

Public Trust in the Recommendations of Local Government Reform Commission: A Study on Cumilla District

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 01/02/26
Revised: 02/04/26
Accepted: 25/04/26
Published: 22/05/26

How to Cite:

Roza, M. A., Shahriar, S. M., Hasan, M. J., Khatun, J., & Siena, J. N. (2026). Public trust in the recommendations of Local Government Reform Commission: A study on Cumilla District. *Dynamic Journal of Arts and Social Science Research*, 2(1), 58-71.

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Journal Home page:

<https://djassr.com/>



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ABSTRACT

The formation of Local Government Reform Commission (LGRC) was catalyzed by the July Revolution 2024 as a critical institutional response to address structural and electoral reforms. Among its key proposals, the commission emphasized reforms in local electoral processes and recommended a unified legal framework as well as a combined election system across all tiers of local government to strengthen local governance in Bangladesh. This study draws on Lewin's Theory of Change (Unfreeze-Change-Refreeze) to understand the role of public trust in solidifying and adopting the desired change or reform. This research aims to assess public trust in the LGRC's recommendations, focusing particularly on citizens' awareness, agreement, and perceptions of implementation feasibility. A total of 400 respondents, purposively selected based on their prior participation in at least one local government election, were surveyed, stratified by administrative units: City Corporation, Pourashava, Upazila Parishad, and Union Parishad. The data analysis was done using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25. Findings reveal that awareness levels vary significantly across local government tiers, with urban respondents (City Corporations and Pourashavas) demonstrating relatively higher familiarity with the LGRC's work. Geographical and gender differences in trust and awareness are also revealed by the study. Lower levels of knowledge with the LGRC were reported by rural respondents, especially women, underscoring the need for more inclusive public engagement tactics. Despite the fact that most respondents accept the proposed combined electoral system, skepticism and doubt remains regarding the political will to implement reforms. The paper concludes with the findings that the successful implementation of the LGRC's recommendations depends highly on public trust, political consensus, and administrative readiness.

Keywords: Local Government Reform Commission (LGRC), Public Trust, Electoral Reform, Bangladesh, Local Governance.

1. INTRODUCTION

To ensure efficient local governance in Bangladesh, the necessity of an effective local government system is inevitable. After independence in 1971, the Constitution of Bangladesh preserved the principles of local governance, particularly in Articles 59 and 60, which permit elected local bodies and give them the power to manage resources (Rahman & Ahmed, 2021). In the post-independence period, several commissions and committees were formed at various times to effectively build local government and ensure good governance at the local level, but the recommendations of those commissions and committees were never implemented effectively

(LGRC, 2025). Public trust, in the context of civil service reform and local governance, can be conceptualized as both a precondition and a product of policy implementation. It is understood as a form of social capital and plays a crucial role in the legitimacy of democratic institutions for successful policy reforms implementations (Baliamoune-Lutz, 2011; Keele, 2007). It reflects citizens' collective belief in the government's capacity and intent to deliver on its reform commitments. In response to the nationwide demand for greater decentralization and service delivery accountability, the Local Government Reform Commission (LGRC) was formed following the July movement of 2024. This study draws on Lewin's Theory of Change (Unfreeze-Change-Refreeze) to understand the role of public trust in solidifying and adopting the desired change or reform. LGRC introduced a set of recommendations aimed at transforming the structural and electoral frameworks of local government institutions. LGRC particularly advocates for a combined election system for the local government and to formulate a unified single law to eliminate the complexity of the existing separate laws for the Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad, District Parishad, Municipality and City Corporation. A draft of this has been prepared and if it is promulgated in the form of an ordinance, it will be possible to hold elections together in one schedule (LGRC, 2025). This study particularly focuses on these election related recommendations and aims to examine the level of public trust in the Local Government Reform Commission's recommendations. The study seeks to explore the extent of public trust in these proposed changes, investigating whether citizens believe these reforms will genuinely be implemented and whether they perceive them as steps toward improved local governance. Through this study, public feelings will be understood towards the reforms which have been proposed, and it will help in implementation strategies and ensuring public engagement.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing Public Trust

Public trust can be understood as a manifestation of the willingness and sincerity of all citizens or community groups to believe (trust) on the authority or power of the government to realize the policies that have been determined by their implementation (Bok, 1992; Calnan & Sanford, 2004; Chanley et al., 2000; DiPiazza Jr & Eccles, 2002; Haning et al., 2020). Public trust is understood as a form of social capital which has two aspects, namely involvement in public activities and interpersonal trust (Baliamoune-Lutz, 2011; Keele, 2007). Public trust, in the context of civil service reform and local governance, can be conceptualized as both a precondition and a product of policy implementation. It reflects citizens' collective belief in the government's capacity and intent to deliver on its reform commitments.

2.2 Local Government Reform Commission (LGRC)

The development of local government in Bangladesh reflects its colonial heritage as well as the restructuring carried out after independence. The formal local government system was introduced by the British colonial administration through the Local Self-Government Act of 1885, which provided a basic structure (Ahmed, 2014). After independence in 1971, the Constitution of Bangladesh preserved the principles of local governance, particularly in Articles 59 and 60, which permit elected local bodies and give them the power to manage resources (Rahman & Ahmed, 2021). The Local Government (Union Parishads) Act, 2009 further institutionalized these provisions (Islam, 2015). However, various decentralization initiatives are therefore being challenged by factors such as central domination or weak fiscal autonomy (Sarker, 2006). Though reforms such as the Upazila system and Local Government Support Program (LGSP) aimed at empowering local institutions, real autonomy and revenue generation capacities still remain limited (World Bank, 2012; UNDP, 2023). Due to inadequate monitoring and civic engagement frameworks, issues of accountability and citizen participation persist (Faguet, 2015). After the July 2024 movement, the Local Government Reform Commission (LGRC) was established for reviewing and recommending procedures for effective governance under the leadership of Prof. Tofail Ahmed. The LGRC emphasized restructuring legal frameworks, unifying laws, and enhancing fiscal and administrative capacity of local bodies (LGRC, 2025). The recommendations provided by LGRC also advocated

increased citizen participation, gender equality, and establishment of performance-based evaluations to build public trust in local government (LGRC, 2025). The LGRC proposes a simple, transparent, inclusive, and uniform democratic organizational structure for the five levels of local government: Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad, Zilla Parishad, Municipality, and City Corporations. Initiatives can be taken to adopt these structures immediately, subject to the drafting of an ordinance. LGRC also stated the number of wards should be re-determined based on the Union Parishad's population and area. Currently, the population of the Union Parishad spans from a high of 4,75,000 to a minimum of approximately 5,000 people. In this situation, running the Union Parishad as a functional organization requires altering the ward's boundaries and population. As a result, with a population of 1,200-1,500 persons per ward, the Union Parishads can contain anything from 9 to 39 wards. Following an evaluation of the situation, the Ministry of Local Government can take urgent action. It is recommended that both the Upazila Parishads and Zilla Parishads establish ward systems to make membership easier. Each Union Parishad would be considered as three Upazila Parishad wards, whereas an Upazila might be divided into three Zilla Parishad electoral wards. In another recommendation LGRC recommended one-third of the Union, Upazila, and District Council wards would be designated for women, with three elections held on a rotational basis. This rotating women's reserved ward scheme may be reviewed after the next three elections.

2.3 Public Trust and Reform Implementation

Public trust has long been recognized as a foundational element in democratic governance and policy reform processes. It not only legitimizes governmental authority but also facilitates compliance, participation, and the overall success of reform implementation. Scholars across disciplines have emphasized that public trust reflects citizens' confidence in government actors to act in public interest and deliver on promises (Bok, 1992; Chanley et al., 2000; Calnan & Sanford, 2004). In developing countries, including Bangladesh, public trust in reform commissions has often been compromised by a legacy of non-implementation. Repeated failures to translate recommendations into action have led to public disillusionment and skepticism about the state's reform agenda (Rahman & Ahmed, 2021; LGRC, 2025). These experiences reinforce the view that trust is not a static attribute but one that is continually shaped by interactions between government promises and citizens lived realities. The 2024 Local Government Reform Commission presents an opportunity to restore trust through meaningful action. However, the success of its recommendations—particularly regarding electoral reforms—depends significantly on whether the public perceives the process as capable of overcoming the implementation failures of the past.

2.4 Change and Resistance to Change

Drawing on Lewin's (1947) Change Model, trust in a reform process requires citizens to first be 'unfrozen' from old beliefs through adequate awareness, to accept and agree with the proposed changes during the 'change' stage, and to perceive the recommendations as feasible to implement during the 'refreeze' stage. Similarly, Resistance to Change Theory (Oreg, 2003; Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979) highlights that lack of awareness, disagreement with the change content, and perceived barriers are key sources of resistance that weaken trust in change agents and processes. Therefore, higher awareness and agreement are expected to increase trust, while higher perceived challenges are likely to reduce it. Unfreezing is the process which involves getting to a point of understanding that change is necessary and getting ready to move away from current comfort zone. In this study, necessity comes from the July movement and before reform commission's reform recommendations which were not implemented. In the change stage people look for new ways to do things. In this study, LGRC has made some reform recommendations which means that there is a plan to change. Changes will reach their full effect when they're made permanent. In this study, LGRC's recommendations will be permanent if there is public trust, proper communication and participation. If it will not be permanent or not change that can be a result of resistance to change such as lack of information, lack of trust in change agents (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979), fear of the unknown (Lewin, 1947), inadequate communication/participation (Lines, R. 2004).

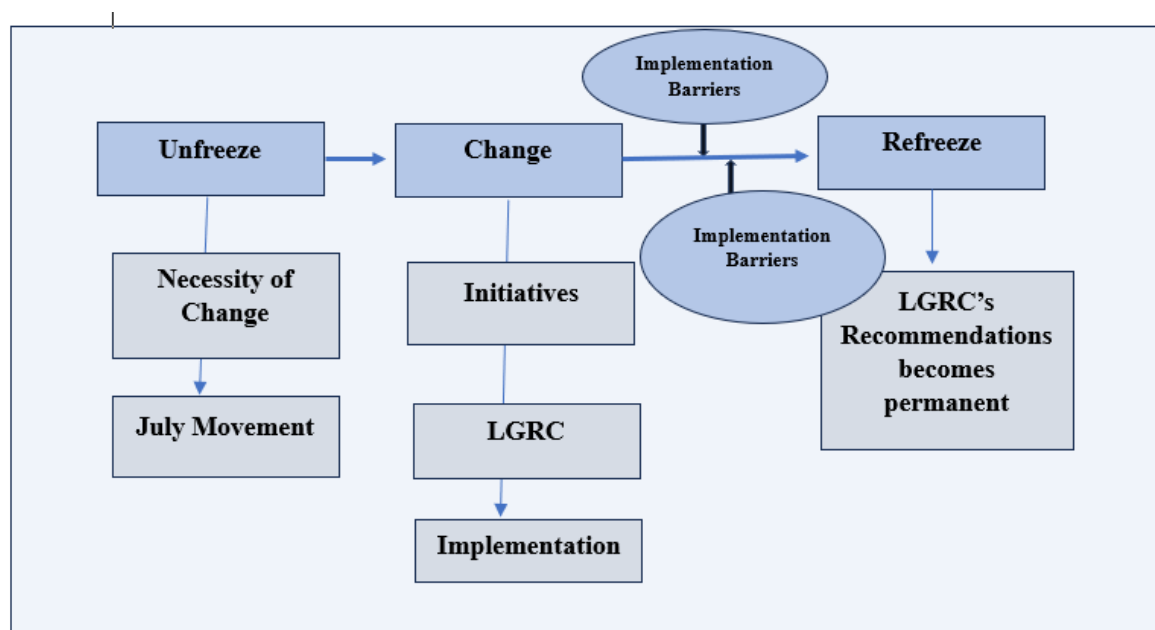


Figure 1: Theoretical framework adapted from Kurt Lewin's change model (1940)

2.5 Research Gap

While literature exists on public trust, reforms, and local government in Bangladesh separately, there is a lack of specific empirical research investigating public trust in the recommendations of the current LGRC within the post-2024 context, and how this trust (or lack thereof) relates to awareness and perceived implementation challenges across different local government tiers. This is especially important as the political and administrative condition in Bangladesh is not the same after the July 2024 revolution, and this situation may influence how people react to reform efforts. This study aims to fill that gap by focusing on public perspectives, using raw data from the field, and analyzing how trust, awareness, and perceived challenges are shaping the future of local governance reform in Bangladesh.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study followed a mixed method approach with both surveys and interviews. Data collection was done using a questionnaire with both open-ended and closed-ended questions and also semi-structured interviews. The study used multi-stage sampling combining cluster sampling, purposive sampling, and stratified sampling. Following the cluster sampling the study selected 4 tiers of local governments, namely city corporation, pourashava, upazila, and union of Comilla district as it contains all these local government tiers with a diverse administrative context. Using the Yamane (1967) and Krejcie & Morgan (1970) equations, the study determined the sample size with a 5% statistical sampling error. Based on a stratified representation of the entire population in each local government tier, a total of 400 samples were selected purposively ensuring that they have at least once in their life participated in any LG election. A total of 10 interviews were also collected. For this research, technical tools have been employed to support the data and ensure its accuracy. The data were not normally distributed, according to the findings of the Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests. Next, the values for skewness and kurtosis were ascertained. This study also used a Whisker boxplot, histogram, and Q-Q plot to identify the outlier and extreme observations in the dataset. Ultimately, the data set's missing values were found by coding 999 and computing the series mean.

4. FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Demographic Profile

This table outlines the thematic and statistical analysis to gauge public awareness, trust, and perceived issues of Local Government Reform Commission (LGRC) proposals in post-2024 Bangladesh. This compiles the respondents' demographic information. The data has been taken from 400 respondents at four different local government tiers of Cumilla district where the respondents represented four levels of local government: Upazila Parishad (21.8%), Union Parishad (24.0%), Pourashava (25.5%), and City Corporation (28.7%).

Table 1: Demographic Profile

Local government tier	Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	City Corporation	115	28.7
	Pourashava	102	25.5
	Upazila Parishad	96	24.0
	Union Parishad	87	21.8
Gender	Criteria	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	Female	186	46.5
	Male	214	53.5
	Total	400	100.0
Age	Criteria	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	18-25	44	11.0
	26-32	126	31.5
	32 and above	230	57.5
	Total	400	100.0
	Criteria	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	Total	400	100.0
Education Level	Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	No Schooling	8	2.0
	Primary	34	8.5
	Secondary	66	16.5
	Higher Secondary	157	39.3
	Graduate and above	135	33.8
	Total	400	100.0
Occupation	Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	Farmer	27	6.8
	Housewife	130	32.5
	Teacher	57	14.2
	Student	58	14.5
	Businessman	128	32.0

Here the male respondents made up 53.5% of the sample, while female respondents made up 46.5%. Most of them were over age 32 (57.5%) and others age ranges were 26-32 (31.5%) and 18-25 (11.0%) respectively. Among the respondents 39.3% of them had completed higher secondary education, 33.8% were graduates or above, and the remaining respondents had either primary (8.5%), secondary (16.5%), or no formal schooling (2.0%). In terms of occupation, nearly two-thirds of the sample were housewives (32.5%) and businesspeople (32.0%). The remaining respondents were students (14.5%), teachers (14.2%), and farmers (6.8%).

4.2 Trust and Awareness of the Local Government Reform Commission (LGRC):

This portion of the paper represents the respondents' knowledge about the Local Government Reform Commission (LGRC), how they felt about the reform process, and how much they trusted and believed in the LGRC's suggestions.

Out of the 400 people who answered the survey, a large majority (317 people, or 58.0%) said they knew about the LGRC. Only 83 people (42.0%) said they had not heard of the Commission. Additionally, when asked directly about their knowledge of the LGRC's suggestions for local government, 232 respondents (58.0%) said they were aware of these suggestions, while 168 respondents (42.0%) said they were not.

Table 2: Trust and Awareness of the Local Government Reform Commission

Trust and Awareness Indicators	Frequency		Percent
Awareness of the Local Government Reform Commission (LGRC)	Yes	317	58
	No	83	42
	Total	400	100
Awareness of LGRC's specific recommendations for local government	Yes	232	58
	No	168	42
	Total	400	100
Perception of public consultation during the LGRC reform process	Yes	160	40
	No	78	19.5
	May be	162	40.5
	Total	400	100
Perceived importance of reforming the existing local government system in Bangladesh	Very Important	243	60.8
	Important	140	35
	Neutral	17	4.3
	Total	400	100
Trust in the LGRC as a fair and neutral body	Strongly trust	184	46
	Trust	173	43.3
	Neutral	43	10.8
	Total	400	100
Agreement that LGRC recommendations reflect local citizens' needs	Strongly agree	163	40.8
	Agree	162	40.5
	Neutral	71	17.8
	Disagree	4	1
	Total	400	100
Confidence in effective implementation of LGRC recommendations	Very confident	132	33
	Confident	115	28.7
	Neutral	122	30.5
	Less confident	23	5.8
	Not confident	8	2
	Total	400	100
Overall trust in the LGRC and its recommendations	Strongly Trust	120	30
	Trust	185	46.25
	Neutral	30	7.5
	Distrust	50	12.5
	Strongly Distrust	15	3.75
Total		400	100

People had different ideas about how open the reform process was to everyone. Only 160 people (40.0%) thought that the public was properly consulted during the reform process, and a similar number (162 people, 40.5%) said they weren't sure how much the public was consulted ("may be"). Another 78 people (19.5%) said that public consultations had not been held.

A respondent from City Corporation Resident stated that

"I'm aware there were some meetings, but I don't believe they were accessible to everybody. They invited a couple of community leaders, but the rest of us heard about it afterwards. If they want genuine reform, they need to meet the public first, not a bunch of individuals who already have sway."

When asked about the importance of reforming the existing local government system in Bangladesh, 243 people (60.8%) said that reform was "Very Important," and another 140 people (35.0%) said it was "Important." Only a small number of people (17, or 4.3%) stayed neutral on the issue.

A Pourashava Resident Respondent told that

"If we don't reform the local government system now, we will keep facing the same old problems — corruption, favoritism, and inefficiency. People want change because the system we have can't meet the needs of our growing population. Reform isn't just important; it's the only way forward."

People also thought the LGRC was a fair and impartial group. 184 people (46.0%) said they had

"strong trust" in the LGRC, and 173 people (43.3%) said they had "trust." This shows that most people thought the LGRC was a good group. On the other hand, 43 people (10.8%) were neutral, which means they weren't very doubtful or didn't care.

Most of the people who answered said that LGRC's suggestions were in line with what people in the area needed: 163 people (40.8%) "strongly agreed," 162 people (40.5%) "agreed," and 71 people (17.8%) "neutral." Just 4 (1.0%) "Disagreed."

Finally, when asked how sure they were that the LGRC's suggestions would be put into action, most people were somewhat hopeful. One-third of the people who answered (132 people, 33.0%) said they were "Very confident," and 115 people (28.7%) said they were "Confident." But 122 people (30.5%) said they were "Neutral," and 31 people (7.8%) said they were less optimistic, saying they were either "Less confident" (23 people, 5.8%) or "Not confident" (8 people, 2.0%).

The findings generally indicate that the public has a reasonable awareness of and level of trust in the LGRC and its reform agenda. The public also strongly agrees that local government reforms are necessary. In order to ensure that everyone feels included and that people continue to have faith in the reform process and its successful execution, the data also indicate that there are certain areas where public consultation and communication could be strengthened.

4.3 Perceptions on Key Local Government Reform Commission (LGRC) Recommendations:

The table shows public perception on key LGRC reform proposals. The results show that most people agree with the changes that have been suggested. Very few people disagree or stay neutral. This means that a lot of people support the reform agenda.

Table 3: Perceptions on Key Local Government Reform Commission

Key Recommendations	Frequency		Percent
I Support the integration of five local government laws into a unified Local Government Act.	Strongly agree	316	79
	Agree	80	20
	Disagree	4	1
	Total	400	100
	Strongly agree	250	62.5

Holding all local elections under a single ordinance will improve efficiency and reduce confusion.	Agree	145	36.3
	Neutral	5	1.3
	Total	400	100
Redefining Union Parishad wards based on population is necessary for effective governance.	Strongly agree	185	46.3
	Agree	192	48
	Neutral	15	3.8
	Disagree	8	2
Total	400	100	
One-third reserved rotating seats for women across three elections is a fair approach.	Strongly agree	165	41.3
	Agree	191	47.8
	Neutral	44	11
	Total	400	100
Direct elections for women in 40% of all wards would better ensure female representation.	Strongly agree	145	36.3
	Agree	188	47
	Neutral	56	14
	Disagree	11	2.8
	Total	400	100

A large number of people who answered strongly supported combining five existing local government laws into one Local Government Act. Of the 400 people who answered, 316 (79.0%) "Strongly agreed," 80 (20.0%) "Agreed," and only 4 (1.0%) "Disagreed." There is a lot of agreement on making the law easier to understand, as this shows.

People also liked the idea that all local elections would follow the same rules. In particular, 250 people (62.5%) "Strongly agreed," 145 people (36.3%) "Agreed," and only 5 people (1.3%) were "Neutral." This means that most people think this change will help make elections easier for administrators and faster.

When asked if they agreed or strongly agreed with the idea of changing the boundaries of Union Parishad wards based on population size, 185 people (46.3%) said "Strongly agreed," and 192 people (48.0%) said "Agreed." Only 15 people (3.8%) said they were "Neutral," and only 8 people (2.0%) said they "Disagreed." Similarly, 89.1% thought that reserving one-third of the seats for women over three election cycles was a fair and balanced way to do things (165 "Strongly agreed," 191 "Agreed," and 44 "Neutral").

Also a large number of people support for allowing women in direct election in 40% of the wards. Among the respondents 145 people (36.3%) "Strongly agreed," 188 people (47.0%) "Agreed," and only 11 people (2.8%) "Disagreed." Which shows that the public is very committed to getting more women involved in politics.

4.4 Assessment of the LGRC: A Pearson Chi-Square analysis:

Table 4: Assessment of the LGRC

Significance (p-value)				
Trust and Awareness	Age	Gender	Education	Occupation
Awareness of the Local Government Reform Commission (LGRC)	0.006	0.693	0.000	0.000
Awareness of LGRC's specific recommendations for local government	0.027	0.109	0.000	0.000
Perceived importance of reforming the existing local government system in Bangladesh	0.000	0.576	0.000	0.000
Trust in the LGRC as a fair and neutral body	0.124	0.000	0.000	0.000
Agreement that LGRC recommendations reflect local citizens' needs	0.023	0.152	0.000	0.002

Confidence in effective implementation of LGRC recommendations	0.000	0.094	0.000	0.000
Perception of public consultation during the LGRC reform process	0.000	0.099	0.015	0.001

The Chi-Square tests showed that people's knowledge, trust, and opinions about the Local Government Reform Commission (LGRC) varied a lot depending on their demographics. Respondents' age ($p = 0.006$), education ($p < 0.001$), and job ($p < 0.001$) were all strongly linked to their awareness of the LGRC. This shows that these factors affect how well people know about the commission. Age ($p = 0.027$), education ($p < 0.001$), and occupation ($p < 0.001$) were all strongly linked to knowing about specific LGRC recommendations, but gender ($p = 0.109$) was not. Age ($p < 0.001$), education ($p < 0.001$), and occupation ($p < 0.001$) had a big effect on how people felt about the need to change the current local government system. Gender differences, on the other hand, were not significant ($p = 0.576$). There was a strong link between trust in the LGRC as a fair and neutral body and gender ($p < 0.001$), education ($p < 0.001$), and occupation ($p < 0.001$). Age, on the other hand, did not have a strong link ($p = 0.124$). People who agreed that LGRC recommendations reflect the needs of local citizens also had strong connections with age ($p = 0.023$), education ($p < 0.001$), and occupation ($p = 0.002$), but not with gender ($p = 0.152$). Age ($p < 0.001$), education ($p < 0.001$), and occupation ($p < 0.001$) were all linked to confidence in the effective implementation of LGRC recommendations, but gender had no significant effect ($p = 0.094$). Finally, age ($p < 0.001$), education ($p = 0.015$), and occupation ($p = 0.001$) were all strongly linked to how people thought about public consultation during the LGRC reform process. Gender differences, on the other hand, were not significant ($p = 0.099$). When we look at all of these results together, they show that age, education, and job have a big effect on most aspects of public awareness, trust, and support for LGRC initiatives. Gender, on the other hand, has a small effect. In general, the Chi-Square analyses show that age, education, and job all have a big effect on how people know about, trust, and see the LGRC and its reform process. Gender, on the other hand, only had a big effect on trust in LGRC neutrality. It had a smaller effect on most other variables. These results show that when trying to get people to trust and be aware of changes in local government, communication and engagement strategies need to be tailored to different groups of people.

4.5 Perceived Barriers to Implementation of LGRC Reform

Semi-structured interviews with 10 respondents representing levels of local government, civil society, and professional backgrounds were employed to complement the quantitative findings and examine the explanations for variations in levels of trust in the LGRC. The answers were analyzed through thematic analysis allowing to search for the underlying patterns and organize them into seven superordinate themes: Political Interference, Regime Change and Reform Discontinuity, Bureaucratic Resistance, Corruption in Local Governance, Lack of Community Consultation, Poor Communication of Reforms, and Elite Capture of Local Institutions.

4.5.1 Political Interference

Union Parishad resident Respondent 1 was outraged at political interference in local government reform and swore:

“No matter how much thought has gone into the reforms, local political leaders always try to hijack the process for their own interests. Even if the LGRC's advice was actually put into practice, political leaders would try to politicize postings, funding, and ward demarcation.”

4.5.2 Regime Change and Reform Discontinuity

Respondent 2, a civil society activist from city corporation, expressed skepticism regarding the sustainability of reforms under shifting political regimes:

“We've seen many commissions before. As soon as the ruling party changes, it all disappears. I'm afraid this will happen again. Without political support, reforms have no future.”

4.5.3 Bureaucratic Resistance

Interviewee 3, an administrative officer at the Upazila level, described bureaucratic resistance as insidious but persistent:

"They don't refuse outright, but they delay papers, request unnecessary clearances, and create process barriers. It's the passive resistance that can hinder any reform without being militant in the public eye."

4.5.4 Corruption at the Local Level

Local journalist Respondent 5 was highly concerned about entrenched corruption:

"If you reform the system and the same corrupt people are present, what is the use? Reforms in LGRC would be futile unless contracting corruption, fund disbursement corruption, and service delivery corruption are addressed."

4.5.5 Absence of Genuine Community Consultation

School teacher Respondent 6 had a complaint that there was no bottom-up approach in the reforming process:

"They say it's for us but no one asked us what we think. We hear about it later on Facebook or in the local papers. If the public are not consulted, then the public would never own these reforms."

4.5.6 Poor Communication of Reforms

Respondent 7, a youth community organizer, cited ineffective communication efforts:

"People have heard the name LGRC but don't know what it does and why it matters. There are not appropriate campaigns, so regular citizens can't connect with these reforms."

4.5.7 Elite Capture of Local Institutions

Small businessperson Respondent 8, who hails from a rural population, was lamenting elite capture:

"In our district, the same three families control everything—reforms or no reforms. They decide who receives contracts, who receives money, and even who speaks at meetings."

The qualitative data indicate that the public's trust in the LGRC reform agenda is highly constrained by long-standing structural and political obstacles. Interference in politics, discontinuity caused by regime change, bureaucratic pushback, and institutionalized corruption have the shared result of diluting the effect of reform initiatives. Moreover, the absence of effective consultation at the community level, inadequate communication strategy and the long-standing elite capture of local institutions also further exacerbate public disengagement. These interconnected obstacles highlight that, in the absence of systemic institutional safeguards and inclusive governance structures, hopes for achieving sustainable and effective local government reform are faint.

5. DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Public Awareness and agreement with LGRC

The purpose of this study was to find out how much people know about, think about, and trust the Local Government Reform Commission (LGRC). It also looked at how demographic factors affect how people feel about changing local government in Bangladesh. The results show that socioeconomic and demographic factors, like age, education, and job, have a big effect on how much people know about the LGRC and its efforts to make changes, as well as how much they trust the commission and its processes. The study reveals that older, more educated, and working citizens are the most aware of the LGRC and its reform agenda. The Chi-square tests showed that the respondents' age was strongly linked to how much they knew about the LGRC ($p = 0.006$) and

its suggestions for reform ($p = 0.027$). This means that younger people might not be as involved or know as much as older people. In the same way, the level of education and the type of job were strongly linked to knowing about LGRC ($p < 0.001$ for both) and knowing about its recommendations ($p < 0.001$ for both). This is similar to what other studies have found in similar local government settings: people with more education tend to have better access to civic networks and information channels (Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007; Crook & Manor, 1998; Faguet, 2014).

Additionally, all of the variables that were examined, including public trust, opinions about how inclusive consultations were, and how impartial and fair the LGRC was perceived to be, displayed this pattern of demographic division. Gender ($p < 0.001$), education ($p < 0.001$), and occupation ($p < 0.001$) all had a strong effect on how much people trusted the LGRC as a fair and neutral body. Age, on the other hand, did not have a significant effect ($p = 0.124$). The difference in trust between men and women is interesting and supports what other research has found about gender and governance: women may have different ideas about what is fair and impartial in public institutions. This is interesting because gender only had a big effect on this one variable. Most other aspects of awareness and confidence didn't show any differences between men and women. This means that women and men may both know about LGRC and its goals, but women may be more skeptical or cautious about trusting it as a neutral reform body (Goetz, 2003; Molyneux et al., 2007).

There was a similar pattern in how people thought about the LGRC's reform proposals and the consultation process. Age, education, and job were all important factors in whether people agreed that the LGRC's recommendations reflect the needs of local citizens ($p = 0.023$, $p < 0.001$, and $p = 0.002$, respectively) and whether they were sure that these recommendations would be put into action ($p < 0.001$ for all three). These results are very similar to the questions it was asked in earlier research and the theoretical and analytical framework we used, which said that differences in age and socioeconomic status would affect how much people trust reform processes. A large number of respondents were "neutral" or "less confident" about the ability to implement the plan—122 respondents (30.5%) were neutral and 31 respondents (7.8%) reported less or no confidence. This is in line with what has been said in the governance literature about participatory legitimacy and inclusive public consultations (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001)

5.2 Perceived Challenges to the Implementation of the LGRC's Recommendations

In addition to the quantitative results, semi-structured interviews further revealed latent obstacles to LGRC reforms that underpin our survey findings. Political interference, regime change and bureaucratic inertia were convergent themes and they evoke sentiments of grievances reported in previous studies by Sarker (2006) and Panday (2019) regarding the susceptibility of Bangladesh's decentralization. Interviewees described how elites continue to capture and undermine public trust through corruption, suggesting that given major public support for reform, institutional weaknesses may lead to derailment of efforts for reform—reiterating Andrews' (2013) critique of reform sustainability in low-capacity governance systems. These results cumulatively suggest that while there is broad public backing for the electoral reforms of the LGRC, implementation is contingent on the overcoming of such perceived barriers as politicization, poor communication, and a lack of genuine consultation. This serves to underscore the need for open and participatory reform processes, as noted by Faguet (2015) and Diamond (2007), and validates our argument that legal-institutional efforts must be supported by socially inclusive and politically sensitive measures to rebuild and sustain public trust.

5.3 Theoretical Discussion of the Study Findings

The study fits well with the theoretical idea that making changes to local government that are useful requires more than just technical knowledge; it also needs to involve people and be aware

of the situation. It is essential to work actively to build these things through strategies that take into account the differences between demographic sub-groups. To get younger people, people with less education, and people who work in less formal jobs more involved and build the trust, which is needed to reach out in a specific way. This lines up with what other researchers have said about changing local government which says that communication, fairness in participation, and long-term public trust are all important for making changes and keeping them going. (Crook & Manor, 1998; Shah & Thompson, 2004).

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study investigated public awareness, perceptions, and trust concerning the Local Government Reform Commission (LGRC), and examined how demographic characteristics shape these attitudes. The findings demonstrate that public awareness and trust in LGRC initiatives are not evenly distributed across society but are significantly shaped by age, education and occupation. Respondents with higher levels of education, those more established in their professions, and older individuals showed greater familiarity with the LGRC's work and more trust in its neutrality and capacity. Despite variations in awareness and trust, respondents across all demographic groups voiced strong support for most LGRC reform proposals, including simplifying legal frameworks, improving public service delivery, enhancing gender representation, and transferring administrative and tax-collection authority to local bodies. These overwhelmingly positive sentiments underscore the relevance of the reform process to local aspirations and its capacity to address administrative inefficiencies. Moreover, the findings that a substantial proportion of respondents acknowledged the importance of public consultation but expressed uncertainty over its extent point to the need for more transparent and inclusive engagement. Qualitative responses point towards regime change being widely perceived to be the first obstacle towards sustaining long-term reforms, a perception confirmed by survey results showing political opposition as the dominant obstacle. The respondents underscored the fact that bureaucratic slow-down and ownership could derail implementation of reform. A general view among the respondents was that local entrenched elites capture opportunities and resources, excluding the meant-to-be benefits of decentralization. In answering the research questions posed at the outset, this study contributes to the literature on local governance reform by demonstrating the key role of socioeconomic variables in shaping public trust and awareness and by reaffirming the public's broad endorsement of LGRC proposals that promote transparency, efficiency, and inclusiveness. However, these findings also imply that reform implementation must be accompanied by tailored communication strategies that proactively involve all demographic segments — especially younger people, those with less formal education and women — to foster sustained trust and legitimacy.

This research provides exploratory evidence that, while support for local government reforms in Bangladesh is strong, achieving meaningful and durable reform will require inclusive processes, continuous public education and the deliberate engagement of diverse stakeholders. Future reform initiatives would benefit from leveraging these insights to ensure that LGRC's efforts translate into sustained improvements in local governance practice and public service delivery, ultimately fostering a more participatory, responsive and resilient local government structure across all tiers. Although the Government of Bangladesh has been steadfast in commitment by creating the Local Government Reform Commission (LGRC), there remain some aspects of public awareness, trust and participation to be addressed. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made to increase the effectiveness of the reform process by the LGRC and public confidence:

Enhancing Public Awareness Through Comprehensive Information Campaigns

- The government needs to follow directed and comprehensive public information campaigns to educate citizens, especially younger, less educated, and informal sector working citizens—about the LGRC reform initiative.

Institutionalizing Inclusive and Continuous Public Consultation

- Continuous and ongoing public consultation processes should be ensured, particularly at the Union and Upazila levels.

Strengthening Electoral Engagement and Gender-Responsive Local Governance

- The government and Election Commission should ensure that local election candidates, especially women, engage in mandatory public campaigning and voter outreach prior to elections. Field interviews revealed that many citizens vote based solely on political party symbols without knowing the individual candidate or their agenda, while elected female representatives often do not perform their duties—delegating responsibilities to male family members instead. This undermines both democratic accountability and the goals of gender representation. Therefore, local authorities should enforce rules requiring each candidate to introduce themselves, share their vision with voters, and engage in public forums. Additionally, mechanisms must be introduced to monitor the active participation of elected women representatives in post-election governance activities.

Funding statement: There was no external funding for this study.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that they do not have any conflicts of interest.

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