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## Contemporary Trends and Patterns of Democracy in Bangladesh: A Perception Study

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*Trends and patterns of democracy in a country evolve from past historical processes to its current level of adoption and degree of liberalization of democracy. The testimony to a functional democracy in a country can be traced by the citizens' perception on public institutions, quality of adult franchise, public responsiveness, media freedom and human rights. The survey on democracy portrays citizens' perception on democracy which was carried out in 2014 in 50 constituencies under 16 districts in Bangladesh. Survey findings revealed strong democratic aspirations of the people under the rule of civil power that guarantees respect for human rights, ensures good governance and rule of law, provides responsive service delivery and ensures accountability in all spheres. A fair majority of the respondents believed that democracy which persists in Bangladesh was wretched. Interest in politics or political affiliations among the general public was also found to be low. A majority of the respondents reported that they were not affiliated with any political party and reported very little interest in politics. Majority of the respondents*

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*equated the term 'democracy' with the notion of holding free and fair elections in the country. Therefore, holding free and fair elections was assumed to be the real test of democracy in Bangladesh. Along with this, the autonomy and capacity of the Election Commission was also seen to be critical for holding free and fair elections. A majority of the respondents' viewed that the Election Commission was not capable of delivering free and fair elections, hence, the rationale for handing power over to Non-Party Care Taker government prior to the general elections was re-emphasized. Based on the findings of the study, it was revealed that the trend and pattern of democracy in Bangladesh could be said to be fragile due to the mistrust among political parties and the reliance on Non-Party Care Taker governments by the major opposition parties to hold free and fair elections in the country.*

## **Introduction and Background**

Aspirations for democracy are deeply ingrained in the minds and culture of the people of Bangladesh. The struggle for freedom was rooted much earlier in the 50s' which later culminated in the war of independence in 1971. The experience of democracy in Bangladesh had been mixed which perhaps hindered the proper functioning and growth of democracy. On the one hand there were democratic governments in power, on the other there had been military interventions and the capture of state power. The initial democratic experience of Bangladesh was halted by military interventions after the brutal killing of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975 and the country came under military rule until the end of the 80s'. After deposing the military dictator, Hussain Muhammad Ershad, through political movement, a national consensus among major political parties installed the provision for non-Party Care Taker government<sup>2</sup>. The country remained on its democratic path until 2007 when the tenure of the BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) led government came to an end, and during the transition, a military led non-Party Care Taker government took power and continued for two years until early January 2009. One of the mandate of the non-Party Care Taker government was to restore the environment and trust needed for

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<sup>2</sup> Care Taker Government was introduced to oversee a new parliamentary election on completion of its term. The Thirteenth Amendment of the constitution gave power to an elected government to transfer power to an unelected non-party caretaker government to oversee a new parliamentary election on completion of its term. The system which lasted for nearly two decades conducted four elections in 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2008 to transfer political power. The system was first put in place informally in 1991 (later ratified by the Eleventh Amendment), at a time of critical political transformation, before it was included in the Constitution in the 1996. The system was repealed in 2011 with the passage of the 15th amendment of the constitution.

holding free and fair elections and bring desired electoral reforms. The 2008 election held under the military backed non-Party Care Taker government brought Bangladesh Awami League to power which remained in office up to 2014. The ruling political party Awami League repealed the constitutional provision for holding elections under the non-Party Care Taker government. It replaced the provision of non-Party Care Taker government and allowed the government in power to conduct elections. This resulted in nationwide political violence and a boycott of the elections by the major opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). This led Bangladesh Awami League to come to power for another successive term through the elections held on 5 January 2014. The elections were reported to be controversial, with almost all major opposition parties boycotting, as a result of which 154 of the total 300 seats remained uncontested. With this backdrop, it may be said that the state of democracy in Bangladesh was in a fragile state, faced with deep conflicts between the two major feuding political parties, which resulted in violence with the motive to annihilate one another.

### ***Country Profile\****

**Population:**

159.89 million (2015), Population Composition: Muslim (around 88.2%), Hindu(10.7%), Christian and others (1.1%)

**Land Area:**

1,43,998 square km, Land boundary:4413 km,(India=4142km, Myanmar=271 km),Arable land- 58.96%.

**Population Density:**

1077 per square km(2015)

**Per Capita:**

US \$1,385(2015)

**Average Life Expectancy:**

70.9 years (2015)

**Incidence of Poverty:**

23.2% (2016)

**Ultra Poor:**

12.9% (2016)

**GDP Growth Rate:**

7.11 (2016)

**Literacy Rate:**

Both Sex=63.6, M=65.6, F=61.6 (2015)

\* Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS)

The study was conducted in June 2014, in 50 constituencies, under 16 districts in Bangladesh, with a sample population of 2,795. The survey captures a particular phase from 2007 to 2014, which marks the period that led to political tensions and uncertainty on holding free and fair elections. This was triggered by the repeal of the non-Party Care Taker government provisions from the Constitution and the lack of perceived trust on the Election Commission by the major opposition parties on the question of neutrality. This paper presents Bangladesh's trend and pattern of democracy perceived by the citizens during this particular phase. The survey measures six broad areas: democracy and trust in institutions, governance, service delivery, perceptions on the economy, politics and elections, and lastly perceptions on relations with foreign countries.

### **Focus of the Paper**

However, the focus of the paper will be confined to the state of democracy only and attempts to map the trend and pattern of democracy in Bangladesh. The paper in particular addresses the following questions:

- What conceptions did the respondents have with regard to democracy in Bangladesh?
- What was the level of trust that the people reposed in major public institutions of the country?
- What views the citizens' had on the capacity of the election commission and the provision for non-party Care Taker government for holding general elections for transfer of power?

### **Methodology of the Study**

The survey followed a quantitative approach and includes structured questionnaires having two sets i.e. set 'A' and Set 'B' provided by CSDS<sup>3</sup> and customized with country-specific questions. The survey was conducted from April to June 2014<sup>4</sup> across the country, covering 50 constituencies in seven administrative divisions in Bangladesh. Among the 64 districts, 16 districts have been selected, 6 districts from Dhaka and Chittagong division, 10 districts from the remaining 5

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<sup>3</sup> CSDS –Center for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, India.

<sup>4</sup> From January 2014, constitutional provision for holding election under the government in power by revoking of the Care Taker Government Provision was made resulting in the boycott of election by the major opposition political party and followed by nationwide violence and hartal. The first quarter of the year 2014 is therefore marked by political unrest and violence in response to the general election which was boycotted by major opposition political parties. The socio-political context of the country was not suitable due to the abnormal situation until June 2014 to hold the survey.

divisions. Two polling institutions from each of the constituencies were selected for the survey with a total sample population of 2795 who were voters. As the study maps citizens' perception on democracy and institutions through a quantitative approach, no qualitative data through interviews or focus group discussions have been gathered to substantiate the findings of the study. Further to this, the study did not combine qualitative data derived from other secondary sources; as such the survey findings were mere perceptions of respondents. Though the survey findings gave a picture on the state of democracy in a particular time period, but the findings might also be suggestive of democratic trends and patterns in future over a longer time horizon.

**Table 1: Demographic profile of the respondents**

<p><b>Demographic Profile of the Respondents:</b> Male 49%, Female 50%, Married 85%, Unmarried 10%.</p> <p><b>Religious Identity:</b> Muslim 85%, Hindu 9%, Buddhist 4%, Christian 1% and Others 1%.</p> <p><b>Area of Residence:</b> Respondents from village account for 72%, town 8%, city 7% and big cities 13%.</p> <p><b>Educational Background:</b> With regard to educational background, 24% of the respondents received no education or are regarded as illiterate, 47% studied up to secondary level, 8% studied up to higher secondary or college level, 7% completed their post-graduation, 6% reported that they could read or write though they have received no formal education, and 8% gave no response.</p>
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*Source: Survey Data*

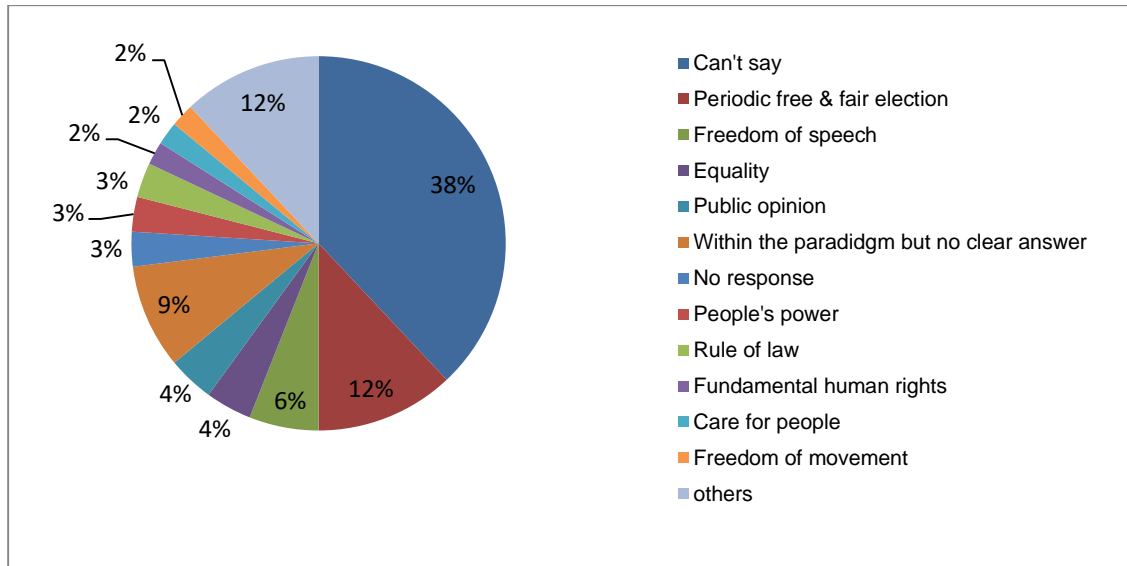
**Findings of the Survey**

The findings of the survey are presented below in three segments. In the first segment it presents what conceptions and preferences the respondents had with regard to democracy? In the second segment what was the trust perception of people on major public institutions of the country? And lastly what views citizens' had on the capacity of the election commission and the provision for non-party care taker government for holding general elections?

**A. What conceptions and preferences did the respondents have with regard to democracy?**

The term ‘democracy’ was conceived by people differently. Such conceptions of democracy were captured in the following graph:

**Graph 1: Respondents’ understanding of the term ‘democracy’**

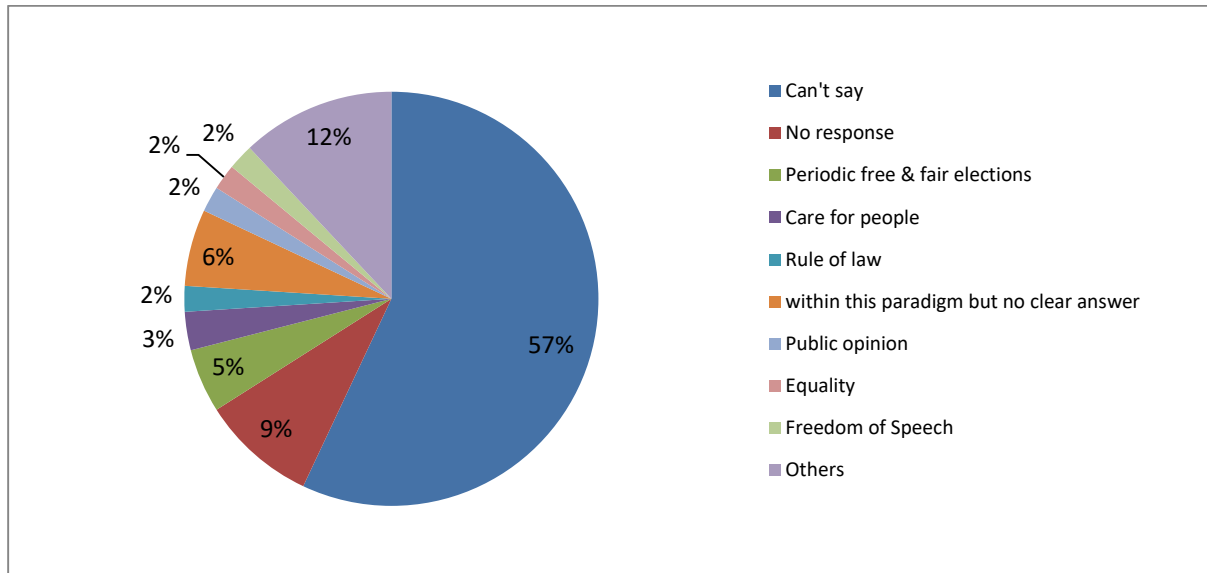


n=2795

Majority of the respondents (38%) had no clarity on the conception of democracy. 12% thought democracy meant the holding of free and fair elections on a regular basis. 6% of the respondents equated democracy with freedom of speech by which they meant acceptance and respect for differences of opinion in society. 4% of the respondents perceived democracy as having equality. Equality may mean equal opportunity, reducing gaps between rich and poor, distributive justice and the establishment of an egalitarian society. 4% of the respondents perceived democracy as having respect for public opinion and choice. But the other meanings of democracy such as democracy as a government of a ‘multi-party system, the rule of law, fundamental human rights, people’s participation, a representative government etc., were responded to marginally by the respondents which might suggest non-clarity on the conception and meaning of democracy.

The second response of the respondents on their understanding of the term ‘democracy’ suggest the following:

**Graph 2: Respondents’ understanding of the term ‘democracy’ (Second Response)**



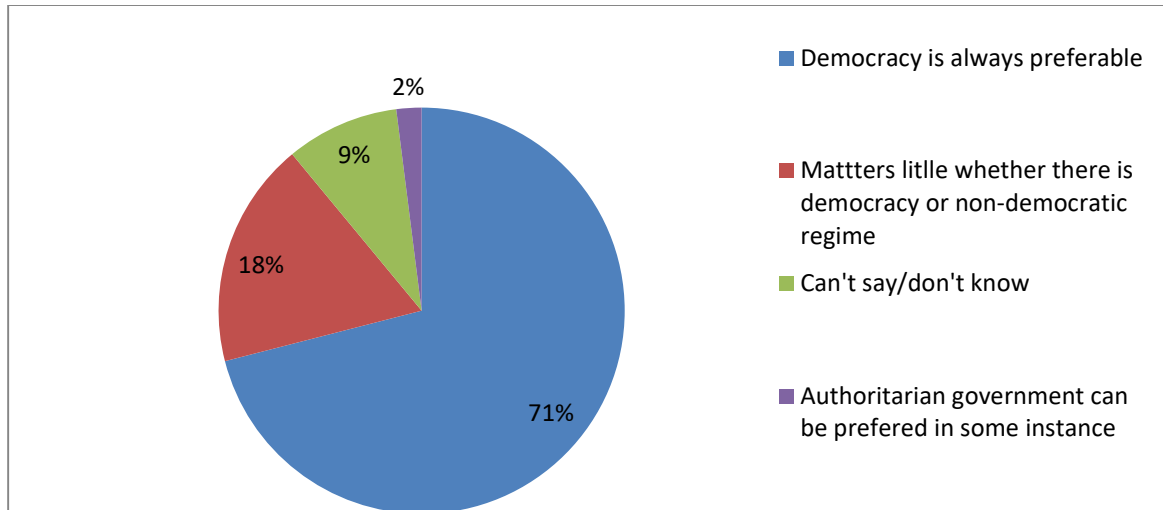
n=2795

In the second response, 57% of the respondents reported ‘can’t say’ which might suggest that the meaning of the term ‘democracy’ was not understood by majority of the people. 9% of the respondents refrained from responding. Only 5% reported that democracy meant the holding of free and fair elections, while 2% understood democracy as a political system which would be citizen responsive. Therefore, in common parlance, democracy was conceptualized as a process of having free and fair elections; the other ingredients of democracy as conceived in the case of Western democracy, perhaps were not known or understood by the respondents.

### **Preference of the people for democracy**

Preferences and aspirations of the people for democracy could be inferred from the five parameters i.e. aspirations for democracy, authoritarian leadership visa vie parliamentary democracy, rule of army, rule of experts or rule of religious leaders over parliamentary democracy.

**Graph 3: Citizens' preference for democracy**



n=2795

Democratic aspirations and preferences were also reflected when opinion was sought on having parliamentary democracy vis-a-vis strong leaders who might decide single-handedly.

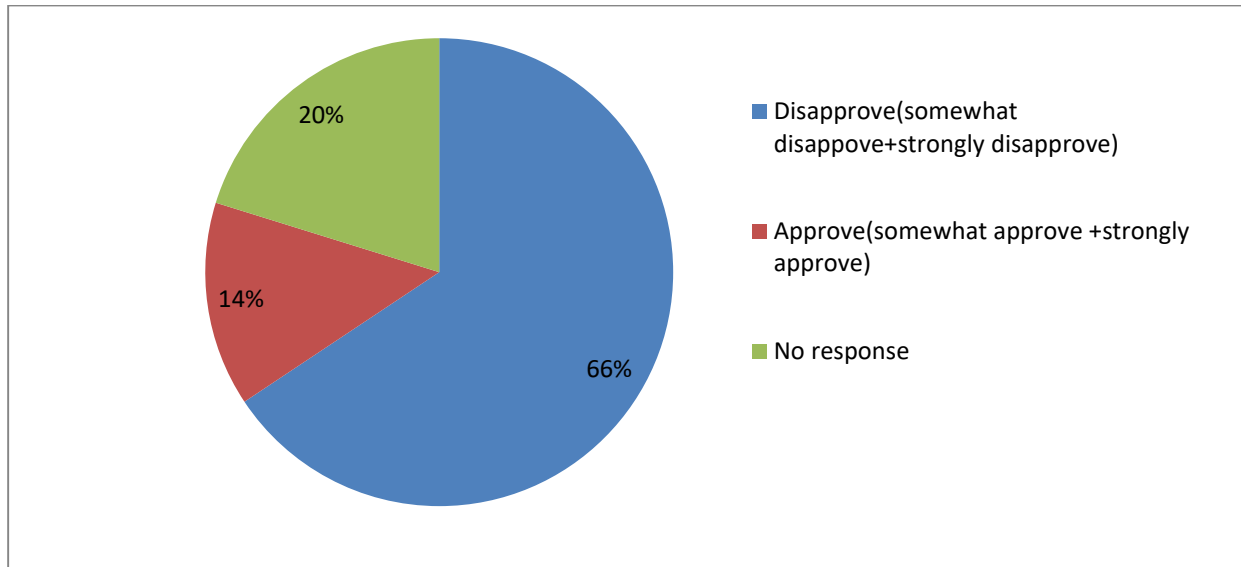
The question asked was that, ***“there are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve the statement that, we should get rid of elections and parliaments and have experts make decisions on behalf of the people”***

66% of the respondents strongly rejected the proposition of authoritarian leadership against parliamentary democracy. Only 14% of the respondents however had different views on governance, where they were of the opinion that a strong leader might decide single-handedly what would be good for the country.



## Response with regard to alternatives to democracy

*Graph 4: Alternative to parliamentary democracy and general elections*



n=2795

With regard to alternative to democracy, the question asked was *“there are many ways to govern a country. Would you approve or disapprove the statement. We should get rid of the parliament and elections and have a strong leader decide things”*. Only 14% approve the proposition that a strong leader should decide things, 65% reported disapproval that a strong leader should decide things and 21% gave no response.

The respondents were asked a follow-up question, *“there are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve the statement- the army should come in to govern the country”*. In response to this question, 26% approved strongly and somewhat approved, while 54% somewhat disapproved and strongly disapproved that army should come in to govern the country.

On the question of the country under expert rule, the question asked was *“there are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve the statement-we should get rid of elections and parliaments and have experts make decisions on behalf of the people?”* 12% approved that

experts should make decisions over parliaments and 66% disapproved that experts decide things over parliament, 22% however, gave no response.

On the question whether religious leaders should make major decisions instead of politicians, the question asked was “*there are different ways in which a country may be governed. Would you say that you approve or disapprove the statement that all major decisions about the country should be taken by religious leaders rather than politicians*”? 18% approved the proposition that religious leaders should take all major decisions, 65% disapproved that religious leaders should take all major decisions and 17% gave no response.

### **Dimensions and essential features of Democracy**

“Democracy” (*Ganatantra*) is often used loosely to mean rule by popular vote which may give legitimacy and a basis for ascendancy to power. In common parlance of the term, the Western model of democracy is mostly seen to be absent, non-functioning and largely overlooked while interpreting democracy. Therefore, democracy was seen by the ordinary people as the continuity and smooth transition of political power on the basis of free and fair elections. Conceptions of democracy differ across people depending on their political awareness, socio-economic levels, attitude towards politics, and expectations. Features of democracy, as perceived by the respondents, constituted the following ingredients. Several options were given to seek opinions of the respondents when they were asked, “*many things may be desirable, but not all of them are essential characteristics of democracy, what would you chose among the following statements?*”

**Table 1: Features of democracy as identified by respondents**

<b>First response</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Second response</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Third response</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>People chose the government leaders through free and fair election</b>	43	Basic necessities like food, clothes, shelter are provided for all	48	Government ensures law and order	34
<b>Government narrows the gap between the rich and the poor</b>	17	Government provides people with quality public services	17	Government ensures job opportunities for all	20
<b>People are free to express their political views openly</b>	14	The legislature has oversight over the government	7	Multiple parties compete fairly in the election	14
<b>Government does not waste any public money</b>	5	People are free to organize political groups	7	Media is free to criticize the things government does	11
<b>Don't Know/Can't say</b>	17%	Don't Know/Can't Say	16%	Don't Know/Can't Say	17%
<b>No response</b>	4%	No response	5%	No response	4%

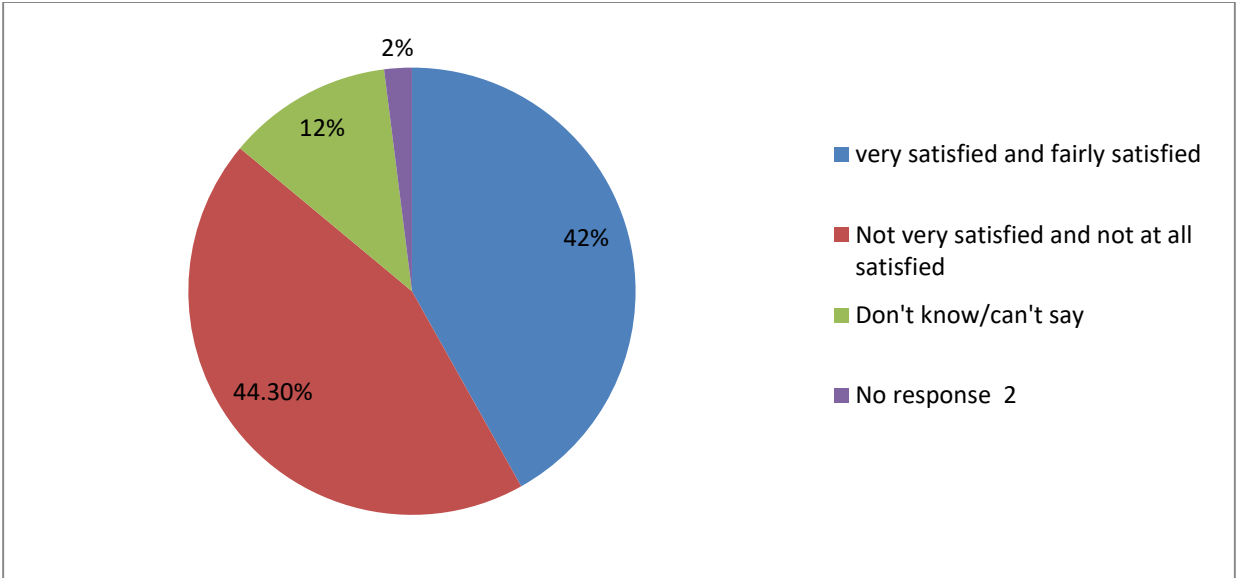
According to the above findings of the survey, the top three responses include i). people chose the government leaders through free and fair election (43%), ii). basic necessities like food, clothing, shelter are provided for all (48 %) and iii). government ensures law and order (34 %). In the second response i).government narrows the gap between the rich and the poor (17%), ii). government provides people with quality public services (17%) and iii). government ensures job opportunities for all (20%). 17% of the respondents in the first response, 16% of the respondents in the second response and 17% in the third response have reported “don’t know”. The other responses worth mentioning as essential features of democracy include: in the first category ‘people are free to express their political views openly’ (14%), in the second response ‘the legislature has oversight over the government’ (7%) and in the third response ‘multiple parties compete in the fair election (14%). The key component of these essentials of democracy as ranked by the respondents captures the essence of democracy according to them i.e. people elect representatives through free and fair elections to runs the country. Secondly, the aspirations from democratic governance are economic and social freedom and enhanced quality of life. Lastly, the ability to express views freely,

legislative oversight on the executive and the presence of a multi-party system were some of the essential features of democracy indicated by the respondents.

**Satisfaction with the state of democracy**

The taste of democracy lies in the freedom of individuals from economic subjugation to political repression and the exploitation of full potential as a human being. However, the satisfaction level may depend on their awareness and political aspirations and quality of governance. To measure satisfaction with the state of democracy, the question asked was “*on the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Bangladesh. Are you satisfied or dissatisfied?*”

*Graph 5: Satisfaction with democracy*



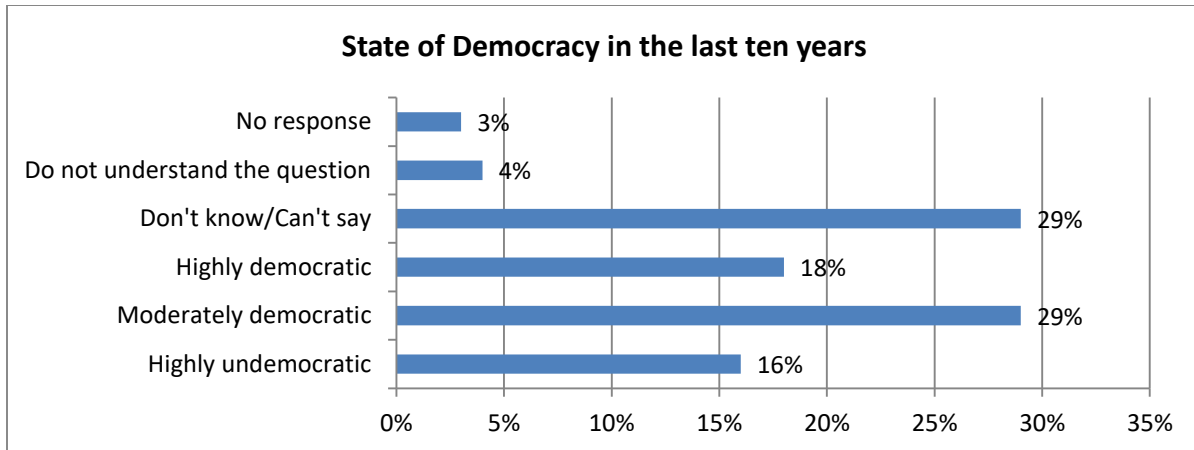
n=2795

From the above, it shows that 42% of the respondents reported that they were very satisfied with the way democracy was practiced in the country while 44% of the respondents were not happy. 12% reported ‘don’t know/ can’t say’.

**Democratic tradition of the country: past and future trends**

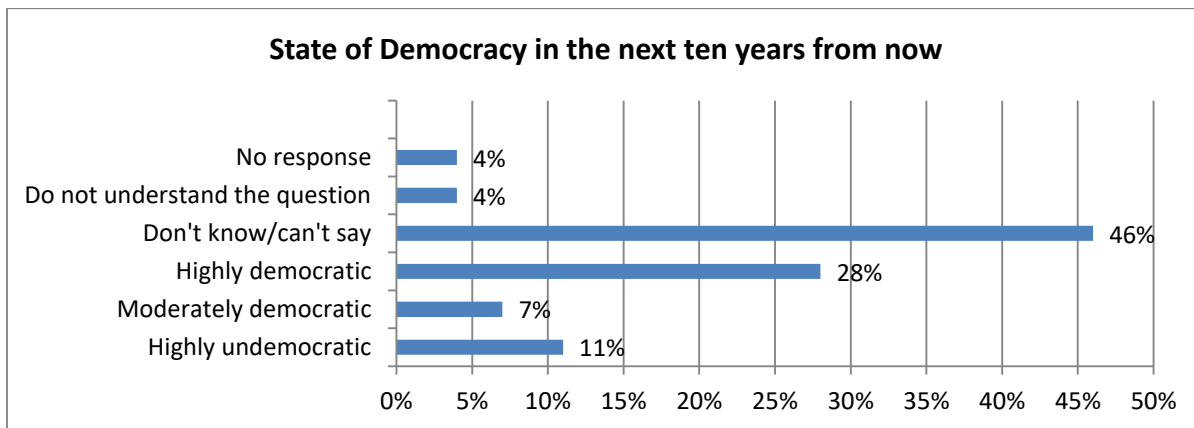
In the following two graphs 6 and 7, the perceptions of the respondents on the past and present state of democracy are presented.

**Graph 6: Democracy: past trends**



n =1424

**Graph 7: Democracy: future trends**



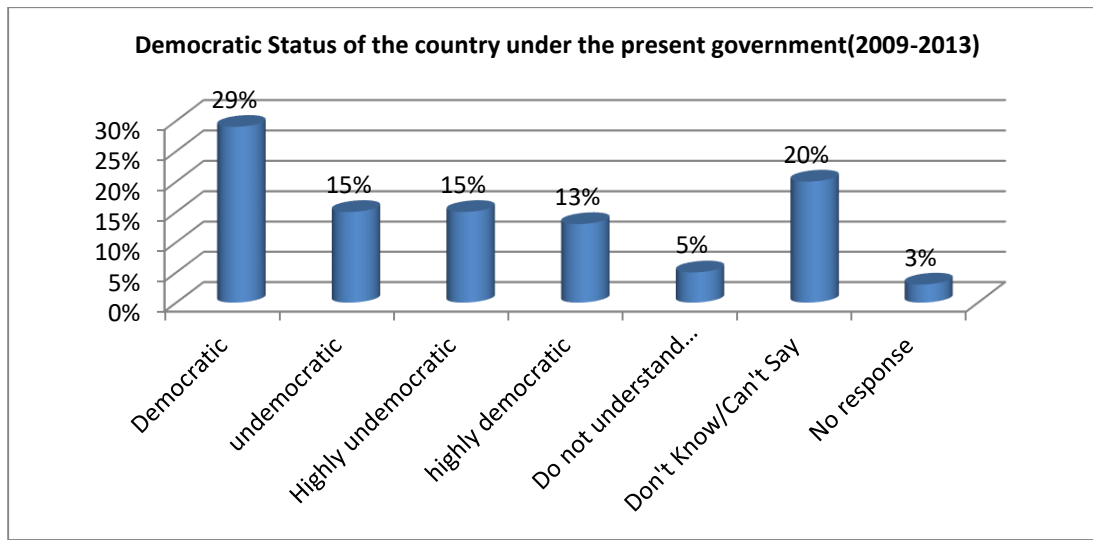
n =1424

In both the graphs 6 and 7, a reflection on the past and progress of democracy in the future by the respondents suggested qualitative improvement in Bangladesh, as it is a moderately democratic country shaping to be a highly democratic country in the future. In both the cases, though a large number of respondents reported ‘don’t know/ can’t say’, it might be suggestive that a majority of people were either apathetic towards democracy or were in a socio-economic state where democracy had very little significance in their lives.

### Democratic status of government

In order to map the perception of the respondents on the democratic status of the government, the following question was asked: *“where would you place our country under the present government”?*

*Graph 8: Democratic status of the government*



n =2795

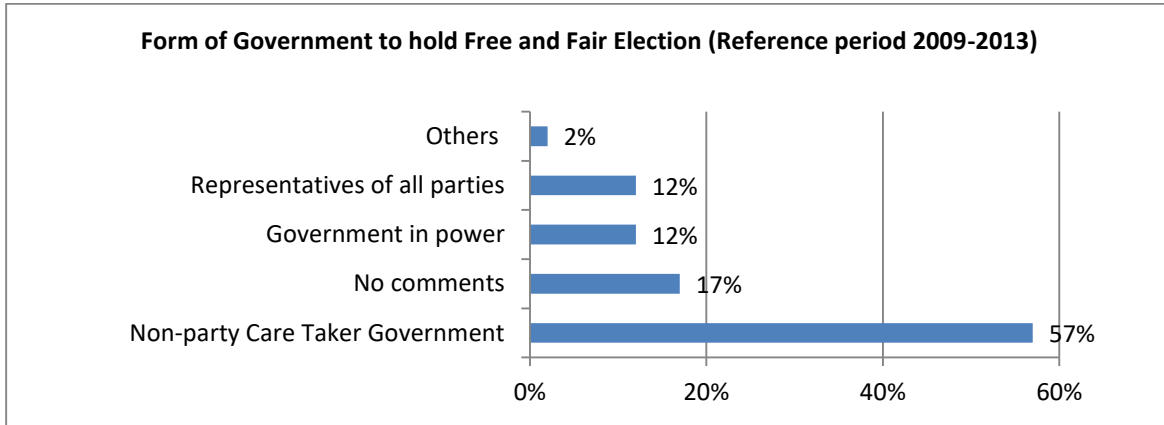
From the above graph, we see that 30% of the respondents considered the then government in power as undemocratic, while 42% considered it as democratic. 20% of the respondents reported that they don't know or can't say and only 3% remained non-responsive.

### Perceived form of government for holding free and fair election

Smooth democratic transition is a precondition to the continuity of democracy. Lack of trust within the political parties and for ensuring functional autonomy of the election commission, the Non-Party Care Taker Government provision was incorporated in the Constitution, which led the country to run three general elections. In order to assess the citizens' perceptions about the form of government during elections, the question that was asked was, *“What form of government do you want to see from the following to hold free and fair election?”*

Majority of the respondents (57%) reported that a Non-Party Care Taker government could guarantee a free and fair election for the country.

**Graph 9: Choice of government to hold free and fair elections**



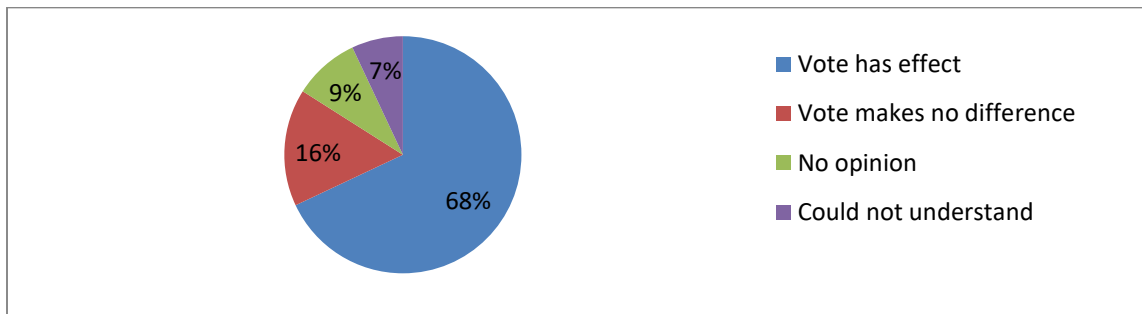
n =1424

**Perception of vote as a means to influence quality of governance**

In Bangladesh, voting as a democratic right of the people for choosing their representatives had been well grounded in the society. Though voting had been instrumental for selecting candidates, it was seen to have minimal influence on governance.

In order to assess whether voting had any influence on governance, the respondents were asked, *“do you think your vote has effect on how things are run in your country or do you think your vote makes no difference?”*

**Graph 10: Voting influence on quality of governance**



n =2795

Of the respondents, 68% believed that their vote had influenced how things were run in the country, 16% believed that their vote had no influence on the quality of governance, 9% had no opinion and 7% reported that they could not understand the question. Though the majority of the respondents believed that their vote might have an effect on the quality of governance, politicians tend to forget election promises.

### **People's Participation in the voting process**

Voting behaviour of citizens could be shaped by the context, resulting in elections becoming free, fair and participatory. In order to measure peoples' voting power, the respondents were asked, "*in talking to people about elections, it is observed that some people were able to vote while others were not able to vote. Talking of the last parliamentary elections (held in 2008), were you able to vote?*" Three scales were used such as 'able to vote', 'not able to vote' and don't remember. 83% said that they were 'able to vote', 10% reported that they were 'not able to vote' and only 3% reported that they 'do not remember'. From the findings it may be inferred that voters could freely vote in the general election in 2008.

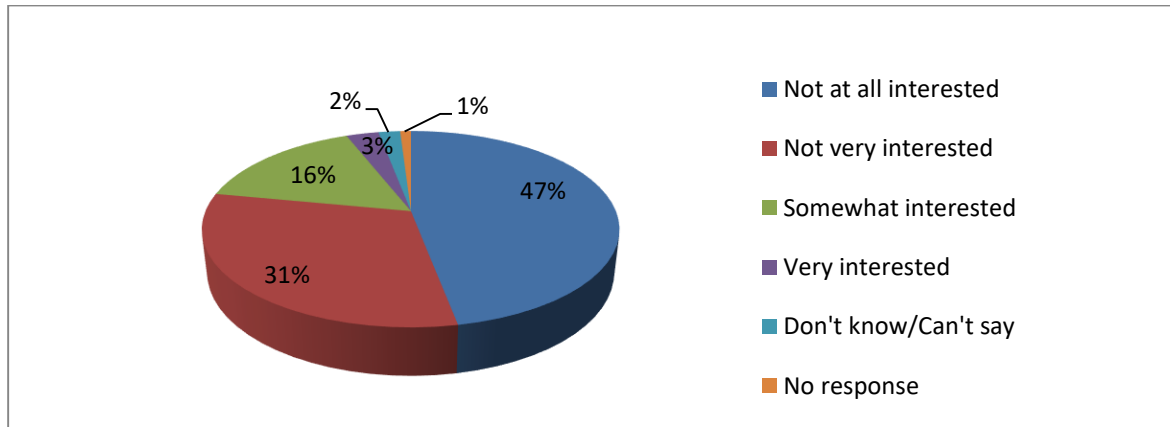
### **Persuading others to vote for certain candidate**

Campaign or lobbying in favour of some candidate or party prior to an election is an indicator of citizens' political participation in the democratic process. In persuading people to vote for certain candidate or political party in the general election held in 2008, respondents were asked "*whether they tried to persuade others to vote for certain candidates?*" Two scales were used such as 'yes' or 'no'. 21% of the respondent reported that they lobbied in favour of particular candidate from a political party, 79% of the respondents reported that they did not persuade voters to vote for any candidate or political party (n=1397).



## Political Interest

*Graph 11: Citizens' interest in politics*



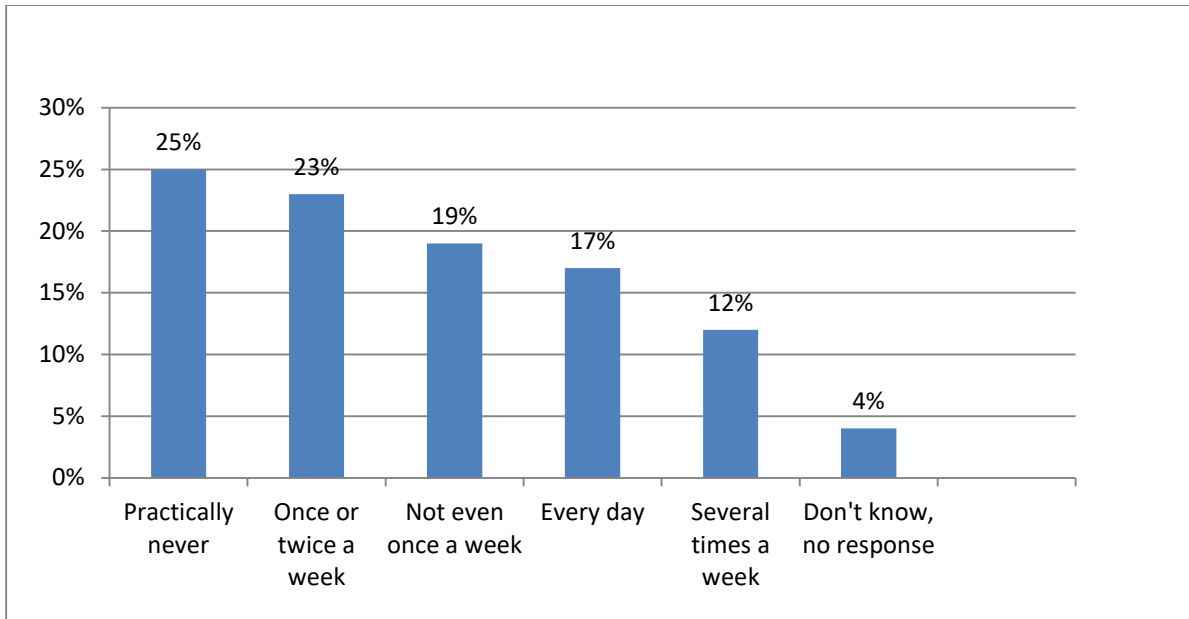
n= 1424

About interest in politics, 78% expressed that they had no interest. Only 18% reported that they had interest in politics, 2% reported 'don't know' or 'can't say' and 1% did not respond. Interest in politics is also expressed by other measures such as following news about politics and the government on a regular basis. The following figures give a picture of the sensitivity to politics, policy and activities of the government.

### **Following news on politics and activities of the government**

Following news on politics and activities of the government indicate citizens' political education and awareness. According to the survey findings presented in graph 12 below, 25% of the respondents never followed news on politics and governmental activities, 23% reported following news once or twice a week, 19% reported that they did not follow news on politics and government activities even once in a week, 17% reported that they followed such news on daily basis and 12% reported that they followed such news several times a week. These findings might suggest citizens' general apathy towards politics and government and might also be caused by other economic and social factors.

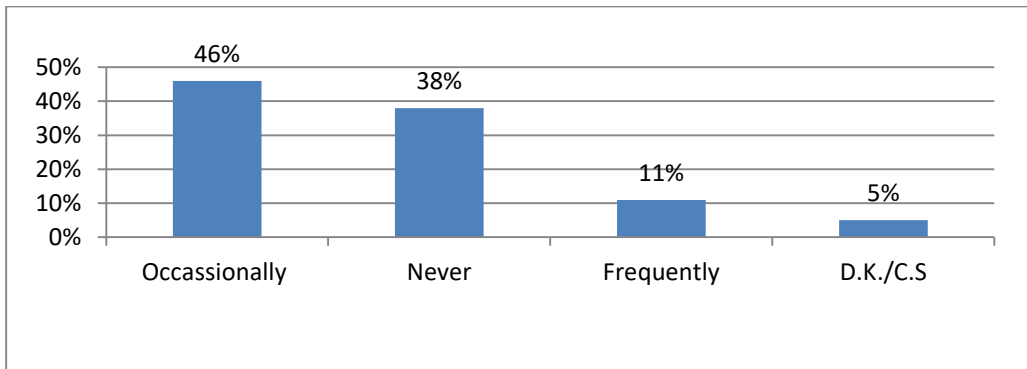
**Graph 12: Interest in following news about politics and government**



n=1424

**Discussion on political matters**

**Graph 13: Discussion on political matters with friends and family**

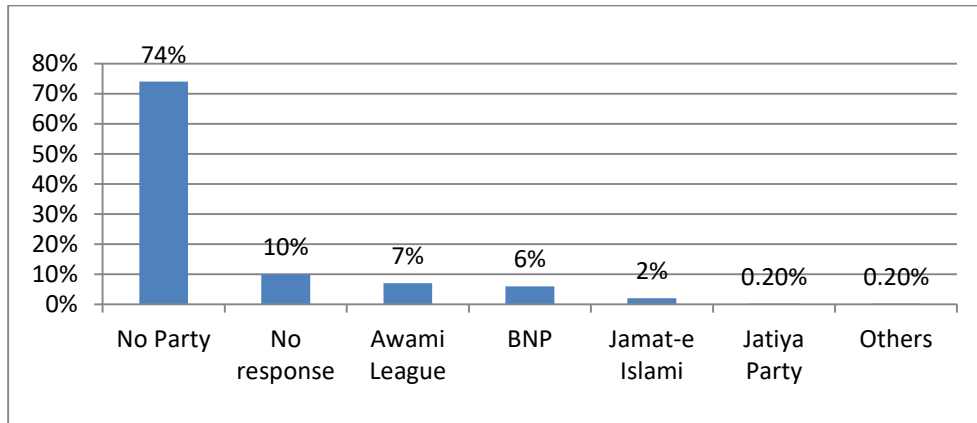


n=1424

Of the respondents,46% reported that they occasionally discussed politics with members of their family or with their friends.38% reported that they never discussed politics, only 11% reported that they discussed politics frequently with friends and members of their family.5% reported ‘don’t know’/‘can’t say’. From the findings it might be inferred that discussion on politics was very low.

## Proximity to political party

*Graph 14: Political orientation and proximity*



n=1424

Proximity to a political party is expected to be more in a democracy. However, proximity may be dependent on many factors such as social, ideological and strategic. The above findings of the survey showed that a majority of the respondents (74%) had no political party affiliations. 7% reported affiliations to Awami League, 7% to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), 2% to the Jamat-e-Islami and 1% to the Jatiya Party. Therefore, majority of the respondents could be said to be non-affiliated to any political party directly or indirectly.

### **Attitude towards Politics**

In assessing respondent's attitude towards politics, the respondents were asked whether they agreed that politics and government business appears to be complicated. 64% of the respondents opined that politics was complicated. Such notions of politics gave some sense of the political environment of the country, where politics might be marred by violence and complexities.

## **B. What was the trust perception of people on major public institutions of the country?**

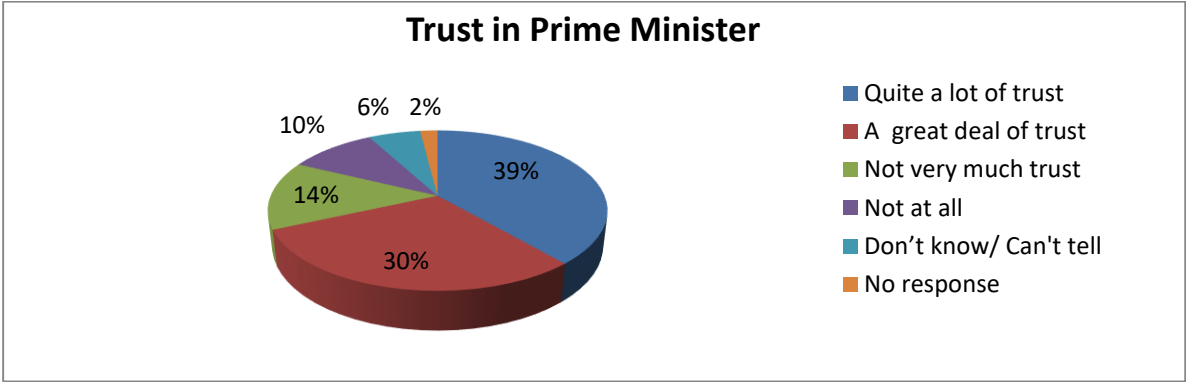
### **Citizens' Trust in Public Institutions**

Citizens' trust in public institutions such as the parliament, judiciary, police, civil services and local government generally indicate that the institutions are functioning well and enjoy public

confidence. Such perceptions about institutions might be constructed with no prior experience of any transaction, such as a citizen who might have no business with the parliament but still be aware of how the parliament is working. Data on trust in the Prime Minister, courts, political parties, civil service, election commission, military, police, local government, newspaper and television are presented below:

**Trust in Prime Minister**

*Graph 15: Citizens' trust in Prime Minister*

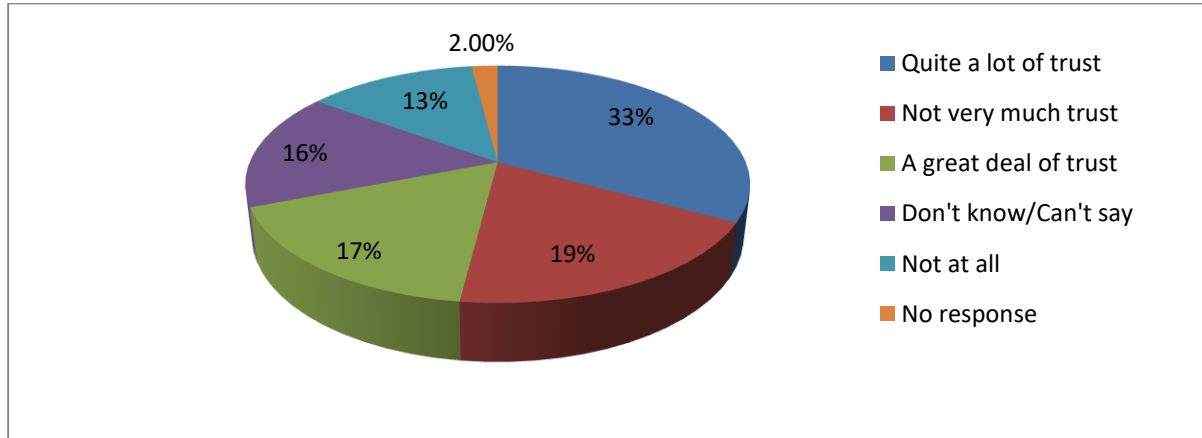


n=1424

Trust in the Prime Minister is one broad indicator of popular support for the Prime Minister in a parliamentary democracy. 39% of the respondents reported 'quite a lot of trust' and 30% reported 'a great deal of trust' in the prime minister of the country. Thereby, 69% of the respondents had trust in the prime minister according to the survey findings. 14% reported 'not very much trust' and 10% reported 'not at all'. Thereby, a 24% expressed lack of trust in the prime minister. 6% and 2% of the respondents reported 'don't know' or gave no response respectively.

## Trust in Courts

*Graph 16: Citizens' trust in courts*

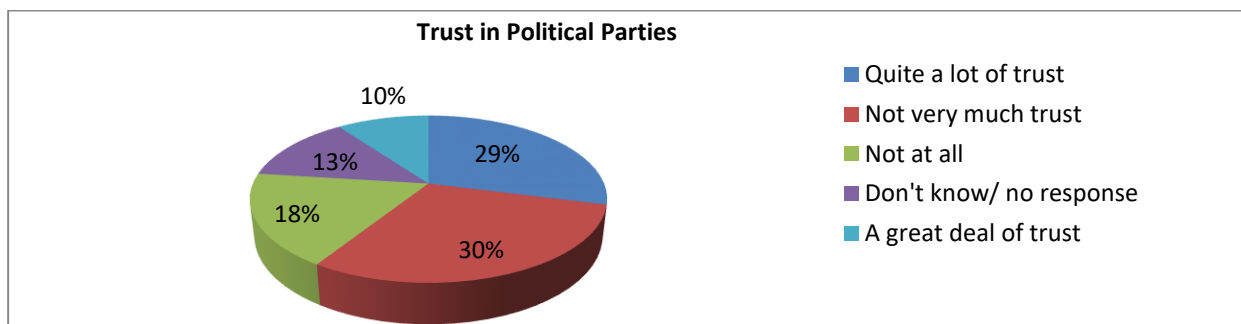


n =1371

In assessing citizens' trust in the courts, 33% of the respondents reported that they put 'quite a lot of trust' in the courts, 17% reported that they put 'a great deal of trust' in the courts, thereby, a total of 50% of the respondents are believed to have trust in the courts. 19% of the respondents were critical about courts and reported 'not very much trust' in them, 13% of the respondents did not trust the court at all, thereby, a total of 32% were critical about the courts. 16% of the respondents reported 'don't know or can't say'.

## Trust in political parties

*Graph 17: Trust in political parties*



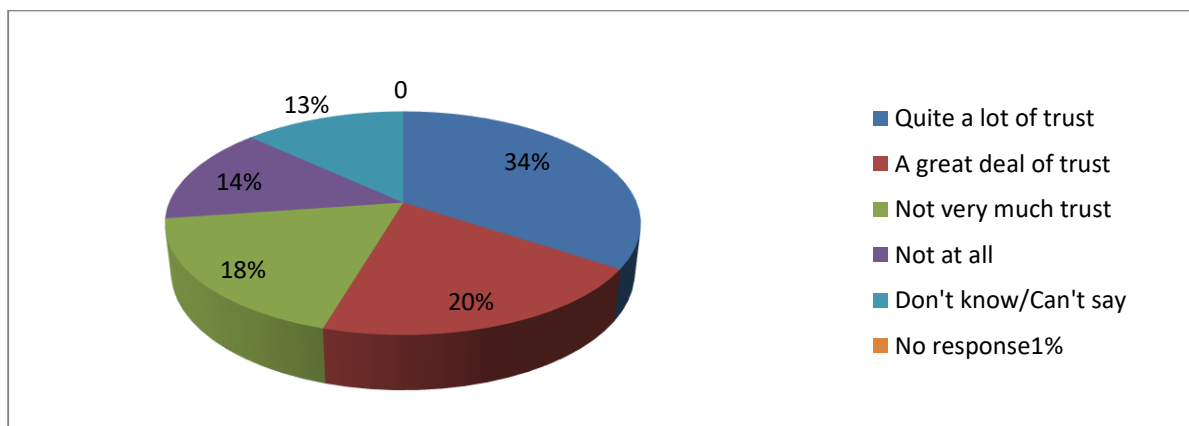
n =1424

Trust in political parties, according to this survey, has received mixed opinions. 29% of the respondents put ‘quite a lot of trust in political parties’ and 10% reported ‘a great deal of trust’ in political parties, at the same time 30% of the respondents reported ‘not very much trust’ on political parties and 18% reported ‘not at all’, thereby a total of 48% reported that they did not have trust in political parties. From the findings of the survey, it may be inferred that trust in political parties was low or had declined.

### Trust in Parliament

Trust in the parliament might indicate how the parliament was working and how public interest was voiced.

**Graph 18: Citizens’ trust in Parliament**



n =1424

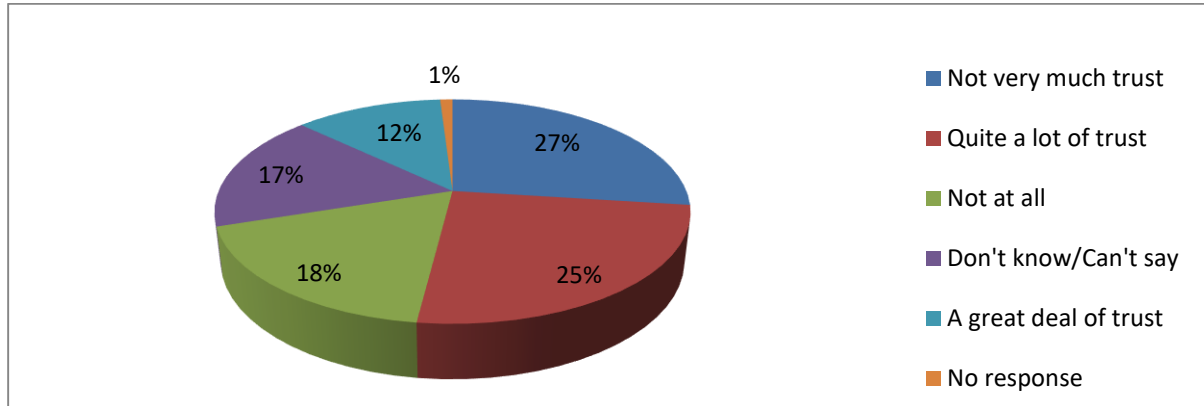
According to the survey, 55% of the respondents reported that they had trust in the Parliament. Those who reported ‘not very much trust’ and ‘not at all’ constitute 32% of the respondents. 13% reported ‘don’t know’. Based on the above findings, generalized trust in the parliament was seen to be high.

### Trust in the Civil Service

Generalized trust in the civil service, according to this survey, was seen to be low. Of the respondents, 45% reported low or no trust and 37% reported trust in the civil service. Trust in the civil service of Bangladesh had declined over the years due to various reasons. Lack of meritocracy

and professionalism, politicization of the civil services, inefficiency and lack of accountability, and corrupt practices have eroded trust in public service.

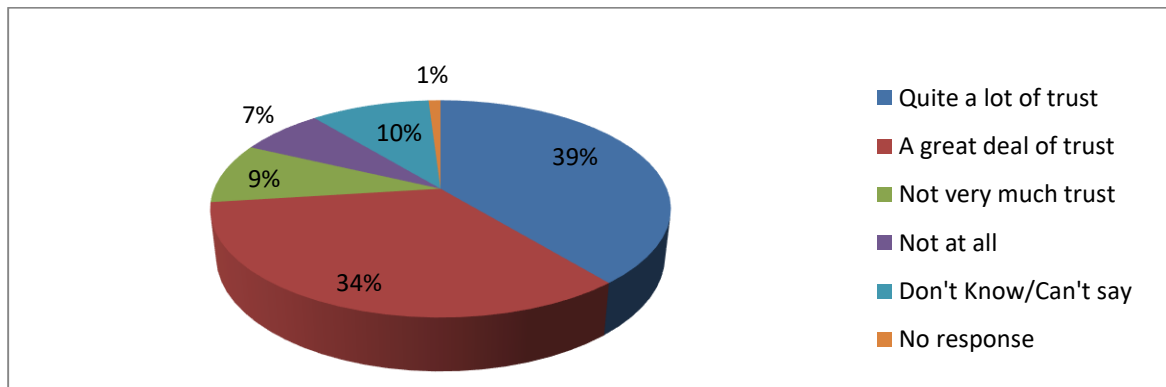
**Graph 19: Citizens' trust in the Civil Service**



n =1424

**Trust in Military**

**Graph 20: Trust in Military**

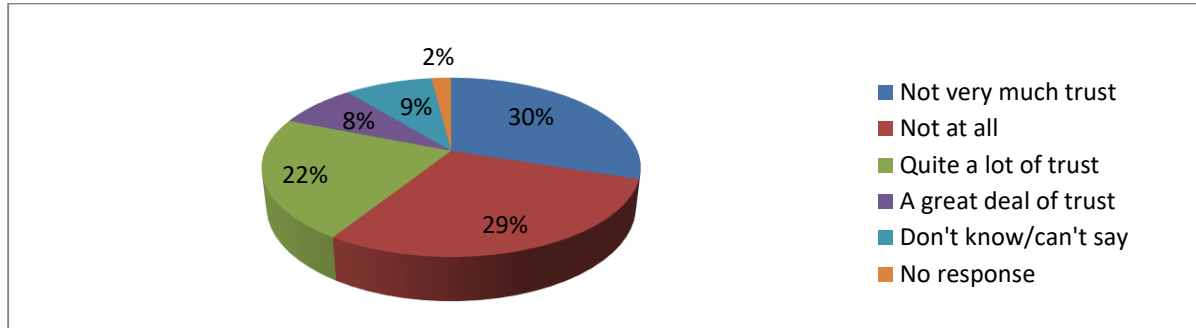


n =1424

In Bangladesh, generalized trust in the military is traditionally seen to be high. 73% of the respondents reported that they put high trust in the military of the country and 16% reported low or no trust in the military. It may be inferred that generalized trust in the military of the country was high.

## Trust in police

*Graph 21: Citizens' trust in police*



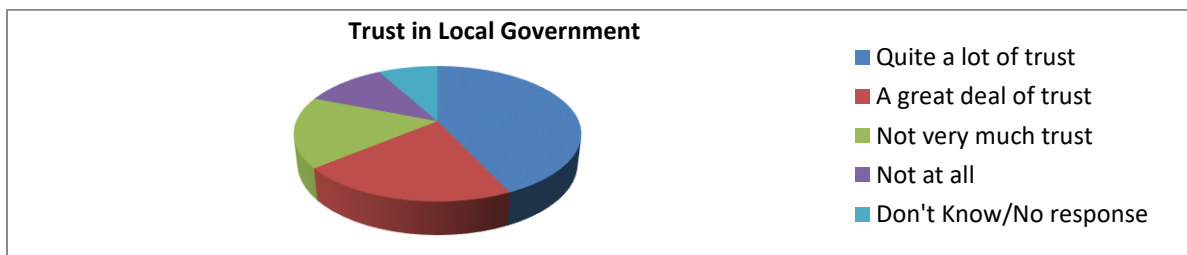
n=1424

The above data shows low generalized trust in police in Bangladesh. 30% of the respondents reported 'not very much trust' and 29% reported 'not at all' thereby a total of 59% reported no trust. Only 22% reported 'quite a lot of trust' and 8% 'a great deal of trust' thereby 30% reported trust in police. 9% reported 'don't know' or 'can't say' and 2% had no response.

## Trust in local government

With regard to trust in local government institutions such as the union council, upazila and pourashova/ municipalities, it was seen to be high. 43% of the respondents reported 'quite a lot of trust' and 21% reported 'a great deal of trust', thereby a total of 64% of the respondents reported trust in the local government institutions. 17% reported 'not very much trust' and 11% reported 'not at all', therefore a total of 28% reported 'no' or 'low' trust in local government institutions. 8% reported 'don't know'/'can't say' or gave no response.

*Graph 22: Trust in local government*



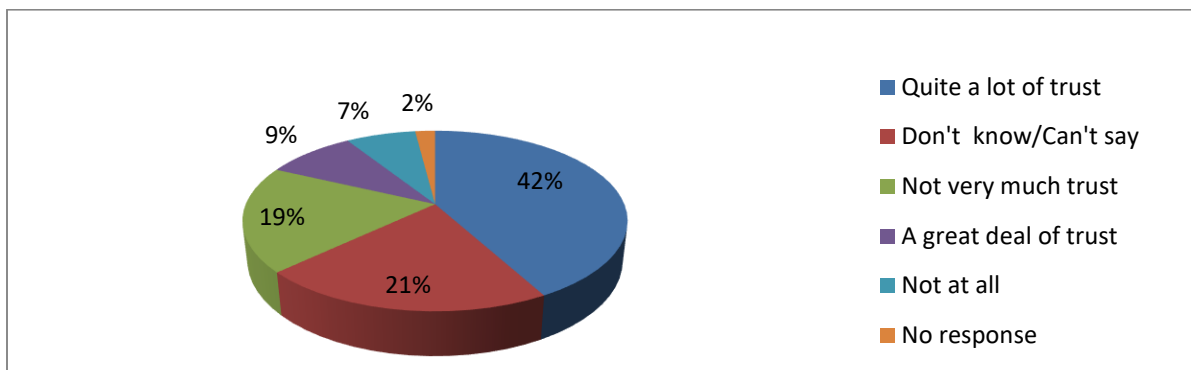
n=1424



### Trust in newspaper

In trusting the information provided in the newspapers, 42% reported that they had “quite a lot of trust” and 9% reported ‘great deal of trust’, thereby 51 % of the respondents reported trust in newspapers. 21% of the respondents reported ‘they don’t know’ or reported ‘can’t say’. 2% gave ‘no response’. On the contrary, 19% reported ‘not very much trust’ and 7% reported ‘not at all’, thereby a total of 26% reported ‘low’ or ‘no’ trust in newspapers. The findings might also suggest low newspaper readership by the general people arising out of apathy towards public affairs.

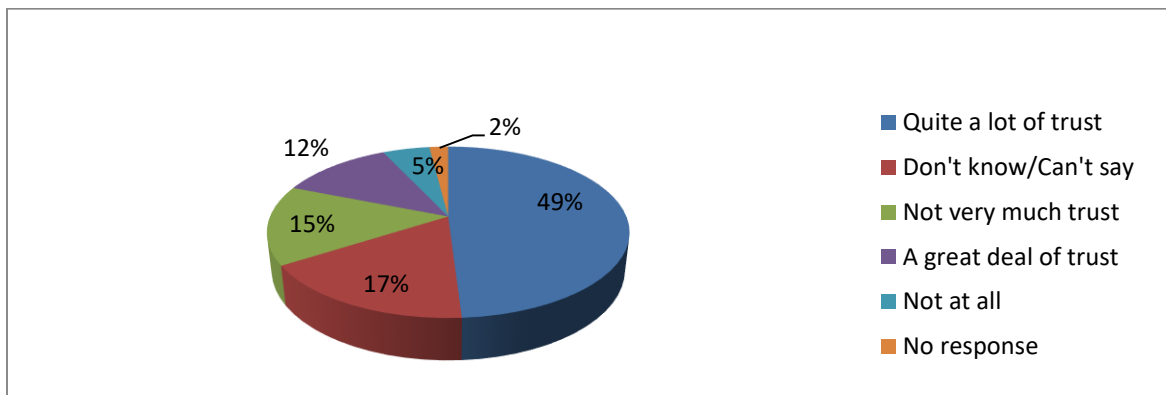
*Graph23: Trust in newspaper*



n=1424

### Trust in television

*Graph 24: Trust in television*



n=1424

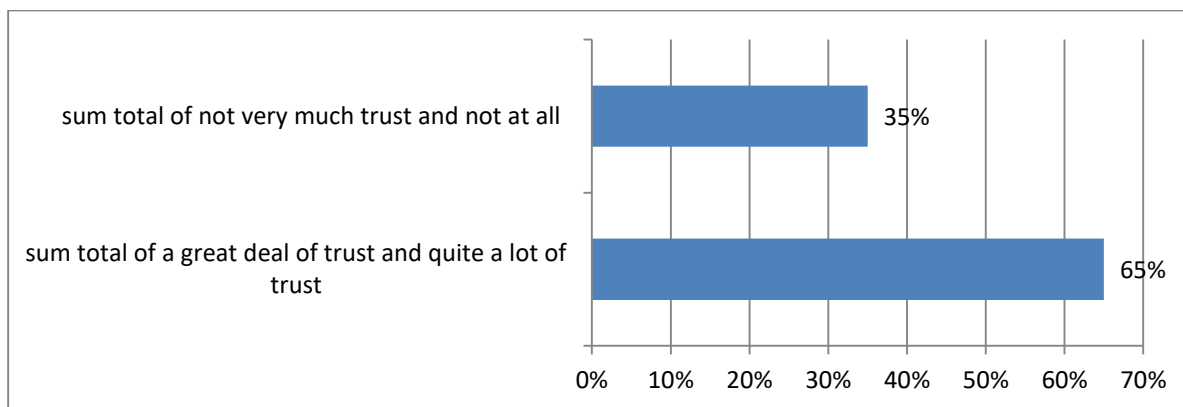
In trusting television as a media, 49% reported that they had ‘quite a lot of trust’. 12% reported that they had ‘a great deal of trust’, thereby 61% of the respondents reported that they trusted

television services. Correspondingly, 17% reported ‘not very much trust’ and 5% reported ‘not at all’, thereby a total of 22% reported lack of trust in television. A total of 17% of the respondents reported that they ‘don’t know’ or ‘can’t say’ whether they trusted television or not. This might also suggest low media exposure of certain population of the country and apathy towards news and other entertainment.

**Trust in radio**

On trusting the services of radio, a total of 65% of the respondents reported that they had trust in radio. Contrary to this, 35% of the respondents considered radio as untrustworthy. Radio popularity in terms of regular listening had declined significantly due to other media exposure.

*Graph 25: Trust in Radio*



n=795

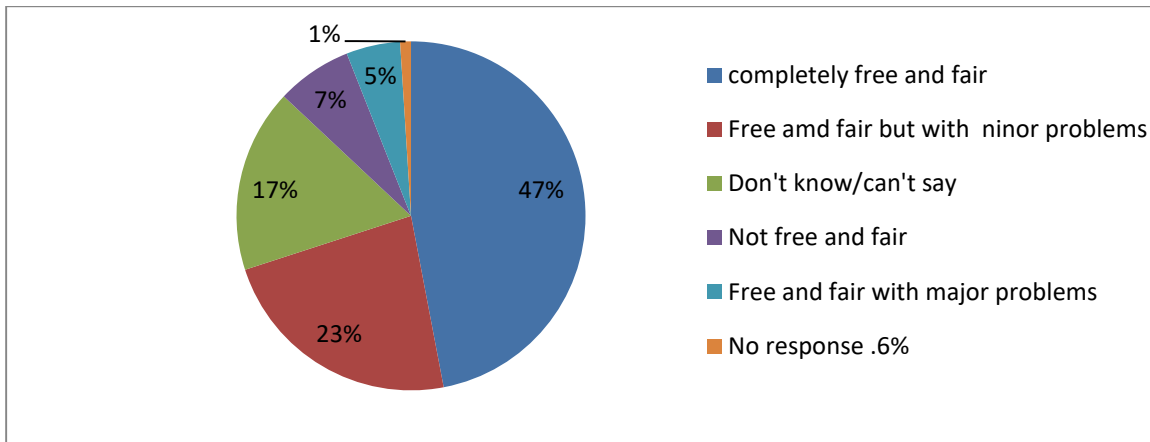
**C. What views citizens’ had on the capacity and trust on in the election commission and the provision for Non-Party Care Taker Government for holding general elections for transfer of power?**

**Role of the Election Commission in holding free and fair elections in the country**

Holding free and fair elections could be regarded as a testimony to the capacity and willingness of the election commission to deliver credible general elections in the country. Views on the general elections which were held in 2008 under the Care Taker Government suggested that 47% agreed that it was completely free and fair. 23% of the respondents viewed it as ‘free and fair but with

minor problems'. 17% reported 'don't know/ can't say' which might signify avoidance of answer due to sensitivity of the issue or apathy towards election or politics of the country. 7% of the respondents viewed it as 'not free and fair' and 5% considered it free and fair but with major problems. Taken together those who considered the election of 2008 as free and fair accounted for 75%.

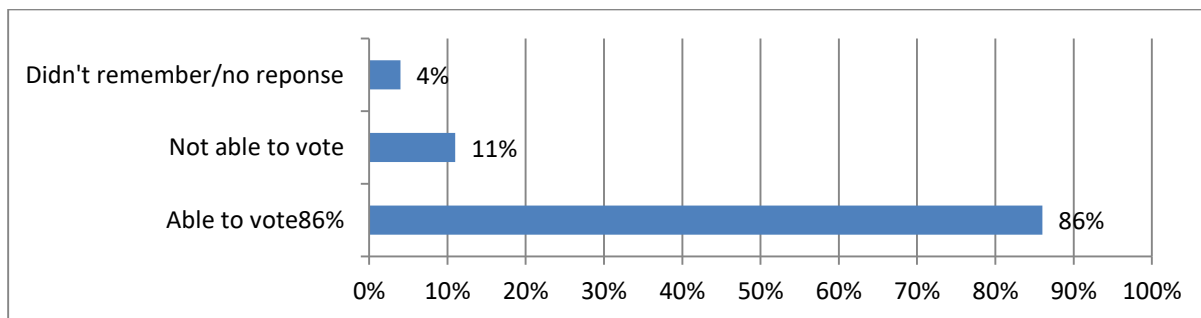
**Graph 26: Views on general election results held in 2008**



n=1424

In order to further assess how free the general elections of 2008 were, the respondents were asked *“in talking about elections, it is found that some people were able to vote while others were not able to vote. Talking of the parliamentary elections held in 2008, were you able to vote or not able to vote?”*

**Graph 27: Voting experience in the general election held in 2008**

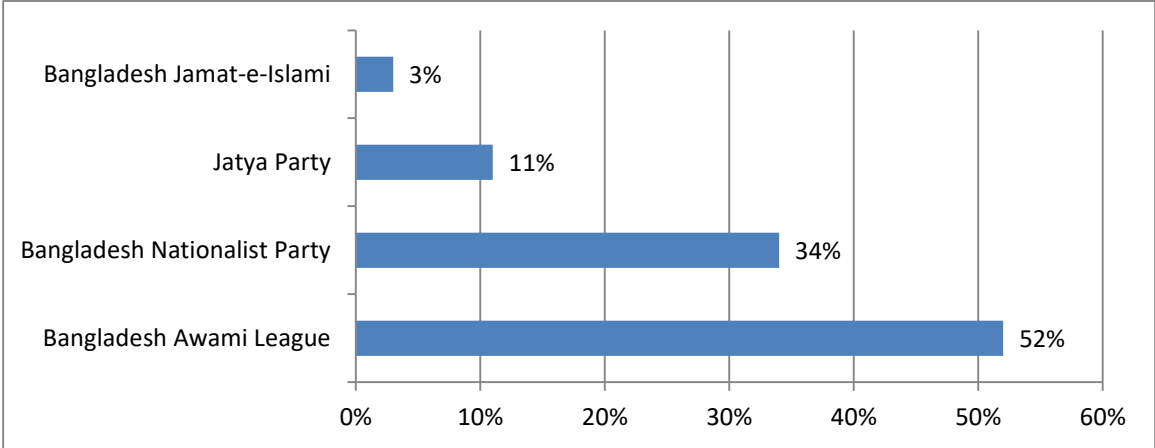


n=2696

A total of 86% of the voters reported that they were able to vote in the general elections held in 2008 under the Care Taker Government. 11% reported that they were not able to vote freely. 4% of the respondents reported they did not remember or gave no response. The Care Taker government was mandated for preparing the grounds for holding a free and fair election in the country with the major political parties.

In order to assess respondents voting preferences, the question asked was *“If able to vote, which party did you vote for?”*

**Graph 28: Voting preference of the voters in the general election of 2008**



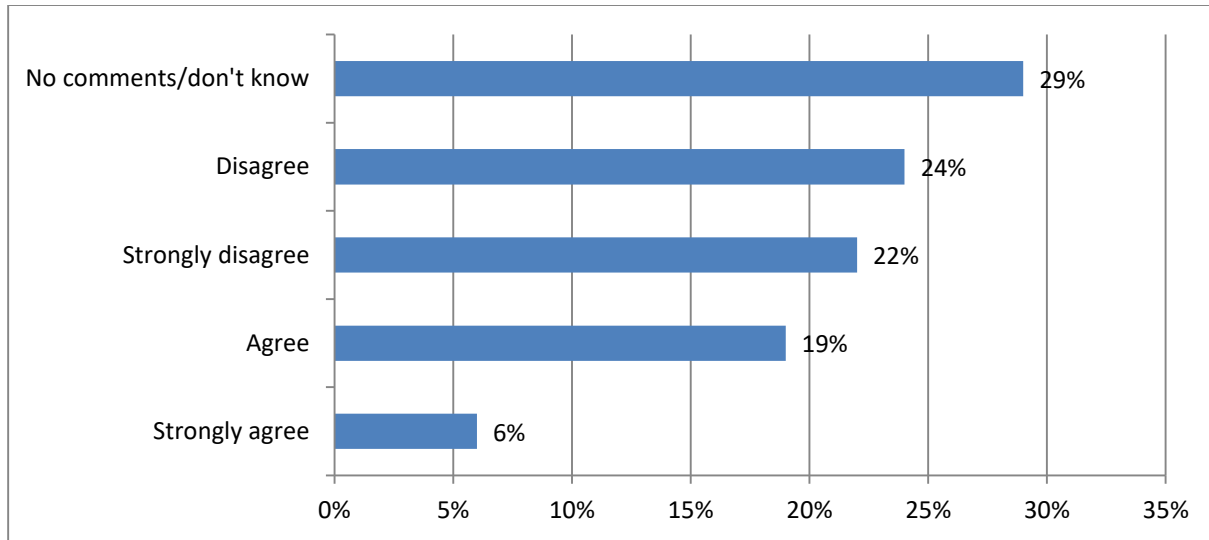
n=1519

With regard to the voting preferences of voters for major political parties in the general elections of 2008, it showed that 52% of the respondents voted in favour of the Bangladesh Awami League, while 34% voted for Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), 11% voted for Jatiya Party and 2% for Jamat-e-Islam.

**Trust in the Election Commission**

In order to assess perceptions on the election commission, respondents were asked to give their views on the following statements: *“election commission in Bangladesh is strong and independent enough to hold a free and fair election under a government in power. Do you agree with this statement?”*

**Graph 29: Views on the election commission**



n=1424

Of the respondents, 46% disagreed with the statement that the election commission was strong and independent enough to hold free and fair elections under a political government. On the other hand, 25% respondents agreed with the statement that the election commission was strong and independent enough to hold free and fair elections under a political government. Respondents who had no comments or said 'don't know' on the independence of the election commission for holding free and fair elections accounted for 29%. From the above findings, the independence and capacity of the election commission to deliver free and fair elections under a political government has been shredded with doubts. Hence, the need for holding elections under the Non-Party Care Taker government was rationalized.

### **Concluding remarks and futuristic note**

The findings of the survey revealed strong aspirations for democratic governance by the people under the aegis of civil government. Though majority of the respondents reported that they preferred democracy to any other form of government, the findings of the survey revealed that a majority of the respondents had no clear conception about the term 'democracy'. A certain section of the respondents viewed 'democracy' as a system of governance which guarantees 'free and fair election'. With regard to 'satisfaction' on the level of democratic values and practices, 37% of the

respondents reported that they were fairly satisfied with the way democracy was practiced in Bangladesh, while 45% reported that they were not satisfied with the state of democracy. With regard to the democratic status of the country under the government when the survey was carried out, 42% reported that it was democratic, while 30% considered the government as undemocratic. With regard to past and future democratic trends, majority of the respondents expressed hope that there would be a positive move from a 'moderately democratic' country to a 'highly democratic' country in the next ten years.

With respect to interest in politics, 79% of the respondents reported that they had little interest in politics. Likewise, following news on politics and government activities also scored a very low percentage. With regard to political affiliations, majority of the respondents (74%) reported non-affiliation to political parties, though a small percentage reported political affiliations to major parties.

On generalized trust in public institutions, findings of the survey revealed high citizens' trust in the parliament, higher judiciary, local government institutions and the military, while trust in the civil service scored low.

With regard to perceptions on the conduct of the general elections of 2008, majority of the respondents agreed that the said general elections were free and fair. On the question of holding free and fair elections by the election commission, majority of the respondents viewed that the election commission was not capable and strong enough to hold free and fair elections under a political government.

On the question of having a Non-Party Care Taker government for holding general elections for transfer of power, 57% of the respondents supported a Non-Party Care Taker Government. Though this has been a major demand from the opposition parties, the provision in the constitution had been repealed following the verdict of the higher judiciary. Therefore, the legality of the Non-Party Care Taker government does not arise anymore under the existing constitution. But this issue has become the centre point of all conflicts in Bangladesh politics. Lack of trust among the political parties and confrontational politics, in other words, politics of annihilation, are gradually taking

the two major political parties to the point of no return. The findings of the survey suggest that the trends and patterns of democracy in Bangladesh might still be fragile and unstable.

. . . . .