobilization. Nevertheless, they noted that the marginalization still continues, with the BNP, parts of the secular civil society, and aspects of the intellectual elites, all playing a role in limiting Jamaat to re-joining the Bangladesh political arena as HRW-01 said:

“Jamaat has always been unjustly left out. All people should be allowed to participate in democracy, but even after the July insurgency, BNP leaders, leftist parties, and NGOs continue to describe them as anti-liberation.”

PA-01, JL-03, HRW-01, AC-02, YJW-01-02, OPL-01-02 described Jamaat-e-Islami as a “party without ballots,” emphasizing its continued struggle to regain grassroots momentum in Bangladesh’s post-2013 political landscape. Despite its historical strength as a major Islamist organization, its electoral influence declined significantly, with its 2008 vote share markedly lower than its peak in 1991 (Mostafa, 2024). The majority of respondents argued that, despite emerging signs of reorganization, JeI faces substantial electoral and political constraints in a highly competitive and polarized political environment. The widespread social resistance in mainstream constituencies continues to limit its mass acceptability and institutional recovery.

PA-01, JL-01-02-03, HRW-01, AC-02, YJW-01-02 acknowledged that since 2009, the AL government persistently sought to weaken JeI's organizational strength. However, JeI has strategically expanded its transnational networks and maintained informal domestic structures, enhancing its resilience and institutional endurance. JL-01-02-03, HRW-01 even suggested that JeI's growing adaptability might enable it to rival or surpass the BNP in forthcoming elections, signaling potential shifts in the configuration of Bangladesh's opposition politics.

Drawing on political resilience theory, the study finds that movements facing systemic repression often adapt through organizational reconstruction, ideological recalibration, and tactical flexibility (Vuori, 2021). In this regard, JeI's underground activism, community mobilization, and international linkages function as coping mechanisms, ensuring institutional survival despite prolonged state suppression. As Opp (1990) suggests, while loosely structured groups often collapse under repression, highly organized movements tend to decentralize, radicalize, or exploit alternative political openings to sustain relevance.

Notably, in 2024, JeI's collaboration with student movements marked a significant strategic shift. Following the August 5 revolution, JeI adopted a proactive public stance—providing humanitarian aid, engaging with civic actors, and protecting minority religious sites (MMC-01, IS-02, JI-01). JI-01-02, PA-01, YJW-01-02 further noted increased confidence within JeI toward electoral re-engagement, particularly after the successes of its student wing, Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS), in the DUCSU, RUCSU, CUCSU and JUCSU polls. These developments underscore JeI's evolving strategy to reassert political legitimacy, strengthen youth-based mobilization, and position itself as a redefined Islamic democratic actor within Bangladesh's political sphere. Jamaat also advocates tolerance of other religions, and this is a strategic change to a more tolerant political stance (Ramachandran, 2024; The Daily Star, 2025). PA-01, JL-01-03, HRW-01, AC-02, YJW-01 gave optimistic but cautious views on the electoral performance of JeI indicating that the party might achieve more than 20-25 percent of the total votes in future elections.

As the comparative analysis shows, there is not much difference between JeI and its primary ally, the BNP, not more than two percent. According to the BRAC University poll, JeI becomes more visible: 12 percent of all people surveyed were planning to vote to the BNP, 10.4 percent to JeI, and 2.8 percent to the National Citizens Party (NCP). The BNP, JeI, and NCP of 16.3, 11.3 and 2 percent respectively eight months earlier illustrated minor hubs of BNP and JeI and

slight rises in emerging student parties. The AL lost its support of 8.9 to 7.3 percent, the Jatiya Party lost its 0.7 to 0.3 percent, and other Islamist parties fell to 2.6 to 0.7 percent (The Daily Star, 2025). These tendencies show that JeI still is an actor in the transforming electoral environment in Bangladesh, especially among constituencies that do not want to be attached to mainstream political parties.

4.2. Social Legitimacy and the Historical Burden of 1971

During the 1971 Liberation War, Jamaat-e-Islami assumed a significant and controversial role by opposing the secession of East Pakistan and aligning with the Pakistani military regime to suppress the nationalist movement. This alliance was part of a broader military strategy involving auxiliary militias such as the Razakar, Al-Badr, and Al-Shams, which sought to counter pro-independence forces (Islam, 2024). The conflict witnessed mass atrocities, including the deaths of an estimated three million people and widespread sexual violence, leaving enduring scars on Bangladesh's collective memory (Tamanna, 2025). While such allegations remain pervasive, Jamaat leaders have consistently denied involvement in torture, rape, or killings, arguing that their wartime actions were political rather than criminal (AC-01; JL-01-02). Scholars such as Bose (Ahmed, 2011) and Rayhan (2019) underscore the complexities of these narratives, linking Jamaat's stance to broader ideological, geopolitical, and historical contexts that continue to shape Bangladesh's post-war political discourse.

PA-01, JL-01, HRW-01, OPL-01-02 emphasized the fact that Jamaat-e-Islami still has to handle the stigma that it imposed on itself due to its noncooperation in the Liberation War. The history of cooperation with the Pakistani forces supports the image of JeI as the anti-national force, which offers political advantages to the ruling parties in delegitimizing the organization through trials and executions of the top leaders (Hossain et al., 2021). Since the uprising of July 2024, the idea of the controversial history of Jamaat gained significant currency in the public, and the secular movements and the Awami discourse are much more likely to associate Islamic extremist activism with political instability. YJW-01-02 often refer to JeI as being out of sync with modern ideals of inclusive citizenship, democratic accountability, and economic growth, and show signs of intergenerational differences in perceptions of politics.

To address these issues, JeI attempts to recover its social image by social welfare and infrastructural development, in an effort to regenerate confidence and expand its political

popularity. Nonetheless, these attempts have not been very successful, in large part due to the fact that the party has never publicly admitted or apologized to the historic fault and still continues to promote an Islamist political model, which restricts its chances to eliminate the historical weight on the shoulders of the people and its political legitimacy (Mostafa, 2021).

The respondents considered the events of July 2024 to be a watershed moment and, to a certain degree, allowed JeI to re-establish its organizational space and re-enter the national discourse. However, PA-01, AC-02, OPL-01-02 highlighted that its negative stand during the war is one of the most important impediments. The fact that the party does not take a firm position or even make an official apology over what it did during the war destroys any attempts at the rehabilitation process and exposes the party to political criticism. Although the term “razakar” seems to be less significant among younger voters (PA-01, AC-02, YJW-01, JI-01), the respondents emphasized the fact that the lack of historical accountability is still a phenomenon that undermines the trust, which is why the chances of JeI becoming a completely legitimate political party in Bangladesh remain low. Furthermore, the BNP, leftists and secular-nationalist actors continue to use Jamaat’s war-time past as a tool for restricting its present political space (JI-01).

Most of the interviewees claimed that the July 24th, 2024 uprising resulted in a significant event that redefined the controversial political course of Jamaat-e-Islami, which allowed the organization to rebound and regain part of its credibility. It was interesting to note that the party non-officially apologized to the anti-Liberation position in 1971, marking a calculated policy of reconciliation with the past and an effort to overcome the psychological baggage of the so-called razakar on its political and social rehabilitation (Bhuiyan, 2025). PA-01, AC-02, OPL-01-02 noted that Jamaat’s rehabilitation remains constrained by its controversial role in the 1971 Liberation War and its failure to issue a definitive apology. Although PA-01, AC-02, YJW-01, JI-01 suggested that the “razakar” stigma lessens among younger cohorts, most emphasized unresolved historical accountability as a persistent source of mistrust.

Furthermore, the BNP, leftists, and secular-nationalist parties continue instrumentalizing Jamaat’s wartime past to maintain their political influence, as JI-01 reflected, “*The July 2024 movement offered some room to breathe, but still we live under the shadow of history. Our adversaries—BNP, leftist parties, even civil society leaders—invoke 1971 as a means to keep*

us illegitimate. Unless we can clearly discuss our past, then our future will forever be constrained.”

4.3. Intra-Islamist Rivalries

Most interviewees claimed that the spread and competition of various Islamist players in Bangladesh has seriously damaged the political and ideological reputation of Jamaat-e-Islami. The Islamism in Bangladesh takes various forms- politically active as well as mostly apolitical orientations- but most Islamic formations are still critical of ideological purity and political practices of Jamaat. Deobandi oriented organizations like Hefazat-e-Islam, Islami Andolon Bangladesh, Khilafat Majlish, and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam overtly doubt the legitimacy of Jamaat. IS-01-02, AC-01 noted that populist rhetoric of Hefazat, enhanced by their huge madrasa networks, are particularly attractive to rural and conservative people to allow the group to spread into regions where Jamaat has lost traction. In fact, Hefazat leaders have openly denounced Jamaat as a hypocritical political outfit instead of an actually Islamic one (The Daily Star, August 5, 2025).

Likewise, Salafi-based movements, such as Ahle Hadith Andolon, Jamiat Ahle Hadith, and Ahle Hadith Bangladesh regularly attack Jamaat as Khariji or non-Islamic doubting both its aqida (creed) and doctrinal purity. According to AHS-01, Jamaat aqida is weak; their ideology has been spoilt as they adopt bid‘a (innovation) even they are Khariji. Although PA-01, AC-01-02 mentioned that Sufi oriented movements sometimes accuse Jamaat of lacking in piety, others, like those of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Hizb-ut-Tawhid, are more rigid and view Jamaat as ideologically watered down and politically expedient.

Overall, this intra-Islamist fragmentation limits the ability of Jamaat to seize power or to establish itself as the true representative of the Islamist politics. Rivalry in doctrine and political maneuvering has compelled Jamaat to manoeuvre through a highly fractious Islamist environment, in which it is important to balance theological orthodoxy and political pragmatism with electoral viability in order to stay afloat even further. PA-01 commented, *“Even after the July 2024 uprising, Jamaat faces tremendous pressure from other Islamist parties. Instead of coming together, these parties vie over ‘who’s more Islamic,’ where Jamaat finds itself on a weak wicket. The intra-Islamist competition weakens their leadership claim and divides the Islamist vote bank.”*

Tajfel and Turner's (1979, 2004) social identity theory posits that collective identity is reinforced through distinctions between the in-group ("us") and the out-group ("them"), as organizations consolidate internal cohesion by excluding and delegitimizing rivals. In Bangladesh, competing Islamist factions enhance their collective identity by portraying Jamaat-e-Islami as ideologically compromised or insufficiently Islamic, thereby asserting their own authenticity. Despite persistent stigmatization, most participants noted that Jamaat adopts a pragmatic strategy to cultivate alliances with other Islamist actors ahead of forthcoming elections. By fostering collaboration and organizational cohesion, Jamaat seeks to rebuild its electoral base, mitigate intra-Islamist divisions, and reclaim political legitimacy in the post-uprising landscape. (Amin, 2025)

4.4. Organizational Adaptability and the Question of Reform

According to the research, Jamaat-e-Islami has low adaptability to the organization, which limits its capacity to react to the dynamism of the political environment that can shift quickly after the July 2024 uprising. The party leadership is still very conservative and inward looking a fact that is further enhanced by its strict hierarchical nature and closed decisions making. These structural rigidities hamper adaptation to the modern dynamics in politics, and innovation, according to some interviewees (OPL-01-02, AC-01-02, PA-01, YJW-01). Lack of organizational change and overdependence on old forms of operation also limits the ability of Jamaat to cope with the changing socio-political environment in Bangladesh (Islam, 2015).

According to IS-01, PA-01, AC-02, there was a necessity to change the educational syllabus of Jamaat, which remains based on classical texts and obsolete structures. A wider institutional inertia is represented by the fact that the party was not as likely to modernize its intellectual and ideological curricula. Other participants (PA-01, HRW-01, OPL-02, YJW-01) noted that there is not much room to argue or disagree with the Jamaat internal culture as the leadership is not willing to add the grassroots point of view. This withdraw organizational culture maintains a sense of being self-reliant and isolates younger and reform-orientated members. Moreover, IS-01-02, AC-02 spoke of the lack of institutional systems, i.e. a formal fatwa council, research institute, or policy think tank to encourage intellectual renewal or strategic innovation. The absence of such bodies prevents Jamaat in putting their ideological principles into the framework of current national and global issues and reduces their topicality and attractiveness.

The stagnant situation of the party with regards to social issues, such as gender equality, minority rights, and democratic participation were also mentioned by several participants (PA-01, AC-01-02, HRW-01). Although these themes are more and more represented in the modern Islamist movements of the Muslim world, the discourse and policy framework of Jamaat has not changed much. According to PA-01, YJW- 01, Jamaat still relies on Bangladesh Islamic Chhatra Shibir (BICS) to mobilize. This dependency, though useful in providing cohesion to the organization, restricts the ability to reach wider constituencies, as well as the development of ideas.

Organizational Learning Theory states that organizations are required to evolve by critically analyzing the previous failures and refocusing on the strategies as the external conditions change (Argyris and Schon, 1997; Berta et al., 2015). In the case of Jamaat, the major issue is deciding whether to continue with the narrow Islamist politics or whether to adopt a wider socio-political approach with focus on governance, welfare and participatory democracy. The history of comparative experiences of conversion of ideology, e.g. the development of the Refah Partisi into the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey, testifies to the fact that ideological reinterpretation could lead to better legitimacy and increase political power.

However, JI-01-02 admitted that Jamaat has taken small steps to reform, such as the attempt to include the women and minorities in the organizational structure of Jamaat. According to JI-01, PA-01, AC-02, the party now has a different focus which is no longer on building an ethno-religious state that is based on the Islamic sharia but instead, is a welfare state that builds on morality-based governance. Although restricted, these changes suggest a new awareness of Jamaat that it must gradually undergo ideological and structural change in order to survive in the competitive and dynamic Bangladesh politics.

4.5. Media Framing and Islamophobia

The interconnection of media framing and Islamophobia is one of the strongest issues facing Jamaat-e-Islami both nationally and internationally (IS-02, JI-01, PA-01, AC-01). According to the principles stipulated in media framing literature (Lentz, 1991; Entman, 1993; Pan and Kosicki, 1993; Iyengar and Simon, 1993; Nelson, 2002; Taylor, 2008; Iyengar, 1991; Zaklama, 2025), the media are selective in using information to emphasize, interpret, and reproduce information in a manner that affects the way people perceive political actors and events. It is the way such framing mechanisms influence not just what people think about but also the way they perceive political phenomena. Negative representations also lead to polarization in the

society, stereotyping, and creation of skewed stories that delegitimize the targeted groups (Berk, 2025).

According to IS-02, JI-01-02, AC-01, both the national and social media often portrays Jamaat as anti-liberation, accomplice to the war crimes, and antagonistic to women and minorities, which contradicts its efforts to demonstrate itself as a democratic and patriotic political party. This dynamic has been exacerbated by the post-9/11 international discourse on terrorism, which in many cases confuses international media in identifying Islamist political organizations with militant extremism, and making the latter, most of the time without empirical evidence.

Islamophobia as theorized by Edward Said (1978) and later developed by Meer and Modood (2009, 2020) refers to a discourse of ideas and practices that essentialize Islam as violent, retrogressive, and unsuitable to modernity. It is expressed via prejudice, exclusion as well as institutional discrimination, hence disrupting social cohesion and human rights (Ciftci, 2012). Media images of Islam as terrorism across the globe have been instrumental in the spread of Islamophobic attitudes and policies, many of which are necessarily absorbed into the national discourses.

In Bangladesh, PA-01, IS-01-02, JI-01-02 noticed that the Islamophobic discourses, very much imported into the western discourse have been localized and rallied to marginalize Jamaat. The party is being othered in a systematic way where it is represented as undemocratic, intolerant, and violent. This is the continuing stigmatization that invalidates the Jamaat arguments to moderate politics and creates doubts among the masses. In most cases when Jamaat tries to reinvent itself through promoting democratic reform, social justice or minority rights, these efforts are overwhelmed by established frames focusing on its controversial history and suspected radicalism. As a result, Islamophobia, fueled by the media, still limits the political reintegration of Jamaat and its ideas to be blackened in the changing politics of democracy in Bangladesh.

4.6. Corruption, Political Instability, and Geopolitical Interference

According to PA-01, AC-01, IS-01-02, JI-01-02, YJW-02, Jamaat-e-Islami faces deep structural constraints arising from pervasive corruption, persistent political instability, and external geopolitical interference. Corruption, often characterized as a systemic “social disease” in Bangladesh, affects nearly all sectors—including the political apparatus, civil

bureaucracy, judiciary, and law enforcement institutions. While parties such as the Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) are frequently implicated in corrupt practices, Jamaat has sought to distinguish itself as a disciplined, morally upright, and relatively corruption-free organization. However, the entrenchment of corruption within the broader political culture obstructs Jamaat's ability to maintain ethical consistency and fair competition. Although its ideological commitment to *shari'a*-based ethics and organizational discipline could, in theory, offer an alternative to Bangladesh's moral and political decay, the pervasiveness of corruption and deceit continues to undermine these ideals.

PA-01, AC-01 further noted that the political instability following the July 2024 coup has impeded the continuity of Jamaat's policy implementation and weakened its organizational coherence. The volatile political environment has intensified partisan rivalry, disrupted democratic governance, and fractured national unity. For Jamaat, this instability diminishes strategic continuity, restricts long-term planning, and constrains its capacity to function effectively within a democratic framework.

In addition, geopolitical interference has significantly affected Jamaat's political prospects. As emphasized by IS-02, PA-01, and AC-01, regional and global powers frequently frame Islamic political movements as potential security threats or sources of extremism, often without empirical justification. These narratives, disseminated through diplomatic and media channels, generate domestic suspicion and justify state repression, surveillance, and the misuse of legal instruments against Jamaat. Certain Indian political figures and Hindutva ideologues have similarly labeled Jamaat a threat to regional stability. In response, Jamaat's Secretary General publicly affirmed the party's commitment to maintaining peace and security along the India–Bangladesh border and emphasized that Jamaat poses no threat to India or its people (Roy, 2024).

5. Conclusion

The Revolution in July 2024 changed the political and social course of Jamaat-e-Islami, temporarily increasing its popularity but also revealing its long-term weaknesses. Jamaat is still struggling with the stigma of its history associated with the Liberation War of 1971, despite its disciplined structure and ideological coherence, which weakens its legitimacy. The ideological rivalry of Salafi, Sufi and other Islamist groups also contributes to the divide in its support base, and the negative images of the domestic and foreign media strengthen the ideas of

extremism and anti-democratic views. Inside an organization, it is organizational inflexibility, old educational systems, and uneven positions on women and minority rights that impede change and flexibility.

Jamaat needs to seek to establish inclusive and reform-based politics, establish cooperation with other Islamic groups, and expressively interact with various stakeholders to remain politically relevant. The open communication and civic participation will be essential in restoring the credibility by countering the Islamophobic and negative media narratives. Finally, the future of the party remains uncertain, because it will need to develop into a moderate and democratic platform that is based upon Islamic values but is sensitive to the present needs of equality, justice, and human dignity. Some positive news--like the re-energized actions of Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir and the general shift in public opinion--are encouraging signs that Jamaat is slowly regaining its footing and claiming once again a role as a potential political force in the country.

6. Policy Recommendations

Presently Jamaat-e-Islami faces both significant challenges and potential avenues for political revitalization. The organization requires comprehensive reforms to enhance social legitimacy, public trust, and organizational resilience while navigating its controversial historical legacy. Addressing its role in the 1971 Liberation War with transparency and specificity is crucial for fostering national unity, democratic consolidation, and societal cohesion. Institutionalized consultation with professionals, civil society actors, and

JI must promote inclusivity by actively engaging youth, women, and minority groups. Incorporating participatory decision-making, grassroots dialogues, and strategic use of social and digital platforms can enhance public perception, showcasing the party's commitment to social justice, democracy, and inclusivity. Institutional modernization—through research centers, policy think tanks, and ideological councils—would foster adaptive leadership, critical debate, and evidence-based policymaking.

Reframing Jamaat's ideological narrative toward welfare-oriented governance, education, healthcare, poverty alleviation, and minority rights, rather than a strict sharia-based agenda, could broaden its constituency and counter perceptions of radicalism. Comparative cases, such

as Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP), demonstrate how Islamist parties can reinterpret ideology to enhance legitimacy and electoral appeal.

Strategic communication is necessary to counter negative media framing and Islamophobic discourses. Non-violent, socially constructive initiatives, independent media programs, and engagement with academics, policymakers, and international observers can enhance legitimacy, promote pluralism, and ensure that the party's democratic credentials are recognized domestically and internationally.

Ji should pursue strategic reforms grounded in democratic values, including freedom of expression, religious liberty, judicial independence, and professional governance. A moderate foreign policy approach would mitigate geopolitical risks and bolster credibility. Concurrently, the state must guarantee equitable legal protections and recognize Islamic political parties as legitimate participants in Bangladesh's pluralistic democracy. Through inclusive engagement, protection of marginalized groups, and youth participation, both Jamaat and the state can contribute to a more stable, just, and democratic society.

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