



Received: 21 June 2024

Revised: 12 August 2024

Accepted: 25 August 2024

# NATURE OF POLITICAL CULTURE OF THE COASTAL FISHERMEN IN BANGLADESH: A FIELD STUDY

Md. Sultan MAHMUD<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh; smahmud@ru.ac.bd

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(This article belongs to the Theme 1: Politics and Policies of Developing Countries)

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## Abstract

This study is to explore the nature of political culture of coastal fishermen towards the existing politics of Bangladesh. The following are a few of the primary goals of this current research: 1) To investigate the views, opinions, and extent of political culture of coastal fishermen; 2) To determine the political engagement of fishermen living in coastal regions of Bangladesh; and 3) To assess the influence of the political awareness of fishermen living in coastal areas. In this study, I have attempted to uncover the political attitudes of coastal fishermen towards the political culture of Bangladesh. This research examines the scenario of political attitudes among coastal communities in Bangladesh. The research took place in two unions located in the Patuakhali district. Qualitative methods were employed to collect data, specifically examining political involvement, cultural influences, and the perspectives of fishermen living along the coast. A random sampling method was used to gather data from 127 respondents in the field. The study fixated on the political attitudes of coastal fishermen and their perceptions towards the political culture in Bangladesh. In conclusion, based on the research findings, several recommendations have been projected to boost the awareness of coastal fishermen. These recommendations aim to contribute to the development of democracy in Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** Political Culture, Political Attitudes, Coastal Fishermen, Bangladesh

**Citation Information:** Mahmud, M. (2024). Nature of Political Culture of the Coastal Fishermen in Bangladesh: A Field Study. *Asian Political Science Review*, 8(2), 36-47. <https://doi.org/10.14456/apr.2024.14>

## **Introduction**

In the modern era, democracy is widely valued as the most effective system of governance, ensuring that every individual's voice is heard and no one is excluded. It enables all citizens to engage in the political process and advocate for their own interests and worries. This is why it is believed that including marginalized and minority groups in political decision-making alongside the majority groups is crucial for achieving political and civil harmony and stability (Rocher, 1990). This, in turn, helps to advance the process of democratic consolidation. The fishing communities in Bangladesh face marginalization and disadvantages. During the fishing season, they experience abundance and prosperity due to the high income from catching a large amount of fish. However, during the lean fishing season and government-imposed fish catching ban, their lives become difficult and they face scarcity (Hossain, 2014). The political significance of coastal fishermen is often overlooked. Therefore, this study aims to explore the political attitudes of coastal fishermen in Bangladesh in order to integrate this marginalized and disadvantaged group into the broader democratic framework. The research aims to examine the political views on the political environment in Bangladesh, focusing on two specific unions: Dhankhali and Mohipur Union in the Kalapara Upazila of Patuakhali District. This paper aims to investigate the political culture of Bangladesh's coastal area by examining the attitudes, opinions, voting behavior, and political environment. The primary goal of the coastal fisherfolk communities in Bangladesh is to meet their basic needs and ensure their survival. However, these individuals lack a reliable and long-lasting means of exerting their influence and protecting their rights (Ahmad, 2019). During elections, various political parties employ different tactics to gain the support of these individuals. Candidates make promises during elections. (Jahan, 2000). The aim of this research is to comprehend the political process of this nature. To achieve this, a survey method was employed in two specific unions in the Patuakhali districts. The study primarily examines the political beliefs and opinions of fishermen residing in coastal areas. An effort has been made to comprehend the elements contributing to the transformation of political conduct and the current political landscape. (Siddiqui, 2005). The objective of the research is to gain insight into the social factors that influenced the shift in political awareness and beliefs among the population of Bangladesh. Alongside conducting surveys, the study also aims to demonstrate the fundamental concepts of political culture, including people's involvement, awareness, perspectives, attitudes, and engagement with political activities.

The main objective of this study is to explore the nature of political culture of coastal fishermen towards the existing politics of Bangladesh. The specific objectives of the study are as follows: 1) To investigate the views, opinions, and extent of political culture of coastal fishermen; 2) To determine the political engagement of fishermen living in coastal regions of Bangladesh; and 3) To assess the influence of the political awareness of fishermen living in coastal areas.

## **Materials and Methods**

Interview questions were used to gather empirical data from the chosen respondents. Key questions were related to political culture of fishermen of coastal areas. Prior to finalization, the designed questionnaire underwent pre-testing. Other data were collected from various published documents in the form of books, journals, government circulars, newspapers, research reports and internet browsing. Books and Journals have provided theoretical knowledge regarding the Political Culture of Bangladesh. An interview schedule was created with a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions to gather information from the participants. The schedule was designed in a way that ensured all the necessary information was obtained from the respondents. The researcher personally interviewed each participant to

ensure impartial responses, and then reviewed each questionnaire for accuracy and consistency. This was necessary because it was challenging to reach the same participant at a later stage. This study focuses on using the empirical research method to examine the political awareness and involvement of coastal fishermen. The researcher collected data from two specific unions in the Patuakhali District, Dhankhali and Mohipur, using questionnaires and interviews. A structured questionnaire was created specifically for the coastal fishermen in two unions of Patuakhali districts in Bangladesh. The questionnaire was administered to the fishermen and information was gathered. In addition, the researcher also reached out to several political representatives, community leaders, and members of the political elite to gather their perspectives on the different aspects of political culture and its influence.

### **Study Area**

Patuakhali is a district in the Brishal Division, covering an area of 3220.15 square kilometers. The northern border of this area is Barisal district, while the southern border is the Bay of Bengal. To the east lies Bhola district, and to the west is Barguna district (Banglapedia). Within Patuakhali District, there are two unions in Kalapara Upazila called Dhankhali and Mohipur. Dhankhali has an area of 14652 acres, a population of 22,716, and a literacy rate of 50.11%. On the other hand, Mohipur union has a land area of 7025 acres, a population of 20,886, and a literacy rate of 56.4% (Bangladesh National Information Bureau).

### **Logics Behind the Selection of the Study Area**

The political attitude refers to how individuals think and acquire political knowledge and perceptions, whether through reasoning or intuition. It determines their level of awareness and can predict their behavior and attitude towards politics (Almond & Verba, 1963). In today's democratic world, it is essential to include all individuals in the political decision-making process. This includes addressing the needs of marginalized and disadvantaged fishing communities in national politics. However, there is a lack of quality research on the attitudes and behaviors of these marginalized groups. Therefore, the main objective of this research is to fill this gap and conduct a study in the field, taking into account the researcher's familiarity with the study area.

### **Sample Size**

A sample refers to a representative group of individuals from the population who possess all the desired qualities of fishermen. A total of 127 respondents, who are exclusively engaged in the fishing industry and belong to two unions in the Patuakhali district, were chosen.

### **Data Analysis**

The data was examined using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). It was converted into computer code and examined using single or multiple variable tables. Statistical methods were also employed to analyze the data.

### **Conceptual Structure**

#### **Political Culture**

Political culture refers to the manner in which individuals in a nation perceive and participate in politics, as well as their attitudes towards the legitimacy of political systems and established political practices (Lijphart, 1971). It also encompasses the emotions expressed by elected officials, which contribute to the development of a political community (Orum, 1991). The concept being discussed is widely recognized as both appealing and captivating in the field of political science, but it is also a subject of much debate and uncertainty (Khan et al., 1996). The term was first coined by Lenin and was later introduced in English by Sidney and Beatrice Webb in the 1930s (Andaleeb, 2007). They used the term to explain the importance of political education and mass media in the Soviet Union during that period. Almond initially defined political culture as the "particular arrangement of attitudes" towards political behavior (Easton, 1953). However, *The Civic Culture*, which was published in 1963, became a significant milestone in the examination of political culture. Almond & Verba

(1963) expanded on the characteristics and categories of political culture by analyzing survey data from five different countries. They were aware of the importance of political culture in relation to developing countries. They recognized that simply adopting Western institutions was not enough for newly emerging countries to embrace democracy; they needed to grasp the cultural aspects of democracy (Mahajan, 2006). Citizens have the ability to impact the government through different means and express their opinions. However, influencing the government is more about one's attitude and emotions, which can be more challenging to acquire (Almond & Verba, 1963). Political culture refers to a specific and structured set of political beliefs that dictate how government, politics, and the economy should function. It establishes a structure for bringing about political transformations and is specific to nations, states, and other collectives. A political culture is distinct from a political ideology because individuals can have differing opinions on ideology (what actions the government should take), yet still have a shared political culture (Johari, 1987). Certain ideologies are so deeply opposed to the current state of affairs that they demand a complete overhaul of government operations, thereby encompassing a distinct political culture. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba categorized political culture into three different types: Parochial, Subject, and Participant. In the Parochial type, citizens have limited knowledge and interest in the central government and are not significantly impacted by its decisions. In the Subject type, citizens are aware of the central government and are strongly influenced by its decisions, with little opportunity for disagreement or opposition (Almond & Verba, 1963).

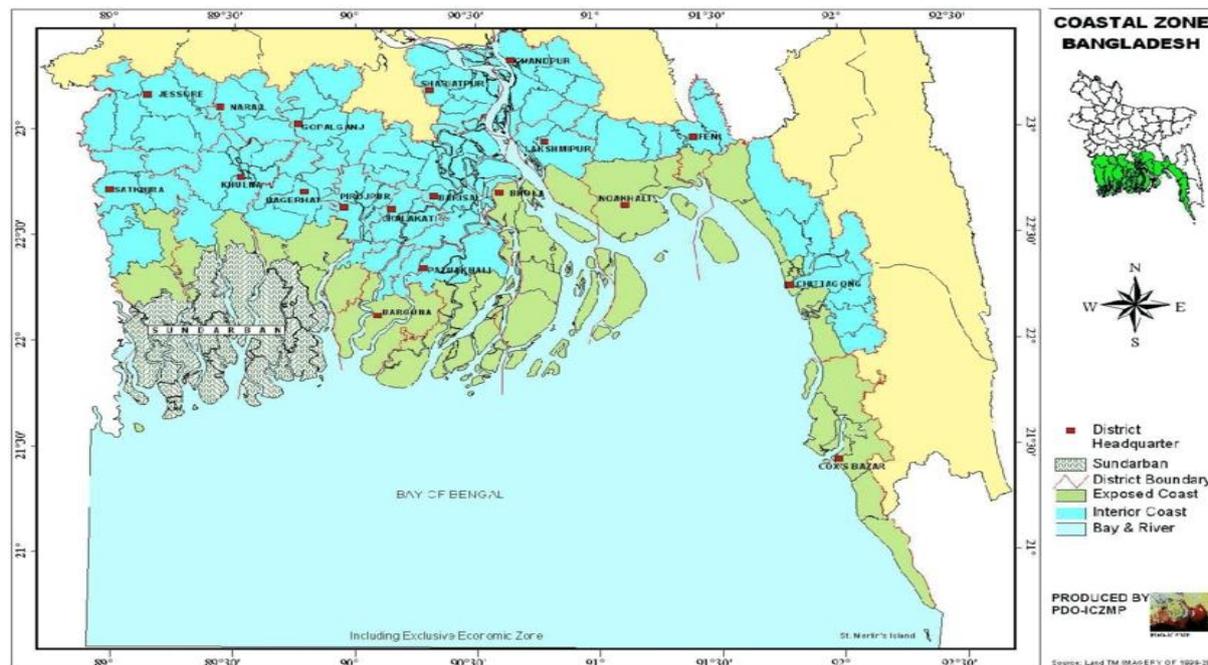
### **Fishermen**

Bengali cuisine has a strong emphasis on fish, which is a major non-vegetarian food source (Mamun et al., 2016). This cultural tradition has led to Bengalis being nicknamed 'Mache Bhate Bengali', highlighting the importance of fish in their diet (Rashid, 2014).

Additionally, the fishing industry plays a crucial role in the economy of Bangladesh. It not only provides a significant portion of the country's non-vegetarian food needs but also generates substantial revenue. In the fiscal year 2020-21, Bangladesh ranked third globally in terms of its fishing resources, with a harvest of around 20 million tons of fish (Shamsuzzaman et al., 2017a). This contributed 3.57 percent to the nation's GDP. Furthermore, Bangladesh has successfully exported fish and fish-related products to more than 50 countries worldwide. In the fiscal year 2021-22, these exports earned a total of \$533 million, accounting for over 1 percent of the country's total export earnings (Nasreen et al., 2023). Fishermen are individuals who rely on fishing as their primary means of employment and income. In Bangladesh, fishermen also engage in crop cultivation to support their livelihoods. These fisherfolk communities consist of poor and landless peasants residing in riverine and coastal regions, whether they work in fishing part-time or full-time. Approximately two million individuals are engaged in fishing activities nationwide, with approximately 18.2 million people employed in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. Roughly 500,000 fisherfolk rely on the coastal region for their livelihood (Tietze et al., 2000). These coastal communities have unique social, political, and economic traits. They are marginalized socially, underestimated politically, mistreated culturally, and are geographically isolated and susceptible. The lives and livelihoods of fishermen, both men and women, as well as their children, are greatly impacted and influenced by various external and internal socio-economic and political factors, challenges, and difficulties.

## Coastal Area of Bangladesh

Bangladesh is situated in the northeastern part of the Bay of Bengal (Obioma, 2015). Coastal regions are typically described as the areas where land and sea meet, including large lakes within the vicinity. These coastal areas are varied in their purpose and constantly changing, making it difficult to define them with precise spatial boundaries.



**Figure 1** Coastal zone of Bangladesh

Bangladesh spans 147,570 square kilometers and has a population of around 165.6 million. The coastal area of Bangladesh makes up 47,211 square kilometers, equivalent to about 32% of the country's total land area. This region consists of 19 districts and is inhabited by approximately 38 million individuals, accounting for 28% of the country's population (Nasreen et al., 2023). The 19 districts of coastal area are Bhola, Barishal, Barguna, Bagerhat, Pirojpur, Jhalakathi, Satkhira, Chandpur, Shariatpur, Gopalgang, Narail, Jashore, Khulna, Patuakhali, Lakshmipur, Noakhali, Feni, Chattagram and Cox's Bazar. Bangladesh possesses a 710 km long coastline and an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The region is rich in various natural resources, such as the valuable Sundarban mangrove forests, fisheries, shrimp farms, agriculture, and deposits of minerals and salt. (Momtaz & Shameem, 2015). This region is known for its export promotion sites, harbors, airports, ports, tourism, and other industries. It provides a wide range of products and services to the people of Bangladesh, benefiting from its lively natural environment.

## Review of Literature

This research investigates the nature of political culture of coastal fishermen towards the existing politics of Bangladesh. It investigates the views, opinions, and extent of coastal fishermen. The model for this research follows the seminal work of Bisin & Verdier (2000, 2001) on the cultural transmission of preferences. It investigates the evolution of cultural traits in a population of socially interacting individuals. It explains the persistence of cultural minorities and the two-way causality between socialization decisions and policy outcomes. To demonstrate this claim, I extend Bisin & Verdier's model by introducing two homogeneous classes of agents (the poor and the economic elite) and two political systems (autocracy and democracy). It also considers the endogenous cost the elite will incur when

they wish to maintain autocracy. The formal study of the dynamics of the interaction between the political culture changes of the economic classes and the preferences for political systems in this article is, to my knowledge, new. Namely, endogenous modeling of the impact of inequality, corruption and democratic effectiveness in shaping preferences for a political system through the process of political socialization is one of the main contributions of this article. However, it has been widely discussed and theorised in sociology and political sciences (Almond & Verba, 1963; Easton, 1979; Fukuyama, 1997; Lipset, 1959; Mauk, 2020). For instance, the political system support theories suggest that long-term experiences with a political system influence the evolution of its support (Almond & Verba, 1963; Easton, 1979; Lipset, 1959). These theories imply that long-term experience with political system effectiveness (in dealing with issues such as inequality and corruption) should affect citizens' preferences and support for a political system.

This research is related to the political culture of redistribution attitude, which assumes that democracy will lead to redistribution as it extends the voting rights of the poor (Alesina & Rodrik, 1994; Bénabou, 2000; Meltzer & Richard, 1981; Romer, 1975). It is also connected to the models that, in addition, incorporate social unrest in their analysis (e.g. Acemoglu et al., 2015; Boix, 2003; Roemer, 1985). In these models, inequality matters in shaping political transitions. Nevertheless, the approach developed here is different. Inequality affects the expected utility of parents, influencing the transmission of political preferences, which then leads to political transitions. This work can be contrasted with empirical work focusing on the effect of democracy and rule of law in political system (Manow, 2005; Mohtadi & Roe, 2003; Paldam, 2002; Sandholtz & Koetzle, 2000). An alternative point of view is taken into account here.

This model follows the view of this literature in which political ideology is considered programmatic but with a coordinating role of expectations. However, this analysis goes further and focuses on the impact of corruption in the transmission of political system preferences. In this study, lack of proper political participation and election system affects the political ideology of democratic citizens and the distribution of resources, expected to be improved under a democratic political system. It will shape citizens' support for a political system and thus the probability of democratization or democratic consolidation.

Ahmad (2019) has explained the background, extent, justification, difficulties, structure, ecological impacts, and prospective developments of coastal zone management. He integrated coastal zone management is primarily employed as a strategy for coastal development in Bangladesh. However, the political attitudes and perspectives of coastal fisherfolk are not emphasized in his paper. Billah et al. (2018) explained the living conditions and economic status of fishermen in the Bhatiary coastal area of Chittagong, Bangladesh from January to June 2009. However, there has been no similar research conducted in the Patuakhali districts to assess the level of involvement and awareness of the coastal fisherfolk in the political system.

Das et al. (2015) has described the current information on the living conditions of the fishing community in Batiaghata upazila of Khulna district between February and December 2013. Data was collected using questionnaires, surveys, group discussions, and public interviews. The findings of the study provided valuable insights into the socio-economic aspects of their lives. However, no efforts were made to address or update the political awareness of these individuals.

Shamsuzzaman et al. (2017b) has tried to explain the sustainable development goals is a challenging endeavor that requires the involvement of all sectors. This research examines the regulatory systems that govern the coastal fisheries resources in the country, focusing on the policies, legislation, and institutional mechanisms designed to effectively manage and utilize these resources for the sustainable development and well-being of the population. However,

the researchers did not examine the political strategies employed by coastal fishermen to connect them with national-level politics.

Rashid (2014) has mentioned that the Constitution of Bangladesh has specific provisions for the development of disadvantaged areas, including remote coastal areas. Additionally, many Members of Parliament (MPs) were elected directly from coastal districts in the recent parliamentary election. This paper primarily aims to provide an overview of how people at the grassroots level perceive their problems and prospects regarding coastal governance and well-being, with a focus on the socio-economic conditions of these individuals. However, there is a lack of effort to address the political perceptions and attitudes towards the existing political culture within these marginalized communities. Mamun et al. (2016) has conducted a retrospective assessment of the local capacity building methods used to implement co-management of fisheries and other resources in southern Bangladesh. It addresses the effectiveness of the capacity building tools employed, but does not explore the perceptions and attitudes of coastal fishermen or their involvement in national politics. Ahmed & Diana (2015) has tried to explore and understand the procedures of fish drying, particularly the role of women fishers in the processing and selling of dried fish. The study also intends to analyze employment patterns, such as the work environment, hours, pay, and other financial advantages. However, it does not seek to evaluate the attitudes of the participants towards the national political culture in the areas being studied.

Most of this literature emphasizes the role of schooling and the media on political interest, civic engagement and political participation. Instead, this framework analyses the role of schooling and the media as agents of socialization and examines how they affect the transmission of policy preferences for a political system. The economic elite use these agents of socialization as tools to influence citizens' political preferences.

## Research Results

In order to conduct effective research, the participants of these two unions have been divided into three age groups: young age, middle age, and old age. The first group consists of individuals aged 18 to 30 years (29%), the second group includes those aged 31 to 50 years (79%), and the third group comprises individuals aged 50 to 80 years. Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents across different categories, including the percentage and frequency. The selection of respondents was done systematically to ensure equal representation across all age groups. The study revealed that the respondents had diverse perceptions and attitudes. They were further classified into three educational qualification levels. Table 2 presents the breakdown of respondents by their educational qualifications, with 72.88% having a primary level qualification, 27.11% having a secondary level qualification, and an unspecified percentage being illiterate. It is worth noting that all respondents belonged to the same professional field.

**Table 1** Age

		Age Category			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Young	29	22.8	22.8	22.8
	Middle	79	62.2	62.2	85.0
	Old	19	15.0	15.0	100.0
Total		127	100.0	100.0	

**Table 2** Educational Qualification Category

	Frequency	Percent	Total	Total
Illiterate	68	53.5		127(100%)
Literate	59	46.5	Primary level Secondary level	72.88% 27.11%

**Table 3** Political Consciousness of Fishermen

SI NO	Question	Yes	No	No Reply	Some	Total %
1	Voter	125(98.4%)	2(1.6%)			127
2	Influenced to vote	2(1.6%)	123(96.9%)	2(1.6%)		
3	Involved in politics of family members	62(48.8%)	64(50.4%)	1(.8%)		
4	Political discussion with family member	57(44.9%)	70(55.1%)			
5	Political discussion with outside of family members	75(59.1%)	52(40.9%)			
6	Rule of Law	61(48%)	57(44.9%)	9(7.1%)		
7	Keeping promises of representatives	32(25.2%)	95(74.8%)			
8	the elected representatives play any role to influence your political awareness	21(16.5%)	106(83.5%)			
9	Opposition parties carry out their activities properly	52(40.9%)	75(59.1%)			

**Table 4** Consciousness of Coastal Fishermen

SI NO	Question	Regular	Irregular	No	Others	No Reply	Total %
1	Listening news on TV	64(50.4%)	54(42.5%)	9(7.1%)			127(100%)
2	Newspaper Reading	1(.8%)	5(3.9%)	121(95.3%)			
3	Nature of casting vote	115(90.6%)	10(7.9%)	2(1.6%)			

The table 3 & 4 above indicates a small variation between respondents who are engaged in politics and those who are not. Among coastal fishermen, 50.4% are directly involved in politics, while 48.8% are not. Additionally, 0.8% of respondents chose not to answer this question. The study also reveals that 44.9% of respondents frequently discuss current political events with their family, and 59.1% discuss politics with their acquaintances. Contrary to this, 55.1% of the participants completely avoid discussing politics with their family members and people outside their family. The percentage of respondents who never engage in political discussions with others (40.9%) is not insignificant. Additionally, a small number of voters (1.6%) out of the total 98.4% in that specific area are influenced by the ruling party or other individuals. However, a significant majority of voters (96.9%) are independent and able to express their opinions through the electoral process. The research reveals that most respondents in the selected coastal area are not under any pressure or influence when voting

for their preferred candidate, although a few individuals still feel they are being influenced. Furthermore, 48% of respondents in the coastal area believe that the rule of law exists in Bangladesh, while 44.9% believe that there is no rule of law in the country. A small percentage (7.1%) chose not to respond to this question. Despite the findings of this study, where a majority of respondents (74.8%) believe that elected representatives have not kept their promises, a minority (25.2%) still have faith in their ability to fulfill those promises. Additionally, a small percentage (16.5%) believe that these representatives play a crucial role in shaping their political awareness, while a significant majority (83.5%) deny any involvement in influencing voters. This indicates that coastal fishermen in Bangladesh are politically aware, but their opinions differ when it comes to the role of the opposition party. According to 40.9% of respondents, the opposition party has been successful in carrying out their activities, while 59.1% believe that they have failed to fulfill their responsibilities.

**Table 5** Influenced to vote

Opinion	Frequency	Valid Percent	Total
Party in power	1	.8	100.0
Not influenced	126	99.2	

**Table 6** The election system of Bangladesh

Nature	Frequency	Percent	Total
Acceptable	21	16.5	16.5
Fair & Transparent	53	41.7	58.3
Unfair	53	41.7	100.0

To gather the opinions of coastal fishermen in Bangladesh about the election system, a set of questions was presented to them. The data in the table 6 indicates that 16.5% of the respondents believe that the election process in Bangladesh is acceptable, while 41.7% of the fishermen consider it to be completely fair and transparent. Conversely, another 41.7% of the respondents are dissatisfied with the current election system, viewing it as entirely unfair and biased. The study reveals that the coastal fishermen's opinions on the election system in Bangladesh are divided. Additionally, the table 5 shows that only 0.8% of the respondents are influenced by the ruling party, while the remaining 99.2% are not influenced when casting their votes. Overall, this study concludes that the current election system allows the people of Bangladesh to participate in choosing their representatives.

**Table 7** Elected representatives play in providing facilities

Nature	Frequency	Percent	Total
Biased	89	70.1	127(100%)
Fair	37	29.1	
No Reply	1	.8	

During the survey, participants were asked about the fairness of elected representatives in providing facilities. 29.1% of respondents agreed that elected representatives play a fair role, while only one respondent did not provide an answer. However, the majority of respondents, 70.1%, believed that elected representatives show bias when providing facilities to the people.

According to the table 8, 55.9% of the respondents think that the current political culture in Bangladesh is satisfactory, while 42.5% consider it to be unfavorable. In contrast, only 1.6% of the fishermen have a strong belief that the present political culture in Bangladesh is highly unstable.

**Table 8** The political culture of Bangladesh

Opinion	Frequency	Percent	Total
Good	71	55.9	Table 100.0
Bad	54	42.5	
Unstable	2	1.6	

## Conclusion and Discussion

This research discovered a connection between perceptions, attitudes, and political participation and awareness. The findings suggest that considering consciousness and attitudes is crucial. The study revealed that only 18.4% of the respondents accept the election system in Bangladesh, while 41.7% believe it is completely fair and transparent. Although the majority of coastal fishermen (50.4%) are not actively engaged in politics, a significant number (48.8%) are directly involved in political activities. This is a positive sign for the functioning of democracy, as only a small percentage (8%) of voters are influenced by the ruling party or other individuals when casting their votes. The vast majority of respondents (99.2%) believe that their voting decisions are not influenced by the government or any other mechanisms. Additionally, almost half of the respondents (48.8%) believe that there is a presence of rule of law in Bangladesh, while a slightly higher percentage (50.4%) believe that there is no rule of law in the country. This research reveals that there are numerous aware individuals residing in the coastal region who possess the ability to assess the election process and overall political climate of Bangladesh. The study documents the attitudes of coastal residents towards the political culture and current politics of the country. It also reveals that 50.4% of the participants have no involvement in politics. These findings, along with other relevant sources cited in the study, indicate that although the current political climate and culture suffer from significant shortcomings, the attitudes of coastal residents towards politics are not discouraging. The study also highlights that a significant portion of coastal residents vote without any influence from the government or other external factors. Based on the research findings, the following suggestions can be proposed to enhance the awareness of coastal residents, enabling them to actively participate in national politics.

- 1) Ensuring greater participation of coastal residents in local organizations to foster a positive political mindset and social integration.
- 2) The media can have a significant impact on fostering a positive mindset among rural individuals, who have limited access to political education from formal institutions. However, it is crucial to be cautious and prevent the dissemination of misleading information through mass media.
- 3) Political parties provide opportunities for coastal residents to participate in various levels of party structure and leadership selection. It is important that these processes are carried out through a robust democratic process. This research extensively examines the current state of politics in Bangladesh, focusing on political participation, political culture, political socialization, political involvement, and electoral politics.

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**Data Availability Statement:** The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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