

‘Youth Quotas and Youth-i-zation’ Or ‘Youth Leadership and Youth Movement’?  
– A response to age demographics.

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**Abstract:** The paper argues that young people can be disadvantaged and side lined in the face of increasing aged population. A quota system, however, cannot serve their interest due to four main reasons. First, young people do not belong to a homogenous group and therefore, the youth leaders selected under quotas may not represent all the youth equally across the nation. Second, the youth will not find it difficult to exercise power through the ballot box in future because young people are increasingly dissatisfied with ‘system politics’ and are gradually more interested in virtual ‘symbolic politics’. One of the reasons why the young generation is detached from traditional party politics is the change in their identity construction, particularly their focus on individual identity. In the age of globalization, youth quotas as an entry point to the shared political projects have less significance for the young community when they believe much in ‘individual identity’ and less in collective goal. Third, youth quotas are against the principle of equality, justice and democracy as they give a young person entry to the politics just because of his or her age, not because of quality. Therefore, youth quotas can have a negative impact on the politics as a whole. Instead of raising the quality of politician and challenging the political status quo, youth quotas will just led to youth-i-zation of political party as oppose to gerontocracies. Lastly, instead of solving generational conflict, youth quotas will rather increase both intergenerational and intra-generational conflict. Young people selected under quotas may fail to meet the expectations both from old generation and young generation. Therefore, quotas are not permanent answer to the demographic change. I argue that there are two alternatives to quota system to bring intergenerational justice. First, one alternative to short term quotas can be the introduction of long-term targets or goals to develop young leadership from the beginning of the career, particularly from school. The second and the most relevant alternative to youth quotas can be the youth movement which will take place not in the parliament, but in the virtual world where a virtual community of solidarity and care will work as a platform to deal with the intergenerational concerns.

## **Introduction:**

‘Indeed, many of our problems today can be described as cases of catastrophic success, where we’ve identified a problem and fixed it, but in so doing, we ignored the attendant and potentially worse problems the fixes themselves created. More important, this isn’t just a financial engineering mess. It is a generational time bomb, which will explode as a terrible clash of generations’ (Kotlikoff and Burns, 2012: 2)

‘Devising a solution to the problem of intergenerational justice can be achieved if and only if it can be shown that there exists an accessible path of political action from the status quo to at least one morally desirable scheme of institutional reform’ (Kates, 2011: 19-20).

The first quote indicates a recent demographic phenomenon that the world is facing today: the growth of aging population and its implication for the young generation. The second quote attempts to solve the problem hinted in the first quote. This paper discusses further on the topic included in the two quotes mentioned above. It analyses the relevance of youth quotas as a means of dealing with intergenerational challenges from the view point of four main arguments. Although young people can be disadvantaged and side lined in the face of increasing aged population, a quota system, however, cannot serve their interest. Because, first, the young generation is not a homogenous group and therefore, the youth leaders selected under quotas may not represent all the youth equally across the nation. The second argument against youth quotas is: the youth will not find it difficult to exercise power through the ballot box in future because young people are increasingly dissatisfied with ‘system politics’ and are gradually more interested in ‘symbolic politics’. In the age of globalization, youth quotas as an entry point to the shared political projects have less significance for the young community who believe more in ‘individual identity’ and less in collective goal.

Third, youth quotas are against the principle of equality, democracy and justice as they give a young person entry to the politics just because of his or her age and not because of quality.

Therefore, just to fill the quantitative gap and not to focus on quality, youth quotas can have a negative impact on the politics as a whole. Instead of raising the standard of politician and challenging the political status quo, youth quotas will led to youth-i-zation of political party as oppose to gerontocracies. Even if, quotas are considered as affirmative action or positive discrimination for a historically disadvantaged group such as women, this logic does not work for youth quotas. It will be misleading to compare youth quotas with gender quotas. Gender quota comes as a compensation for the historical exclusion of women. It is not the same in case of youth quotas because a young man always has a chance to join politics when he becomes old, but a female's gender does not guarantee that she will be elected at a later period of her life; rather she is often excluded from the male-centred politics because of her gendered nature.

Lastly, instead of solving intergenerational problems, youth quotas will rather increase both intergenerational and intra-generational conflict. As young people selected under quotas are not elected democratically by citizen's votes, they may fail to meet the expectations both from old generation and young generation. Therefore, youth quotas are not permanent answers to the demographic changes. I argue that there are two alternatives to quota system to bring intergenerational justice. First, one alternative to short term quotas can be the introduction of long-term targets or goals which will encourage policy makers to develop young leadership from the beginning of the career, particularly from the school. The youth leadership programme can be incorporated both as a part of the course curriculum to teach the theoretical perspective of politics and leadership and also as voluntary projects to show the practical aspects of youth leadership. The second and the most relevant alternative to quotas can be the voluntary youth movement which will take place not in the parliament, but in the virtual world where a virtual community of solidarity and care will work as a platform to deal with the intergenerational concerns. In the later part of my essay, I will give example of a youth leadership programme developed in the primary school sector in Bangladesh. I will also give examples of two youth movements: one is from Birmingham and the other example is from Bangladesh which show how young people organize movements on blog and facebook that eventually change the meaning of politics itself.

This paper starts with a brief introduction of the changing nature of age demography and its impact on intergenerational conflict. The discussion is continued by explaining the four main arguments that I mentioned above. The paper concludes with analyzing the two alternatives to quota to deal with intergenerational issues.

### **Changing nature of age demography and intergenerational conflict:**

The world population is aging. One in every nine people of the world's population is over 60 and the figure is projected to one in five in 2050.<sup>1</sup> According to UNFPA report (2012:13), 'In 1950, there were 205 million persons aged 60 years or over in the world. By 2012, the number of older persons increased to almost 810 million. It is projected to reach 1 billion in less than ten years and double by 2050, reaching 2 billion'. Although, the aging population is more prevalent in developed world (Europe 22% and North America 19%), the developing region is also aging at a fast rate. Seventy seven percent of the world's net gain of older people took place in developing countries and the elderly growth rate is expected to rise above 3.5 percent annually from 2015 (Kinsella and Velkoff 2001). The combination of declining fertility and increasing longevity will further increase the number of elderly people in the coming years throughout the world.

On one hand, population aging represents a success story of human development (Kinsella and Velkoff 2001; UNFPA 2012). On the other hand, it has brought myriad social, political, economic and policy implications. Among these consequences, the most discussed one is the impact of aging population on intergenerational conflict. The increase in the number of elder people is followed by a decline in the number of young generation. This numerical imbalance poses new challenges particularly for the welfare states in their policy concerns about public expenditures for elderly in contrast to young: too many old hands are reaching into too few young pockets and taking amounts that are far too high (Kotlikoff and Burns 2012 ). While the public fund for elderly is increasing, it is decreasing for young people each year. The elderly

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<sup>1</sup> See also <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/japan/9579950/World-faces-ageing-population-time-bomb-says-UN.html>

are becoming better off as a group than the non-aged people. In economic terms, the older are becoming richer at the expense of the younger (Bengtson 1993). At the same time, the rise in pension also means the rise in the financial burden of the young people. For example, in USA, the retirement money is \$30,000 US dollar per retiree per year which is three-fourth of annual US per capita income. This large amount of bill poses huge taxes on the young workers (Kotlikoff and Burns 2012).

Along with the economic concerns, the aging population has placed major challenges also for the political sector. The older people not only constitute the larger proportion of voters but also members of political parties (Goerres 2009 cited in Hanley 2010). In 2000 election for president in USA, both Democratic and Republican strategists focused on older voters arguing that 'It's virtually impossible to take back the House or win the presidency without taking back seniors...That makes them the key battleground, and both parties know it' (Tonner 1999 cited in Binstock 2000). Therefore, the political parties continue to focus more on those policy areas which are most concern to older voters, such as social security, health etc (Feldmann 1999 cited in Binstock 2000:18). In other words, the older voters are drawing budget from politics. There is also a possibility that the aging concerns can generate pressure for the emergence of pensioners' or 'Grey interest' parties : 'age-specific controversies relating to social policy have often acted as trigger events for pensioner party formation, by providing a focus for mobilization and an outlet for deeper sense of social and civic exclusion some seniors feels'(Hanley 2010: 226). For example, proposed plan to raise retirement ages led to the foundation of the Scottish Senior Citizens Unity Parity (SSCUP) (ibid). Therefore, aging concerns can led to a 'terrible clash of generation' (Kotlikoff and Burns 2012: 2).

A number of ways have been discussed in the literature to tackle the generational conflict: social investments in children to maintain welfare guarantees for the elderly in the future (Esping-Andersen and Sarasa 2002); increasing incentives for future generations to invest more in human capital (Fougère et al 1999); using disaggregated programme expenditure data to identify the spending priorities of young and old people (Castles 2008). This paper adds a new dimension to these studies by analyzing whether introduction of 'youth quotas' can solve the generational problem.

## **Youth Quotas as a measure to solve generational conflict?:**

Quotas are introduced as 'affirmative action' for a marginalized group to ensure their representation. The term 'affirmative action' was first used in the 1960s in the United States as an institutional measures to stop any discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation or anything else.<sup>2</sup> As the young generation is inadequately present in the political life worldwide, it would be logical to introduce youth quotas. Youth quotas can take different forms, such as reserved seats (constitutional and/or legislative), Legal candidate quotas (constitutional and/or legislative) and Political party quotas (voluntary).<sup>3</sup>

The implementation of youth quotas often get inspiration from the introduction of gender quotas: 'If we observe the political position of women as analogous to the position of youth, then it would seem that a youth quota is the safest instrument for increasing their participation in the bodies of government' (Ilišin,2002: abstract). However, the question remains whether youth quotas can ensure the representations of young people and can solve the intergenerational clash, at least in politics. The first challenge of implementing youth quotas comes from the young generation's composition as a heterogeneous group.

## **Young people as a heterogeneous group:**

Although youth quotas can give young people entrance to the politics, they cannot, however, ensure youth representation. It is because the young generation is not a homogenous group. Often, attitudinal differences between age groups are less than those within age group (Campbell 1971 cited in Binstock 2000). Therefore, 'there is no sound reason to expect that a birth cohort- diverse in economic and social status, labour force participation, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, education, health status, family status, residential locale, political attitudes, partisan attachments...would suddenly become homogenized in self-interests and political behavior...' (Binstock 2000: 23).



and the mechanisms of representative democracy unattractive and politician untrustworthy' (Guidikova 2002: 105). Although there are evidences of young European taking part in local council projects, their participation is often sought 'as a matter of rhetoric or to legitimate decisions taken by adults' (ibid: 106). In fact, an Austrian survey showed that 56% of the young people's disinterest in politics came from the participation in local projects (ibid). In contrast to older people who show strongest attachments to traditional political institutions, the young generation shows weaker identification with the major parties (Binstock 2000). There is also a decline in the turnout rate among the young people in terms of voting participation (ibid).

One of the reasons of young generations' detachment from party politics is the change in their identity construction, particularly their focus on individual identity. Today, the young generation uncouple themselves from national or regional territorial identities and associate more with individual identities, such as their profession, hobby or music groups. Therefore, the young see politics not as a way to achieve collective goals but as a means to implement their own individual life projects (Guidikova 2002). This is the reason why the young generation are involved with single issue movements rather than large national projects: 'Individualisation is partly responsible for the weakening of the interest in political participation and democratic control over political institutions, and for the disappearance of the popular belief in collective action in a shared political "project" as a means of maximizing individual well being' (ibid: 111).

The focus on individual identity construction has been facilitated by the process of globalization and technological progress. The new communication technology has changed the meaning of political participation among the younger generation. The computer and internet has become the new parliament to take part in politics. According to a survey, 'young people were the most eager to "get in contact, from a computer, with politician and take part in political debates" or to take part in on-line discussion groups'. Therefore, there is a shift in interest of the young people from 'system politics' to 'symbolic politics' (ibid: 108). Symbolic politics is defined as the virtual politics where different virtual communities, action groups carry out political debates and where politicians act not more than technical assistant. Symbolic politics creates a new form of political participation on the basis of individual identities and not on the basis of collective interests of societies. Young people's attachment with information technology

and symbolic politics may change the definition of politics and democracy itself in near future. Therefore, youth participation into politics through the quota system bears less meaning for the generation who has managed to change the meaning of identities and political participation in the age of globalization. The focus on individual identity also brings the issue of equality, justice and democracy in politics.

### **Youth-i-zation of politics: Against the principle of equality, justice and democracy:**

Although youth quotas are meant to bring intergenerational justice, they, however, violates the very principle of equality and justice it is looking for. Youth quotas give preferences to young over old person and are thereby against the law of equality of opportunity. Youth quotas also upset the rule of democracy as the voters do not get the chance to elect the candidate.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, Quotas break the constitutional guarantee of inalienable rights to all and are contrary to the prohibition of discrimination in the constitution<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, youth quotas hamper the productivity or quality of work as the person is selected not because he or she deserves, but because of his or her youngness. ‘Quotas are bad for business and it’s important to take the voluntary approach’ said a British Conservative MEP Marina Yannakoudakis.<sup>6</sup> Research shows that a higher gender quota can decrease the overall quality of the elected female politicians initially (Julio and Tavares 2010).

Also, it is important to look at the overall impact the youth quotas can make on the politics as a whole. A research on gender quotas showed that instead of changing masculine culture of politics, they often reinforce the status quo (Baldez 2006). For example, gender quota has made Rwanda the country of the highest percentage of female parliamentarians (30%) in the world. However, ‘the elections that brought them to office were marked by “ ‘serious irregularities and ‘fraud’ ” and “the main opposition parties and candidates had been banned or disqualified before voting began” (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2005 cited in Baldez 2006:108).

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<sup>4</sup> See also <http://www.quotaproject.org/aboutQuotas.cfm>

<sup>5</sup> See also <http://www.heise.de/tp/artikel/37/37302/1.html>

<sup>6</sup> See also <http://www.euractiv.com/justice/women-day-gender-quotas-necessar-news-518345>

Research on young representative shows that they often adopt the adult-like look once they enter the politics, they are turned into 'young suits, mini politicians' (Faulkne 2009: 101). Therefore, young people's entry into formal politics through youth quotas will not change the status quo of politics automatically.

A case study on Social Democratic Party (SPD) in German showed that a quota provision led to an over representation of female candidate or feminization of the top position in the party on one hand. The situation, however, led to a 35.5% decrease in the overall number of female members from 1988 to 2011. Therefore, the introduction of "forced rate" was unattractive not only to men but also to women who enter the party as 'token women'. This is perhaps the reason why quota system is called a 'subtle form of misogyny'.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, what youth quota can do is to increase the number of young people in the political party quantitatively. I called this process a 'youth-i-zation of the party as similar to feminization of party and as oppose to gerontocracies. Youth-i-zation is only a quantitative change; it, however, does not raise the quality both of the politics and politician automatically, nor does it serve the interest of the young generation who very much value their individual identity. The example of gender quotas also shows that they impact on the self-esteem of the person being selected. As Berry (2011) said, 'But to be promoted to board level just because a certain number of female places need to be filled would make most women feel insulted, rather than elated. In short, we want to be promoted on our own merits'.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, youth quota or positive discrimination against the young generation will not empower them; rather it will weigh down their self-esteem.

While implementation of youth quotas can take lesson from the example of gender quotas, the comparison can be often misleading. Gender quota comes as a compensation for the historical exclusion of women. However, it is not the same in case of youth quota. Because a young man will always have a chance to join politics when he becomes old, but a female's gender does not guarantee that she will be elected at a later period, rather exclude her from the

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<sup>7</sup> See also <http://www.heise.de/tp/artikel/37/37302/1.html>

<sup>8</sup> See also <http://www.computerweekly.com/blogs/witsend/2011/07/is-there-an-alternative-to-female-quotas-for-management-boards.html>

male-centred politics because of her gender. My last argument against youth quotas focuses on its impact on overall intergenerational conflict.

### **Youth quotas and intergenerational and intra-generational conflicts:**

Youth quotas cannot solve the intergenerational conflict, rather reinstate and reinforce it. It is because of the fact that the necessity of youth quotas is rooted in the reciprocal and often inverse linkages between the elderly and the young. Therefore, any attempt to introduce youth quota creates an 'elderly as burden' image in the public mind and policy directions.<sup>9</sup> Instead of being an indicator of human development and an opportunity, population aging becomes a burden and a problem to be solved. This attitude towards elderly is a great hindrance to solve the intergenerational conflicts.

Along with intergenerational conflict, youth quotas also create intra-generational conflict. The case study on a number of young people as the Action Group in a youth participation project of the Bepton city council showed that young people selected through quotas often face two contradictory dilemmas: on one hand, as a youth representative, they must be able to give young people's views and therefore, they must show just how similar they are with other young people and how different they are from the adult (Faulkner 2009). On the other hand, they must act responsibly as adult to demonstrate how they can be taken seriously and how different they are from other young people and they cannot be easily replaced. In doing so, they often separate themselves from other young people and no longer remain authentic young people. Consequently, they fail to represent the young people. Therefore, they were criticized both by adult members and other young members in Bepton community for both claiming to be like other young people and also for trying to act differently from them (ibid). This ambiguous attitude of youth cannot be changed through youth quotas. There must be alternatives to quotas which will bring opportunities out of population aging both for young and old people.

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<sup>9</sup> See also <http://econpapers.repec.org/bookchap/oxpobooks/9780195414653.htm>

## **Goals or target to build youth leadership:**

One alternative to short term quotas that I propose here is the introduction of long-term goals or targets to build youth leadership. There are differences between goals and quotas: ‘Quotas are rigid and exclusionary; they imply, "This is what you must achieve, no matter what." Goals are flexible and inclusive; they imply, "This is what we think you can achieve if you try your best.”’<sup>10</sup>Therefore, quotas can be defined as forced targets that can be achieved within a short period of time. This is why quota system is often termed as ‘fast track’ (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2006). On the other hand, goals are the long term targets that can bring sustainable development. ‘Goals provide a target to strive for and a vehicle for measuring progress’.<sup>11</sup> Research on gender quotas shows that high representation of women can be reached even without the introduction of quotas. For example, Denmark, Norway and Sweden have achieved the highest percentage of women in the parliament (20-30%) in the 1970s, when the quotas were not even introduced in those countries (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2006). Therefore, youth voices can be heard by achieving goals or targets and not necessarily by introducing any youth quotas.

The Target to make young leaders will encourage policy makers to develop leadership skills among young children from the beginning of their career, particularly from the school. Young people will be trained to become future leader. The programme can be included both as a part of course curriculum to teach the theoretical perspective of politics and leadership and also as voluntary projects to show the practical aspects of youth leadership. I will give example of a youth leadership programme developed in primary school sector in Bangladesh.

In 2011, the Bangladesh government planned a student council among primary school going children to prepare themselves as country’s future leader.<sup>12</sup> Student Council is one type of shadow parliamentary system of governance. It was a new concept in the country for practicing democratic norms from childhood. The programme was started in 2011 in 100 schools as a pilot

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<sup>10</sup> <http://hrweb.berkeley.edu/faq/1660>

<sup>11</sup> <http://hrweb.berkeley.edu/faq/1660>

project. The project was aimed ‘at creating quality leadership, practicing democratic norms and values and exhibiting tolerance to others’ opinions in the minds from early childhood’<sup>13</sup>.

At the student council, members were elected by vote from the fellow students from class three to five. The student council membership was valid for one year. After the election, the members of the council selected a prime minister by voice vote. The prime minister then distributed responsibility among his or her cabinet like a parliamentary system of democracy. There were ministers for education, midday meal, environment, health, water resource, teaching materials, cultural affairs and sports, reception of guests and others as per the recommendations of the general students.

The project was a huge success and created great enthusiasm among students, parents and teachers. Therefore, the government started the project in another 600 primary schools in 2012.<sup>14</sup> The example of student council at primary school in Bangladesh can be a starting point to achieve target for youth leadership from the earlier period of life. From the leadership program, the young children will learn skills not only to become leaders but also to be more tolerant to tackle conflict such as intergenerational clash in their future life. Therefore, long term targets or goals can be an alternative to youth quotas for dealing with intergenerational issues.

### **Virtual youth movement:**

I argue that it is not the forced quotas, but the voluntary youth movement which is the answer to the demographic changes. The youth movement takes place not in parliament, but in the virtual world. Therefore, the movement has the element to change the nature of politics radically in future as it has no spatial boundary of nation or region (Guidikova 2006). It creates a

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<sup>12</sup> See also <http://www.demotix.com/news/1033506/exceptional-student-council-election-primary-school-dhaka#media-1033426>

<sup>13</sup> See also [http://www.newstoday.com.bd/index.php?option=details&news\\_id=29969&date=2011-06-11](http://www.newstoday.com.bd/index.php?option=details&news_id=29969&date=2011-06-11)

<sup>14</sup> See also [http://www.newstoday.com.bd/index.php?option=details&news\\_id=29969&date=2011-06-11](http://www.newstoday.com.bd/index.php?option=details&news_id=29969&date=2011-06-11)

number of virtual communities which are called ‘communities of interest, solidarity and care’. It shifts the traditional ‘system politics’ to a ‘symbolic politics’. It enables the young people to change the social order by giving priority to subjectivity over norm and tradition, ‘to spontaneity over structure’ and ‘to meaning over power’ (ibid: 111). Therefore, virtual world becomes the new centre of politics and power and the source of the emergence of new youth movement.

I will give two examples of youth movement: one from Birmingham where a young leader attempted to tackle the issue of intergenerational conflict through a blog site and another from Bangladesh which shows that how young people organize an event through facebook and successfully change the meaning of politics itself.

In early 2011, a young man from Birmingham, Daniel Blyden, who is also the creative director and founder of YEP media, has started a blog site titled ‘The Lost Links’ to gather public opinion on intergenerational relationships. The project was part of social action campaign by the Young Foundation’s Up Rising Youth Leadership Programme. The project had become so big that it appeared offline and organized a conference at Aston University in 2012. There was a workshop held after the conference in which a group of under 21s and over 50s participated into creative social activities such as making short documentaries about each other’s lives and experiences of living in Birmingham. Through these activities, the young generation got an opportunity to engage with the elderly. The main purpose of starting the blog can be understood from Daniel’s statement:

“I strongly believe that the wisdom and experiences of the old coupled with the strength and energy of the youth are what will move society forward effectively. I have responded by doing something small within my community and I hope that it will make us think about making friends across different generations.”<sup>15</sup>

Daniel statement can be a true inspiration to tackle the intergenerational issue in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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<sup>15</sup> See also <http://theb44.wordpress.com/2012/04/09/emerging-young-leader-set-to-tackle-intergenerational-segregation/>

The second example of Shahbag movement took place on February 5, 2013 in a neighborhood called 'Shahbag' in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. The movement was based on the demand of the death sentence of the war criminals of Bangladesh, also known as razakar or volunteer who assisted the Pakistan army in murders and rapes during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War.<sup>16</sup> The other demand from the movement was to make a secular Bangladesh by a ban of the religious political party Jamaat-i-Islam from Bangladeshi politics. The main aim of the Shahbag protest movement can be summarized in the protester's own words:

'We swear an oath that the leadership of the mass of people from the *Gonojagaran Mancha* (National Awakening Stage) will continue the movement from Teknaf to Tetulia until capital punishment is handed down to those *Razakar* and Al-Badr members who committed crimes against humanity like mass killing and rape in 1971. We take the oath that we will remain vocal, both on the streets and online, until the politics of the war criminals, Jamaat and Shibir, is banned and the citizenship of their members cancelled. We further take the oath that we will continue this demonstration and keep demanding trials, under a special tribunal, of those *Razakars* and Al-Badr activists who were convicted, and under trial, but freed after 1975. We swear that we will boycott the war criminals' business entities -- Islami Bank, Ibn Sina, Focus, Retina and various other coaching centres. We know through these they collect money to continue with their anti-liberation activities. We will also boycott the academic and cultural organisations through which they are spreading anti-liberation sentiments among the children. In brief, we will work for banning all the business, social and cultural organisations belonging to *Razakars* and Al-Badr activists. We swear that we will continue with our demand for stringent punishment of Jamaat and Shibir, who have committed crimes of sedition by threatening civil war, after making their immediate arrest by recognising them through video footage of news and newspaper pictures. We swear that we will boycott war criminals' mass media like *Diganta Television, Daily Naya*

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<sup>16</sup> Time reported a high-ranking U.S. official as saying, "It is the most incredible, calculated killing since the days of the Nazis in Poland." Estimates are that one to three million people were killed, nearly a quarter of a million women were raped and more than ten million people fled to India to escape persecution. See also [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2013\\_Shahbag\\_protests](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2013_Shahbag_protests)

*Diganta, Amar Desh, The Daily Sangram, Sonar Bangla Blog.* We will not subscribe to the newspapers of the war criminals at any office or house. At the same time, we request the pro-liberation mass media to boycott the war criminals and their accomplices.<sup>17</sup>

The present Bangladesh government passed a resolution to prosecute war criminals on 29 January 2009. As part of the process, a formal charge was filed by the prosecution against Abdul Quader Mollah, a war criminal, on 18 December 2011. On 5 February, 2013, the International Crime Tribunal had sentenced Abdul Quader Mollah to life in prison after he was convicted on five of six counts of war crimes. Shahbag protesters considered Mollah's sentence too merciful for his crimes. Therefore, they called for additional protests at Shahbag.

It is interesting to note that the shahbag protest was initiated by an online activist group called Blogger and Online Activists Network (BOAN). The bloggers' group used Facebook to spread news worldwide about events at Shahbag. A Facebook event for organising human chain was created 5 February 2013 and the human chain gradually turned into a big event. Facebook is still the main source of information about Shahbag protests.

The Shahbag protest has attracted people from all social strata to its cause. Tens of thousands of people joined the demonstration. Bangladeshis abroad expressed solidarity with the protestors through social-media websites Facebook and Twitter. The Shahbag intersection at the center of the protests has been referred to as "Generation Circle" or "Shahbag Square", in a comparison to the events in Tahrir Square of Cairo. The protestors are called 'freedom fighter of the new generation'.<sup>18</sup> A participant of the movement, Amiruddin Ahmed said, "After coming here I have realised that the national flag is secure at the hands of our children".<sup>19</sup> The prominent writer of Bangladesh Muhammed Zafar Iqbal addressed the young participant and said, "I am

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<sup>17</sup> See also [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2013\\_Shahbag\\_protests](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2013_Shahbag_protests)

<sup>18</sup> See also <http://www.ndtv.com/article/world/shahbag-square-the-heart-and-soul-of-a-students-movement-338243> and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2013\\_Shahbag\\_protests](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2013_Shahbag_protests)

<sup>19</sup> See also [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2013\\_Shahbag\\_protests](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2013_Shahbag_protests)

here to offer my apology to you. I wrote in newspapers that the new generation only hits 'Like' on Facebook and writes on blogs, but does not take to the streets. You have proved me wrong and I thank you all for this".<sup>20</sup>

In counter to Shahbag movement, another group was formed out of the religious political party Jamat-i-Islam who supported the war criminals. The movement took a new phase when one Shahbag protester, named Rajib, was killed brutally by Islamist rebellions. Suddenly, the movement turned from its demand for capital punishment of war criminals to a demand to build a secular Bangladesh. It was a very challenging step in a country where 90 percent people were religious Muslims.

The Shahbag protesters stayed at Shahbag square for about one month. The movement began to lose its popularity after they pronounced their second demand on making a secular Bangladesh. Shahbag protest, however, remains successful in becoming a key defining moment in the history of Bangladesh. The scale of the protest, the overwhelming presence of young people in the crowds, the large presence of women at overnight sit-ins (which is unusual in traditional Bangladesh) and the role of internet in organizing the protests: all of these things indicate the arrival of "something new".<sup>21</sup> The protest represents 'a new grassroots movement expressing its distaste for the country's corrupt political culture' (Lewis 2013).<sup>22</sup>

## **Conclusion:**

The world is now aged. Although population aging is an indicator of human development, it has brought numerous policy challenges, particularly in the light of intergenerational conflict. There has been an inequitable distribution of public resources between the elderly and the young people. Therefore, the young are deprived economically. The

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<sup>20</sup> See also [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2013\\_Shahbag\\_protests](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2013_Shahbag_protests)

<sup>21</sup> See also <http://pcp.gc.cuny.edu/events/understanding-shahbag-bangladesh-at-a-crossroads>

<sup>22</sup> See also <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/indiaatlse/2013/03/21/the-paradoxes-of-bangladeshs-shahbag-protests/>

quantitative minority of the young people make them disadvantaged also in politics. The older people both constitute the larger proportion of voters and also members of political parties. The clash of interests between the old and young generation may led to further intergenerational conflict. Therefore, recent aging policy literatures focus on how to tackle the intergenerational problem. This paper aims to look at youth quotas critically to see whether they can solve the intergenerational conflict.

Quotas are certainly good and temporary measures to give the young minority entrance to politics. However, they cannot ensure youth representation due to four reasons. First, young people are not a homogenous group. Amid the heterogeneous personal attributes in education, religion, nation etc, age is the only common identity among young people. Therefore, it is not

Lastly, youth quotas cannot solve the intergenerational conflict, rather reinstate and reinforce it. The necessity of youth quotas is rooted in the reciprocal and often inverse linkages between the elderly and the young. Therefore, any attempt to introduce youth quota creates an 'elderly as burden' image in the public mind and policy directions.

A number of studies now focus on intergenerational solidarity or intergenerational interdependence which stress what different age groups have in common rather than what their competing interests are (Williamson, McNamara, & Howling, 2003 cited in Bengtson and Oyama 2007). Instead of the financial inequalities between the generations at the macro level, these studies look at the voluntary support transfers from parent to child at the family level. For example, South Asian immigrant elders in the UK continue to fulfill their obligations by sending remittances to their families and community in their country of origin and family members maintain intergenerational ties by visiting relatives abroad (Burholt & Wenger, 2004 cited in Bengtson and Oyama 2007). Intergenerational solidarity and interdependence can be the new research direction in the study of age demographics. In this new research direction, the virtual youth movement can be the new space for carrying out intergenerational dialogue which will contribute to create a community of mutual interest both for young and old people. At the same time, investment in long term goal to build young leadership at school will make the future young leaders who will serve the interest of both young and old generation.

“I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. I did not use any external sources except for the referenced literature and other sources listed at the end of this paper.”

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