

The Next Challenge for Bangladesh's 2024 Uprising

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<https://www.e-ir.info/2024/10/02/opinion-the-next-challenge-for-bangladeshs-2024-uprising/>

KAZI A S M NURUL HUDA, OCT 2 2024

The 2024 student-public uprising in Bangladesh marked a pivotal moment in the nation's history, a powerful expression of collective will against a repressive regime. This movement, characterized by mass protests and a unified demand for political reform, succeeded in toppling an increasingly authoritarian government. However, to fully appreciate the significance of this uprising, it is important to explore it through the lens of Hannah Arendt's concept of 'natality,' which provides a deeper understanding of the implications and challenges that follow such a momentous event.

Arendt's concept of natality, or the capacity to bring something new into the world, is a crucial tool for analyzing political action and transformation. For Arendt, political action is not merely about achieving freedom from oppression; it involves the creation of new possibilities and the establishment of a new political reality. This perspective challenges us to assess whether the 2024 uprising in Bangladesh was merely a symbolic break from an oppressive past or whether it represents a genuine effort to forge a new political future.

The uprising was a striking display of the power of collective action. The masses, driven by frustration with autocratic rule, censorship, and social injustice, mobilized to demand substantial changes. The fall of the regime was celebrated as a victory for democracy and an end to years of authoritarianism. The movement's success in dismantling the old order reflects the capacity of a united populace to challenge entrenched power structures. In this sense, the uprising was a clear manifestation of liberation—a removal of the barriers that had stifled political and social freedom.

Yet, as Arendt's notion of natality suggests, liberation alone does not constitute the completion of the political process. The real measure of a revolutionary movement is whether it can create a new political order that reflects the aspirations of its participants. Arendt argues that natality involves more than just the cessation of an oppressive regime; it requires the birth of new possibilities and the establishment of a coherent and forward-looking vision for governance and societal organization.

The gap between liberation and the establishment of a new political order is a critical aspect of the analysis. While the uprising succeeded in removing the old regime, it has not yet produced a unified and visionary political agenda. The space created by the movement's success remains open and vulnerable to various influences. The challenge now is to ensure that this space is not merely filled by the remnants of the old regime or by competing factions, but rather by a new, inclusive political vision that addresses the underlying issues that fueled the uprising.

The difficulty of transitioning from a successful rebellion to a new political reality is a common feature of revolutionary movements. It is often easier to unite people against a common enemy than to mobilize them around a shared vision for the future. The energy and unity displayed by the protesters during the uprising have not yet fully translated into a coherent plan for the future. This gap highlights a crucial aspect of Arendt's concept of natality: the need for ongoing creativity and engagement in the creation of a new political order.

The current situation in Bangladesh underscores this challenge. While the movement has demonstrated the people's ability to act collectively and demand change, the process of building a new political landscape is fraught with difficulties. The lack of a clear and unifying vision for the future risks undermining the gains achieved through the

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uprising. The new political space created by the removal of the old regime is at risk of being filled by competing interests or by a return to previous power structures.

Arendt's idea of natality emphasizes that political action requires more than just a single moment of liberation; it necessitates the continuous effort to create and sustain new possibilities. For Bangladesh, this means moving beyond the immediate victory of toppling a regime and engaging in the complex work of establishing a new political order. This process involves not just imagining new possibilities but actively working to implement them through democratic institutions and participatory governance.

The transition from liberation to the creation of a new political reality is inherently complex and challenging. It requires not only a vision of what the future should look like but also the practical means to realize that vision. In the case of Bangladesh, this means addressing issues such as political representation, social justice, and economic inequality. The movement's success in these areas will ultimately determine whether it can fulfill its potential as a transformative event.

Arendt's concept of natality also highlights the importance of continued political engagement and innovation. A successful revolutionary movement is not an end but a beginning—a starting point for ongoing efforts to build a better society. The people of Bangladesh now face the challenge of sustaining the momentum of their uprising and translating it into lasting change. This involves creating and nurturing democratic institutions, promoting inclusive dialogue, and ensuring that the new political order reflects the diverse needs and aspirations of the populace.

In a nutshell, while the 2024 uprising in Bangladesh represents a significant achievement in the struggle against authoritarianism, it is also an unfinished revolutionary movement. The real test of its success will be determined by its ability to give birth to a new political order that embodies the hopes and aspirations of its participants. Arendt's concept of natality provides a valuable framework for understanding this transition, as it emphasizes the need for ongoing creativity, engagement, and the establishment of new possibilities. The future of Bangladesh will depend on whether the energy of the uprising can be harnessed to create a sustainable and visionary political landscape that reflects the collective will of its people.

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Kazi A S M Nurul Huda is an associate professor of philosophy at the University of Dhaka. He holds a PhD in philosophy from the University of Oklahoma, USA. His main philosophical interests lie in epistemology, political philosophy, ethics, and their interconnections. He is also interested in applied philosophical and ethical areas, such as environmental philosophy, development ethics, business ethics, bioethics, and the philosophy of education. His work has been published in journals such as *Developing World Bioethics*, *Business Ethics*, *the Environment*, and *Responsibility*, *Cultural Dynamics*, *International Journal of Applied Philosophy*, *Symposion* and *Philosophy and Progress*. His most recent commentaries have been published in *The Daily Star*, *The Diplomat*, *E-International Relations*, *New Age*, and *Countercurrents*.