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# Examining the barriers of Rakhine's political representation in Bangladesh through social capital

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## Abstract

The endorsing party system and electoral voting converge as a traditional pattern of political participation among citizens of Bangladesh. However, the political participation of ethnic minorities has evolved through predominantly historic and systematic barriers and marginalization in Bangladesh, despite having a constitutional guarantee for the substantive inclusion of minorities. The Rakhines, in particular, are significantly underrepresented in both national and local governing systems due to socio-economic hurdles, historical oppression, poor access to political networks, and political exclusion. This study considers how social and financial inequalities perpetuate political exclusion and constitute barriers to political representation, as well as to civic life and politics, for the Rakhine. Drawing on Putnam's understanding of social capital, this research also examines how the conceptual framework of networks, norms, and trust shapes the political representation of the Rakhine Buddhist community in Bangladesh, particularly through case studies of Kuakata and Taltoli Upazila.

**Keywords** Political representation, Rakhine community, Social capital, Trust, Norms, and Networks

## 1 Introduction

Political representation is important in liberal democracies because it gives people a voice, especially in large countries. It means that some individuals or groups speak and act on behalf of others to shape decisions, policies, and laws [1]. Yet, political parties often ignore minority ethnic groups when choosing candidates, which can lead to their exclusion and marginalization [2]. To understand this issue, we first need to define what a minority is:

“The best approximation of a generally applicable authoritative definition of minority is that proposed in a 1977 study prepared for the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities by Francesco Capotorti. According to the Capotorti definition, *a minority is a group numerically inferior to the rest of the*



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*population of a state, in a non-dominant position, whose members – being nationals of the state – possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a feeling of solidarity directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language. Affirmative action initiatives are necessary to rectify this problem” [3].*

To address the political underrepresentation of the Rakhine ethnic minority, Robert Putnam’s social capital theory examines the factors that shape citizen participation [4]. Putnam defines social capital as “features of social organizations, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit” [5]. Social capital is built when people support one another and expect reciprocal help [6]. Tzankis [7] found that Putnam’s theory stresses trust as a key part of modern political culture.

This study examines the barriers that contribute to the underrepresentation of the Rakhine Buddhist community in Barishal, particularly in Kuakata and Taltoli Upazila. The Rakhine are an ethnic group with a strong cultural identity, but are often excluded from political representation. Their arrival in Kalapara followed a tragic history: Burmese general Mahawengula’s forces killed the last Arakan king, Mahathmada, and many people died as the Arakan state was taken over. In 1794, 150 Rakhine families settled in places like Rangabali, Mawdubi, Balyatali, and Kuakata in Galachipa and Taltoli. They earn their living through agriculture, fishing, and boatbuilding [8], which is why they chose a coastal area such as Kuakata. However, their land, ponds, crematoriums, and other resources have been taken by the majority Bengali population. This has made them an “invisible minority” and shows how overlooked communities struggle to gain visibility, representation, and acceptance in society and politics [9].

In contrast, some ‘super-minorities’ like the Sikh community in India, which makes up 1.7% of the population, play key roles in politics, defense, and the economy. Their strong bond and networks help them achieve self-sufficiency and active representation [10]. A super-minority member is someone from a minority group with exceptional abilities, often seen as a leader for the group [11]. Pierre Bourdieu also described social capital as a personal quality that allows people to use resources to influence others [12]. This paper uses Robert Putnam’s theory instead of Bourdieu’s because Putnam’s view of social capital is more relevant to civic participation, as shown in his book “Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community” [13]. This study examines the Rakhine community’s trust in institutions, cultural norms, and the impact of networking on political involvement. However, viewing Rakhine marginalization solely as a social capital issue risks overlooking the roles of the government and businesses in perpetuating exclusion. Harvey’s idea of accumulation by dispossession explains how capitalism and the state expropriate land and jobs, benefiting the powerful, a pattern that aligns with the region’s history. Meanwhile, Sen’s capability approach and Bhaduri’s idea of development with dignity argue that development should focus on real freedoms, security, and self-respect, rather than on social connections [14–19].

The Rakhine Buddhist community in Barishal faces major political barriers [20]. Corruption reduces trust in government and institutions, which leads to underrepresentation [21]. Addressing corruption, injustice, and a lack of transparency, as well as defending minority rights, is essential to building social capital. Raising awareness and guaranteeing fair access to government resources are important for helping Rakhine voices be heard in politics. Including Arakanese-medium education in policy decisions

would help preserve the group's ethnic heritage, as Sámi indigenous education in Norway began in 1997 with a separate curriculum in Sámi areas [22]. The ongoing political underrepresentation of the Rakhines leads to social imbalance and neglect of their cultural needs, thereby weakening democracy and social unity. An eleven-member committee, led by the additional secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration, was formed on 25 March 2025 under the interim government. There has been public debate about whether this committee can address the long-standing problems minorities face. The committee's proposal reduced government job quotas to 7%, with 5% for children of liberation fighters, 1% for indigenous people, and 1% for people with disabilities and gender diversity [23]. With approximately 100 culturally and linguistically diverse indigenous groups in Bangladesh, the government has met its symbolic duty of representation. However, unfairness happens when quotas are set without considering the real disadvantages people face. Most young Rakhines are unemployed and financially unstable, so the government's inability to create jobs for them makes it much harder for them to speak up and take part in politics.

Even though Bangladesh reserves seats for women, ethnic minorities still experience political exclusion. In contrast, countries such as Singapore and New Zealand go beyond quota requirements, and some Asia-Pacific nations give minorities more legislative seats than their population share [24]. In Bangladesh, economic exclusion further limits minorities' political representation [25]. Poor policy implementation prevents the Rakhine community from building trust in institutions, deepening their marginalization. Ongoing land loss caused by the majority Bengali population remains a major problem [26]. Robert Putnam's social capital theory distinguishes between bonding social capital, which supports close relationships, and bridging social capital, which helps people advance in society [4]. The Rakhine Buddhist community lacks both forms of capital, which limits its political representation and requires attention.

This paper starts by outlining the problem and reviewing the literature on political representation and the Rakhine ethnic community. It then presents a conceptual framework, explains the research design, and presents evidence and a case study from the Rakhine Buddhist community in Patuakhali and Barguna. Finally, it discusses the results and tests the objectives using conceptual models. To summarize, the findings show that social capital trust, norms, and networks plays a key role in the Rakhine community's political representation when members build both bonding and bridging networks and maintain a strong spiritual and traditional identity.

## 2 Review of the Literature

A significant portion of the Rakhine population in Barishal demonstrates a parochial attitude towards most alluring political matters. Analysis indicates that the primary cause of their insufficient political participation is their backwardness, which stems from socio-economic and communication barriers they face [27]. Democratic theorists argue that significant citizen representation is crucial for the success of democracy, despite the challenge of understanding why many people remain passive citizens [28]. Group representation is crucial in terms of democratic equality and civic inclusion [29]. Non-dominant groups are undeniable in political representation, as their presence undermines elite dominance, diminishes issue-oriented politics, promoting inclusive governance and accountability; conversely, their absence erodes democratic representation [30]. In

addition to SDG 16.7.2, the objective is to provide responsive, inclusive, participative, and representative decision-making at all levels for sustainable development [31].

The 'democratic paradigm' in international legislation has been censured for overemphasizing electoral competitiveness and institutional framework, although deliberative democracy- by recommending inclusive public discussion and debate ahead of legislation- provides a more overarching model that requires states to stand by political equitability, secure representation, and resolve minority concerns according to the principles of equality and autonomy [32]. However, certain marginalized groups have denser social networks that facilitate political mobilization because they are more numerous or more concentrated. For example, despite being an ethnic minority, Muslims in Switzerland exhibit a relatively high level of political representation, primarily due to their strong associational ties and both bridging and bonding forms of social capital [33]. Although some people have access to resources that make democratic practice easier or more natural for them, others face diverse social and economic disadvantages that impede their ability to become politically active [34]. For example, the Amish People, a Protestant group that focuses on community and prioritizes spiritual journey over social ties, are unrepresentative in national elections [35]. This kind of political inactivity is also seen among the Rakhine Buddhist Community in Barishal, which lacks the ability to protect democracy in Bangladesh; inclusiveness remains mandatory.

Analyzing these barriers through the lens of Robert D. Putnam's social capital theory would provide a clearer understanding of how trust, social networks, and norms influence political participation within a community. This literature review examines the significance of inclusiveness through active political representation, drawing on the conceptual and theoretical framework of social capital and its relevance to the political representation of Rakhine communities. The concept of "social capital" was initially introduced by educator Lyda Judson Hanifan in 1916, who marked it as a significant feature of everyday life, including kindness, friendliness, mutual cooperation, and the extent of social contracts [36]. Subsequently, Robert David Putnam, an American political scientist, is renowned for his contentious work *Bowling Alone*, which argues that the United States has experienced an unparalleled decline in civic, social, associational, and political engagement [13]. Putnam's analysis of American community life in the latter third of the 20th century reveals a decline in social capital, deteriorating workplace relationships, a 25% decline in religious institutions, and declining political representation [37]. This can provide a comparative framework to analyze political underrepresentation among the Rakhine Buddhist Community in Barishal. Robert D. Putnam referred to social capital as a public good, incorporating the levels of participatory prospects, civic attitudes, and trust in others relevant to cities and the nation-state [5, 13].

This study primarily employs Robert Putnam's social capital theory as its theoretical foundation. Yet, critical political economy and capability-based approaches push the analysis beyond "lack of social capital". Harvey argues that contemporary capitalism proceeds through accumulation by dispossession, in which the state facilitates the appropriation of land, resources, and collective rights from subordinated groups [38]. Such a lens helps to interpret Rakhine land loss, demographic decline, and induced migration not only as causes of low trust but as central mechanisms of marginalization themselves.

Putnam's theory asserts that social capital, fundamentally the 'quantity' of 'trust' exists, as the primary element defining the political culture of contemporary civilizations. As

Putnam said, voluntary organizations that promote parallel connections among individuals foster trust, the norm that promotes interpersonal bonding. He explicitly associates trust and its accompanying reciprocity with civic engagement [7]. However, for marginalized groups like the Rakhine Buddhist community, the deficit in social capital exacerbates significant political exclusion. The Rakhine community faces obstacles in cultural assimilation due to ethnic amalgamation and isolation from Bengali society [39]. This theory also emphasizes the role of institutional trust and civic norms in enabling political representation. According to Putnam, it highlights the importance of institutional trust and civic norms in representation.

This theoretical framework of social capital provides a basis for understanding how the Rakhine Buddhist community's political representation is shaped by both social capital and internal and external factors. This paper examines three variables of social capital, as defined by Robert Putnam: Trust, Norms, and Networks. Moreover, Sen's capability framework and Bhaduri's idea of development with dignity both indicate that ethnic minorities may still face obstacles to employment, education, political participation, and the preservation of their culture, even when they possess formal rights or quotas [40, 41]. These perspectives indicate that the Rakhines' weak political representation reflects deeper structural processes that undermine their freedoms and dignity, in turn shaping and being shaped by their trust, norms, and networks.

## 2.1 Trust

Putnam viewed "trust" as the origin of social capital, which boosts governmental performance, as the level of political representation of the people is correlated with the level of trust in government [42, 43]. Since the mid-1960s, public trust in government in modern industrial democracies has declined, revealing an erosion of perceived reliability [44]. Mistrust of the government is increasing due to nepotism and corruption; substantial trust fosters social capital, thereby promoting public-sector prosperity in Bangladesh [45]. Trust manifests in two primary forms: relational (grounded in social norms) and systemic (rooted in societal structures). The relational approach promotes personalistic transactions, whereas the systematic approach supports more formal, typically larger, transactions that are legally authorized. China's weak institutions foster mistrust in the broader system, leading to underrepresentation among citizens [46]. Land disputes between Bengalis and Rakhines have fostered not only lawsuits and violence but also deep psychological conflict and distrust. Mongthan Chan of Taltali, Barguna, alleges and recounts with frustration that Bengalis have unjustly seized their land, while he faces ongoing threats. In anger, Rakhines like him protest, "*We are the first settlers here.*" [47]. This paper explores both systemic and relational trust, as the Rakhines' lack of political representation, despite their willingness, results from the antagonistic attitudes they encounter from institutions and society.

This study also explores moralistic trust, highlighting its importance in extending beyond collaboration with known individuals to civic participation with unknown ones [48, 49]. A lack of moralistic trust reduces active political representation. For example, following the toppling of communist rulers 10 years ago, Romania and Moldova have struggled with democratic transitions due to low civic engagement stemming from mistrust between politicians and citizens [1, 50]. The Rakhines, due to past historical

trauma, such as not being allowed to use food shops that were confronted with majoritarian-dominated institutions and decision-making, have a lack of moral trust.

## 2.2 Norms

Christine Horne characterizes norms as central to the social sciences, primarily as social regulations or expectations [51]. However, Noelle-Neumann's (1974) spiral of silence theory posits that people who perceive themselves as in the minority often remain silent because they fear social isolation. This makes majority opinions seem even stronger over time [52]. Research shows that people are less likely to speak up about controversial political issues when they believe they hold a minority view, particularly on moral or value-related issues [53]. Studies in workplace and online environments also find that when people perceive a hostile climate, they are less likely to express dissenting views [54].

Moreover, minority communities exhibit distinctive norms and hesitate to engage in conflict due to their minority status and poor socioeconomic conditions, preferring not to challenge governing institutions [55], which may also be observed in the Rakhine Buddhist community in Barishal. Another social norm can be observed among ethnic people, who often experience strong ties to their homeland, characterized by a feeling of nostalgia or homesickness [56]. This kind of social norm may lead them to become disinterested in the host country's politics or to have a tendency to return to their country of origin. Some minority communities' traditional customs and religious beliefs are in conflict with the state ideology. For example, Haredi groups of Israel oppose the democratic system, military service, voting, taxes, and government welfare, thinking that it goes against God's plan to save the world [57]. Similarly, the Rakhine Buddhist community may hold similar religious beliefs or face community restrictions, which can render them unrepresentative in local and national politics.

## 2.3 Networks

Thorp noted that one of the major obstacles to the poor starting organizations is their inability to network [58]. Hence, analyzing existing bonding and bridging social networks is crucial to understanding their impact on political representation among the Rakhine Communities. On the one hand, relationships within a group or community marked by a high degree of similarity in demographic traits, attitudes, and the information and resources that are available are referred to as bonding social capital, for example, neighbors, close friends, and relatives. Conversely, bridging social capital refers to connections that link people across cleavages that typically divide society (e.g., race, class, or religion), as well as to associations that 'bridge' between communities, groups, or organizations [59].

The balance between bonding and bridging social capital is crucial [5]. Bonding social networks provide a crucial support to those facing socioeconomic hardship or poor health, fostering norms and trust for cooperative action. Research shows that low-income mothers in public housing estates rely heavily on social networks for survival, but lack bridging social capital, which hinders their connections with external organizations. Moreover, bridging social capital offers benefits such as improved information-gathering skills, increased access to power, and new opportunities [60]. Through interaction with diverse individuals, bridging social capital tends to enhance tolerance and acceptance

of others, ideas, and opinions, as it transcends social boundaries [61]. Building consensus between organizations with disparate interests is made possible by bridging social capital, which also enables the sharing and exchange of information, ideas, and innovation [5]. Members of one network may be able to access resources and opportunities in another network through overlapping networks [62]. The bridging form of social capital is inclusive primarily, consisting of a thin trust in light and dynamic networks [63]. It is noteworthy to mention that discomfort and unprofessional communication between the Rakhine Community and Bengalis are observed, which disrupts the bridging network, leading to reduced representation and political engagement [27]. The study examines the social capital of the Rakhine Buddhist community, focusing on bonding, bridging, and their combination. The study also investigates whether the strong bonding network hinders the formation of bridging networks, as it also shows the systematic marginalization and dispossession approach in the following.

#### **2.4 Systematic marginalization and dispossession**

In this paper, systematic marginalization and dispossession are seen as processes shaped by history and organized by institutions [64]. Some groups are pushed to the social and political “margins” because they have less access to land, resources, rights, and decision-making. Meanwhile, dominant groups strengthen their position at the “center” [65]. Here, social marginalization is not a random or short-term exclusion, but a process of othering that depends on the context. Certain communities are pushed to the edges of society, lose control over important resources, and face stigma and exploitation [66]. Dispossession refers to the forced transfer of land and other forms of capital, including economic, social, cultural, and political assets [67]. This often happens through actions by the state or market actors. It breaks social ties, weakens local livelihoods, and increases long-term dependency and vulnerability. In the context of ethnic minorities like the Rakhine, Harvey’s accumulation by dispossession framework explains how neoliberal policies facilitate land grabs, leading to demographic decline and eroded social capital [68]. Empirical evidence based on South Asia shows similar patterns. For example, in India, tribal regions, dispossession has disintegrated kinship networks and reduced political mobilization. Sen’s capability approach complements this by emphasizing that such processes fail to provide genuine freedoms of participation, thereby leading to underrepresentation [69]. Bhaduri claims that true development requires dignity through full employment and security, not token quotas, which aligns with the Rakhine’s unemployment and migration issues [70]. This often happens through actions by the state or market actors. It breaks social ties, weakens local livelihoods, and increases long-term dependency and vulnerability [71].

#### **2.5 Research design and methods**

This paper addresses the question “how barriers rooted in fear and exploitation do undermine social capital, in the Putnamian sense, and affect the political representation of the Rakhine community in Bangladesh?” To explore this question, this article aims to address the connection between the level of trust among the communities in the institution and political representation in local/national elections; identify how religious and cultural norms influence the participation and representation in politics; and measure

how the level of networking - bonding and bridging- influences political representation among the communities.

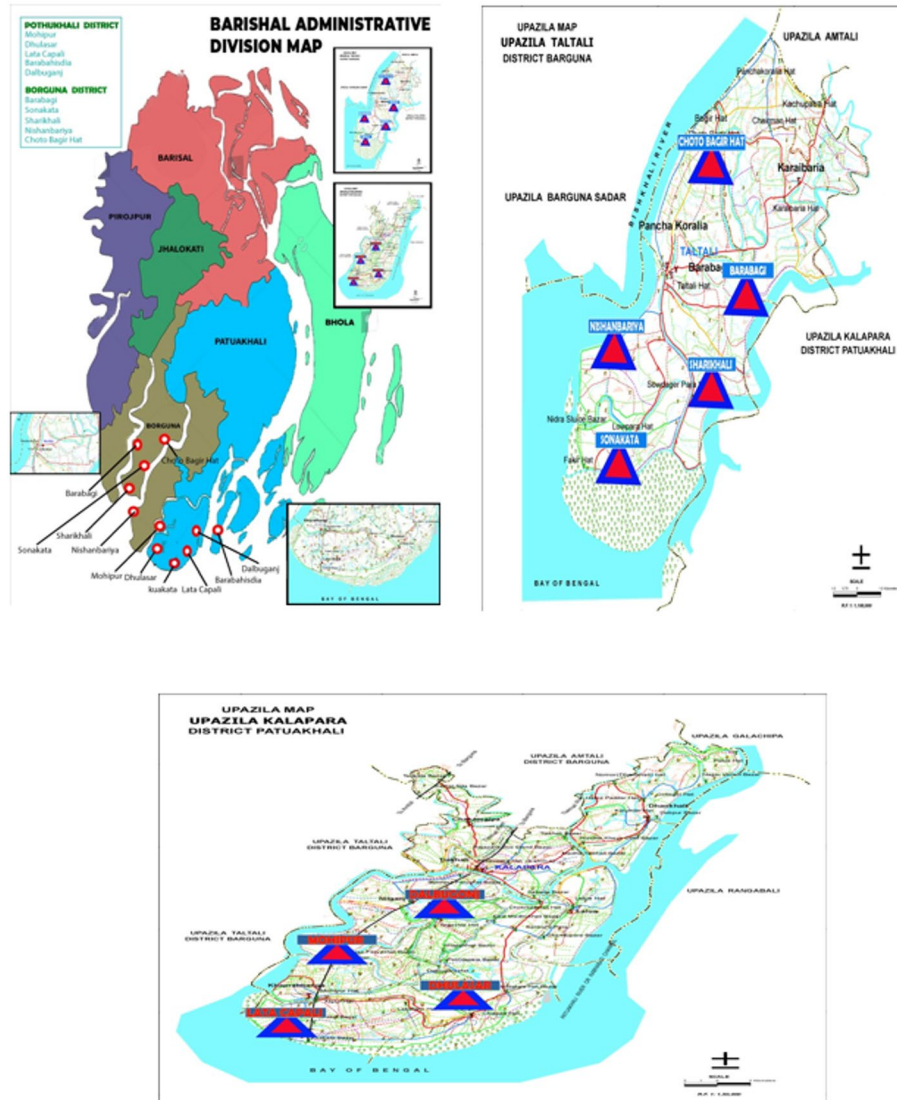
Moreover, this qualitative study examines the barriers faced by the Rakhine Buddhist community in Barishal in their pursuit of political representation. It employed a qualitative method, including Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Group Interviews (GIs), and document analysis, to examine the relationships among trust, norms, and networks and to identify common themes and patterns in participants' daily lives.

An interpretive approach was employed to analyze the data in this qualitative study. All the data were then reviewed, and collectively, the most valid and frequent issues that emerged across the interviews, focus group discussions, and the case study were identified. This process involves a delicate comparison of participants' narratives, attention to consistency, and validation of information through cross-checking with multiple respondents and secondary documents. Subsequently, the central issues were identified, and the prepared data were examined in relation to Robert Putnam's framework of social capital, Sen's capability approach, and Bhaduri's idea of development with dignity. Patterns related to trust in institutions, the impact of fear and exploitation, cultural and religious norms, and the roles of bonding and bridging networks were highlighted and interpreted through Putnam's categories of trust, norms, and networks. This interpretive method enabled the study to consistently identify how everyday experiences of the Rakhine community relate to broader questions of political representation, while maintaining sensitivity to the community's own expressions, concerns, and consent. The research team sought to engage with their culture by building a friendship and seeking to understand their concerns, personal issues, and fears, all with their consent, which validated the analysis as both accurate and robust.

## **2.6 Case study on Kalapara and Taltali Upazila**

Based on several important criteria, including historical, cultural, and sociopolitical dynamics that specifically shape the experiences of this ethnic minority group, Patuakhali and Barguna districts in Barishal Division have been chosen as the focal point for this study of political representation of the Rakhine Buddhist community. The term "Rakhine" came from the Pali word Arakha (protector), reflecting their lasting preservation of faith, tradition, and endowment, while they are locally referred to as "Mog" as well. The Rakhine community in Bangladesh traces its roots to the Kingdom of Arakan, which once spanned parts of modern-day Rakhine State in Myanmar and southeastern Bangladesh, including Kalapara Upazila, as shown in the Kalapara Upazila administration profile. They gradually began to settle in Patuakhali and Barguna to protect themselves from the Burmese king's attacks.

## 2.7 Maps of case selection areas



In addition, Bangladesh is home to 45 or more ethnic groups. Out of the country's total 3 million ethnic groups, the Rakhine population is currently only a few thousand. Historical records, such as J.C. Jack's "Bakerganj District Gazetteer," indicate that the Rakhines, upon their arrival, cleared forests to render the region tenantable, with their population increasing by 20% within a decade after 1876 [72]. Between 1784 and 1900, more than 50,000 Rakhines lived in the coastal region of Barisal. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2022), approximately 3,500 Rakhines reside in the Barishal Division, specifically in the two districts of Patuakhali and Barguna [73]. However, the Rakhine population in Patuakhali and Barguna had declined to 2,271 by 2024. The Rakhine population has declined by around 95% over the last 200 years, and approximately 81% of Rakhine villages have been abandoned [74]. There are only 26 and 13 Rakhine villages left in Patuakhali and Barguna, respectively, out of the 144 and 93 that existed in 1948. "Chaiani" village is the final Rakhine community to be destroyed because of the acquisition of "Payra port"; moreover, nearly every household faces two land-related cases [47]. There were 237 paras in the Barishal region between 1784 and 1900, but the number of

paras decreased to 47 between 1991 and 2004. According to a survey conducted in the Caritas Barisal region, a total of 44 Rakhine paras remain, including 27 in Kalapara, 04 in Rangabali, and 13 in Barguna Sadar and Taltali upazilas.

Previously, this generation was not educated; however, the majority of youth are now pursuing academic education, and the rate of unemployment is also high. Most members of the Rakhine community earn their livelihoods through small-scale businesses, including cloth-making, cake-making, tea-selling, shop ownership, cloth weaving, and farming [20]. However, the socioeconomic conditions of the Rakhine community in Patuakhali and Barguna are not stable. Historically, the region has been affected by flooding, arid land, and territorial seizures. Climatologically, the entire southern coastal region of Bangladesh is more vulnerable than other areas of the country due to its spatial geomorphological characteristics [75]. Global warming and sea-level rise have been well documented and are expected to continue to rise over time. These have significant adverse effects on agricultural production, food and nutrition security, and the livelihoods of individuals residing in coastal zones, particularly the Rakhine ethnic community [76].

Furthermore, their means of subsistence are no longer viable, as they frequently fall prey to various forms of discrimination, harassment, land grabbing, rape, religious practice violations, indirect pressure, etc., as shown in numerous newspaper articles from 2010 to 2020 have detailed these infractions, many of which remain unresolved [77]. Additionally, 96% of children and adolescents in the Rakhine population can speak their mother tongue but are unable to read or write, which puts their education at risk [78]. These factors have come up with the socio-economic exclusion and poor networking of the Rakhine Buddhist community, resulting in their underrepresentation in local and national elections. The Constitution of Bangladesh, in Article 23(A), states that the state shall protect, look after, and promote the distinct cultures of tribes, minority races, ethnic groups, and communities, forbidding prejudice based on race, religion, or place of birth, while ensuring favorable measures for indigenous peoples. Comparably, the State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950 bars non-members of Bangladesh's aboriginal castes and tribes from acquiring land belonging to these communities [79]. Moreover, the Rakhine people in this area still face numerous issues despite several beneficial government initiatives; their low level of political representation may be one of the causes of their sufferings.

### 3 Findings

This study explores the barriers to Rakhine's Political Representation in Barishal Division, based on 150 respondents from Key Informant Interview (KII), Group Interview (GI), and Focus Group Discussion (FGD), from the Rakhine Buddhist Community across various Rakhine Paras in the southern part of Barishal Division as a source of primary data. Most of the respondents were from Misri Para, Kerani Para, Diaramkhola Para, Kalachan Para, Amkhola Para, and Bedkata Para of Kuakata Upazila in Patuakhali District, as well as Taltali Para, Satompara, Agathakurpara, and Namissipara of Taltali Upazila in Barguna District. The demographic synopsis of the participants is as follows, providing an overview of the data.

**Table 1** Demographic profile of Rakhine respondents in Kuakata and Taltoli ( $n = 150$ )

Category	Kuakata ( $n = 90$ )	Taltoli ( $n = 60$ )
Age 28–35	9	8
Age 36–42	11	5
Age 43–50	7	6
Male (%)	50	50
Female (%)	50	50
No formal education	7	4
SSC	13	5
HSC	19	7
Bachelor	6	11
Homemakers	8	8
Entrepreneurs/Teachers/Retailers	4	2
Farmers/ Fishermen	6	4

**Table 2** Contrast between electoral participation and political ambition

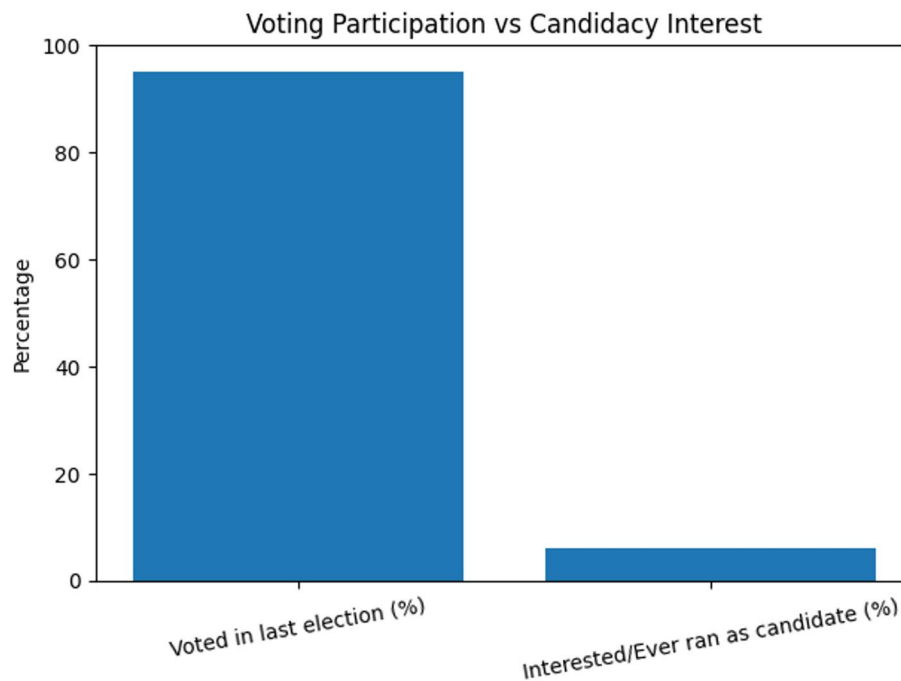
Indicator	Percentage
Voted in last election (%)	95
Interested/Ever ran as candidate (%)	6

### 3.1 Demographic overview of the participants

The closed-ended questions were conducted to collect specific, quantifiable data about the respondents' demographic features and other relevant qualities. These questionnaires were formulated with fixed response options to facilitate straightforward data analysis. A total of 150 participants from Kuakata and Taltoli were interviewed using these closed-ended questions. The interviews were designed with both face-to-face and small group settings, ensuring that respondents could select from the given options without bias. This demographic outline exhibits a representative combination of the participants from Patuakhali and Barguna districts. The age ranged between 28 and 50 years (table-1), encompassing a significant portion of the politically aware and knowledgeable about the present condition of the community, because Rakhine are not like the way they were 10 years ago, due to social media and technological advancements. Gender participation was balanced, with 50% male and 50% female respondents, to examine their distinct social barriers (Table 1). In terms of educational background, respondents varied from individuals with no formal education to those holding SSC, HSC, and Master's degrees. Regarding occupational status, the sample encompassed a broad spectrum of occupations, including farmers, fishers, homemakers, entrepreneurs, educators, students, and retailers (Table 1).

### 3.2 Political representation and voting pattern

The Rakhine Community's voting rate is too high, with almost all male and female voters participating in local and national elections over the last decade, as indicated by Table 2 and Fig. 1. Most of them follow political news regularly through social media and engage in political discussion at the tea stall and community gatherings. However, an exception remains: the Buddhist monks (Vante) have no interest in politics because of their religious restrictions; they vote but never discuss such chaotic, worldly matters inside the Pagoda. But the question arises, what is the reason behind their high participation in voting despite a 'controversial' as well as non-ethnic binded electoral system of Bangladesh, some of them answered "*we are sensitive about the government because of our*



**Fig. 1** High voting participation but extremely low candidacy interest among Rakhine respondents

*safety issue, so we collectively discuss which government would prioritize the minority rights the most, so we are aware of our voting rights to protect the best interest of ourselves."*

Besides, Rakhine does not hope to participate in any election as a candidate. In Patuakhali, the last political leader or local representative, such as a chairman or member, was found in the 1960–1970s. After that, no one from the Rakhine community was elected in that area. Fifteen years ago, one of them contested an election but lost unfairly; thereafter, he went to Myanmar after the election, as reported by the community leader from the Rakhine areas. The scenario in Taltoli, Barguna, is slightly different. According to Chanthun Mung (Ex-president of one party's youth organization in 1982), "at present, there is nobody who represents in politics from our community, but in 1961 there was a chairman in the union parishad and in 1978 my father was a member of a ward of the union parishad." Over the last two decades, very few candidates have participated in elections, yet none have won.

### 3.3 Party affiliation of Rakhine populace

A few people have political party affiliations; however, in Patuakhali, no significant political party leader has been seen in the last 50 years. Nevertheless, some political party leaders resided in Taltoli, Barguna district, during the 1980s and 1990s. Moreover, it has increased a few percentage points; from where the participant, President of the Rakhine Buddhist Welfare Association (RBWA), affiliated with one of the political parties in Bangladesh, also expressed distress that his son couldn't get a job during the previous ruling period, and his crops were burnt by the criminals. In Bangladesh, he does not feel secure, especially as an ethnic minority, because they are less in number and they have no politically influential channel to protect them. Additionally, he expressed that he has dual citizenship and will shift soon to Myanmar, as Buddhist people have power, influence, and can live safely. In Amkhola Para Kuakata, Aung Kwsun, a community leader,

said the religious extremism of Bangladesh is also a reason for their migration. Most of them noted that political representation for the Rakhine community has since ceased, but during the Pakistan period they actively participated in politics and served as chairpersons and members of the local governance system. Because they were in the majority in this area at that time, they held much of the land that the Bangali people had illegally seized, and justice did not favour them. As a result, they avoided politics, but as citizens, they voted regularly as shown in Table 2 and Fig. 1. They added that back then, most of the Rakhine people had no literacy; they could not read Bangla, so Bangali people took away four Kani areas of land, claiming that one Kani and their ancestors had signed them unconsciously. However, they spoke about one politician named Aye Thein Rakhine, who belongs to the Rakhine community, is a politician from Cox's Bazar, and was a member of parliament for the reserved women's seat-30 from 1996 to 2001 and seat-7 from 2009 to 2014 as an exception.

### 3.4 Trust to the political leaders and governance

Most of the Rakhine said that they cannot trust the national government subtly and added that the government cannot provide safety and facilities to engage them in politics. A woman, near forty, said that "if the political system of Bangladesh were more democratic, more equal, and peaceful, they might have representation in politics. Community leaders agreed that government policies helped them somewhat, such as student scholarships, quotas, and ration cards, but these are not enough. Moreover, the government makes policies for them, but local leaders discriminate against them, as they don't get even one-third of the opportunities in reality." A Buddhist monk, Indro Bongsho Bhikkhu, said that "the government takes no step to preserve our scripture, we don't get any funds for pagoda education; they only provide some funds during religious festivals, and we don't get the opportunity like what other religions gets. The government did not take the initiative to repair Buddha Bihar. Some educated people were fearless; they said they didn't trust the national government at all because they did not receive justice in land-related matters. The government favors the Muslim majority; their quota is only 1% which is so unfair for them, they said. A few tea stall owners indirectly expressed dissatisfaction with the interim government, believing the previous government had implemented better policies for them, but they avoided further explanation. A community leader, Mathus Rakhain, stated that their ancestors arrived in Bangladesh in 1784; at that time, nobody lived in those areas. The lands were certified as theirs during the British period, but after Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan, the Bangali people reclaimed their land, leading to a decline in their numbers as they began migrating. In the Rakhine, Patuakhali, and Barguna regions, a total of 237 Rakhine villages were identified, of which 192 have no trace of Bengali habitation.

According to the demographics of the Rakhine people in the greater Barishal region, approximately 81% of Rakhine villages have been depopulated in just 200 years, resulting in a population decrease of about 95%. There is still no justice at the state level against the cruel and unjust occupation of land for the Rakhines. Even at the local level, everyone from the village to the local administration is indifferent. Rakhines do not receive any assistance at night when various legal issues related to their land crisis are addressed in government offices, and they told, "Obhinoy koirona" (don't act) [71]. Section 97 of the State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950 mandates that tribal members permanently

transfer their land and property to another tribal member in Bangladesh. To transfer property, tribal members must apply to the Revenue Officer, who will consider the Act and the Land Reforms Ordinance, 1984. But they mentioned that “though land law is useful to us, the government failed to implement it, Bengalis convince another Rakhine to buy land in his name, then occupy the land themselves and betray the Rakhine”.

### 3.5 Moralistic, systemic, and relational trust

Moralistic trust was described by Uslander [80], who argues that trust is a moral obligation to strangers or out-groups, despite past betrayal and traumatic history. He added that moralistic trust affects political participation. “Some of the Rakhine people answered that despite not being properly benefited by the national government, we still keep faith in the system because we have no options left, as a minority, we cannot raise our voice against any wrongdoings of the authority. So, whatever small facilities we get, we are happy with this, we just want to live with security, and that’s enough for us”. This suggests that they have a moralistic trust in the national government, but they don’t trust local political leaders or the majority community at all. They expressed concern that our friendship with the majority is superficial; they don’t want us to hold power, and if we participate in elections, they will never vote for us. Local leaders do not effectively provide the opportunities that the government offers to the Rakhine. Therefore, they lack moral trust in the local government and the majority population. On the other hand, their relational trust is generally good, and they have a strong sense of community cohesion, except in a few cases. An older man said their bonding is good, but not as strong as it used to be; unity is decreasing compared to the past, but it’s still satisfactory. However, the relational trust with the Bengali neighbor is superficial, a woman said, “*we regularly interact with the Bengalis and they are so well behaved towards us, but if something serious happens, they will not come to save us.*” They don’t trust the political system at all; they expressed resentment that “*Bangladesh’s political system is riddled with corruption*”, undermining democracy and safety. The thana and courts are tainted by corruption, and land is often given away to the majority, who hold power and wealth, as evidenced by a lack of systemic trust and a general distrust of local leaders.” Even Bhaduri says their development path lacks dignity. Underemployment, migration, and token quotas do not bring self-respect or a real voice. Without money or political power, survival is difficult. Land laws, which are meant to help, are often ignored [81].

### 3.6 Norms within the Rakhine system

Safeguarding the culture and heritage holds significant importance for the Rakhine Community, as they have maintained their native language for nearly 250 years without any government assistance. Their cultural norms have some influence on their underrepresentation in politics. They are more interested in “in-group politics,” such as who will be the next matobbar, whether the traditional monarchic system will remain or need to be abolished, and the replacement of the matobbar selection system with a merit-based system. According to the monastic code of conduct, the Vinaya, Buddhist monks are generally expected to remain detached from worldly matters. Moreover, the Buddha’s teachings emphasize a peaceful life that rejects worldly attachment and greed. So, naturally, they are taught to be quiet from birth and avoid conflict. A monk stated that if Bangladesh’s political system were peaceful and safe, they would be involved in politics.

He also said that Myanmar's politics is chaotic; however, there they have a more extensive network to protect each other, which they lack in Bangladesh.

Aye Maung Talukder said, "our community feels 'born into' political marginality because this place was ours before, and we were the majority, but they robbed our land. Therefore, we don't want to be involved in any riots where we are not respected and will surely lose." His story shows a strong sense of "us" versus "them" and a sense of lost ownership, which is common in identity politics when structural inequality exists [82]. The difference between "we were the majority" and "they robbed our land" shows a politicized group identity and a feeling of disadvantage and disrespect, rather than a personal issue. Research on identity politics shows that histories of deprivation and exclusion shape how people perceive institutions and participate in them [83]. Place-based grievances develop into place resentment toward perceived out-groups who are seen as enjoying "undeserved benefits" in one's own territory [84]. This aligns with Talukder's account of "our" land being taken and expectations of defeat if they engage, as supported by existing research on similar cases.

Building on this perspective, place-attachment and place-identity theories suggest that people gain a sense of uniqueness, continuity, self-esteem, and self-efficacy from their connection to a place [85]. If people lose control over their territory or feel that external decisions are imposed on them, their place identity is threatened, which reduces their place-related self-esteem and self-efficacy [86]. When people feel alienated or have a negative connection to a place, they are less likely to get involved in local change and more likely to withdraw or "opt out" [87]. Whether people protest or withdraw depends heavily on how much they believe in their own or their group's political power, as well as on the wider social and political situation [88]. In repressive or very unequal settings, low confidence and fear of certain loss make not participating a reasonable way to cope, rather than just a sign of apathy [89].

On the other hand, the picture of Barguna was a little different because they were better off in terms of education, finance, and held more power; the influence of community leaders was less here, as they mentioned that "it is just our tradition." Another respondent said, "if someone joins a political party, others start gossiping, and it's not encouraged," which indicates that political involvement may expose them to threats. They are more interested in Myanmar's politics because many of their relatives live there, and they are concerned about their well-being.

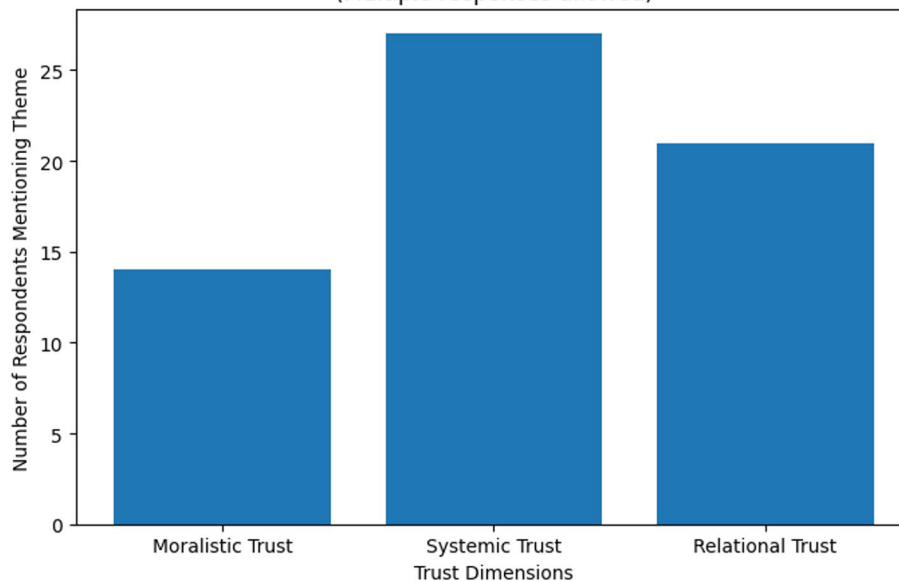
### 3.7 Bonding versus bridging networks

The Rakhine community depends on close internal networks, especially in Kuakata and Taltali. People trust their leaders and usually make decisions within the community rather than using formal institutions. Still, as Maung Mia points out, there is a deeper issue. Groups such as the Rakhine Buddhist Welfare Association and the Rakhine Social Welfare Association lead the community in Barguna and Patuakhali. Other organizations include the Buddhist Vihara Association, the local branch of the Bangladesh Adivasi Forum, and the Bangladesh Rakhine Students' Welfare Association. Many members are aware of their political rights, but these groups are not well organized, and leadership is weak due to inactivity. The Rakhine community has about 2,500 members, including 14 or 15 government BCS officers, a joint secretary, a brigadier general, and a University of Dhaka teacher. However, those who have reached high positions have left

**Table 3** Core themes of political participation barriers among the Rakhine community

Theme	Sub-theme	Respondents mentioning	Representative quote
Trust	Moralistic	14 (9.3%)	"We still keep faith because we have no options."
Trust	Systemic	27 (18.0%)	"Government cannot ensure justice in land issues."
Trust	Relational	21 (14.0%)	"If something serious happens, Bengalis won't save us."
Norms	Cultural restraint	8 (5.3%)	"We are taught to avoid conflict."
Bonding Networks	Strong in-group ties	24 (16.0%)	"Unity is not like before, but still strong."
Bridging Networks	Weak external links	29 (19.3%)	"Only leaders reach the UNO, not us."
Land Dispossession/Fear	Fear of loss & injustice	32 (21.3%)	"They robbed our land, so we avoid politics."

**Frequency of Trust-Related Barriers Among Rakhine Respondents (n=62)**  
(Multiple responses allowed)



**Fig. 2** Frequency of themes of trust types and key barriers among Rakhine respondents (n=62)

the community and rarely stay in contact, which prevents the community from building political influence.

The Rakhine community has limited connections. Tables 3 and Fig. 2 show that only community leaders can share concerns with the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO), while most Rakhines cannot. General community members must go through the Matobbers first to reach officials, and even leaders cannot contact higher authorities. This suggests that structural barriers, not just internal networks, limit their participation. Some respondents said, "the connection with the majority population is better with our community leaders, but the general public does not have the same strong connection." One woman said she only talks to her Bengali college friends and avoids neighbors because the Bengali community mocks their unique facial features. Mocho, a 29-year-old man, shared that during his school years, he read an English passage that called them "Mogs". "Mogs basically were sea robbers who looted people at sea, but we are not them; none

*of our ancestors looted anyone. The writing of the passage broke my heart,"* he said. Table 3 lists the main barriers to political representation for the Rakhine community. Land dispossession and fear were mentioned by 32 respondents (21.3%), weaker bridging networks by 29 (19.3%), and systemic mistrust by 27 (18.0%). These results show that political marginalization is caused by structural marginalization and limited access, not by apathy. While 24 respondents (16.0%) reported strong internal unity, this has not led to influence outside the community. Figure 2 supports this, and shows that systemic mistrust, especially about land justice, law enforcement, and local governance, is the most common barrier. Trust within the Bengali majority is weak, and trust within the community seems to come more from necessity than from real confidence.

Table 3; Fig. 2 show that low bridging and linking social capital result from structural domination, including evictions, territorial stigma, exclusion from decision-making, and discrimination by institutions. The theory of systematic marginalization and dispossession suggests that these low levels in the Rakhine community are caused by structural domination. Ongoing evictions, territorial stigma, exclusion from decision-making, and discriminatory institutions steadily weaken networks, trust, and access to power. This process limits political participation [90, 91]. Building on Putnam's ideas about social capital, this paper uses a broader framework that brings together Harvey's 'accumulation by dispossession', Bhaduri's critique of 'development by dispossession' and 'development with dignity', and Sen's capability approach. This helps to explain Rakhine underdevelopment as a result of structural domination, capability failure, and loss of dignity, rather than just a lack of social capital.

According to Harvey, Bhaduri, and Sen, the underdevelopment of the Rakhines is not just a lack of "social capital" as Putnam describes, but the result of systematic marginalization and dispossession by the dominant Bengali population. Harvey's idea of accumulation by dispossession explains the way state-backed development and market growth repeatedly grab land, resources, and livelihoods from minorities, concentrating wealth and power at the center and pushing minorities into greater insecurity and dependence [15]. Bhaduri adds that "development by dispossession" shows how corporate-led, jobless growth and displacement create a growing informal sector, where poverty and political weakness are not accidental but built into current growth coalitions and land-acquisition systems [18]. In this view, the development of the majority and the "success" of dominant groups depend on the Rakhines' loss of land, economic independence, and bargaining power, which weakens their ability to organize, speak out, and be represented.

Looking through Sen's capability approach, the main issue is not just income or participation in groups, but the ongoing failure of basic capabilities and dignity. Sen's view of development focuses on expanding people's real freedoms to live lives they value, not just on income or growth statistics [92]. From this perspective, low levels of bridging and linking social capital in the Rakhine community are symptoms of structural domination caused by long-term dispossession, being made a minority, and misrepresentation rather than a cultural cause of their situation [93].

#### **4 Analysis and conclusion**

By analyzing the above data, it can be observed that the Rakhine Buddhist community in the Patuakhali and Taltali region exhibits high political literacy and considerable voter participation. However, in terms of political representation, such as holding important

positions in any political party or being elected representatives in local government elections, they have been notably underrepresented for the last 50 years. That means they are symbolically included but substantively excluded from political representation. Existing studies have noted that while Bangali communities lack a distinct political culture, the Rakhine population tends to remain parochial. However, over the last decade, the situation regarding political participation and awareness has changed, as the Rakhine population is becoming increasingly aware of civic engagement and citizen rights due to technological advancements and rising educational rates; however, they remain underrepresented because of the obstacles posed by fear and exploitation. Robert Putnam's social capital theory provides an explanation for the obstacles that contribute to the lack of political representation. These challenges have deep roots in a long history of dispossession and loss of opportunities. Over the past two centuries, the Rakhine people have lost much of their land, villages, and population. This is an example of what Harvey calls accumulation by dispossession. Here, the state's failure to protect Rakhine land from the majority population acts as a barrier that weakens their 'bridging social capital.' When a community faces ongoing dispossession, it must focus on survival instead of building the outside political networks they need for representation. In this case, state policies, legal changes, and market pressures have worked together to push a minority out of valuable coastal areas and reduce their political power [94, 95]. Harvey's research demonstrates that land loss due to development, tourism, and government actions diminishes both material security and political power. Sen's framework shows why being a legal citizen doesn't really give someone a political voice when his safety, job, and education are at risk. Amartya Sen's capability approach may help us understand why politicians are withdrawing from politics. People need more than just formal rights to participate in politics. It also needs real freedoms, like the right to an education, economic security, the ability to move around, language access, and protection against forced labor. The Rakhines have lost land, struggled to make a living, and the government has not helped them. This makes it harder for them to use their legal citizenship to gain real political power. In this case, not talking about politics is a smart way to stay safe and avoid trouble, not a sign that people don't care about their culture. Persistent insecurity, unfair land dispute resolution, and fear of retaliation from the majority limit Rakhines' real freedom to organize, run for office, or claim their rights, as Sen's perspective on the failure of capability indicates. The Rakhine people lose meaningful political rights because they live in constant fear of retaliation and face ongoing economic insecurity. As Sen points out, the right to vote does not matter much if fear and deprivation stop people from using it safely.

Moreover, democracy in Bangladesh is fragile or unstable as it cannot ensure the equality and the safety of the minorities; they don't have trust in this nominal democratic political system of Bangladesh. Besides, they cannot trust the "populist political leaders" of Bangladesh as they prioritize the majority sentiment to stay in power and do not care about the minority rights and safety. The Rakhine community thinks that if they are attacked, the police won't be able to protect them, or the court will favor the majority or the powerful ones, or those who have powerful lobbying. It can be termed as "Majoritarian Democracy," which creates a cycle of trust issues among the minorities. In addition, the demographic shift of the Rakhine Paras is nearly causing them to go extinct. Due to land grabbing and natural disasters, they lost faith in the government and migrated to Myanmar. "As the Arakan want to create an independent state with their

people, the government policies are also helping them migrate, which they trust more, and they have good connections with the people there, because Myanmar is a Buddhist state,” said a Rakhine leader, “Arakan is permitting citizenship automatically if they can prove that they were Arakanese.”

In the case of moralistic trust, it may be somewhat present in the national government, as they formulate policies that are not always implemented. Despite Rakhine’s lack of trust, they still depend on the government, police, or court for formal legitimacy or judgment because they have no other options left, which indicates the presence of moralistic trust. However, the moralistic trust of Rakhines is absent towards the political leaders, as they discriminate against them in their rights. The Bangali majority also doesn’t care for them deeply and tries to dominate them, so it is very natural not to have moralistic trust in them. Mostly, their relational trust is quite strong, except for some power struggles within the matobbers (local elite). However, they behave in a calculative manner with their Bangali neighbours; here, relational trust is lacking. And their systematic trust in institutions such as the court, law, and police is not present at all because they have never received proper justice for their rights and land-related issues. The government policy framework is quite sufficient for them, but institutional frameworks, such as local government, cannot implement those policies, as it is clear that the frameworks don’t function effectively for them.

The most important argument is that they are not as satisfied as they pretend to be toward the Bengalis, the government, and political leaders. They are always afraid, so they avoid conflict for their own protection; they don’t want to upset the majority. The spiral of silence theory posits that people are more likely to express their views when they believe they are in the majority than when they believe most others do not share their views. It is suggested that this process is caused by a fear of social isolation, which causes the former group to speak up while the latter group remains silent, despite their true social distribution [96]. This is why they vote regularly for their community interest but do not represent themselves politically. Furthermore, the spiral of silence thus reinforces Putnam’s norms dimension, where fear of isolation perpetuates political inaction among minorities, even as they maintain high voter turnout for self-protection [97].

A typical pattern is noticed; all of the Buddhist Monks were highly dissatisfied and expressed a grudge towards the national government. They said the government does not put any effort into preserving their religion, culture, and religious scriptures. However, it is questionable whether, despite all the restrictions, Buddhist monks in Myanmar actively engage in politics. Perhaps this is because Buddhism generally has two main divisions: “Theravada” and “Mahayana.” Of these, Mahayana Buddhists are generally more active in politics. The Bangladeshi Rakhine Buddhists are primarily Theravada Buddhists. Theravāda, the ancient school of Buddhism, has preserved Gautama Buddha’s ideology and perception for over a thousand years, and among its present-day disciples, Bhikkhu Sujato—ordained in 1994 in the Thai forest lineage of Ajahn Chah—highlights the canonical teaching in MN 22, which prohibits engaging in discourse that is base, trivial, or unbeneficial and does not lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, calm, direct knowledge, self-awakening, or Nibbāna, including discussions on kings, robbers, ministers, armies, battles, material goods, relatives, places, women, heroes, gossip, or cosmological matters [98]. In Theravada Buddhism, the Bangladeshi Rakhine

community adheres to the old school of the Buddha's teachings, which precludes political engagement for monks [99].

On the other hand, in Arakan, the form of Buddhism practiced today is known as Theravada Buddhism [100]. Behind these paradoxical attitudes lay historical significance. Many Burmese Buddhists considered the British colonial period, when the government was separate from religion and conventional monastic support was disrupted, as an indication that Buddhism was on the decline. This shocking event from the past made both laypeople and monks take steps to strengthen their shared religious and cultural ideals [101].

Furthermore, network plays a crucial role in human development. It would not be logically correct to define the Rakhines as a community with a strong bonding network, because the successful leaders among them, as mentioned earlier, such as BCS cadre and Brigadier General, don't maintain many connections with the community, which creates a gap. Due to this gap, a disconnection has occurred at the grassroots level, resulting in a political vacuum, leadership gap, and lack of representation. Perhaps they are not bothered by the communities that much, but rather by themselves after breaking the barriers of minority stigma. Besides, their bridging networking is too devitalized. Amit Bhaduri's concept of 'development with dignity' helps explain the disengagement of Rakhine networks from politics. If people lack job security, land protection, and respect from institutions, they do not have power, even if they are included symbolically or given electoral quotas. Many Rakhines believe that involvement in politics beyond their community is more harmful to their safety and social stability than it is beneficial. Their networks are centered on enduring with dignity, yet they are unable to make connections with others because of disparities in power, dispossession, and the imminent threat of violence. They do not receive support from Bengali communities and lack the lobbying and leaders needed to engage with higher officials, owing to the financial crisis and limited education, both of which are crucial for participation in mainstream politics.

When it is put together what Putnam, Harvey, Sen, and Bhaduri say, the emphasis moves from a simple 'social capital deficit' to a more thorough, structural view of political marginalization. People don't trust each other because institutions take away resources, people don't speak up because it costs a lot of money to participate, and networks don't contact each other because it's dangerous and doesn't offer much reward. It's not their fault that Rakhine doesn't have representation; they lost their land, their abilities, and their dignity.

The results show that Rakhine is still being pushed to the edge and that this is still happening. Even if you don't think about social capital, this is still true. Bhaduri's focus on dignity shows that political involvement is mostly symbolic and lacks the power to change things without land rights, job security, and respect for institutions. This study shifts how people think about the lack of Rakhine representation from a civic problem to one rooted in political and economic structures. It does this by combining the ideas of Putnam, Harvey, Sen, and Bhaduri (Table 4). Not only are the Rakhines not involved in politics, but they also can't participate because they lost their land, abilities, and dignity. This broader perspective helps us understand how politics operates for minorities in Bangladesh and how to plan development that is not equitable and inclusive.

**Table 4** Synthesis of the framework

Scholar	Core concept	Application to the Rakhine community
Robert Putnam	Social Capital	Explains the breakdown of trust and bonding.
David Harvey	Accumulation by Dispossession	Identifies the root cause: state/market-driven land grabbing.
Amartya Sen	Capability Failure	Explains why legal rights are useless without material security.
Amit Bhaduri	Development with Dignity	Shows that participation is empty without institutional respect.

**Author contributions**

Md. Sunbin Islam led the research team, conceptualized the study, developed the theoretical framework, designed the methodology, supervised the research process, reviewed and edited the manuscript, and made critical revisions. Nusrat Jahan co-led the research team, contributed to conceptual development, conducted the literature review, coordinated and carried out data collection and organization, drafted major sections of the manuscript, and contributed substantially to the analysis, interpretation of findings, and revision of the paper. Upoma Dutta contributed to the literature review, data collection, drafting of the case study section, and analysis of findings. Nazirul Islam supported the literature review and data collection and assisted in drafting and interpreting the findings. Md. Inzamamul Jewel contributed to the literature review, fieldwork, spatial mapping of the study area, and writing of the findings. Urmi Akter contributed to the literature review, data collection, drafting of the findings, and analytical discussions. Shuva Biswas contributed to the literature review, data collection, writing of the findings, and analytical input. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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**Data availability**

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

**Declarations****Ethics approval and consent to participate**

All research methods and procedures complied with relevant ethical standards. The research team kept participants' anonymity and securely stored data in encrypted, password-protected files. This team carried out the research according to internationally avowed ethical guidelines and enactments for research involving human participants. Ethical approval was granted by the Department of Political Science, University of Barisal, solely based on the Chairman's signature. As part of a thorough process, the corresponding author guided and supervised the entire research team on research integrity and regulations. The team ensured informed consent from all participants and/or their legal guardians after explaining the research's objective, data handling, and confidentiality protocols before participation, as they voluntarily participated, and apprised of their freedom to withdraw at any phase without any adverse outcomes.

**Consent for publication**

Informed consent for the publication of anonymized responses and data was obtained from all participants aged 18 and above and/or their legal guardians. The team also secured informed consent from all individual participants involved in the study and/or their legal guardians.

**Competing interests**

The authors declare no competing interests.

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