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Article

Perceived vs. Actual Political Orientation: A Study of Political Self-Awareness Among Bangladeshi University Students

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Abstract

This study investigates the gap between perceived and actual political orientation among Bangladeshi university students using the Political Compass framework. The research aimed to measure how accurately individuals understand their own positions along the economic (left– right) and social (libertarian–authoritarian) axes. A quantitative survey design was employed, collecting responses from 196 university students through a questionnaire that combined self- assessment items with the Political Compass test. Participants’ calculated positions were compared with their self-reported alignments to determine discrepancies. Results revealed that only 1.5% of respondents correctly identified their social orientation, and 2.6% accurately identified their economic orientation. The majority perceived themselves as more liberal or left- leaning than their calculated positions, with an overall mean misrepresentation of 7.07 units. Further independent *t-tests* also proved that there is a significant difference between the participants’ perceived position and calculated position on the political compass.

Keywords: political compass; left; right; liberal; conservative; ideology; perception

In most political discussions, ideologies are often simplified into a single left–right spectrum, dividing opinions based on economic policies such as redistribution, taxation, and market freedom. However, this binary approach fails to capture the complexity of political beliefs and the diversity of ideological identities that exist within societies. The Political Compass, a two-axis political spectrum model developed by political journalist Wayne Brittenden and collaborators in 2001, offers a more nuanced alternative to the traditional left– right dichotomy by measuring individuals’ positions on both economic and social dimensions (Political Compass, n.d.). Since its creation, the Political Compass questionnaire has been widely used in political science education, media, and research to map ideological orientations.

The left generally advocates for social equality, redistribution of wealth, welfare policies, and state intervention in the economy to reduce inequality. The right tends to support free markets, individual responsibility, private property, and limited government intervention in the economy.

Liberalism is rooted in values like individual freedom, equality before the law, civil rights, and limited government, often emphasizing personal choice and democratic governance. Conservatism prioritizes tradition, social order, stability, and gradual change rather than radical reform. It often emphasizes authority, family, religion, and national identity as core social values.

Authoritarianism emphasizes obedience and order over individual freedom, while libertarianism emphasizes autonomy and the protection of civil liberties (Feldman, 2003).

Despite the global relevance of these distinctions, political awareness in many developing democracies remains limited. In Bangladesh, for example, political alignment is often shaped by party loyalty, historical narratives, or populist rhetoric rather than a clear understanding of ideological positions. As a result, many citizens may be unaware of where they truly stand on the political compass. Examining this gap is essential for fostering informed democratic participation and

encouraging a more nuanced political discourse in the Bangladeshi context. This paper will study this gap among university students.

Literature Review:

Scholars have long argued that ideological attitudes are better represented as multidimensional than as a single left-right line. Early and influential work in this tradition shows that political attitudes cluster along multiple latent dimensions (e.g., economic redistribution vs. social/cultural values), and that two-dimensional scaling methods produce richer descriptions of both elites and mass publics (Poole & Rosenthal; Evans).

Researchers developing multi-item scales for left-right and libertarian-authoritarian values demonstrate that separate measures for these dimensions yield stronger validity than single-item left-right self-placement alone (Evans, 1996; related methodological work on ideal-point and 2-D scaling).

A growing literature questions the construct validity of simple self-placement questions (e.g., “Are you left or right?”) because respondents’ understandings of “left,” “right,” “liberal,” and “conservative” are heterogeneous across groups and contexts. Recent empirical work finds that self-reported ideological labels sometimes weakly align with respondents’ issue positions, and that the predictive power of single left-right self-placement varies by education, question framing, and political context (Yeung, 2025; research on left-right predictive power).

The literature on political misperception and false polarization shows individuals often misjudge the views, extremity, or prevalence of other groups’ beliefs — a problem that can also affect how people understand and report their own ideology. Work on false polarization documents that citizens tend to overestimate between-group differences and can adopt simplified partisan heuristics rather than nuanced ideological positions (Lees et al., 2021). Additionally, experimental and survey research into political misinformation and partisan cognitive biases reveals systematic asymmetries in how people perceive political facts and ideological labels (Garrett et al., 2021).

Prior research on misplacement and measurement typically uses one or more of the following approaches: (a) compare single-item self-placement with aggregated issue-position scores (issue batteries) to test alignment; (b) apply multidimensional scaling / ideal-point models to either survey responses or roll-call data to estimate latent ideological coordinates; (c) analyze demographic and information correlates (education, media exposure, partisan identification) of misalignment; and (d) use experiments or vignette-based tests to probe how respondents interpret the words “left,” “right,” “liberal,” and “conservative.” Studies using ideal-point or item-response models (Poole & Rosenthal style) and modern two-factor validity checks are particularly useful when you want to locate respondents in a 2-D ideological space.

Problem:

This study addresses the gap between Bangladeshi university students’ perceived and actual political orientations, examining whether self-identification aligns with ideological position as measured by the Political Compass model.

Hypotheses:

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant difference between participants’ self-identified political ideology and their measured political compass position. (In other words, people are aware of their position.)

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant difference between participants’ self-identified political ideology and their measured political compass position. (In other words, people are not aware of their position.)

Variables:

This study included two primary variables: self-perceived political orientation and actual political orientation.

The independent variable, self-perceived political orientation, represented how participants identified their own ideological stance along both the economic (left–right) and social (libertarian–authoritarian) axes. Participants reported their perceived position on a scale ranging from 0 to 10, which was later converted to a (-10 to +10) scale, where lower scores indicated left or libertarian tendencies and higher scores indicated right or authoritarian tendencies.

The dependent variable, actual political orientation, was determined based on participants’ responses to the Political Compass questionnaire, which measured their ideological positions along the same two axes. These calculated coordinates provided an objective measure of participants’ true ideological alignment.

Additionally, demographic variables such as age, gender, university, and academic discipline were recorded for descriptive purposes and to explore potential subgroup trends. These were treated as control variables and measured using nominal or ordinal categories.

Rationale:

Although extensive research in Western contexts has examined ideological self- placement and political awareness, comparable work in South Asia— particularly Bangladesh- remains limited. Most existing studies on Bangladeshi political behavior focus on party affiliation, governance perception, or voting patterns, often neglecting the underlying ideological dimensions that shape those preferences. Consequently, public discourse tends to reduce politics to partisan loyalty rather than ideological conviction.

In this context, examining how university students perceive and understand their own ideological positions becomes crucial. University students represent an emerging generation of potential opinion leaders, policymakers, and civic actors. Their ability (or inability) to accurately identify their political orientation has implications for democratic participation, polarization, and political literacy. A mismatch between perceived and actual ideology may lead to inconsistent policy attitudes, selective activism, and superficial political engagement-phenomena already visible in many developing democracies.

By combining self-reported political identification with the Political Compass framework, this study introduces an analytical lens that transcends party politics and explores the deeper cognitive structure of political awareness among Bangladeshi youth. The findings aim to contribute to both the academic literature on political cognition and to ongoing discussions about civic education and ideological literacy in Bangladesh's higher education system.

Method

Research Design:

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, survey-based design to investigate whether individuals accurately identify their position on the political compass. Participants responded to a questionnaire that assessed their political values across two ideological dimensions—economic (left–right) and social (authoritarian–libertarian). Their responses were used to calculate their likely political compass position. They were also asked to self-identify their political ideology (e.g., left, right, liberal, conservative). The difference between these two measures was analyzed to determine the extent of misalignment.

Design Table:

Variable / Concept		
Survey Question / Item	Scale Used	Purpose / What It

Measures

Perceived

Social Ideology

“Where would you place yourself on social issues?”

Converted to -10 = Very liberal → +10 = Very conservative

Self-assessed position on social axis

Perceived Economic Ideology

“Where would you place yourself on economic issues?”

Converted to -10 = Far left → +10 = Far right

Self-assessed position on economic axis

Actual Social Ideology	Responses to multiple social statements (e.g., LGBTQ+ rights, gender roles, etc.)	Converted to -10 to +10 index	Derived ideological position based on attitudes
Actual Economic Ideology	Responses to multiple economic statements (e.g., taxation, welfare, etc.)	Converted to -10 to +10 index	Derived ideological position based on attitudes
Perceived vs Actual Difference	Calculated difference (perceived – actual)	Numeric distance (Δ)	Measures self-perception accuracy
Combined Ideological Distance	Euclidean distance between perceived and actual positions (2D)	$0-\sqrt{(\Delta x^2 + \Delta y^2)}$	Overall misperception magnitude

Participants:

This study targeted university students in Bangladesh as the population of interest, focusing on their awareness of political orientation as measured by the political compass. According to the University Grants Commission and the Ministry of Education, approximately 4 million students are currently enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs across the country.

To ensure statistical validity and generalizability, the minimum sample size was calculated using the standard formula for proportions in large populations, assuming a 85% confidence level

and a $\pm 5\%$ margin of error. The resulting minimum sample size was approximately 196 participants, which was set as the target for data collection.

In the survey, 196 students participated from different universities across Bangladesh. The universities included the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), University of Rajshahi, University of Chittagong, Bogura University, Islamic University, Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology (CUET), Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology (RUET), and many more. The participants were from various departments of studies, such as Electrical and Electronics Engineering, Computer Science Engineering, Psychology, Physics, Mathematics, English Literature, Political Science, Philosophy, Sociology, Mass Communication, and many others.

The study employed a non-probability snowball sampling technique. The initial survey link was shared with a group of university students personally known to the researcher, who then circulated it within their own social and academic networks. Subsequent respondents further disseminated the form among their peers, creating a chain-referral pattern of participation. This approach was suitable for reaching students from multiple universities across Bangladesh, given the geographic dispersion of the target population and the exploratory nature of the research.

Measures:

Self-Identification: Participants were asked to report their perceived political ideology via questions such as: "How would you describe your political orientation?" (left, right, center, liberal, conservative, other)

Political Compass Assessment: Participants responded to survey items adapted from the official Political Compass questionnaire (Political Compass, n.d.), which measured attitudes along two ideological dimensions: Economic axis (Left–Right) and Social axis (Authoritarian–Libertarian)

Responses were collected on Likert-type scales ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

Pilot Study:

Before administering the final survey, a pilot study was conducted to evaluate the clarity, usability, and comprehensibility of the questionnaire. The pilot sample consisted of 10 Bangladeshi university students who were similar in demographic profile to the intended study participants. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire and provide qualitative feedback on its wording, structure, and length.

Feedback from the pilot study indicated that most participants (6 out of 10) found the questionnaire clear and comprehensible, while two participants suggested minor wording revisions for greater clarity. These suggestions were incorporated into the final version. Two participants reported that the questionnaire was relatively lengthy; however, no significant content reduction was feasible without compromising the study's objectives. Overall, the pilot study confirmed the questionnaire's face validity and usability for the main data collection phase.

Procedure:

Participants completed the survey online. After data collection, responses to the Political Compass items were input into the official Political Compass website to generate two-dimensional coordinates for each participant. These coordinates were used to determine participants' actual ideological position, which was then compared with their self-reported political ideology. Misalignment between perceived and measured positions was analyzed to assess the degree of political self-awareness among university students.

Data Analysis:

Responses were scored to place each participant on a two-dimensional political compass. Self-reported ideology and calculated ideological position were then compared to assess whether participants’ self-perceptions aligned with their measured political views. Data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and Google Sheets for descriptive statistics and percentage analysis.

Results

Table 1.

Perceived Economic	Actual Economic	D (economic)	Perceived Social	Actual Social	D (social)	D (total)
-4	-8	4	-10	-1.28	-8.72	9.593664576
0	0.88	-0.88	6	1.33	4.67	4.752188969
-10	0.88	-10.88	0	1.54	-1.54	10.98844848
-6	2	-8	4	2	2	8.246211251
-10	-8.13	-1.87	-10	-6.12	-3.88	4.307122009
0	0.33	-0.33	4	1.54	2.46	2.482035455

-6	-7.75	1.75	-6	-4.56	-1.44	2.266296538
10	7.75	2.25	10	8.83	1.17	2.536020505
2	-1	3	0	0.33	-0.33	3.018095426
0	-3	3	4	3.33	0.67	3.07390631
6	4	2	-10	0	-10	10.19803903
8	6	2	8	7.75	0.25	2.015564437
6	2	4	-4	-3.33	-0.67	4.05572435
10	8	2	6	7.75	-1.75	2.657536453
6	7.75	-1.75	2	0.33	1.67	2.418966722
6	8.83	-2.83	8	6.56	1.44	3.175295262
0	5.56	-5.56	-8	0.33	-8.33	10.01511358
2	-2.63	4.63	2	0.67	1.33	4.817239874
-4	-3.74	-0.26	-8	-7.75	-0.25	0.3606937759
6	8.13	-2.13	8	5.56	2.44	3.238904136
8	5.56	2.44	-10	0.33	-10.33	10.61425928
0	0.88	-0.88	2	3.33	-1.33	1.594772711
0	-1.13	1.13	-10	-3.78	-6.22	6.321811449
2	4.43	-2.43	6	8.13	-2.13	3.231377415
2	0.33	1.67	4	-2.56	6.56	6.769231862
-2	-3.13	1.13	2	0.33	1.67	2.0163829
0	-2.78	2.78	-10	-1.13	-8.87	9.295445121
2	5.56	-3.56	-2	0.33	-2.33	4.25470328
0	-1.13	1.13	-6	-4.56	-1.44	1.830437106
4	7.75	-3.75	-4	-2.78	-1.22	3.943462945
0	2.13	-2.13	2	1.13	0.87	2.300825939
-4	-3.33	-0.67	-8	-4.75	-3.25	3.31834296
4	8.13	-4.13	2	6.12	-4.12	5.83363523
-4	-4.75	0.75	-8	-5.59	-2.41	2.524004754
-8	-2.13	-5.87	-6	0.33	-6.33	8.632832675
-2	0.88	-2.88	4	5.78	-1.78	3.385675708

8	6.13	1.87	8	2.33	5.67	5.970410371
0	7.78	-7.78	0	2.13	-2.13	8.066306466
-4	4.89	-8.89	-10	-8.13	-1.87	9.084547319
-10	-6.12	-3.88	0	0.33	-0.33	3.894008218

4	1.54	2.46	-6	-7.75	1.75	3.018956773
-6	-4.56	-1.44	10	7.75	2.25	2.671347974
10	8.83	1.17	-8	2.13	-10.13	10.19734279
2	4.56	-2.56	-10	-1.28	-8.72	9.088014084
-6	-4.56	-1.44	6	1.33	4.67	4.886972478
-4	-2.78	-1.22	0	1.54	-1.54	1.96468827
2	1.13	0.87	4	2	2	2.181031866
-8	-4.75	-3.25	6	7.89	-1.89	3.759601043
10	10	0	8	8.89	-0.89	0.89
8	8	0	-6	-4.56	-1.44	1.44
-4	9.23	-13.23	-4	-2.78	-1.22	13.28613187
-6	0.88	-6.88	2	1.13	0.87	6.93478911
2	-0.56	2.56	-8	-4.75	-3.25	4.137160862
0	0.56	-0.56	8	5.56	2.44	2.503437637
8	9.91	-1.91	0	0.88	-0.88	2.102974084
10	9.93	0.07	0	-1.13	1.13	1.132166066
4	10	-6	2	4.43	-2.43	6.473399416

6	9.97	-3.97	8	8.13	-0.13	3.972127893
8	0.33	7.67	-4	-8	4	8.650369934
4	-8.13	12.13	0	0.88	-0.88	12.16187897
-6	-4.56	-1.44	-10	0.88	-10.88	10.97488041
-4	-2.78	-1.22	-6	2	-8	8.092490346
2	1.13	0.87	-10	-8.13	-1.87	2.062474242
-8	-4.75	-3.25	-6	9.13	-15.13	15.47512197
-10	2.13	-12.13	-10	0.46	-10.46	16.01713145
0	-5.56	5.56	0	7.78	-7.78	9.562531046
6	6.98	-0.98	2	-3.33	5.33	5.419344979
-4	9.91	-13.91	4	-4.56	8.56	16.33284115
0	0.33	-0.33	6	-9.13	15.13	15.13359838
-10	-1.28	-8.72	8	-10	18	20.00095998
6	1.33	4.67	10	10	0	4.67
0	1.54	-1.54	-2	0.88	-2.88	3.26588426
4	2	2	-4	2.33	-6.33	6.638441082
6	6.78	-0.78	-8	-2.78	-5.22	5.277954149

-8	-4.33	-3.67	-6	-4.56	-1.44	3.942397748
-10	-6.12	-3.88	-4	-2.78	-1.22	4.067284106
4	1.54	2.46	2	1.13	0.87	2.609310254
-6	-4.56	-1.44	-8	-4.75	-3.25	3.554729244
10	8.83	1.17	0	0.88	-0.88	1.464001366
-4	-7.73	3.73	-5	-2.13	-2.87	4.706357402
-10	0.88	-10.88	-10	2.13	-12.13	16.29451748
-8	-4.56	-3.44	0	-5.56	5.56	6.53813429
4	4.78	-0.78	6	6.98	-0.98	1.252517465

-6	-4.56	-1.44	-4	9.91	-13.91	13.98433767
-4	-2.78	-1.22	-6	10	-16	16.04644509
2	1.13	0.87	8	6.62	1.38	1.631349135
8	5.56	2.44	0	0.33	-0.33	2.46221445
0	0.88	-0.88	-10	-8.13	-1.87	2.066712365
0	-1.13	1.13	0	0.33	-0.33	1.177200068
2	4.43	-2.43	-6	-7.75	1.75	2.994561738
8	-6.67	14.67	10	7.75	2.25	14.84154305
6	-10	16	10	10	0	16
-10	-1.28	-8.72	-6	-4.56	-1.44	8.838099343
6	1.33	4.67	-4	-2.78	-1.22	4.82672767
0	1.54	-1.54	2	1.13	0.87	1.768756625
4	2	2	-8	-4.75	-3.25	3.816084381
10	7.75	2.25	-4	-8	4	4.589389938
-4	9.91	-13.91	0	0.88	-0.88	13.93780829
-10	-8.13	-1.87	-10	0.88	-10.88	11.0395335
0	0.33	-0.33	-6	2	-8	8.006803357
-6	-7.75	1.75	-10	-8.13	-1.87	2.561132562
10	7.75	2.25	0	0.88	-0.88	2.415967715
-4	9.91	-13.91	0	-1.13	1.13	13.95582316
-6	10	-16	2	4.43	-2.43	16.18347614
8	6.62	1.38	10	7.75	2.25	2.639488587
-10	8.13	-18.13	-4	9.91	-13.91	22.85136757
-10	4.44	-14.44	0	9.89	-9.89	17.50216272
-6	-4.56	-1.44	0	-1.33	1.33	1.960229578
-4	-2.78	-1.22	-8	-5.65	-2.35	2.647810416
2	1.13	0.87	0	-5.56	5.56	5.627654929
-8	-4.75	-3.25	6	6.98	-0.98	3.394539733
-10	-1.28	-8.72	-4	9.91	-13.91	16.41726226
6	1.33	4.67	0	9.89	-9.89	10.93713857
0	1.54	-1.54	0	-1.33	1.33	2.03482186
4	2	2	-8	-5.65	-2.35	3.085854825
-4	-8	4	-10	9.91	-19.91	20.30783346
0	0.88	-0.88	-4	9.91	-13.91	13.93780829
-10	0.88	-10.88	-6	10	-16	19.34875707
-6	2	-8	8	6.62	1.38	8.118152499
-10	-8.13	-1.87	0	9.89	-9.89	10.06523721
8	5.56	2.44	0	-1.33	1.33	2.778938646
0	0.88	-0.88	-8	-5.65	-2.35	2.509362469
0	-1.13	1.13	-10	-6.12	-3.88	4.041200317
2	4.43	-2.43	4	1.54	2.46	3.457817231
-10	2.13	-12.13	-6	-4.56	-1.44	12.21517499
0	-5.56	5.56	10	8.83	1.17	5.681769091
6	6.98	-0.98	-10	7.78	-17.78	17.80698739
-4	9.91	-13.91	-6	-4.56	-1.44	13.98433767
-4	-4	0	-4	-2.78	-1.22	1.22
6	6	0	2	1.13	0.87	0.87

-10	-8.13	-1.87	-8	-4.75	-3.25	3.749586644
0	0.33	-0.33	2	6.78	-4.78	4.791377672
-6	-7.75	1.75	8	8.9	-0.9	1.967866865
10	7.75	2.25	0	-4.44	4.44	4.977559643
10	10	0	2	-2.3	4.3	4.3
2	4.78	-2.78	4	-3.44	7.44	7.942417768
4	5.56	-1.56	6	-0.33	6.33	6.519394144
6	7.89	-1.89	8	0.33	7.67	7.899430359
2	-2.3	4.3	0	10	-10	10.8853112
4	-3.44	7.44	10	10	0	7.44
-6	-4.56	-1.44	2	4.78	-2.78	3.13081459
-4	-2.78	-1.22	4	5.56	-1.56	1.980403999
2	1.13	0.87	6	7.89	-1.89	2.080624906
-8	-4.75	-3.25	-10	-6.12	-3.88	5.061314059
-10	-1.28	-8.72	4	1.54	2.46	9.060353194
6	1.33	4.67	-6	-4.56	-1.44	4.886972478
0	1.54	-1.54	10	8.83	1.17	1.934037228
4	2	2	-10	2.13	-12.13	12.29377485
6	6.78	-0.78	0	-5.56	5.56	5.614445654
8	5.56	2.44	6	6.98	-0.98	2.629448611
0	0.88	-0.88	-4	9.91	-13.91	13.93780829
0	-1.13	1.13	-10	-8.13	-1.87	2.184902744
2	4.43	-2.43	0	0.33	-0.33	2.452305038
4	4.56	-0.56	-6	-7.75	1.75	1.837416665
0	0.98	-0.98	10	7.75	2.25	2.454159734
0	0.33	-0.33	-10	8.13	-18.13	18.13300306
-4	9.91	-13.91	-6	-4.56	-1.44	13.98433767
-6	10	-16	-4	-2.78	-1.22	16.04644509
8	6.62	1.38	2	1.13	0.87	1.631349135
-10	2.13	-12.13	-8	-4.75	-3.25	12.55784217
0	-5.56	5.56	-10	2.13	-12.13	13.3435565
6	6.98	-0.98	0	-5.56	5.56	5.645706333
-4	9.91	-13.91	6	6.98	-0.98	13.94447919
-10	0.88	-10.88	-4	9.91	-13.91	17.6596291
-10	-5.78	-4.22	-10	-3.33	-6.67	7.892863866
-6	-5.56	-0.44	-6	-4.78	-1.22	1.296919427
-8	-4.43	-3.57	8	4.43	3.57	5.048742418
-8	-7.78	-0.22	-10	-1.28	-8.72	8.722774788
-10	-1.28	-8.72	6	1.33	4.67	9.891779415
6	1.33	4.67	0	1.54	-1.54	4.917367182
0	1.54	-1.54	4	2	2	2.524202844
4	2	2	0	0.88	-0.88	2.185040045
-10	-1.28	-8.72	0	-1.13	1.13	8.792911918
6	1.33	4.67	2	4.43	-2.43	5.264389803
0	1.54	-1.54	-10	8.13	-18.13	18.19528785
4	2	2	-6	-3.33	-2.67	3.3360006
-6	-5.56	-0.44	-10	-4.78	-5.22	5.238511239

-8	-4.43	-3.57	0	8.83	-8.83	9.524379245
-6	-0.33	-5.67	0	8.88	-8.88	10.53581036
-8	-2.13	-5.87	-5	-2.13	-2.87	6.53404928
0	5.56	-5.56	-10	2.13	-12.13	13.3435565
0	9.89	-9.89	0	-5.56	5.56	11.34573488
0	-1.33	1.33	6	6.98	-0.98	1.652059321
-8	-5.65	-2.35	-8	-5.65	-2.35	3.323401872
-5	-2.13	-2.87	0	5.56	-5.56	6.25703604
-10	2.13	-12.13	0	9.89	-9.89	15.65084662
0	-5.56	5.56	0	-1.33	1.33	5.716861027
6	6.98	-0.98	0	5.56	-5.56	5.645706333
-10	5.56	-15.56	-10	8.13	-18.13	23.8916408
-6	-0.33	-5.67	-6	-3.33	-2.67	6.267200332
-8	-2.13	-5.87	-10	-4.78	-5.22	7.855272115
0	5.56	-5.56	0	8.83	-8.83	10.43467776
0	9.89	-9.89	0	8.88	-8.88	13.29159509
0	-1.33	1.33	0	-3.78	3.78	4.007156099
-8	-5.65	-2.35	-6	-1.13	-4.87	5.407346854
-10	9.13	-19.13	-10	10	-20	27.67592636

Table 2.

Measure	% of Participants	Average Misperception (Δ)	Interpretation
Overall Misperception (Total Distance)	196 participants = 100%	7.07 units	Everyone misperceived their ideological position; average total misalignment was 7.07 units on the 2D compass
Social Axis – Self-Reported More Liberal	131 participants = 66.83%	5.38 units	Most participants believed they were more socially liberal than their calculated positions suggested
Social Axis – Self-Reported More Conservative	62 participants = 31.63%	3.33 units	A smaller group underestimated their social liberalism and

perceived themselves

as more conservative

Economic Axis – Self-Reported More Left-Leaning

123

participants = 62.76%

4.84 units

Most participants believed they

were more economically left than they actually are

Economic Axis – Self-Reported More Right-Leaning

68 participants

= 34.69%

3.15 units

A smaller group believed they were more economically right-

leaning than calculated

The study analyzed 196 valid responses. Respondents’ perceived and calculated political positions were compared across both the social and economic axes of the Political Compass model.

On the social axis, 31.63% of respondents perceived themselves as more conservative than their actual calculated positions, with an average deviation of 3.33 units. In contrast, 66.83% perceived themselves as more liberal, with an average deviation of 5.38 units. Only 1.5% of respondents correctly identified their social alignment.

On the economic axis, 34.69% perceived themselves as more right-leaning than they actually were, with an average deviation of 3.15 units, while 62.76% viewed themselves as more left-leaning than calculated, with an average deviation of 4.84 units. Only 2.6% accurately identified their economic position.

Overall, when the direction of deviation is not considered, the mean magnitude of misrepresentation across both axes is 7.07 units, indicating a significant discrepancy between self-perceived and calculated political orientations among Bangladeshi university students. This outcome supports the alternative hypothesis that Bangladeshi university students are not fully aware of their actual placement on the political compass.

To test whether the differences between perceived and actual political orientations were statistically significant, independent *t*-tests were conducted for both the economic and social axes. Results revealed a significant difference between participants’ self-reported and calculated economic orientations. The extremely low p-values for both dimensions ($p = 0.00000264$ for the economic axis; $p = 0.000000023$ for the social axis) indicate a highly significant discrepancy between perceived and actual ideological positions. These findings further support the alternative hypothesis (H_1) that Bangladeshi university students are not fully aware of their true political orientation.

Discussion

The results of this study reveal a notable discrepancy between Bangladeshi university students’ self-perceived and objectively calculated political orientations. A significant majority of respondents misjudged their political alignment on both the social and economic axes of the Political Compass model. Specifically, only 1.5% and 2.6% of participants correctly identified their position on the social and economic axes, respectively. The mean magnitude of overall misrepresentation (7.07 units) further illustrates that even politically aware young adults frequently misunderstand their ideological standing.

One striking pattern is that most respondents perceived themselves as more liberal or left-leaning than their responses ultimately indicated. This tendency was particularly evident in questions related to LGBTQ+ rights and capital punishment. Many participants who self-identified as liberal demonstrated conservative attitudes toward these issues—reflecting how selective liberalism may operate within Bangladesh’s socio-political context. Such findings suggest that while students increasingly associate “liberal” with progressivism or modernity, they may not internalize the full spectrum of liberal values, especially those that challenge entrenched cultural or religious norms.

Conversely, a smaller subset of participants who considered themselves conservative or right-leaning often displayed comparatively liberal stances in certain domains, notably nationalism. This group appeared more open to global perspectives and less rigid in viewing national identity as exclusionary. These inconsistencies reflect the fluid and sometimes contradictory nature of political self-categorization in developing democracies, where ideology is often shaped more by social sentiment than by systematic political theory.

Economically, respondents who viewed themselves as right-leaning tended to favor government oversight and welfare over an entirely free-market system. This pattern indicates that even among those who perceive themselves as supporters of economic individualism, there exists an underlying preference for state intervention—perhaps rooted in Bangladesh’s collectivist traditions and expectations of governmental responsibility.

Overall, these results demonstrate that Bangladeshi university students’ political self-awareness is fragmented and context-dependent. Their ideological inconsistencies may stem from limited exposure to structured political education, the influence of cultural conservatism, or the tendency to conflate political “labels” with social identity rather than policy preference.

Overall, the results confirm that participants’ political self-awareness is limited and often inconsistent with their objective ideological stance. This finding aligns with the study’s alternative hypothesis, reinforcing that Bangladeshi university students tend to misperceive their political orientations rather than accurately recognize them.

In addition to the primary student sample, a small exploratory sample of 20 professionals and policymakers was surveyed to provide preliminary insights into political self-awareness among high-level actors. The exploratory sample of 20 professionals and policymakers showed differences in political self-awareness compared to the university student population. While students demonstrated limited alignment between self-identified and measured positions, the elite participants showed relatively higher consistency. Although this secondary dataset is too small for generalization, it suggests potential variation in political self-awareness across education and experience levels.

These findings highlight the need for civic education reforms and political literacy initiatives in higher education.

Future studies may benefit from stratified sampling to systematically compare students, professionals, and the general population, which would allow for more comprehensive and generalizable conclusions about political self-awareness in Bangladesh.

Limitations:

While this study provides valuable insights into the gap between perceived and actual political orientation among Bangladeshi university students, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research utilized a non-probability snowball sampling method, which, while effective for reaching a geographically dispersed student population, restricts the generalizability of the findings to the wider population of Bangladeshi university students.

Participants were recruited primarily through peer networks, which may have introduced selection bias, as socially connected or politically engaged individuals were more likely to participate.

Second, all responses were self-reported, raising the possibility of social desirability bias, where participants might have answered in ways that align with perceived social norms rather than their

true beliefs. This is particularly relevant in the Bangladeshi context, where political and cultural sensitivities may influence respondents' openness on issues such as religion, gender, and sexuality.

Third, the study relied on data collected through an online survey, which could exclude students with limited internet access or those less active on social media, thereby affecting representativeness. Additionally, while the Political Compass framework provides a structured analytical tool, it remains a Western-developed model that may not fully capture the nuances of Bangladeshi socio-political ideology.

Lastly, the analysis primarily employed descriptive statistics, which effectively illustrate trends but do not establish causal relationships. Future research could incorporate inferential statistical tests or qualitative interviews to validate these findings and explore the underlying reasons behind ideological misperception.

Conclusion

This study found that Bangladeshi university students often misjudge their own ideological orientation, frequently perceiving themselves as more liberal or left-leaning than their measured positions. Such discrepancies indicate that political awareness among students is fragmented and context-dependent, reflecting broader cultural influences and limited exposure to structured political education. The findings underscore the need for enhanced civic and ideological literacy in higher education to promote informed democratic engagement. Future research should employ larger and more diverse samples to further explore ideological misperception in Bangladesh’s broader population.

Appendix

The following paper is included:
Copy of Google Form Survey questionnaire with instructions at the beginning
Perceived vs. Actual Political Orientation: A Study of Political Self- Awareness Among Bangladeshi University Students
Hello!
Thank you for taking part in this survey. This questionnaire is part of an academic research project exploring how Bangladeshi university students perceive their political ideology and how that self-perception aligns with measured positions on the political spectrum.
Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw at any time. All responses will remain anonymous and will be used solely for academic research purposes.
The survey should take about 15-20 minutes to complete. Please answer each question as honestly as possible — there are no right or wrong answers. If you have any questions regarding this study, feel free to contact the researcher at faruqus2025@gmail.com.
Thank you very much for your time and contribution!

*	Indicates	required	question
1.	What's your name? (Optional)		
2.	Where do you study? *		
3.	What are you majoring in/What have you majored in? *		

- 4. Where do you live?

5. What year are you in? (e.g., undergrad 1st year, 2nd year, 3rd year, 4th year, or Master's)

6. How would you describe your overall political orientation on the **economic axis (left–right)**? Please choose a point on the **0–10 scale** below, where: *

0 = Far Left (e.g., strong government involvement, redistribution)
5 = Centrist
10 = Far Right (e.g., free market, minimal government)

Mark only one oval.

012345678910

7. How would you describe your overall political orientation on the **social axis (liberal–conservative)**? Please choose a point on the **0–10 scale** below, * where:

0 = Very Liberal (e.g., progressive, individual freedoms)
5 = Centrist
10 = Very Conservative (e.g., traditional values, authority)

Mark only one oval.

012345678910

Propositions to determine your political orientation

Just a few propositions to start with, concerning — no less — how you see the country and the world.

8. If economic globalization is inevitable, it should primarily serve humanity rather than the interests of trans-national corporations. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

9. I'd always support my country, whether it was right or wrong. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

10. No one chooses their country of birth, so it's foolish to be proud of it. *

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Disagree



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- ☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
11. Our race has many superior qualities, compared with other races. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
12. The enemy of my enemy is my friend. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
13. Military action that defies international law is sometimes justified. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
14. There is now a worrying fusion of information and entertainment. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
- Now, the economy. We're talking attitudes here, not the FTSE index.
15. People are ultimately divided more by class than by nationality. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
16. Controlling inflation is more important than controlling unemployment. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
17. Because corporations cannot be trusted to voluntarily protect the environment, they require regulation. *
- Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
18. “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need” is a fundamentally good idea.
*
Mark only one oval.

☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
19. The freer the market, the freer the people. *
Mark only one oval.

☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
20. It’s a sad reflection on our society that something as basic as drinking water is now a bottled, branded consumer product. *
Mark only one oval.

☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
21. Land shouldn’t be a commodity to be bought and sold. *
Mark only one oval.

☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
22. It is regrettable that many personal fortunes are made by people who simply manipulate money and contribute nothing to their society. *
Mark only one oval.

☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
23. Protectionism is sometimes necessary in trade. *
Mark only one oval.

☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
24. The only social responsibility of a company should be to deliver a profit to its shareholders. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

25. The rich are too highly taxed. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

26. Those with the ability to pay should have access to higher standards of medical care. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

27. Governments should penalize businesses that mislead the public. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

28. A genuine free market requires restrictions on the ability of predator multinationals to create monopolies. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Now a look at some of your personal social values ...

29. Abortion, when the woman’s life is not threatened, should always be illegal. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

30. All authority should be questioned. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

31. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

32. Taxpayers should not be expected to prop up any theatres or museums that cannot survive on a commercial basis. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

33. Schools should not make classroom attendance compulsory. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

34. All people have their rights, but it is better for all of us that different sorts of people should keep to their own kind. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

35. Good parents sometimes have to spank their children. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

36. It's natural for children to keep some secrets from their parents. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

37. Possessing marijuana for personal use should not be a criminal offence. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

38. The prime function of schooling should be to equip the future generation to find jobs. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

39. People with serious inheritable disabilities should not be allowed to reproduce. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

40. The most important thing for children to learn is to accept discipline. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

41. There are no savage and civilized peoples; there are only different cultures. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

42. Those who are able to work, and refuse the opportunity, should not expect society’s support. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

When you are troubled, it’s better not to think about it, but to keep busy with more cheerful things. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

43. First-generation immigrants can never be fully integrated within their new country. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

44. What’s good for the most successful corporations is always, ultimately, good for all of us. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
45. No broadcasting institution, however independent its content, should receive public funding. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
- ... and how you see the wider society.
46. Our civil liberties are being excessively curbed in the name of counter-terrorism. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
47. A significant advantage of a one-party state is that it avoids all the arguments that delay progress in a democratic political system. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
48. Although the electronic age makes official surveillance easier, only wrongdoers need to be worried. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
49. The death penalty should be an option for the most serious crimes. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
50. In a civilized society, one must always have people above to be obeyed and people below to be commanded. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree

51. Abstract art that doesn't represent anything shouldn't be considered art at all. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
52. In criminal justice, punishment should be more important than rehabilitation.
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
53. It is a waste of time to try to rehabilitate some criminals. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
54. The businessperson and the manufacturer are more important than the writer and the artist. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
55. Mothers may have careers, but their first duty is to be homemakers. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
56. Almost all politicians promise economic growth, but we should heed the warnings of climate science that growth is detrimental to our efforts to curb*
global warming.
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
57. Making peace with the establishment is an important aspect of maturity. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree

If you got through that okay, you'll find these propositions on religion a breeze.

58. Astrology accurately explains many things. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
59. You cannot be moral without being religious. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
60. Charity is better than social security as a means of helping the genuinely disadvantaged. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
61. Some people are naturally unlucky. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
62. It is important that my child’s school instills religious values. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
- Finally, a look at sex.
63. Sex outside marriage is usually immoral. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree
64. A same sex couple in a stable, loving relationship should not be excluded from the possibility of child adoption. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Agree

- ☐ Strongly Agree
65. Pornography, depicting consenting adults, should be legal for the adult population. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree
66. What goes on in a private bedroom between consenting adults is no business of the state. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree
67. No one can feel naturally homosexual. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree
68. These days openness about sex has gone too far. *
- Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

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