

Economic Dependency and Hidden Electoral Coercion: Exploring Women's Voting Autonomy within Urban Bangladeshi Households During the 2026 National Election

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article history: Received: 12/06/26 Revised: 20/07/26 Accepted: 15/08/26 Published: 26/08/26 How to Cite: Nishat, N. N., Mia, M. S., Orchi, C. T., Shokal, A. I., & Mallik, A. (2026). Economic dependency and hidden electoral coercion: Exploring women's voting autonomy within urban Bangladeshi households during the 2026 national election. <i>Dynamic Journal of Arts and Social Science Research</i>, 2(2), 72-86. https://doi.org/10.71359/djassr/0202/2026082501 Corresponding Author: Name: Md. Sipon Mia Email: miamdshipon870@gmail.com Journal Home: https://djassr.com/  Check Updates	Even though the literature on women's political marginalisation so far has been largely focused on institutional barriers to women's political participation, women's economic dependence on male family members as part of the domestic dimension of coercion is an under-researched mechanism. This study aimed to examine the nature and degree of hidden electoral coercion on female voters in urban households by means of their economic dependence before the upcoming national election in 2026 in Bangladesh. The study was conducted using qualitative research design and involved the sampling of 15 urban women for semi-structured interviews that provided rich contextualised data on the impact of financial dependence on women's electoral decision-making. The results indicate that women's financial dependency, from partial to full exclusion from the family's resources, limits their capacity to make their own voting decisions and choices, as interpreted through the Resource Theory of Power (Blood & Wolfe, 1960) and Patriarchal Bargaining Theory (Kandiyoti, 1988). It was also observed that women's voting process in households is influenced using coercive tactics by men like authoritative statements and affective coercion. While there are indications that some women are covertly resisting, however, urbanisation is not a solution to this issue. It theorises how economic dependency in the household is a mechanism of voter suppression, a mechanism that is often overlooked and seen as confined to the outside of the family and provides a unique empirical and theoretical lens on the phenomenon of gendered voter disenfranchisement in South Asia. Keywords: Electoral Coercion, Financial Dependency, Patriarchal Bargaining, Voting Autonomy, Urban Bangladesh, Intra-household Power, Gender and Democracy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Under conditions of electoral democracy characterized by profound structural inequality of genders, the home is not only an intimate domain but also a fundamental political battleground where power differentials are perpetuated, challenged, and turned into concrete electoral realities. In spite of significant advances made in the realm of women's parliamentary representation and gender sensitive policies, the country of Bangladesh still remains rife with deeply patriarchal household dynamics that hamper women's freedom to participate in politics in a self-sufficient manner (Nazneen & Sultan, 2009; Goetz & Hassim, 2003). Given the upcoming 2026 national elections and the context of increased civic activism and urbanization, one question

that urgently needs answering is this: to what degree do women depend economically on men in households and this dependence constitute coercion against their autonomous voting?

It has been long recognised in feminist political economy literature that there cannot be neutrality in family economic relations (Folbre, 1994; Elson, 1998). The division of household income, property, and decision-making power is reflective of gender hierarchies that transcend far beyond the home (Agarwal, 1994; Sen, 1990). When women have no access to an independent source of income, any property, nor can they have autonomy to make decisions regarding finances, it makes it difficult for them to develop and express independent political preferences (Sen, 1999; Kabeer, 1999). This is an indirect mechanism of coercing women at the voting booth without employing any force or prohibition. It works by limiting the financial resources of the individual voter while simultaneously maintaining their subordination according to socially constructed expectations of femininity (Kandiyoti, 1988; Scott, 1985). Despite this, little scholarly attention has been paid towards the issue of electoral coercion experienced by women within South Asian families even when most of the scholarly studies that have been carried out have largely concentrated on analyzing the macro-level structural barriers that limit the political participation of women (Htun & Weldon, 2012; Norris & Inglehart, 2001). Likewise, although much attention has been paid to understanding voter behavior within the Bangladeshi context, very little effort has been made to uncover the particular causal process through which women's voting decisions are influenced by their family environment (Hossain, 2005; Jahan, 1995).

The urban context becomes particularly important and understudied. Urbanization in Bangladesh resulted in households where women are partially employed outside the household, men or male family members manage finances in the household, and patriarchal bargain is present despite the modernity of the household (Hossain & Tisdell, 2005; Nazneen, 2018). In such cases, economic dependency is not only an issue that restricts women's resources but shapes the very circumstances in which they decide how, whether, and whom to vote for. Conceptually, this research is based on three theoretical approaches – the Resource Theory of Power (Blood & Wolfe, 1960), Kabeer's approach to empowerment as increasing women's capacity to exercise strategic choice (Kabeer, 1999, 2005), and patriarchal bargain theory by Kandiyoti (1988) as combined with theories of voter coercion and clientelism (Schedler, 2002; Nichter, 2008; Stokes, 2005). This research will contribute to the existing knowledge on voter disenfranchisement in general and feminist electoral politics in particular by identifying the phenomenon of household economic coercion as a form of voter suppression at the household level (Hyde, 2011; Birch, 2011). To the Election Commission of Bangladesh and civil society organizations, the research findings provide a practical basis for creating interventions not only aimed at safeguarding processes but rather ensuring the equality of participation in the process itself. To feminist scholars around the globe, the 2026 elections in Bangladesh demonstrate the possibility of coexistence between formal democratic procedures and systematic disenfranchisement of women at home (Waylen, 2007; Molyneux, 2001; Tripp, 2015).

Although a substantial amount of work has been done on gender, household bargaining and political marginalisation, none of them have been specifically concerned with examining the operation of economic dependency as a mechanism of electoral coercion on the women of urban Bangladesh in a national election. The present study seeks to fill this gap: it examines the intersection of three forms of dependency—financial, structural, and patriarchal—at the household level to explain, and sometimes limit, women's voting autonomy and how these intersect with the explicit analysis of the 2026 national election. Acknowledging this, the study has three specific objectives, which are supported by research questions.

1.1 Objectives and Research Questions

1. To examine how different forms of economic dependency on male household members restrict women's voting autonomy during Bangladesh's 2026 national election.

2. To identify the specific methods of coercion, pressure, and influence employed by male household members to control the votes of economically dependent women.
3. To explore the lived experiences of economic dependency and voting coercion among women in urban households in the context of the 2026 election.

RQ1: How does a woman's economic dependency on male household members affect her ability to vote according to her own choice in the 2026 national election?

RQ2: What forms of coercion or intimidation do economically dependent women experience from male household members during the 2026 election period to influence their vote?

RQ3: What are the key experiences of economic dependency and voting coercion among women living in urban Bangladeshi households?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Economic Dependency and Women's Household Bargaining Power

Sen's (1990) model of cooperative conflict shows that resource allocation in the household is driven by unequal negotiating power, where the weak fall-back positions of women, in the sense of their low incomes and property endowment, tend to undermine their negotiating power. Agarwal (1994, 1997) has elaborated this approach for South Asia by showing that the possession of property enables women to resist male oppression, and Kabeer (1999, 2005) has argued that financial dependence precludes making the 'strategic life choices', which are the basis of agency and thus make economic freedom an aspect of empowerment itself. In empirical terms, studies from Bangladesh show that women without income are significantly less powerful decision-makers within the household (Hossain & Tisdell, 2005; White, 1992), and that Grown et al. (2005) have shown how inequalities in assets consistently undermine women's ability to resist coercive arrangements in the household. However, the vast majority of the existing literature focuses on dependency in terms of decisions made at home with regard to consumption, child-bearing, and mobility, while neglecting to consider how women's economic dependence translates into political submission regarding their voting power in urban South Asia.

2.2 Gender, Patriarchy, and Political Agency

The fundamental contribution to theory by Kandiyoti (1988) of patriarchal bargain theory shows that women living in resource-poor environments characterized by male dominance strategically adapt to patriarchal norms, such as political submission to men, in a process of rational adaptation rather than through preference for these norms. Patriarchal cultural norms and institutional arrangements have been shown by Htun and Weldon (2012), Norris and Inglehart (2001), and others to be strong predictors of women's political marginalization in democratic societies, while Scott's (1985, 1990) conceptual framework of everyday resistance and hidden transcripts helps us to understand how marginalized individuals both submit to and resist dominating power systems when operating under constraint. In the context of Bangladesh, Nazneen and Sultan (2009) and Hossain (2005) illustrate how patriarchal arrangements in the family affect women's interaction with formal political structures, while Goetz and Hassim (2003) show that political presence among women without economic independence leads to political superficiality. Nonetheless, current research largely emphasizes aggregate constraints on these processes without considering the micro-coercion involved in family politics during elections.

2.3 Electoral Coercion, Vote Control, and Political Behaviour

Whereas Stokes (2005) and Nichter (2008) differentiate vote buying from turnout buying as separate forms of political transaction, Schedler (2002) provides a wider view on the menu of manipulations available to political elites who seek to corrupt election results. As far as Bangladesh is concerned, political parties and public institutions have both been found guilty of perpetrating

electoral coercion in many cases (Riaz, 2019; Islam, 2015), while clients lists have proved to systematically victimize women as electoral commodities (Nazneen, 2018). Electoral coercion practices are also put into a wider global picture of declining democracy when procedural elections exist side by side with coercive manipulation (Hyde, 2011; Birch, 2011). Informal coercive measures used against women have already been found to act through non-standard relations between voters and political authorities (Ozair et al., 2015; Goldstein et al., 2016; Adeghe et al., 2024). However, despite all of its diversity, this body of literature remains focused on the agency of external forces, such as political machines, local brokers, and various state organizations, ignoring the intra-household coercive agency altogether, which has primarily remained theoretical rather than empirical to date. The present paper addresses this research gap by introducing a new concept of intra-household electoral coercion.

2.4 Urban Gender Inequality and Voting Behaviour in South Asia

Urbanisation has been seen to work as a liberalising force in favour of women, allowing them increased involvement in the workforce, broader social networks, and reduced patriarchal control (Kabeer, 1988; Chen, 1983). The education levels of Bangladeshi urban women tend to be higher, and their political awareness tends to be more developed than those of rural Bangladeshi women, and urbanisation in cities like Dhaka has led to changes in family dynamics and employment relations (Hossain & Tisdell, 2005; Nazneen, 2018). However, as Basu (2005), Molyneux (2001), and Waylen (2007) collectively point out, urbanisation often results in the creation of new arrangements of gender-based subjugation without obliterating old arrangements, especially for the urban lower-middle-class in whose case involvement in labour markets is fragile and partial. According to Tripp (2015) and Nussbaum (2000), economic dependency, associated capability deprivations are prevalent across both urban and rural areas and can be as dependent on family power dynamics as macroeconomics. In the case of Bangladeshi urban areas, there is economic independence but still the dominance of men within families means that 'constrained modernisation' takes place, meaning economic empowerment is limited and politically significant (Nazneen & Sultan, 2009).

2.5 Synthesis and Research Gap.

The four strands of literature reviewed above provide the following basis for the analysis that follows: Economic resources shape the bargaining power of households (2.1); Patriarchal norms shape the exercise of that bargaining power (2.2); Electoral coercion is a well-documented phenomenon among political parties, brokers and state institutions (2.3); And urbanisation does not abrogate constraint of women's agency, but rather it reconfigures it (2.4). What none of these strands does, on their own or together, is to introduce the economics of the household into the electoral coercion literature of Section 2.3, in the peculiar context of political modernity in the city as described in Section 2.4. To date, studies of electoral coercion have ignored the family as a site of coercive agency – and studies of household bargaining have not been applied in the ballot box. This intra-household, economically motivated and largely hidden manifestation of electoral pressure is what the present study attempts to fill.

3. Theoretical Framework

The present study takes two complementary perspectives- Resource Theory of Power (Blood & Wolfe, 1960) and Patriarchal Bargaining Theory (Kandiyoti, 1988) to arrive at two different arguments as to how economic dependency of women with their male family members is expected to influence the ability to vote independently during the general election of 2026 in Bangladesh. This mix of theories is deemed suitable because they both have their own, but interconnected, planes of analysis: the first theory presents a view of the nature of the economic foundations of

household power dynamics, and the latter, a view of how the process of sociocultural mediation works.

The Resource Theory of Power (Blood & Wolfe, 1960) focuses on the family's power being based on the economic function of its members. Both Safilios-Rothschild (1976) and Rodman (1972) have adapted this model by adding cross-cultural variations so as to show that the concept of resource-based power is relevant to various household types. Structural disadvantage of women in terms of intra-household power relations is greater for women without property and those without autonomy in decision making, and even more for those who are unemployed (Agarwal, 1994; Kabeer, 1999). Such women have no other choice and thus no leverage in any family negotiations with the male members (Sen, 1990; Folbre, 1994). In urban areas of Bangladesh women's access to jobs is limited which means that women are heavily dependent on men in decision making within the household (Hossain & Tisdell 2005; Nazneen 2018). With respect to RQ1, the theory suggests that the degree of economic dependence will lead to varying degrees of constraint on making autonomous political decisions.

In the field of decision making, which is normally examined from the point of view of consumption or reproduction decisions, an extension to politics is made where a woman whose family survival hinges on the good will of the man is faced with reasons to go along with the wishes of the man regarding the vote (Goldstein et al., 2016; Adeghe et al., 2024).

The Patriarchal Bargaining theory put forward by Kandiyoti (1988) and further theorised by Kabeer (2005) and Molyneux (2001) offers a sociocultural context within which the legitimacy and use of resource-based power operates. As noted above, the theory's essential elements of patriarchy, gender roles, compliance, negotiations, resistance, and strategic accommodations help demonstrate the way that women deal with their structural oppression through strategic maneuvering rather than acquiescence. As evidenced by Nazneen & Sultan (2009) and Hossain (2005), the gender norms pertaining to female politics and subservience to male authority continue to prevail in the lives of formally educated women in urban Bangladesh. Regarding RQ2, Patriarchal bargaining theory helps reveal some mechanisms whereby male household members exert influence on elections: using gender norms as grounds for discounting women's preferences, exploiting economic control as a tool of coercion, and using wifely compliance as an instrument of voting guidance (Kandiyoti, 1988; Scott, 1990). Lastly, Patriarchal bargaining theory's emphasis on negotiations and strategic accommodations offers significant insight into RQ3: as actors that can comply strategically, engage in covert resistance, or negotiate partial autonomy.

As a part of a single theoretical framework these two theories together are interdependent because Resource Theory determines some economic preconditions such as, economic inequality, exclusion of property and financial dependence. These lead to power imbalance in the family. Patriarchal Bargaining Theory offers the means by which power imbalances are translated into political submission using socially sanctioned coercion (Stokes, 2005; Schedler, 2002). Economic dependence is the basis on which leverage for coercion is created, and patriarchal norms provide the justification for the use of coercion without overt violence. The other, when there is economic independence, is patriarchal bargaining, which is possible as long as the patriarchal ideology is deeply entrenched.

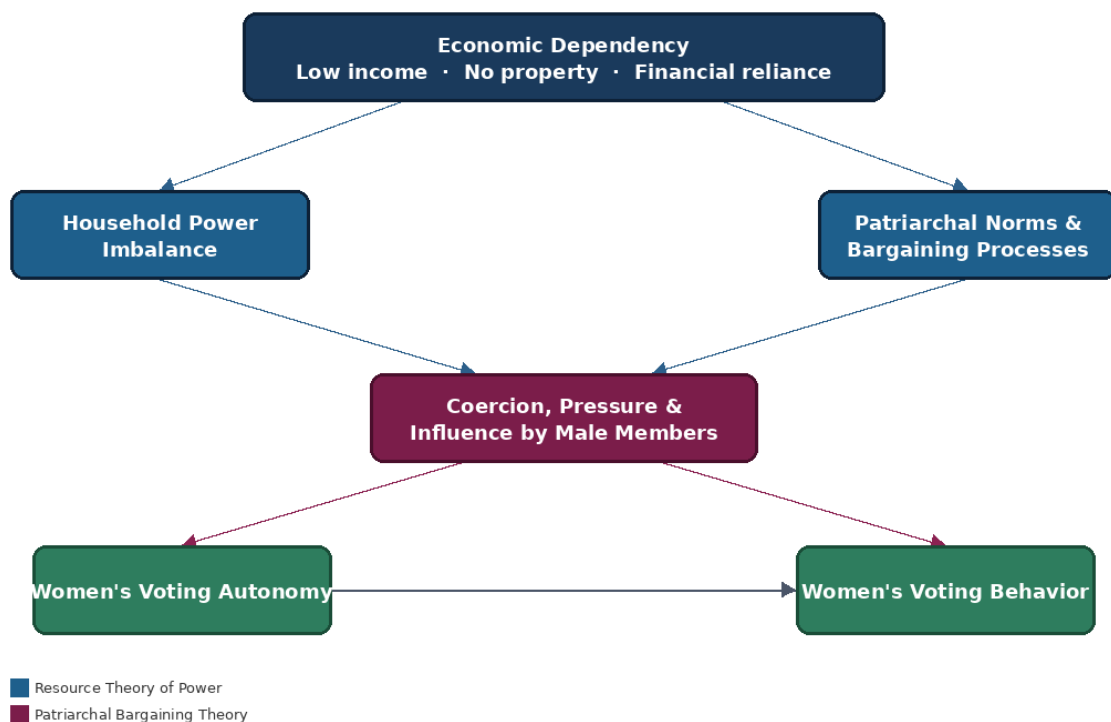


Figure 1. Integrated conceptual framework linking economic dependency to electoral coercion. Source: Developed by the author(s) for this study, based on the Resource Theory of Power (Blood & Wolfe, 1960) and Patriarchal Bargaining Theory (Kandiyoti, 1988).

4. Materials and Methods

4.1 Research Design

The study employs a qualitative research methodology in order to explore the impact of dependency of women on the men in their households, on their ability to vote freely and the impact of coercion as well as household power dynamics on their voting behavior in urban areas of Bangladesh. This type of methodology is well suited for such a study due to the experiential and contextually driven nature of the concepts that are being investigated in this paper such as, dependency, coercion, bargaining and politics which require interpretative tools to capture their complexities and nuances (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Due to the politically charged and socially delicate nature of voter behavior and household power dynamics in Bangladesh, this type of methodology will allow subjects to convey their personal experience of life through self-reporting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). At this stage, a quantitative, survey-based design was deliberately refrained from because the covert, relational and often unspoken nature of intra-household coercion could not be easily captured with the use of standardised instruments and individual semi-structured interviews were preferred to other qualitative approaches because of the sensitive nature of the topic which could only be discussed in a private space, in which participants were able to express their candid views without the presence of other household members or peers who may have inhibited them.

4.2 Sampling Strategy

The participants for the study were selected using purposive sampling technique. Through this method, people are purposely selected as participants based on qualities that have some significance and relevance to the research inquiry (Patton, 2002). Fifteen urban females within the ages of 18 to 50 were included as participants in the study after taking various parameters such as economic standing, level of education, profession, marriage status and economic dependence on

males within their households under consideration. The relatively small sample size ($n = 15$) is in line with the guidelines of qualitative research, the theoretical saturation point, that is when adding more data would not contribute to a new theoretical understanding (Guest et al., 2006). Braun and Clarke (2021) suggest that deductive thematic analysis can be achieved with samples of 12 to 20 participants.

4.3 Data Collection

This study used semi-structured individual interviews conducted with an interview schedule compiled into eight broad themes of the study, namely, participant background, economic status, dependence on income, political awareness, experience in voting, family pressure, contextual environment and future prospects for change. Semi-structured interviews are highly appropriate, especially when investigating issues of sensitive personal experiences and to be able to have an organized approach and discuss what is relevant in the conversation, while still having the flexibility to record any additional topics that might come to mind during the conversation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Prior to being interviewed all participants provided written consent. The anonymisation procedures were carried out in such a way that only codes (P1-P15) were used to identify the participants. The interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis and it was explained to the participants that there will be no repercussions if they chose to leave the interview at any time. To avoid political bias, extra caution was taken during the interviews as it is a sensitive topic in the Bangladeshi context.

4.4 Data Analysis

The study in this context used the deductive thematic analysis of the Resource Theory of Power by Blood and Wolfe (1960), and the Patriarchal Bargaining Theory by Kandiyoti (1988). The analysis followed the five phases recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006): an attentive read through of all transcripts to familiarise oneself with the data; systematic coding of the data by using a theoretically grounded codebook, with codes that include concepts from both theories; categorisation of the codes into possible themes; refining the themes for coherence and relevance to the data; naming the themes to represent both empirical content and theoretical significance. The findings of the study were found to be trustworthy through verbatim transcription, systematic member checking of the interpretative categories with the raw data, consistent use of a systematic scheme of coding throughout all of the transcripts, keeping the researcher reflexivity journal, and thick description of the participant profiles and results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

4.5 Ethical Considerations

With regard to the politically delicate nature of the research, ethical clearance had been sought from the relevant institutional ethics committee in advance of data collection. All participants were given an information sheet, in simple language, outlining the aims of the study, its voluntary nature, the boundaries of confidentiality, and obtained written consent before participating in the interviews. To shield the participants from any possible repercussions either politically or domestically, all identifiable information was stripped from the transcript at transcription stage and codes were allocated to the participants (P1-P15); tapes and transcripts were kept on password protected devices which were only available to the researchers. The participants were made aware of the right to pull out at any time without facing any consequences, to opt not to answer any question asked, and to halt or take a break during the interview in case of any distress about coercion and conflicts inside the household. There were no incentives offered which could be inducing disclosure of politically sensitive information; interviews were held at convenient places and times for the participants:

5. Results

It has become evident from the research results that the economic dominance of women by the males in urban areas in Bangladesh as a means of voter intimidation in the coming election of 2026 is a commonly practiced strategy. Based on the semi-structured interviews conducted with 15 people, five themes have emerged from the analysis of the results. These themes capture a specific aspect of the interaction between the dependency of women economically and the voting behavior of women. However, the theme that emerges strongly from all the interviews is the financial independence of women.

Table 1. Exemplar Participant Quotations Organised by Theme

Emerging Theme	Definition	Exemplar Quotation
Financial Deprivation as Structural Disempowerment	Financial dependency acts as a barrier to forming or acting on independent political preferences.	"I have absolutely nothing in my name — no account, no savings, no property. That scares me sometimes at night." (P2)
Patriarchal Household Hierarchy and Vote Direction	Male family members use patriarchal authority and resource control to direct women's voting behaviour	"The argument comes back to: whose money runs this house? I have no answer to that. So I keep quiet mostly." (P5)
Covert Resistance Within Coercive Structures	Women navigate and subvert electoral constraints through hidden or private acts of defiance.	"I voted my conscience this time. My husband will never know that. I feel a small pride about it — and a small sadness that it has to be secret." (P8)
Economic Independence as Political Emancipation	Access to personal financial resources provides the leverage needed for autonomous political participation.	"The link between money and voice is very direct, in my experience. My financial independence has made me a different person." (P3)
Urban Modernity Without Electoral Equality	Urbanisation does not eliminate intra-household electoral coercion, even among educated and aware women.	"Economic dependency is empirically the strongest predictor. Within-household constraints do not show up in formal election reports." (P12)

Source: Primary data (2026 semi-structured interviews).

5.1 Financial Deprivation as Structural Disempowerment

The relationship between the money that women's finances have and their political agency as an independent subject is theme one and foremost and directly related to RQ1. Individuals from all social classes and occupation categories recognized that being financially dependent, completely or partially, is the very basis that limits their ability to make independent decisions when it comes to expressing themselves politically. Those who were completely dependent said they were in a situation where they could not even have developed an independent political position. This point was brought up by participant P5, who is a housewife residing in Demra: "I cannot vote against my husband even if I wanted to because then what? Where would I go? I'm married and I have three kids but no money coming in. (P5)

The above statement is a reflection of the concept of complete breakdown of the fallback position as per the Resource Theory of Power (Agarwal, 1994; Blood & Wolfe, 1960). However, since the only choice presented to P5 is to continue living as she is, her material dependence makes her unable to be independent even if she wanted to be. P11, a housewife from a joint family of Rayer bazar, took it one step further, talking about financial exclusion in general terms: "I have never felt the space to have a different preference." The issue isn't that they're afraid to voice an opinion, it's that they can't voice an opinion without that fear. (P11) What this means is a uniquely serious sense of disempowerment with respect to politics, where it is not just a matter of repression of any choice of expressed preferences, but of structural inhibition of the formation of such

preferences. It affects me totally, P2 (jobless, Badda) continued. None of my own, how can I fight my family members if they get annoyed with me because I vote differently? I can't afford to survive without support and there is no other way to support myself." The theoretical significance of the point here is anticipatory compliance – that women don't say that they have been directly forced to withhold their votes, but they have taken a rational strategy to comply before the fact. If we follow Kandiyoti (1988) then it is the intrinsic logic of the patriarchal bargaining, in which "surviving within limits" is the main interest. While P1 does not feel totally free even at her job, she confirms Kabeer's (1999) argument that economic freedom has to be substantial for empowerment.

5.2 Patriarchal Household Hierarchy and Vote Direction

The second theme looks at how male members of the household use economic power as a means of exerting control over politics. This directly answers research question 2. The participants observed that there are several ways in which male family members wield economic power for political control. These are all mechanisms that work in the same way and involve exploitation of the imbalance of resources through socially sanctioned patriarchy. But they do have major differences in terms of intensity and clarity. Patriarchy was described by participant P11 in his joint household, where his mother's father took the final say in family decisions and was expected to be followed by his family, including his wife, as stating, "My husband did not voice his opinion — he just agreed, as did everyone else in the family. My mother-in-law's husband decided the family vote and it was expected that everyone else was to follow, including the women."

The building of family political solidarity as a moral obligation is consistent with Kandiyoti's (1988) wisdom on the use of the community as a normative instrument by the patriarchy, which make dissent not only inappropriate, but also immoral. For P5, such moral framing took the following form: "I was very clearly instructed by my husband the previous evening. My husband told me that this was a good party for poor people like us and we should vote for them. I could not see any reason to dissent" (P5). The internalization of the economic rationality of dissenting is shown in "I could not see any reason to dissent." Another example of this approach was given by P1: "He spoke with me about it two or three times leading up to the election; he was trying to convince me but not force me. But there was an assumption that I would vote the same, and if I didn't go for it he seemed a bit frustrated." (P1)

This was the emotional part of the mechanism outlined by P8: "I know my husband and I know when he's displeased at home if he's arguing about something, he will be upset — I measure that." This is an illustration of Scott's (1990) hidden architecture of domination: Power without.

It is not a command, rather a structure of consequences which makes compliance the rational choice. These examples collectively demonstrate that vote direction within the household is more complicated than a straightforward command, for example, and involves factors such as: authoritative statement, repeated persuasion and even implicit affective consequences, yet all these factors are effective because of the resource inequality discussed in Theme 1.

5.3 Covert Resistance Within Coercive Structures

The third theme is different from the two because it looks at things from a different way of thinking. Of looking at all the ways women are limited it talks about how women handle those limits without getting rid of them. This is the focus of research question three. It turns out that women who have limited money are not just waiting for things to happen. They are people who take action. They use what Scott described in 1990 as "weapons of the weak" even when they have little power. The best example of this is P8. She had some money. Still worked in a garment factory in Ashulia. Even though her husband wanted her to vote the way he wanted she voted the way she wanted in the space of the voting booth. She said, "I voted my conscience this time. My husband will never know that. I feel a pride about it. And a small sadness that it has to be secret."

The feelings she described. Pride and sadness. Are important in theory. The sadness shows the kind of mix that happens in deals under a man-controlled system as explained by Kandiyoti in 1988. This mix is about feeling you have some control and at the time knowing your position is still low. P1

said, "I have learnt to say 'I see your point' without committing. It avoids conflict. But there is a price for deflection all the time sometimes I feel like I am holding back myself inside." This shows a way of acting where a woman says yes. Really means no. This is known as a strategy called accommodation. In this case she pretended to agree. Kept her own thoughts. Later she voted a way, than her husband without him knowing. She called it "an act of minor rebellion."

P7, who had a little money and worked for an NGO decided to go to the voting place by herself. The voting booth is the place where women can be alone where they can be quiet and not watched by men. From these stories it is clear that women do have some control even when they are limited by the rules. This control is not enough to change the rules themselves.

5.4 Economic Independence as Political Emancipation

The fourth theme comes from the experiences of participants who have financial autonomy that really matters. This is a test of the Resource Theory of Power in elections. When we talked to P3, P4, P6, P7, P9 and P12 we saw that they all have levels of financial independence. They showed us that having economic resources is closely linked to having autonomy. P3 is a bank manager in Gulshan who supports herself. She said that the link between money and having a voice is very clear. She said "The link between money and voice is very direct in my experience. My financial independence has made me a different person. I speak freely I argue if I need to argue I do not soften my opinions to avoid discomfort." (P3) She also made her decisions when it came to politics. She did her research on policies, voted on her own and did not let her family influence her. She thought of voting as a way to analyze what is good for the community, not just what her family thinks. P6 is a widow who runs her business in Lalbagh. She said "With my money I am a full citizen. Without it I was half a person." What P6 said is similar to what Amartya Sen said in 1999. He said that to be free people need to have the means to make their choices. P6's story shows us how having financial autonomy can change someone's life. What we learned from the data is that even when women have their own money they still have to deal with patriarchal pressures. P1 for example still had to deal with pressure from her family even though she earned her money. P12, who works at a think tank and is good with money said that she had to deal with pressure from her extended family.

The important thing is that women who have autonomy have something to fall back on. They can use their independence to stand up against patriarchal pressures. Financial autonomy gives women like P3, P6 the power to make their own choices and have their own voice.

5.5 Urban Modernity Without Electoral Equality

The fifth and final theme reveals a paradox within the entire database. It shows both modern experiences in urban areas, like education, jobs, phone usage, and civic awareness, alongside the practice of electoral coercion at the household level. This challenges the theory that urbanization encourages women's political participation (Kabeer, 1988; Chen, 1983). All participants in the study demonstrated an understanding of formal democratic institutions, including the voting process, candidates' manifestos, and constitutional rights. Participant 12 is a political scientist who studies electoral behavior. Participant 7 is a gender analyst who monitors policies. Participant 9 holds a master's degree in history and has voted since 1996. However, civic understanding and professional expertise were not enough to secure electoral democracy at home. P12 noted that economic dependency is the strongest predictor in the research he's reviewed. He explained that within-household barriers are largely hidden from electoral monitoring; they don't appear in official election reports.

There are significant problems with the institutions meant to ensure electoral integrity. Systems for security and vote casting prevent outside coercion but fail to address issues at the household level. Many participants said that the 2026 election was more peaceful and organized than previous ones, with more women registered at polling stations. Yet, P12, along with P1, P5, and P11, indicated that despite reduced external coercion, coercion within households still occurs. P4 captured the urban paradox well: "Due to economic difficulties, citizens have become politically vocal; especially women, who manage budgets, can feel everything and that leads to political considerations" (P4).

However, P5 highlighted that this awareness often comes from male family members: “When my husband started supporting a different party because of rising prices, I followed suit.” This suggests that economic involvement in urban areas often originates with men rather than politicized women. P3 noted that some professional women in Gulshan can vote freely, while women in other areas face pressure from their husbands. Urbanization does not weaken or remove patriarchal control within families; instead, it reshapes that control in a way that creates inequalities in women's political agency, which electoral statistics often overlook.

6. DISCUSSION

The five themes together reveal that women's financial reliance on men in their households in Bangladesh creates a hidden form of pressure during elections. This situation is material, socially built, and often goes unnoticed by formal democratic processes. Women who depend on men for financial support face coercion when voting, ranging from family pressure to more subtle relational influences. This shows that intra-household coercion occurs through a complex set of mechanisms, which existing literature on political coercion, mainly focused on external pressure, does not address. The significant differences reported by independent and dependent participants about their financial situations support the Resource Theory of Power, which argues that economic resources shape power dynamics within households.

The research findings fit well with current knowledge and significantly add to existing studies. Previous work by Ozair et al. and Goldstein et al. highlighted that economic dependence among voters indicates political dependence. This study enriches the literature by explaining how that dependence leads to electoral compliance at the household level. The covert resistance identified in Theme 3 underscores a key aspect of Scott's theory of hidden transcripts. However, applying this theory at a micro level within South Asian politics is still largely unexplored. Regarding women's political representation in Bangladesh, the findings support earlier research by Hossain and Nazneen, providing strong evidence for their hypotheses and clearly reflecting the participants' voices. Additionally, this paper contributes to feminist studies of agency under constraint.

Patriarchal Bargaining Theory proves relevant in various ways. Women's submission to patriarchal control stems from rational choices, not ignorance or apathy. P5's inability to vote differently isn't a lack of options; it results from her economic situation. P8 can exercise her freedom but risks being monitored, while P3 has no such constraints. These differing levels of freedom relate to varying degrees of economic independence, further backing the notion that material resources are crucial for political power. Theme 5 stresses that modernity doesn't eliminate political oppression within households, challenging the common belief in development circles that urbanization and education will lead to women's political freedom.

In the context of democracy and electoral politics in Bangladesh, a key takeaway from this research is the need to develop measures of household-level economic coercion. This form of voter suppression stays hidden from electoral observation and enforcement systems. The Election Commission of Bangladesh and civil society groups monitoring elections should establish indicators that assess not only women's turnout in elections but also their ability to participate freely. For NGOs and women's empowerment programs, the research clearly indicates that achieving economic inclusion—including access to property, asset accumulation, and income generation—is essential before any real political freedom can be achieved. Economic dependence within households limits women from voting freely without fear of violence or abuse. Microfinance initiatives that overlook this issue are likely to fail. Finally, for scholars studying feminist theory and democracy, the upcoming election in Bangladesh in 2026 presents a crucial opportunity to explore the relationship between formal democratic institutions and gender-based coercion.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this research paper testify that economic subordination of women to men in the same households can be an effective means of coercion which is used against women voters in the urban areas of Bangladesh. Establishing the link between the macro and micro levels by means of political discourse and household practices, this research has confirmed the theory of economic subordination as an effective way to prevent women from enjoying their political rights. Being proved based on the theories of resources of power and patriarchal bargaining, the findings show that economic coercion is still present in various forms, including authoritative family statement, affective implication, or even compliance regardless of the process of urbanization. Moreover, it can be understood from the findings of this research that even though women use covert defiance, for example, when they vote in the voting booth, such situations when women use defiance should not take place in democratic societies. Consequently, it can be stated that for the sake of creating electoral democracy in Bangladesh, not only the process of elections should be regulated properly but also economic subordination of women voters should be eradicated in the private sphere of households.

8. LIMITATION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The predominant shortcoming of this study is that it used purposive sampling with 15 samples who are all residents of Dhaka and the nearby areas. This method of choosing the sample makes it impossible to make any conclusions about other places such as rural areas or other cities. Future researchers may explore this particular weakness of the study in their research. The politicized nature of voting habits and the power dynamics inside households in Bangladesh could have also led to answers that people thought were socially acceptable even though many steps were taken to ensure the study was valid. These steps included using identifiers for each person and conducting personal interviews in private. Another weakness is that the data collected was cross-sectional, meaning no follow-up interviews were done after the time. Future research could use an ethnographic approach and observe voters on election day to understand how household discussions lead to specific voting behaviors during elections. It might also be useful to study cities like Chittagong, Sylhet and Rajshahi as well as rural and semi-urban areas to see if the urban modernity paradox found in this study can be seen in other parts of Bangladesh that have very different environments and economies. Scale quantitative studies that measure household financial independence and voting independence would also be helpful in this area.

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