

A B S T R A C T

This exercise is an attempt to study women political elites in Bangladesh who are active in national politics. Based on primary data collected from male and female samples, this study highlights some of the distinctive qualities of women political elites, the process responsible for their becoming political activists, and their relative status and achievements in the political arena.

One of the important findings is that women political elites are more urbanised as compared to male politicians and that most of them come from families of high social status, unlike their male counterparts. They also differ significantly from men in educational and occupational achievements but in terms of affluence, both groups appear similar.

The study also indicates that women tend to have different political socialisation experiences compared to their male counterparts. The family variables appear significant in their earliest political orientation but the role of family is not similar in motivating their participation in politics. The time of earliest political socialisation has significant bearing on the motivating factors. However, for men, the role of peer groups is more salient in their political socialisation process.

The study further shows that even when women achieve high positions in their political career they still have unequal status with men. The study also pinpoints the problems faced by women contesting in parliamentary elections and discerns respondents' opinions about "reserved seats" for women in the Parliament. Women exhibit a more supportive attitude to the existing system of reserved seats while more men are discontented with this system. Thus, the study indicates a significant difference between women and men in their opinion about the special constitutional provision on "reserved seats" in the Parliament of Bangladesh.

This study attempts to answer several important questions which lie at the heart of women's political participation in Bangladesh. It presents generated data and findings on certain aspects of women political elites which future researchers may find useful. The findings of the study might have some policy implications in determining future directions and strategies towards a greater participation and roles of women in the political arena.