Youth and National Security: Why Our Voice and Vote Matter

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Introduction

Bangladesh is a country where young people make up a big part of the population. About 28% of citizens are between 15 and 29 years old over 45 million individuals whose choices and aspirations are shaping both the present and the future of the nation[2]. This large youth population is not just a source of opportunity, but also a responsibility, as they play a key role in driving progress. National security should not only be seen in terms of military strength or border protection. It also means keeping peace in society, protecting democracy, ensuring economic stability, and building resilience. If young people feel excluded or lose trust in these systems, the very foundation of security can be at risk.

Young people in Bangladesh actively involved in civic and political activities, such as voting or participating in campaigns.
Source: Daily Star

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[2] *The Daily Star*. "Youths Account for 28pc of Population." April 14, 2024.
https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/youths-account-28pc-population-3293161

For instance, Bangladesh's rapid digital growth and the political engagement of its youth are powerful examples of their influence. Ahead of the 2024 election, many first-time voters emphasized the need for transparency, justice, and accountable institutions. One young voter expressed, *"I want people of Bangladesh to freely exercise their voting right... freedom of speech will be ensured"*[3]. These voices show how youth participation or their absence can directly shape the nation's stability.

Youth-led movements have also been central to democratic change. The Monsoon Uprising of July 2024 saw young activists use Facebook to share satire, artwork, hashtags, and unifying symbols that challenged authoritarian narratives[4]. This wave of digital activism demonstrated how online platforms, when driven by youth, can strengthen democratic values and collective resistance.

In the end, Bangladesh's security and resilience rest heavily on its young people. Their creativity, energy, and active civic participation will be critical in building a stronger and more stable future for the country.

Role of Youth in National Security

1. Voting and Civic Participation

Young people are truly the backbone of democracy in Bangladesh. By voting, joining civic movements, and taking part in policy discussions, they help shape the country's future. Casting their ballots is not just about choosing leaders it's about influencing national priorities, demanding transparency, and keeping democracy alive. Recent elections show this clearly, as first-time voters placed strong emphasis on transparency and freedom of speech, underlining how essential youth participation is for the nation's stability.

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[3] *AP News*. "Young Voters in Bangladesh Demand Change as Election Approaches." January 6, 2024. https://apnews.com/article/07c68aeae7fe2a799f929c689dbc2c2d.

[4] Rahman, M., et al. "Monsoon Uprising in Bangladesh: Digital Mobilization and Youth Activism." *arXiv Preprint*, August 6, 2025. https://arxiv.org/abs/2508.02498.

2. Digital Citizenship

Today's youth are digital natives, and the way they use online platforms can have a real impact on national security. In Bangladesh, young digital safety ambassadors have been actively raising awareness about cybercrime, hate speech, and misinformation[5]. When young people promote responsible social media use, these platforms can become powerful tools for education, community building, and peace, rather than sources of conflict or division.

3. Peace and Tolerance

Youth are in a unique position to bridge religious, political, and regional divides. Groups like Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE) bring together students across campuses to counter hate speech and promote social harmony[6]. Whether through interfaith dialogue or protecting vulnerable communities, youth-led peace building helps build trust and strengthens the resilience of the nation.

Young leaders gather at the National SAVE Promise Club Youth Summit to discuss and take action on crucial issues like mental health and violence prevention. Source: World Bank

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[5] *The Business Standard*. "Youth-Led Initiative to Raise Digital Safety Awareness across Bangladesh." September 28, 2024. https://www.tbsnews.net.

[6] International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). "SAVE Members Take Action: Promoting and Cultivating a Culture of Peace." September 23, 2024. https://www.ifes.org/news/save-members-take-action-promoting-and-cultivating-culture-peace.

4. Innovation and Technology

The creativity of young people is shaping Bangladesh's path toward innovation. Many youth are launching startups in areas like healthcare, education, and agriculture, providing real solutions while boosting economic growth. In cybersecurity, young innovators are developing tools to protect digital systems. This kind of innovation not only strengthens the economy but also helps reinforce national security in today's interconnected world.

5. Climate and Environmental Security

Bangladesh is on the frontline of climate change, and young people are taking action. In the char-land areas of Gaibandha and Lalmonirhat, youth trained under the Youth Engagement in Flood Resilience Project led community drills and awareness sessions, reaching over 5,000 people[7]. In Feni, youth volunteers played a key role during flood relief, distributing supplies and helping communities build long-term resilience. Through these efforts, young people are protecting food systems, livelihoods, and the overall stability of the nation.

Youth from Friendship NGO providing emergency assistance in Flood Affected remote areas. Source: Friendship NGO

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[7] Rahman, S. (2025) *When the Water Rises, So Do We: How Youth in Bangladesh are Driving Flood Resilience*. Medium, 28 July.

Challenges Youth Face

Unemployment and Frustration

Transitioning from education to employment is a difficult journey for many young people. Even with degrees, finding a stable and suitable job is not easy. In Bangladesh, youth unemployment remains high despite the country's overall economic growth. Every year, millions of young people enter the job market, but there are not enough opportunities to match their skills. The situation is particularly challenging for graduates, many of whom cannot find work that fits their education. This mismatch often leaves young people frustrated and disheartened, and if it continues, it could lead to social unrest and weaken trust in the system[8].

Fighting for that one spot among many individuals. Source: The Business Standard

Political Apathy or Distrust

Many young people in Bangladesh feel disconnected from politics. To them, it often seems like a game of power full of corruption and broken promises. Because of this, many feel that voting or participating in civic activities is pointless. A recent survey found that while most young people are registered to vote, a large number have never actually cast their ballot. This shows both their frustration and the lack of trust in political leaders and institutions[9].

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[8] *The Daily Star*. "Labour Market a Ticking Time Bomb." 2024. https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/labour-market-ticking-time-bomb-3767056.

[9] *Dhaka Tribune*. "Youth Disengagement in Mainstream Politics." 2023. https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/328011/youth-disengagement-in-mainstream-politics.

Digital Addiction and Misinformation Traps

The digital world brings many opportunities, but it also comes with challenges. Many young people spend long hours on social media, gaming, or other online activities, which can affect their studies, sleep, and mental health. At the same time, misinformation online has become a serious problem. Fake news can spread quickly and sometimes lead to real-world harm, including conflict and division. Groups like Rumor Scanner Bangladesh try to fact-check and stop false news, but the sheer volume makes it difficult to control completely. Without better digital awareness, young people remain at risk of being misled or manipulated online.

Risks of Extremism and Radicalization

Unemployment, frustration, and political disengagement can make some young people more vulnerable to extremist ideas. Extremist groups often target youth through social media, offering them a sense of identity, purpose, or even financial incentives. Once radicalized, young people may become involved in violent or illegal activities, which can destabilize communities and threaten national security. Preventing extremism requires education, opportunities for civic engagement, and strong community support. By equipping youth with critical thinking skills, awareness of radicalization tactics, and positive ways to express themselves, the risk of extremism can be significantly reduced[10].

Emerging Areas of Youth Responsibility

Youth and Cybersecurity

As Bangladesh becomes more digital, cybersecurity is now a key part of national security. With over 130 million internet users, many of them young, the responsibility for safe online behavior falls largely on youth. They are not only the most active users but also the most vulnerable to cyber threats like hacking, data theft, scams, and misinformation. A careless click, a weak password, or sharing unverified content can create openings for cybercriminals or even hostile actors.

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[10] United Nations Development Programme (2023). *Youth and National Resilience in Bangladesh*. New York: UNDP.

At the same time, young people have the potential to be the strongest defenders of cyberspace. Many are skilled in coding, digital forensics, and cybersecurity. By learning ethical hacking, maintaining good digital hygiene, and taking part in awareness campaigns, youth can play a frontline role in protecting personal data, national infrastructure, and countering cybercrime. Today, cyber literacy is not just a technical skill it is a civic responsibility for the younger generation[11].

Youth and Climate Security

Climate change is one of the biggest threats to Bangladesh's future, and young people are central to both the challenge and the solution. Rising sea levels, frequent floods, and cyclones directly impact communities, causing food insecurity, displacement, and even conflicts over resources. In a country where one-third of the population is youth, their involvement in climate action is essential.

Bangladeshi youth have already been active in tree-planting drives, awareness campaigns, and climate activism. However, their role needs to go beyond activism to include policy advocacy, innovation, and local adaptation projects. From developing eco-friendly technologies to leading disaster preparedness programs, young people can help communities better prepare for climate-related risks. The youth-led "Fridays for Future" movement globally shows how young voices can influence both national and international climate policies[12]. With knowledge, resources, and platforms, youth can become powerful agents of resilience, protecting both the environment and the nation's security.

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[11] Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission. *Internet Usage and Cybersecurity Report*. Dhaka: BTRC, 2024.

[12] United Nations Development Programme. *Youth and Climate Security in Asia-Pacific*. UNDP Regional Report, 2022.

How Youth Can Contribute

Engage in Community and Peacebuilding Activities

Young people can play a vital role in strengthening society by actively participating in their communities. Volunteering in local projects, helping in schools, organizing health or literacy programs, and supporting disaster relief are all ways they can make a real difference. Beyond these services, youth-led initiatives that promote dialogue and understanding across religious, political, or cultural groups help build peace and social cohesion. These efforts not only improve local communities but also contribute to the wider stability of the nation[13].

Use Social Media Responsibly

Social media is one of the most powerful tools young people have today. It can be used for learning, advocacy, and building connections, but it can also spread misinformation and conflict. Youth can support national security by sharing verified information, raising awareness about social issues, and promoting tolerance online. Using social media responsibly turns these platforms into tools for education, civic engagement, and community cohesion rather than sources of division[13].

Participate in Dialogue, Elections, and Public Service

Active participation in governance and civic life is very important. By voting, taking part in policy discussions, joining youth councils, or working in public service, young people directly influence national priorities. Their voices in debates, consultations, and local initiatives help ensure that government decisions reflect the real needs of citizens. This participation not only strengthens democracy but also promotes accountability, making society more resilient to political instability[14].

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[13] United Nations Development Programme. *Youth and National Resilience in Bangladesh*. New York: UNDP, 2023.

[14] *The Business Standard. Youth-Led Initiatives Shaping Communities and Digital Responsibility*. Dhaka: TBS, 2024.

Lead in Innovation and Global Engagement

Bangladesh's youth are leading innovation in technology, startups, agriculture, and healthcare. By developing solutions to local and national problems, they boost economic growth and strengthen social resilience. Additionally, young people who take part in global forums, exchange programs, or international collaborations help represent Bangladesh abroad, bring back new ideas, and build stronger international partnerships. In this way, youth act as bridges between local progress and global engagement [14].

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[14] *The Business Standard. Youth-Led Initiatives Shaping Communities and Digital Responsibility*. Dhaka: TBS, 2024.

Conclusion

A secure and prosperous future for Bangladesh depends on its youth. With millions of young people shaping both the present and the future, their energy, ideas, and actions are crucial for the nation. Informed, responsible, and empowered youth are the strongest defenders of Bangladesh's democracy, peace, and prosperity. By participating in voting, community projects, social initiatives, and digital platforms, young people can help strengthen society and promote harmony. Their creativity and innovation in technology, entrepreneurship, and climate action also play a vital role in making the country more resilient and self-reliant.

At the same time, addressing challenges such as unemployment, political disengagement, and exposure to misinformation is essential to ensure that youth can contribute positively to their communities and the nation. Ultimately, when young people are engaged, responsible, and empowered, they become the driving force behind a stronger, safer, and more stable Bangladesh. The future of the country depends on the choices and actions of its young generation today.