

# The interplay of doxa and episteme in Bangladesh's politics



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In the terrain of Bangladeshi politics, the tension is not simply between belief and knowledge, myth and reason, or performance and policy. These oppositions—framed as *doxa* and *episteme*—do not neatly resolve into a hierarchy of value. Instead, they constitute a dialectic in perpetual suspension. The allure of *doxa*—popular belief, inherited legitimacy, and the immediacy of affect—often coexists with the imperatives of *episteme*: evidence, deliberation, and long-term vision. Yet, attempts to privilege one over the other repeatedly collapse, not least because the conditions for a stable synthesis are historically absent.

The dominance of *doxa* in Bangladeshi political life cannot be disentangled from the structural failure of *episteme*. Nor can *episteme* be simply summoned as a rational corrective to belief without grappling with the aspirations, anxieties, and lived conditions that *doxa* organises. Drawing on recent events—including the July 2024 uprising, the interim government's fragile mandate, and chronic budgetary neglect of public goods—this essay offers not a critique of *doxa* per se, but a reflection on how its entanglement with *episteme* produces a volatile political condition, perpetually caught between rupture and restoration. The argument resists framing *doxa* as pathology or casting *episteme* as panacea, and instead culminates in a contingent wager:

that if democratic politics is to retain even a fragile footing in Bangladesh, we must cultivate the institutional and cultural space where critical knowledge can engage belief without disavowing it.

#### Doxa and Episteme: A fragile dialectic

Inherited from Plato and reworked by Pierre Bourdieu, the distinction between *doxa* and *episteme* has long served to diagnose the epistemic decay of public discourse. *Doxa* is that which circulates unquestioned; *episteme* demands justification, critique, and institutional depth. But to read Bangladeshi politics as a mere triumph of *doxa* over *episteme* would be to miss the deeper dialectic at play. In a society marked by colonial afterlives, authoritarian interruptions, and epistemic unevenness, *doxa* often fills the vacuum left by weak institutions of knowledge. Belief becomes infrastructure when state capacity fails.

Here, the slogans of liberation, invocations of unity, and fetishisation of sovereignty are not ideological residue alone—they serve as affective scaffolding that stabilises a fractured polity. *Episteme*, meanwhile, does not always arrive as emancipation. As Michel Foucault reminds us, *episteme* is not neutral; it governs the very conditions of truth production, delimiting what may be known, by whom, and on what terms. To many,

it appears not as enlightenment but as elite imposition—technocratic, aloof, or externally induced. Thus, the friction between *doxa* and *episteme* is not a clear-cut antagonism but a shifting, unstable interplay of power, affect, and legitimacy.

#### Media and the epistemic short-circuit

Nowhere is this dialectic more

Student movements, independent platforms, and segments of civil society continued raising uncomfortable questions. But the simultaneous rise of mob justice—bypassing due process in favour of affective retribution—illustrated how easily the epistemic impulse could be eclipsed by *doxa*'s visceral force. What this reveals is not the disappearance

rather than interrogate it. This is not merely strategic—it is existential. In a polity where historical legitimacy often carries more weight than policy credibility, *doxa* becomes the currency of political survival.

#### The interim government's epistemic interregnum

The interim government, birthed by an epistemic rupture and popular mobilisation, initially held promise. Unencumbered by electoral calculations, it could have embraced technocratic governance and long-term planning. Expert panels were formed, policy white papers circulated, and consultations initiated. For a moment, *episteme* seemed to gain ground.

Yet, that promise has proved elusive. Pressed by the urgency of stabilisation and haunted by the spectre of collapse, the interim regime has leaned on the tropes of continuity: nation-branding, investor confidence, bureaucratic inertia. Its budgetary choices are telling. Education receives less than 2.5 percent of GDP, undermining efforts to cultivate critical thought. Health remains sidelined in a country vulnerable to both pandemics and chronic illnesses. Agriculture—crucial for rural livelihoods and food security—faces declining support amid mounting climate threats.

Rather than a clean break from *doxa*, we witness a painful return to it. The government, lacking both the democratic legitimacy for sweeping reform and the public trust necessary to anchor technocratic rationality, is caught in a double bind: govern too rationally and risk mass alienation; govern by sentiment and reenact past failures.

#### Arab Spring syndrome and the epistemophobia of governance

Hovering over this impasse is the ghost of the Arab Spring—the fear



VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

of *episteme*, but its fragility—its inability to institutionalise itself in the face of narrative consolidation and emotive closure.

#### Political parties: A feedback loop

Political parties, rather than being mere vessels of *doxa*, function as sites where *doxa* and *episteme* feed off each other. The Awami League's invocation of its liberation legacy or the BNP's narrative of marginalisation are not purely mythic constructs; they also reflect the epistemic vacuum left by underdeveloped democratic norms and public distrust of expert discourse.

Suppressing internal dissent, sidelining expert advice, and rewarding loyalty over competence create a culture in which knowledge is selectively deployed to affirm belief

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that epistemic uprisings end not in democratic renewal but in chaos, authoritarian relapse, or technocratic drift. The lesson many elites draw is caution: too much reform too fast can unmoor the system. The lesson many citizens internalise is impatience: if knowledge does not deliver material or affective results quickly, it is dismissed as irrelevant.

This mutual suspicion makes *episteme* hard to anchor. It is not that reasoned policy is unwelcome—but that, in the absence of institutional memory and civic trust, it struggles to resonate, to “stick.” *Doxa*, for all its volatility, offers immediacy; *episteme* offers complexity, which can feel like delayed gratification and postponement.

#### A non-synthetic path forward

If a path forward exists, it lies not in the forced synthesis of *doxa* and *episteme*, but in embracing their constitutive tension. *Episteme* must learn to translate itself without arrogance; *doxa* must be engaged without condescension. This demands civic education rooted in dialogue, not rote; media that functions less as sermon and more as agora; and budgets aligned not with donor expectations or performative sovereignty, but with the structural needs of the vulnerable.

Most crucially, we need a political ethic that resists collapsing into either technocratic detachment or populist fury. To invoke *episteme* today is not to prescribe a cure; it is to place a wager—a wager, paradoxically, in the power of knowledge to disrupt belief.

In an era haunted by failed uprisings and weaponised mythologies, the wager is fragile and fraught—yet if democracy is to endure in Bangladesh, it is one we cannot afford to squander.

# Bonn climate conference falls short on key promises



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responsive funding, resilience efforts fail. Moreover, global credibility is at stake when aspirational language without financial backing deepens the trust deficit and imperils the 1.5 degrees Celsius goal. The clash over gender definitions mirrors global rollbacks of progressive rights, putting human rights under threat. If GAP language narrows, it

support and guaranteeing decision-making roles, not token presence for women in delegations.

Bonn laid bare political divides but brought no resolution. The urgency is not theoretical: extreme climate events have already displaced hundreds of thousands in 2024–25. Communities are paying the price for negotiation delays—with lost homes, destroyed harvests, and eroded rights.

To observers, Bonn's outcome may read like a draft priority list. But for frontline communities and activists, all eyes are now on Belém. A weak GAP or empty L&D pledges would signal business as usual, not justice.

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loans, shows how international commitments can translate into community impact. But national action alone isn't enough. Global systems must step up or risk failing those who need them most.

Gender justice and Loss and Damage are both at a tipping point. Belém must decide: pass the moment or seize it.

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risks codifying injustice rather than dismantling it.

Bon, Brazil, November 2025, is now the true test. These three demands must be met: (i) mounting finance commitments, (ii) solidifying gender justice, and (iii) enabling participation. Mounting finance commitments mean capitalising the FRLD with at least \$400 billion annually, integrating L&D into the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG), and transforming voluntary reporting guidelines into mandatory obligations. Solidifying gender justice includes embedding inclusive, intersectional definitions of gender, enforcing financing, capacity building, and access for women and gender-diverse communities, and gender-responsiveness across all thematic tracks, not isolating them. The last but not the least, enabling participation means funding for low-income women's attendance and leadership, providing childcare, visa assistance, and institutional

development justice demands that women are not excluded from decision-making, climate finance, and land rights. Without gender-

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