

CGS PEACE REPORT

an initiative of BPO

CGS CENTRE FOR
GENOCIDE
STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF DHAKA



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March- April 2018



**Crime and Violence in
Bangladesh:
An analysis from BPO**

**Legal Aspects of General
Election in Bangladesh**

**Global Overview on
Electoral Violence**

**Understanding Electoral
Violence through
Micronarratives:
Chattogram and Sirajganj**

Photo courtesy: The Daily Star

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BPO- Bangladesh Peace Observatory



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From the Editor's Desk

Not sure whether violence prompted humans to take recourse to election or whether election resulted in violence, the relationship between the two is an old one, but not something that is intrinsic and cannot be eradicated. Indeed, if we were to look at history in this part of the world, a form of election or 'electing' the chief or *raja* by the community was present as early as the Vedic period (1500-500 BC). Noteworthy here is the fact that Gopala, the Pala king of early medieval Bengal, was elected by the feudal chiefs. In fact, some critics maintain that 'democracy' (and election being a central part of it) was invented in Bengal and not in Greece.¹ But then it never got institutionalized, and, indeed, not until the British left the Indian sub-continent in 1947 did election become an agreed means of having governmental leaders. Bangladesh, however, had to wait for another 25 years, with the Pakistan military agreeing to hold direct elections based on the principle of adult franchise only in 1970. But once election was held it led to the breakup of Pakistan with two wings. The eastern wing, while getting the majority of the parliamentary seats was denied power to form the government by the Pakistan military and after suffering a genocide at the hands of the latter and nine months of liberation war, emerged as Bangladesh in 1971.

Post-1971 Bangladesh, however, could not continue with elected governments for long (the military seized power in 1975), nor could it hold violence-free elections. Indeed, even after the return of civilian government in 1991 electoral violence continued and became the new normal. The consenting role of civil society also could not be reproduced. In fact, as a result of protracted protest for democracy and call for election, with members of civil society often engaged in violent campaign, the civil society itself ended up being polarized and violent. One cannot help being reminded here of the Jungian inter-generational reproduction of the archetype of evil and its presence in the minds of people as collective unconscious ready to emerge in the midst of chaoplexity. Paradoxically, as Jung maintains, we can 'get out of the grip of evil if we befriend it.'²

This certainly would require construction of newer structures with the goal of reproducing an archetype of tolerance across generations. Electoral democracy, unfortunately, seems to be taking us in the opposite direction. And this is probably the reason why Mahatma Gandhi was against electoral democracy, calling it a 'heartless

¹ Sohail Inayatullah, *Understanding Sarkar* (Leiden: Brill, 2002). See also, P.R. Sarkar, *Prout in a Nutshell*. Translated by Acharaya Vijayananda Avadhuta (Calcutta: Ananda Marga Publications, 1988).

² Carl Gustav Jung, *The Jung Reader*, edited by David Tacey (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 34.

doctrine' because 51 percent of the people can impose their will on the 49 percent.³ The situation is even more dire now, with Narendra Modi getting two-third of the parliamentary seats with 31 percent of popular votes and Donald Trump becoming President of the United States despite getting nearly three million less votes than Hillary Clinton. Politicians have found ways to make best use of the heartless doctrine even without a majority! But then, this would be the case if 'democracy' is limited to holding elections only. And there lies our hope! In fact, what is required for democracy to thrive and tolerance to take roots is *election plus*, with structures in areas ranging from political parties, education, religion, culture, gastronomy, including economy, devoid of singularity. A quick reading of the *CGS Peace Report* will show that Bangladesh has a long way to go, requiring hard work and creative inputs not only in the areas indicated above but also from each and every person craving for emancipatory futures.

Imtiaz Ahmed

Director, CGS

³ Thomas Pantham, "Beyond Liberal Democracy: Thinking with Mahatma Gandhi," in Thomas Pantham and Kenneth L. Deutsch (ed.), *Political Thought in Modern India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1986), p. 330.

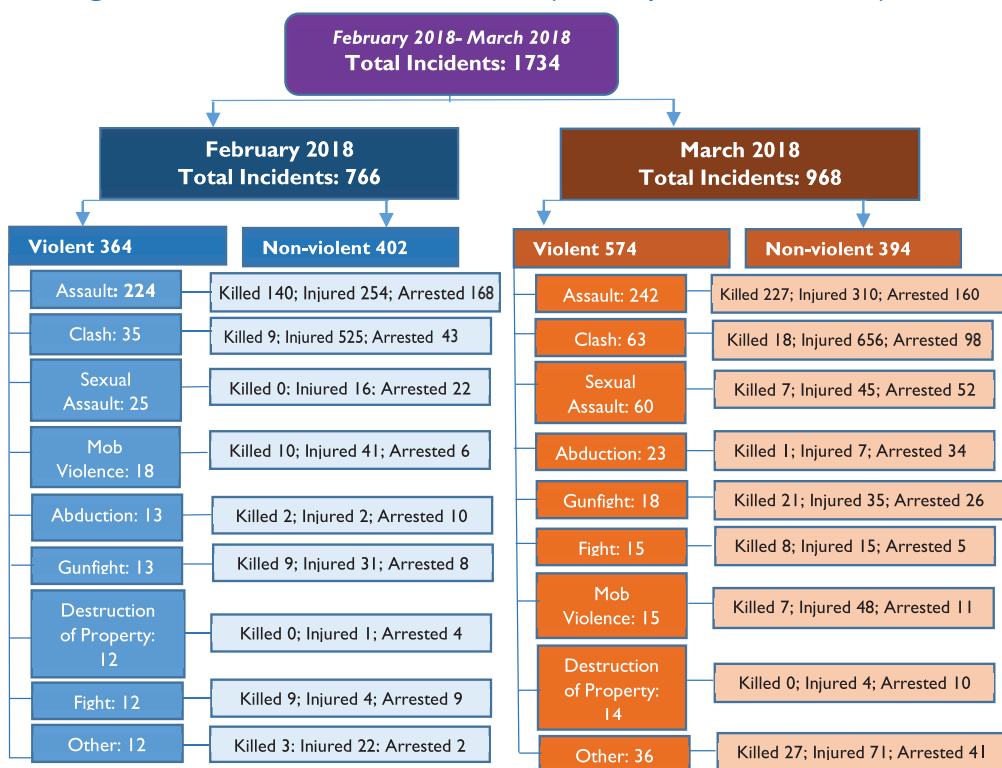
Crime and Violence in Bangladesh: An Analysis from BPO

Part A: Violence Update: (February 2018- March 2018)

The Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) records a wide range of violence using news reports from prominent national dailies. From February 2018 to March 2018, BPO recorded 1734 violent⁴ and

non-violent⁵ incidents all over the country. The **figure 1** below segregates these incidents into some general categories by type of violence.

Figure 1: An Overview of Incidents (February 2018-March 2018)



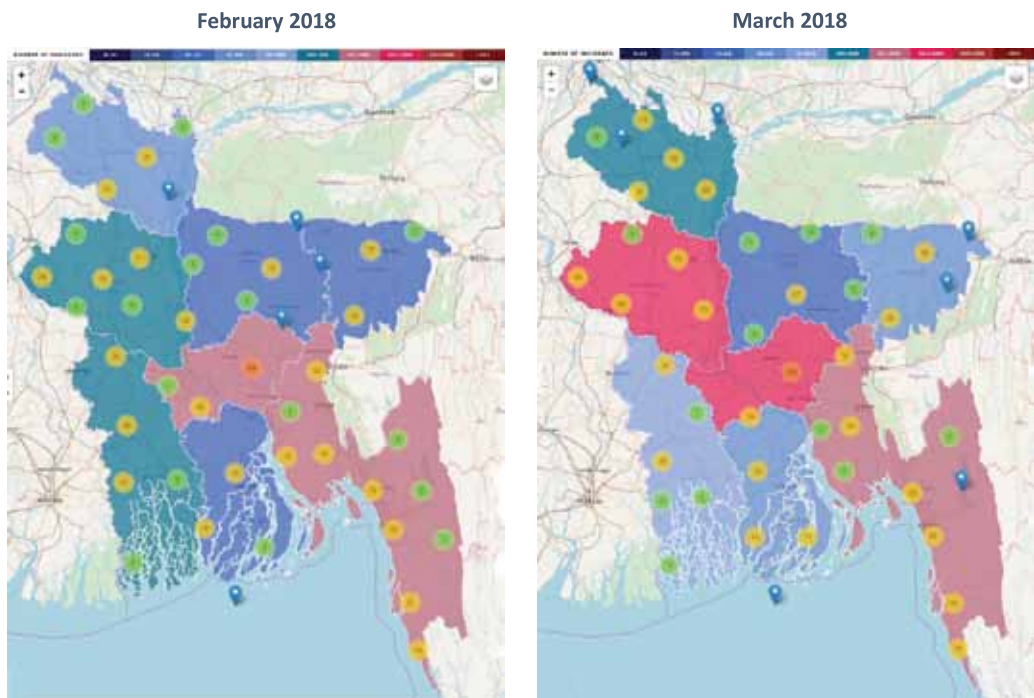
⁴ Violent Incident: According to BPO Codebook: The reported incident involved the intentional use of physical force by an individual or group against another individual or group, in a manner that resulted or could have resulted in death, injury or any other form of physical harm to persons or property.

⁵ Non-violent Incident: According to BPO Codebook: The reported incident did not involve the intentional use of physical force by an individual or group against another individual or group, in a manner that resulted or could have resulted in death, injury or any other form of physical harm to persons or property, e.g. Arrest, Peaceful Protest, Rescue and Recovery.

Figure 2 demonstrates the comparative prevalence of these incident's distribution and concentration into clusters across Bangladesh. A total of 18 green spots⁶, 22 yellow spots⁷ and one red spot⁸ in February 2018 and 14 green spots, 23 yellow spots and one red spot in March

2018 are identifiable through these maps. The prevalence distribution and the increased incident per spot suggest that, with lower green spots and higher yellow spots, March 2018 shows denser clusters with higher number of incidents than February 2018.

Figure 2: BPO Cluster Maps



⁶ Spots with 2-10 incidents

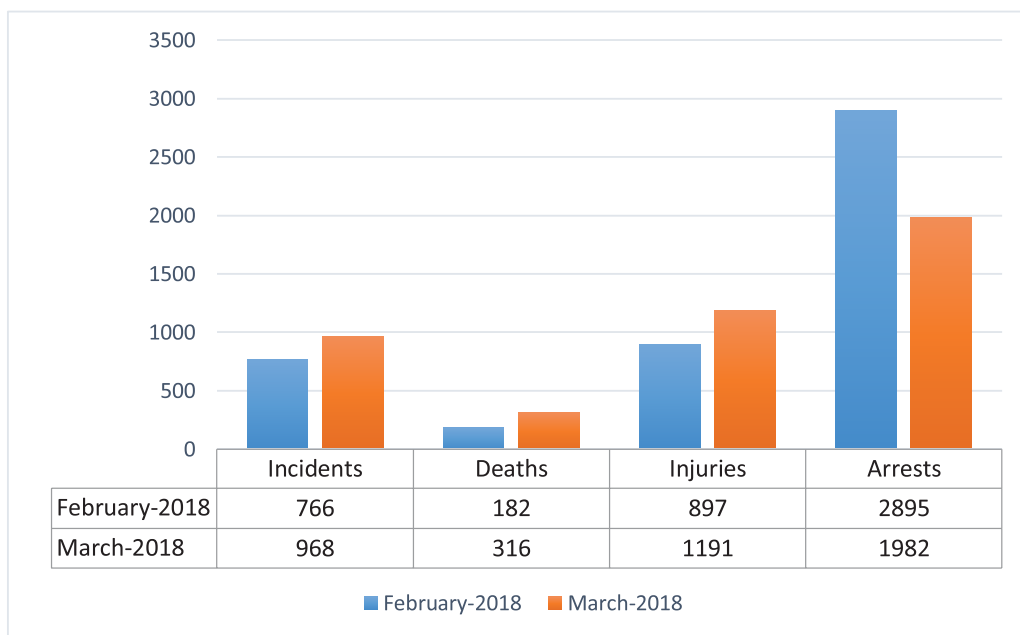
⁷ Spots with 10-99 incidents

⁸ Spots with 100+ incidents

A simpler analysis of **figure 3** substantiates the cluster map data and makes a clear distinction between February 2018 and March 2018. With a gap of 202 incidents, the month of March 2018 ends with 134 more deaths, 294 more injuries than the previous month. But in February 2018, a total of 2895 people were arrested, which is 913 more than the people arrested in March 2018. On 8 February, the

Chairperson of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Begum Khaleda Zia was jailed for five years after she was found guilty in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case. Following the arrest, the BNP activists protested all over the country. According to the BPO recorded data, during February 2018, police arrested 855 activists and leaders of BNP.

Figure 3: Comparative analysis of Incidents (February 2018- March 2018)



Again, a divisional distribution of these bi-monthly incidents as in **figure 4** indicates Dhaka at the top in terms of incident and injuries. According to BPO data, 413 incidents in Dhaka were recorded where 158 people were killed and 526 were injured. After Dhaka, the second highest

incidents were recorded in Chattogram division. A total of 397 incidents were recorded where 98 people were killed, 367 were injured and 1427 people were arrested which is the highest count in the two months. Surprisingly, Sylhet division which stands sixth by incident prevalence

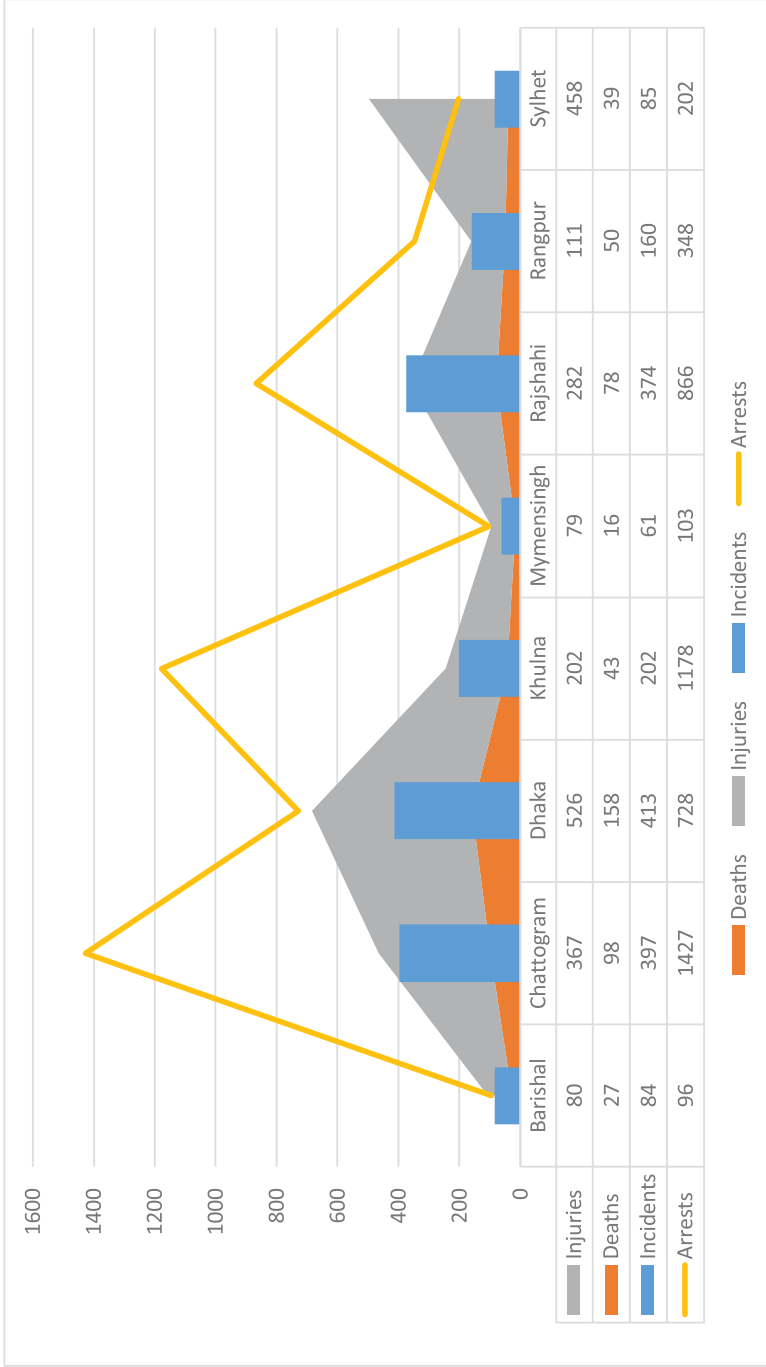
has the second highest recorded injuries. A total of 85 incidents were recorded from Sylhet where 458 people were injured. Notably, on 26 February 2018, a madrasa student was killed and more than 100 others were wounded in a clash between Sunni and Wahabi followers in the Ambari area of Jaintapur Upazila of Sylhet.⁹

Apart from this clash, BPO also recorded 16 more clashes which led to 300 injuries. These clashes were mostly caused by political conflicts, eviction drive, electoral violence, control over market place,

personal dispute, establishing dominance and land-related dispute in Sylhet division over the two months. Khulna division is placed fourth in terms of incident prevalence and second in terms of arrest. A total of 121 out of 202 recorded incidents in Khulna were arrests where 1178 people were arrested. Special drives of law enforcement agencies against drug peddling and preventing destructive activities have contributed to this increment of arrests for this particular division.

⁹ *The Daily New Age* (E-paper) (2018). Accessed 28 February 2018. Available at: <http://epaper.newagebd.net/28-02-2018/4>

Figure 4: Bi-monthly Divisional Distribution of Incidents (February 2018- March 2018)



Along with the divisional shift of incidents and consequences, over months the numbers of incidents also change their prevalence. **Table I** shows six most frequent types of incidents which took place in February 2018 and March 2018. According to the recorded data, the position of top four types of incidents remains constant in both months. From the fourth position, 35 more sexual assaults, 25 more clashes and 109 more assaults¹⁰ occurred in March 2018 than February 2018, while the number of arrests were less by eight in number. A

total of 2625 people were arrested in 402 recorded incidents in February 2018, while a total of 1545 people were arrested in 394 recorded incidents in March 2018. Apart from the top four, abduction/ hostage/ missing and gunfight was also consecutively common as incidents of higher frequency. In February 2018, BPO recorded a total of 13 incidents of abduction all over the country where 17 people were abducted. On the other hand, ten more incidents of abductions took place in March 2018 than February 2018 where 28 people were abducted.

Table I: Top Six Incidents (February 2018- March 2018)

Top 6 Incidents in February 2018		Top 6 Incidents in March 2018	
Types of Violence	Total Number of Incidents	Types of Violence	Total Number of Incidents
Arrest	402	Arrest	394
Assault	224	Assault	333
Clash	35	Clash	60
Sexual assault	25	Sexual assault	60
Mob violence (large group assault)	18	Other	31
Abduction/hostage/ missing	13	Abduction/hostage/ missing	23
Gunfight	13	Gunfight	18

¹⁰ According to BPO Codebook: One-sided violence by an individual or small group against another individual or small group.

Part B: Incidents Recorded by BPO on Electoral Violence

BPO records incidents related to political competitions in the context of elections as a part of incidents related to competition over political power, or between competing political currents, organizations and movements. Over the year, BPO has recorded a number of violent incidents in which election was the main cross-cutting issue. Since 2017, one City Corporation election has been held in Rangpur, one City Corporation election held in Khulna and a number of by-elections and local elections across the country.

BPO recorded a total of 30 incidents of electoral violence from January 2017- April 2018 in which 22 were two-way violence¹¹ such as clash and fight whereas eight were one-sided violence¹² such as assault and mob-violence. 19 out of 64 districts in Bangladesh experienced electoral violence in which a total of five people were killed in separate incidents (**Figure 5**). Two supporters died in two incidents of clash

between supporters of candidates in the Union Parishad election in Narsingdi in March 2017 and Brahmanbaria in April 2017.^{13,14} On the other hand, in June 2017, a Union Parishad election campaigner of a pro-BNP candidate was hacked to death allegedly by the defeated candidate at Borobagra area in Kamarkhanda, Sirajganj. Police arrested the defeated candidate and one of his associates in this connection.¹⁵

Clash induced fatality continued in the year 2018 with two reported deaths. In one incident, in January 2018, a bystander was shot dead and two unidentified people were injured during a clash between two rival groups over the Union Parishad election in Brahmanbaria.¹⁶ Two months later, in the March 2018 a Jubo Dal leader was killed and another one was injured as supporters of Union Parishad aspirant Chairman attacked a polling station in Tangail which led to a clash.¹⁷

¹¹ According to BPO Codebook two-way violence refers to incidents where two individuals or groups engage in violence against each other, and no clear distinction can be made between perpetrators and targets.

¹² According to BPO Codebook one-sided violence refers to incidents where violence is inflicted by an individual or group upon another, and a clear distinction between perpetrators and targets can be made.

¹³ *The Daily Prothom Alo* (E-paper) (2017). Accessed: 4 April 2017. Available at: <https://goo.gl/EPgqQt>

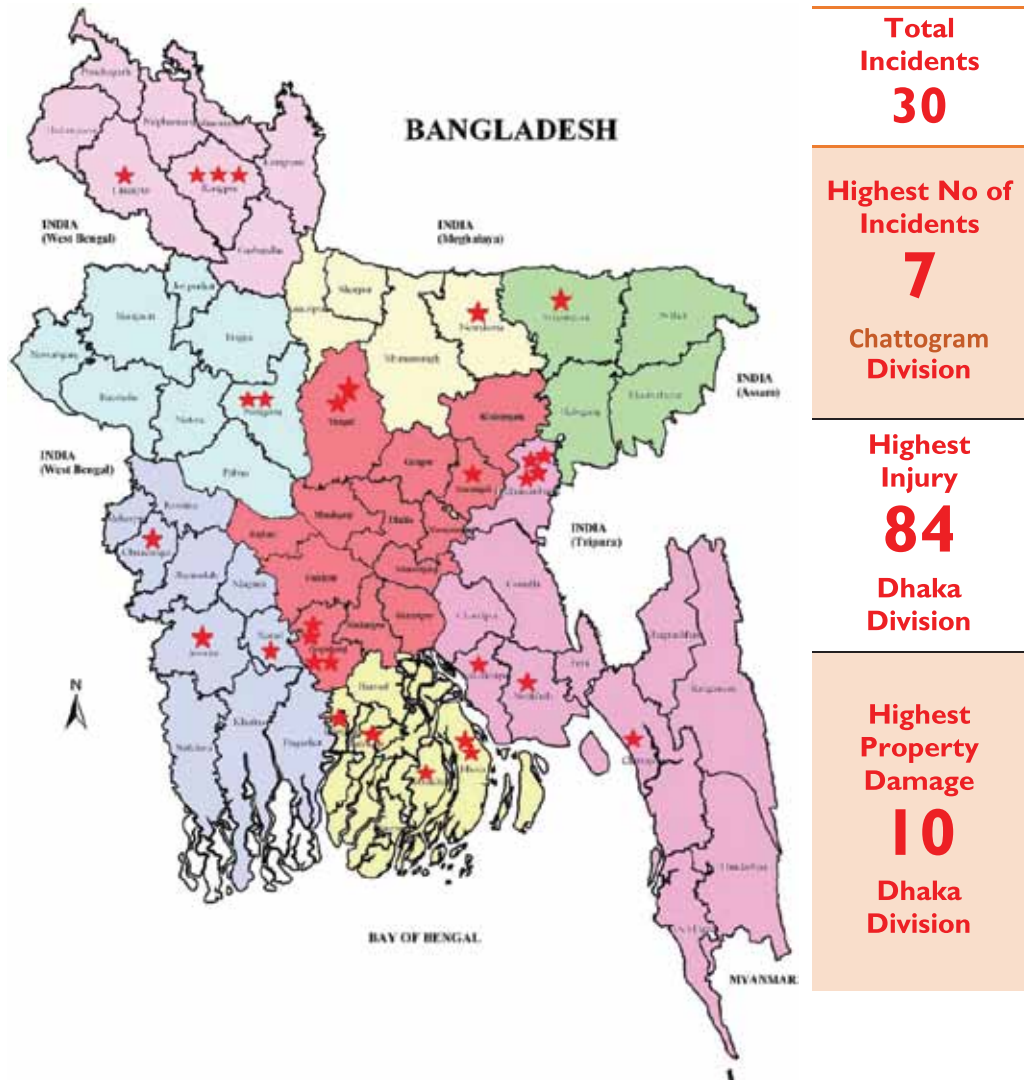
¹⁴ *The Daily Ittefaq* (E-paper) (2017). Accessed: 31 March 2017. Available at: <https://goo.gl/ne8jJB>

¹⁵ *The Daily Star* (E-paper) (2017) Accessed: 17 June 2017. Available at: <https://goo.gl/sJAQ3P>

¹⁶ *The Daily Star* (E-paper) (2018). Accessed 16 January 2018. Available at: <https://goo.gl/r9fqSf>

¹⁷ *The Daily Star* (E-paper) (2018). Accessed 30 March 2018. <https://goo.gl/ATyDkp>

**Figure 5: Geographical Overview of Electoral Violence
(January 2017- April 2018)**



Besides fatality, a total of 306 people including four women were injured in electoral violence over the year from January 2017 to March 2018. 264 out of these 306 people were injured in the recorded 20 incidents of clash. Beside the

clashes, BPO has recorded five incidents of assaults, four mob violence and one fight (**Figure 6**). Police arrested 39 people in connection of perpetrating assaults and engaging in clashes (**Figure 7**).

Figure 6: Types of Electoral Violence (January 2017- April 2018)

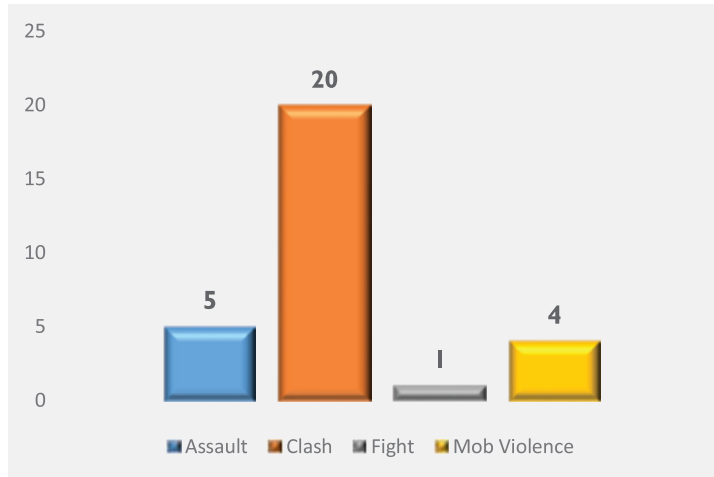
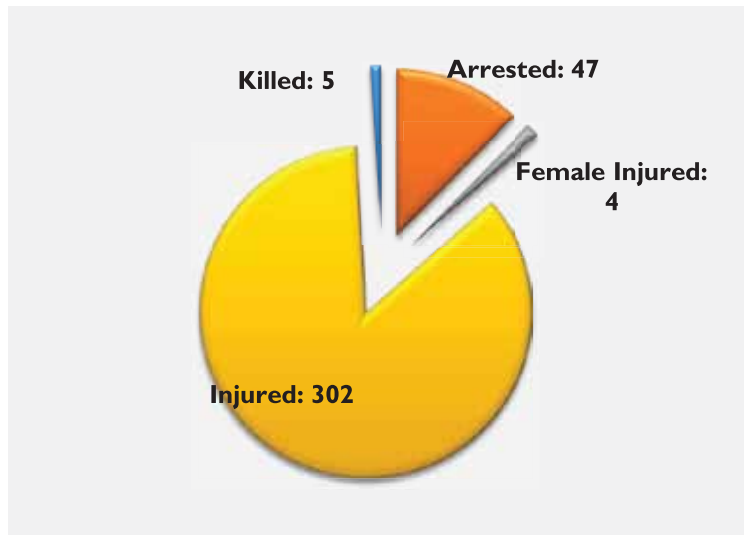


Figure 7: Consequences of Electoral Violence (January 2017- April 2018)



Global Overview on Electoral Violence

Electoral violence is mostly a sub-type of political violence. At times, elections trigger widespread political violence. This violence creates, exacerbate tensions in fragile and conflict-prone situation or oppressive societies.¹⁸ In order to comprehend electoral violence, it is important to look at the global prevalence of the phenomena. This section provides a short overview of issues of tension and violence related to general elections of a

number of countries in the world. The country selection is based upon membership of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and United Nations Security Council (UNSC). SAARC members reflect a regional perspective while UNSC membership represents a diverse global dimension from different parts of the world.

Part A: Electoral Violence in SAARC Member Countries

Founded in 1985. SAARC is an organization of South Asian countries where Bangladesh is one of the founding members. The other founding members are Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Afghanistan joined the organization in 2007.

Afghanistan



The current electoral system of Afghanistan was established by the 2003 constitution under which the first parliamentary and provincial council elections took place in September 2005. Last parliamentary election in Afghanistan was scheduled to be held on 15 October 2016 but it was postponed due to security concerns and disagreement on ensuring a fair vote after a bitterly disputed presidential

election in 2014.¹⁹ From that time, people have demanded adequate budget allocation and security for candidates, election personnel and ballot boxes.²⁰ A suicide bombing which took place in a Kabul voter ID centre killed 50 people in April 2018 has further raised the

¹⁸ EC-UNDP Joint Task Force on Electoral Assistance (2010). "Introduction to Current Trends in Election-related Violence." Accessed: 13 May 2018. Available at: <https://goo.gl/jQ59hm>

¹⁹ Globalsecurity.org (2018). "Afghanistan Parliamentary Election." Accessed: 13 May 2018.

Available at: <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/afghanistan/politics-2018.htm>

²⁰ Reuters (2016). "Afghanistan to Hold Delayed Parliamentary Elections in October." Accessed: 13 May 2018. Available at: <https://goo.gl/QE9NXR>

concerns. Despite the above, Afghanistan's presidential election is due in April 2019 and elections for parliament and district councils are due in October 2018.

Bhutan



Among Bhutan's 634,000 inhabitants, 318,000 are eligible to vote. Also, to guarantee the independence of the elections, members of the royal family and Buddhist monks are not allowed to vote.²¹ Bhutan became a democratic country in 2008 when the first National assembly elections were held and the Constitution was approved. Since then two national elections have been held: 2008 and 2013.²² After the date

of the first election was announced, there were bombing in Thimphu and three other places.²³

India



India, the largest democracy in the world has practiced democracy since it attained independence in 1947. Since then, the country has had 16 parliamentary and 15 presidential elections. The first general elections were held in between 1951-1952. The last general election was held in 2014.²⁴ Financing on election exceeding the legal limit, booth capturing, religious and ethnic tension, tempering

electoral rolls, vote buying²⁵ are alleged defining factors in the election process in India. Consequently, electoral violence is prevalent in both general and local elections in India. For example, in 2011 at least eight people were killed in post-election violence in the

²¹ Inter Parliamentary Union (n.d.). "Bhutan Tshogdu (National Assembly) 2008." Accessed: 13 May 2018. Available at: http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2035_08.htm

²² East Asia Forum (2015). "Democracy Still Taking Root in Bhutan." Accessed: 13 May 2018. Available at: <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2015/07/18/democracy-still-taking-root-in-bhutan/>

²³ BBC (2013). "Bhutan PDP Opposition Party Wins Election." Accessed: 13 May 2018. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-23302048>

²⁴ Factly (2015). "History of Indian Parliament Elections (Lok Sabha)." Accessed: 13 May 2018. Available at: <https://factly.in/history-indian-elections/>

²⁵ *The Financial Times* (2014). "India Elections: A Festival of Vote Buying." Accessed: 13 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/a9d35821-f2f1-3479-8082-2ce1e6fa79cf>

West Bengal.²⁶ Also in May 2014, 43 people were killed in Assam by the rebels during month-long parliamentary election periods.²⁷

The Maldives



In 1978, with the transition of power, a 30-year autocratic rule was established in the Maldives. Due to the constitutional reform in 2004, the situation changed in 2008. It allowed for multiparty participation.²⁸ However, it is alleged that the current government of Maldives exiled the eligible opponents to ensure their position in the upcoming election in September 2018.²⁹

Nepal



Nepal has turned into a federal Republic and abolished its monarchy system in 2008. Before that Nepal's interim parliament declared the country to be a 'federal democratic republic' in 2007 following a general election for the Constituent Assembly in 2008.³⁰ In 2008 the pre-election environment was marred by insecurity and violence, undermining freedom of movement, election-related killing. There were also some notable violations on polling day such as booth capturing, clashes, intimidation, vote buying, underage voting, multiple voting, and proxy voting and so on.³¹ According to the Constitution of 2015, the first national and state-level legislature

²⁶ BBC (2011). "India West Bengal State Hit by Post-election Violence." Accessed: 13 May 2018. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-13422832>

²⁷ *The Guardian* (2014). "India Elections: Death Toll Hits 43 after Attacks on Muslims in Assam." Accessed: 13 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/07/india-elections-death-toll-43-attacks-muslims-assam>

²⁸ International Center for Nonviolent Conflict (2012). "The Maldives – From Dictatorship to Democracy, and Back?" Accessed: 13 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/maldives-dictatorship-democracy-back>

²⁹ Globalsecurity.org (2018). "Maldives - 2018 Presidential Election." Accessed: 13 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/indian-ocean/mv-politics-2018.htm>

³⁰ Bal Gopal Shrestha (2008). "The End of Monarchy in Nepal and its Delicate Journey towards a Republic." Accessed: 13 May 2018. Available at: http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/contributions/pdf/CNAS_35_01_03.pdf

³¹ The Carter Center (2008). "Observing the 2008 Nepal Constituent Assembly Election." Accessed: 13 May 2018. Available at: https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/finalreportnepal2008.pdf

elections were held in 2017. Several incidents of attacks on candidate, explosions, violence during the election campaigning were reported during that election in Nepal.³²

Pakistan



The first peaceful transition of power in Pakistan through election took place in 2013 as Asif Ali Zardari's government handed over power to Nawaz Sharif.^{33,34} But the poll remains one of the most violent ones in Pakistan's history after the 1970s. About 170 people were killed and 743 people were injured in 148 violent incidents and most of the targets were politicians.³⁵ In this circumstance and growing uncertainties, the next general election in Pakistan is scheduled for July 2018.

Sri Lanka



Prevalence of electoral violence in Sri Lanka is low due to many reasons including the electoral behavior of the Sri Lankans.³⁶ Yet, the 2015 election was marked by violent incidents of attacks on polling agents, attacks on party office and supporters, prevention of election monitoring and use of firearms.³⁷

³² Prabin Manandhar (2017). "Electoral Violence and Security in Nepal." Accessed: 13 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.spotlightnepal.com/2017/11/27/electoral-violence-and-security-nepal>

³³ Election in Pakistan (n. d.). "Information about Pakistani Election." Accessed: 13 May 2018. Available at: <http://www.electionpakistani.com/>

³⁴ Abraham Shah (2018). "A Defining Election for Pakistan: Can Pakistan Definitely Put the Era of Military Rule Behind It?" Accessed: 13 May 2018. Available at: <https://fpif.org/a-defining-election-for-pakistan>

³⁵ Umair Javed (2018). Elections and Violent Conflict. Accessed: 13 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1406108>

³⁶ ReliefWeb (2010). "Sri Lanka: Electoral Violence and the Sovereignty of the People." Accessed: 13 May 2018. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/sri-lanka/sri-lanka-electoral-violence-and-sovereignty-people>

³⁷ Sri Lanka Brief (2015). "Election Violence: From 6th to the 8th of August 2015." Accessed: 13 May 2018. Available at: <http://srilankabrief.org/2015/08/election-violence-from-6th-to-the-8th-of-august-2015/>

Part B: Electoral Violence in UNSC Member Countries

Apart from the permanent five members of the Council, there are ten non-permanent members who hold seats for a two-year term on a rotating basis by geographic region. Both categories of members have different types of political systems and issues on election.

PERMANENT MEMBERS

France



The number of eligible voters in France is 47 million. Since 2015, more than 230 people were killed in different terror attacks all over France.^{38,39} Press report indicates that about 50,000 police were deployed to patrol and safeguard the country in the last general election of 2017.⁴⁰ After Emmanuel Macron's victory in the presidential election, about 150 people were arrested for offences ranging from throwing missiles at the police to damaging property in post-electoral violence.⁴¹

China



In China, government encourages citizens over the age of 18 and without any criminal record to choose the representatives of local people's congress every five years. The lowest level of the Chinese Legislature has more than 900 million people to elect 2.5 million representatives.⁴²

Due to limited media access, even if there is an incident, news of electoral violence in China cannot be accessed. Nevertheless, after the

³⁸ *The Washington Post* (2018). "French Police Officer who Swapped Himself for Gunman's Hostage Dies." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/hostage-situation-in-southern-france-being-investigated-as-terror-attack/2018/03/23/64649f1e-2e93-11e8-8ad6-fbc50284fce8_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.5bec9fbfcb2

³⁹ *The Guardian* (2017). "Man Shot Dead by French Army After Killing Two People at Marseille Train Station." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/01/french-police-operation-under-way-at-marseille-train-station>

⁴⁰ *The Times of Israel* (2017). Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: "France Has Won,' Says New French President-elect Macron." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/france-has-won-says-new-french-president-elect-macron/>

⁴¹ *Reuters* (2017). "Almost 150 Arrested After Post-Election Trouble in Paris Overnight." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-election-violence/almost-150-arrested-after-post-election-trouble-in-paris-overnight-idUSKBN1840YF>

⁴² *The New York Times* (2016). "We Have a Fake Election': China Disrupts Local Campaigns." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/16/world/asia/beijing-china-local-elections.html>

Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, there have been no incident of protest against the government.

For Hong Kong, China always wanted to ensure democracy and free and fair election.

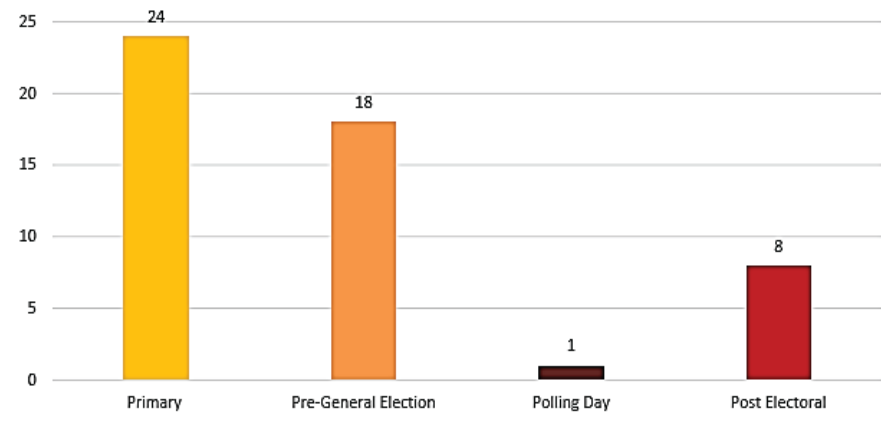
United States of America (USA)



American people exercise their voting power through presidential election. The last presidential election of 2016 is a controversial one with allegations of electoral engineering and violation of privacy. Apart from this, there have been incidents of electoral violence. The violence can be seen from four main phases of election: Primary, Pre-General Election, Polling day and the Post-Election day. The majority of the incidents took place during the primary and Pre-Election phase. The violence came in the form of attacks on either at Trump rallies or anti-Trump protests. During the primary phase, the perpetrators and victims were the supporters of the candidate who were hosting their respective rallies. In the post-election phase, violence was perpetrated by anti-Trump activists and directed at either police or their political opponents.

The graph below segregates the total of 51 incidents of violence that occurred at different phases during the 2016 presidential election (**Figure 8**).

Figure 8: Number of Violent Events by Electoral Phase in USA Presidential Election 2016



Source:

https://government.georgetown.edu/sites/government/files/files/upload/georgetown_-_2016_-_electoral_violence_group_project_1_1.pdf

United Kingdom (UK)



In the UK, there have been riots and disturbances during general elections since 1857.⁴³ Also, there have been instances of interventions by the Royal family and the king in some emergency situations. But after the Second World War, electoral violence became non-prevalent. However, debates on BREXIT and terrorist attacks on Britain during election campaign (especially the Manchester Arena bombing) period have been key determining factors in the last election in June 2017.

Russia



In Russia, electoral violence is hardly visible but a fear of persecution is prevalent. Russian opposition politician Boris Nemtsov's assassination in 2015 was the latest example of political violence.⁴⁴ On 5 May 2018 during the nationwide protests before Vladimir Putin's inauguration for the fourth presidential term, about 1600 people were detained by police. Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalyn was one of those arrestees.

⁴³ Justin Wasserman & Edwin Jaggard (2006). "Electoral Violence in Mid Nineteenth-Century England and Wales." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1468-2281.2006.00393.x>

⁴⁴ Democracy Digest (2016). "Political Violence in Putin's Russia." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.demdigest.org/political-violence-putins-russia>



Group (by region)	Country	Membership Status
African	Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast)	Non-Permanent
African	Equatorial Guinea	Non-Permanent
African	Ethiopia	Non-Permanent
Asia-Pacific	Kuwait	Non-Permanent
Asia-Pacific	Kazakhstan	Non-Permanent
Asia-Pacific	China	Permanent
Eastern European	Poland	Non-Permanent
Eastern European	Russia	Permanent
Latin American and Caribbean (GRULAC)	Bolivia	Non-Permanent
Latin American and Caribbean (GRULAC)	Peru	Non-Permanent
Western European and Others	Sweden	Non-Permanent
Western European and Others	France	Permanent
Western European and Others	Netherlands	Non-Permanent
Western European and Others	United Kingdom	Permanent
Western European and Others	United States of America	Permanent

NON-PERMANENT MEMBERS

Bolivia



Bolivia had its 17th Constitution in 2009. Since then, two general elections have been held in Bolivia. In both the elections, Evo Morales was elected as the President. This is Morales's third term as he had served as the President under the previous Constitution for one term in 2006.⁴⁵ Despite the Constitutional reform and people's decision against re-election through referendum, Morales is all set for a re-election for the fourth consecutive term⁴⁶. Non-violent protests have been held against this.⁴⁷ Voters also spoiled ballots in a judicial election in 2017 as a protest.⁴⁸ In this situation, the country is going to hold its 3rd election under the new Constitution in 2019.

Equatorial Guinea (EG)



Equatorial Guinea's first free general election was held in 1968 after the independence of the country. Since then the country is governed by dictators.⁴⁹ The country holds election regularly after the coup in 1978. But these elections are not free and fair.⁵⁰ Since 1983, each National Assembly election and constitutional referendum has reflected huge public opinion in favor of the ruling party.⁵¹ The ruling party also unleashed violent attacks which left many people injured and incidents of arbitrary arrests of the

⁴⁵ *The Guardian* (2017). "Evo For Ever? Bolivia Scraps Term Limits as Critics Blast 'Coup' to Keep Morales in Power." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/03/evo-morales-bolivia-president-election-limits>

⁴⁶ *The Economist* (2017). "Rights for the Few, Not the Many: Evo Morales Finds A Way to Run For Re-election." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/news/americas/21731949-bolivias-constitutional-court-gives-president-decision-he-wants-evo-morales-finds-way>

⁴⁷ *DW* (2017). "Bolivia: President Evo Morales' Bid to Extend Term Limits Sparks Mass Protest." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <http://www.dw.com/en/bolivia-president-evo-morales-bid-to-extend-term-limits-sparks-mass-protest/a-40900966>

⁴⁸ *Reuters* (2017). "Bolivians Spoil Ballots in Judicial Vote to Protest Morales." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bolivia-politics/bolivians-spoil-ballots-in-judicial-vote-to-protest-morales-idUSKBN1DY215>

⁴⁹ *BBC* (2018). "Equatorial Guinea Country Profile." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13317174>

⁵⁰ Freedom House (2017). "Equatorial Guinea Profile." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/equatorial-guinea>

⁵¹ African Elections Database (n. d.). "Elections in Equatorial Guinea." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <http://africanelections.tripod.com/gq.html>

opposition party members took place.⁵² U.S. Embassy in EG as an observing party stated that the last presidential election in April 2016 was affected by the restriction of freedom of speech, assembly and association; the lack of a level playing field for candidates; continued allegations of candidate and voter intimidation; and a restrictive media environment.⁵³

Ethiopia



Ethiopia has a federal government mainly based on ethnic and language differences led by a dominant party. Elections are held regularly in every 5-years, but the process is questioned because of the ruling party's discriminatory behavior to the opposition parties.⁵⁴ In 2005, the post-election violence surpassed all in the past. 193 people were killed and 763 were injured by the security forces in the month of June and November 2005 and 20000 arrests were recorded when protesters marched against the general election.⁵⁵

Ivory Coast



With a recent history of long civil war, Ivory Coast is now trying to get back to stability with the last election held in 2015.⁵⁶ Before that, post-election violence in 2010 has left severe trauma among the people after at least 1500 deaths and displacement of one million persecuted people from the disputed areas.⁵⁷ The massacre started due to the incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo's unwillingness to accept the result of the election

⁵² EG Justice (2016). "Violence and Retaliation against Political Opposition." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <http://www.egjustice.org/post/violence-and-retaliation-against-political-opposition>

⁵³ U.S. Embassy in Equatorial Guinea (2016). "Thoughts on the Democratic Process in Equatorial Guinea." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://gq.usembassy.gov/thoughts-democratic-process-equatorial-guinea>

⁵⁴ Wondwosen Teshome (2009). "Electoral Violence in Africa: Experience from Ethiopia." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://waset.org/publications/7262/electoral-violence-in-africa-experience-from-ethiopia>

⁵⁵ BBC (2006). "Ethiopian Protesters 'Massacred'." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6064638.stm>

⁵⁶ BBC (2018). "Ivory Coast Country Profile." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13287216>

⁵⁷ BBC (2011). "Q&A: Ivory Coast Crisis." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-11916590>

and to step down.⁵⁸ However, the last election in 2015 has been accepted as fair by some observers.⁵⁹

Kazakhstan



Kazakhstan holds regular elections in every five years for presidential and parliamentary election.⁶⁰ It is following a tradition to hold an early election for the past few terms. The current President, Nursultan Nazarbayev has been the country's President for five terms since the breakdown of the Soviet Union⁶¹, by winning in every poll held in this timeline practically unopposed.⁶² The elections, including the last election of 2015 are not seen as free and fair by many international observers.⁶³ In addition to this, the ruling party is accused of suppressing the opposition and targeted attacks on the opposition party personnel.⁶⁴

Kuwait



Kuwait is a Constitutional Monarchy and holds general elections for 50 seats in national assembly for four-year terms. But the last 15 national assemblies could not finish their full term.⁶⁵ Kuwait politics and electoral systems went under some unrest during 2010-2013 due to

⁵⁸ *The Time* (2010). "Ivory Coast's Disputed Presidential Election." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2035342,00.html>

⁵⁹ International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) (2015). "Post-Election Q&A: Côte d'Ivoire's 2015 Presidential Elections." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <http://www.ifes.org/news/post-election-qa-cote-divoires-2015-presidential-elections>

⁶⁰ The Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan (n. d.). "Brief information about electoral system of the RK." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.election.gov.kz/eng/electoral-system-of-the-rk/brief-information-about-electoral-system-of-the-rk.php>

⁶¹ Freedom House (2012). "Kazakhstan." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2012/kazakhstan>

⁶² BBC (2018). "Kazakhstan Country Profile." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-15263826>

⁶³ BBC (2012). "Kazakhstan Holds Elections Marred by Deadly Riots." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16564797>

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch (2005). "Kazakhstan: New Restrictions Put Election at Risk." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2005/10/11/kazakhstan-new-restrictions-put-election-risk>

⁶⁵ BBC (2013). "Q&A: Kuwait Parliamentary Election." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-23449066>

reforms in voting rules and the possible effect of the Arab spring.⁶⁶ The opposition parties have gained more seats in the last election than the past.⁶⁷

The Netherlands



The Netherlands is an absolute monarchy country. The Head of the state is the king.⁶⁸ The King and the Ministers together make up the Government of the Netherlands.⁶⁹



Therefore, the government of Netherlands is composed of the monarch and the cabinet. The monarch's function is limited to form the government and has no direct influence on the decisions of the government. The ministers from the Council of Ministers who initiate and formulate government policies.⁷⁰

Peru



Peru's election system is based on their 1993 Constitution where the people directly elect a Head of state (the President) as well as a legislature for a five years term. The last election in Peru was held in 2016 where Pedro Pablo Kuczynski from Peruvians for Change party won with 50.1% of popular votes. There has been an incident of pre-election violence where three people including two military personnel were killed and six injured in an attack allegedly staged by leftist Shining Path Rebels on the eve of Peru's presidential election.⁷¹ Despite this, millions of Peruvians headed to the voting booth. But the election has been further marred by the unexpected popularity of Keiko Fujimori, the daughter of the country's ex-dictator Alberto Fujimori.⁷²

⁶⁶ BBC (2018). "Kuwait Profile – Timeline." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14647211>

⁶⁷ Al Jazeera (2016). "Kuwait Poll: Opposition Wins Nearly Half of Parliament." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/11/kuwait-poll-opposition-wins-parliament-161127060822207.html>

⁶⁸ World Atlas (2017). "What Type of Government Does the Netherlands Have?" Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-type-of-government-does-the-netherlands-have.html>

⁶⁹ Government of the Netherlands official Website (n. d.). "Government." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.government.nl/government>

⁷⁰ World Atlas (2017). "What Type of Government Does the Netherlands Have?" Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-type-of-government-does-the-netherlands-have.html>

⁷¹ Reuters (2016). "Three Killed in Suspected Rebel Attack Ahead of Peru Election." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-peru-election-violence/three-killed-in-suspected-rebel-attack-ahead-of-peru-election-idUSKCN0X60T1>

⁷² DW (2016). "Peru Votes in Turbulent Election." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <http://www.dw.com/en/peru-votes-in-turbulent-election/a-19177127>

Poland



Since 1919, the country has been holding regular elections. The next national election of Poland will be held in 2019. Recent parliamentary election of Poland was held on 25 October 2015 along with its multi-party political system.⁷³ But the fairness of election is feared to be violated due to the new electoral reform bill which includes change in the member selection process at the Polish National Election Commission, limiting the power of the Commission over the National Election Bureau, and introduction to an ambiguous ballot marking count.^{74,75}

Sweden



The Kingdom of Sweden holds election once every four years to determine the governing body. In general, there are four types of election in this country: Riksdag⁷⁶, the Country Council Assembly, Municipal Council and the European Parliament. The last national election of Sweden was held in 2014 and the next one is due in September 2018.

⁷³ The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (n, d). "Elections in Poland." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/poland>

⁷⁴ *The Washington Post* (2018). "Democratic Elections in Poland Face a New Threat." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/01/11/free-elections-in-poland-face-new-threats-from-a-new-electoral-reform-bill/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.b5a030bd69bb

⁷⁵ *Reuters* (2017). "Fair Elections in Poland at Risk from Ruling Party Bill, Opposition Says." Accessed: 14 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-politics-election/fair-elections-in-poland-at-risk-from-ruling-party-bill-opposition-says-idUSKBN1DN23I>

⁷⁶ The Riksdag is the national legislature and the supreme decision-making body of Sweden.

Legal Aspects of General Election in Bangladesh

The Election Commission (EC) complies with a number of legal provisions to accommodate different aspects of election. The Commission was constituted in accordance with Article 118 of the Constitution and follows the Representation of the People Order, 1972 to formulate orders, rules and regulations. According to the Article 94 of the Order,

the Commission may, by notification in the official Gazette, make rules for carrying out the purposes of this Order.⁷⁷ Therefore, to meet the purpose of the Constitution and the Order, the Commission has so far come up with the following rules, guidelines and also possess authority granted by a number of Acts relevant to general election.

- The Delimitation of Constituencies Ordinance, 1976.⁷⁸
- The Members of Parliaments (Determination of Dispute) Act, 1980.⁷⁹
- Presidential Election Rules, 1991.^{80,81}
- Election Officer (Special Provisions) Act, 1991.
- National Parliament (Reserved Women Seats) Election Act, 2004.⁸²
- Political Party Registration Rules, 2008.
- Election Commission (Officers and Employees) Recruitment Rules, 2008.

⁷⁷ Legislative and Parliamentary Affairs Division; Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs (n, d.). "The Representation of the People Order, 1972 (President's Order No. 155 Of 1972)." Accessed: 13 May 2018. Available at: http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/print_sections_all.php?id=424

⁷⁸ Under this Ordinance for the purpose of elections to the seats in Parliament, the Commission can divide the country into as many single territorial constituencies as the number of members to be elected under clause (2) of Article 65 of the Constitution related to Establishment of Parliament.

⁷⁹ This is an Act to make provision for empowering the Election Commission to give full effect to the provisions of clause (4) of Article 66 of the Constitution related to Qualifications and disqualifications for election to Parliament. For the purpose of hearing and determination of a dispute the Election Commission shall have all the powers of a Civil Court while trying a suit under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908 (V of 1908).

⁸⁰ According to Article 3 of the Presidential Election Act of 1991:

1. The Election Commissioner shall manage the conducting of every presidential election and shall act at such election as Election Officer.
2. The Election Commissioner shall prepare an electoral register for the purpose of conducting elections and shall make it public by notification.
3. The Election Commissioner shall preside over the meeting of the Members of Parliament convoked for the election of the President and shall, with the assistance of employees appointed by the Commission, conduct the election.

⁸¹ The Commissioner can act as per the Rules of Procedure followed by the Speaker in the Parliament to maintain discipline during presidential election.

⁸² This Act repealed the Representation of the People (Seats for Women Members) Order, 1973 (P. O. No. 17 of 1973).

- Code of Conduct for Political Parties and Candidates' in Parliamentary Elections, 2008.⁸³
- The Conduct of Election Rules, 2008.⁸⁴
- Electoral Rolls Act, 2009.
- Election Commission Secretariat Act, 2009.⁸⁵
- National Identity Registration Act, 2010 (Amendment 2013).
- Independent Candidate (Verification of Support for Candidates) Rules, 2011.⁸⁶
- Voter List Regulations, 2012 (Amendment 2014).
- Guidelines for Foreign Election Observer, 2013.^{87,88}
- Guidelines for Local Election Observer 2013.
- National Identity Registration Rules, 2014 (Amendment 2015).⁸⁹

⁸³ Under this Act:

4. Candidates are prohibited to make or promise donation.
5. Official bungalow, rest house, circuit house or any government office cannot be used as a place for promotion or against any party or candidate.
6. No public meeting or rally can be conducted on any road that can obstruct the movement of the people and no other person can perform similar public meetings or paths on their behalf. In cases of any violation, the victim cannot take the law into own hands and must go to the police for help.
7. Candidates must comply to the regulations of showdown, expenditure, wall painting, leaflet distribution and other ideas of electoral campaign.
8. A candidate cannot: campaign on religious sites, make religiously derogatory comment, damage private property and carry arms.

⁸⁴ According to the Article 94 (The Commission may, by notification in the official Gazette, make rules for carrying out the purposes of this Order) of the Representation of the People Order, 1972, the commission formulated this rule and its amendments of 2013 and 2017. This rule provides instruction manual/ general ideas of vote casting, duties of associated officers, expenditure, electoral symbols and sample forms.

⁸⁵ This Act was made according to Article 118 (4) of the Constitution by which the Commission is independent in the exercise of its functions and subject only to this Constitution and any other law.

⁸⁶ The commission formulated the Rule on the basis of Sub-clause (a) of Clause 3(a) of Article 12 of the Representation of the People Order, 1972 where in the case of an independent candidate, a list of signatures of one percent electors of the concerned constituency: Provided that such list need not to be delivered if the independent candidate has previously been elected in any parliamentary election.

⁸⁷ In pursuance to the provision of 91C of the Representation of the People Order, 1972, The Commission made and promulgate this guidelines for appointment and deployment for Foreign Election Observer.

⁸⁸ Ministry of Home Affairs will instruct the concerned Deputy Commissioners and Superintendents of Police to provide the necessary security to the foreign observers and journalists during their visit to different polling stations of the country. The sponsoring organizations of the observers and journalists must provide their itinerary of visits well ahead of time to the Ministry of Home Affairs for ensuring the needed service. Bangladesh Government or the Election Commission will not be responsible for any mishap encountered by any such visitor who follows his own program.

⁸⁹ The Commission formulated this rule in accordance with section 22 (Commission may, by prior approval of the Government, make rules for carrying out the purposes of this Act, by notification in the official gazette and in addition to the optional electronic gazette notification.), section 3, 5, 7 and 9 of National Identity Registration Act, 2010 (Act No. 3 of 2010), with the prior permission of the government.

- National ID card and Stored Data-databases (Amendment, Verification and Supply) Regulations, 2014.⁹⁰

Besides the General Elections, there are also a number of Acts and Rules related to the following elections:

- **City Corporation Election:**

- City Corporation (Election Behavior) Rules, 2016
- City Corporation Elections (Electronic Voting Machine) Rules, 2010
- Local Government (City Corporation) Act, 2009
- Local Government (City Corporation) Election Rules, 2010 (Amendment 2016)

- **District Council Election:**

- District Council (Election Behavior) Rules, 2016
- District Council Act, 2000
- District Council Election Rules, 2016

- **Upazila Parishad Election:**

- Upazila Parishad (Election Behavior) Rules, 2016
- Upazila Parishad Act, 1998
- Upazila Parishad Elections (Electronic Voting Machine) Rules, 2013 (Amendment 2014, 2015, 2016)

- **Municipality Election:**

- Municipality (Election Behavior) rules, 2015
- Municipal Elections (Electronic Voting Machine) Rules, 2012
- Local Government (Municipality) Law, 2009
- Local Government (Municipality) Election Rules, 2010 (Amendment 2015, 2017)

- **Union Council/ Parishad Election:**

- (Union Parishad) Election Rules, 2010
- Union Parishad (Election Behavior) Rules, 2016
- Union Parishad Elections (Electronic Voting Machine) Rules, 2015
- Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009 (Amendment 2010)
- Local Government (Union Parish) Election Rules, 2010 (Amendment 2015)

⁹⁰ The Commission framed the regulations, with the power given in Article 23 (the Commission may, by notification in the official gazette and in addition to the electronic gazette optionally, make regulations for the purpose of this Act.) of the National Identity Registration Act, 2010 (Act No. 3 of 2010), under section 8, section 13 of sub-section (3) and section 13A.

However, the Representation of the People Order (RPO) is now almost at the final stage of amendment with 34 recommendations from the Commission. Recommendations include: advance voting of the polling officials and members of the law enforcement agencies, provisions for the use of electronic voting machine or digital voting machine, the power to transfer election officials within 24 hours, making independent candidacy easier, increasing punishment for the polling officials, quickly resolving election-related allegations and informing the complainant, raising the amount of deposit to Tk50,000

from Tk 20,000, and appointing third eyes to enquire about election irregularities and violation of electoral code of conduct. But according to Election Commissioner Ms. Kabita, no proposal has been made to change the definition of the law enforcement agencies.⁹¹ As a result of the existing law, the amended RPO will have no option to deploy the army as members of law enforcement in the polls. Still, the amendment is yet to be made and the Commission is uncertain whether it will be possible to make the amendments ahead of the 11th parliamentary election expected in December 2018.^{92,93}

⁹¹ According to the RPO "law enforcing agency" means any Police Force, Armed Police Battalion, Rapid Action Battalion, Ansar Force, Battalion Ansar, Border Guard Bangladesh and Coast Guard Force

⁹² *Dhaka Tribune* (2018). "RPO Amendment Proposal: Army Not Deployable as Member of Law Enforcement." Accessed: 13 May 2018. Available at: [https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2018/01/](https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2018/01/30/rpo-amendment-proposal-army-not-deployable-as-member-of-law-enforcement/)

[30/rpo-amendment-proposal-army-not-deployable-as-member-of-law-enforcement/](https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2018/01/30/rpo-amendment-proposal-army-not-deployable-as-member-of-law-enforcement/)

⁹³ *Dhaka Tribune* (2018). "EC Uncertain over RPO Amendment before Polls." Accessed: 13 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/politics/2018/04/12/ec-uncertain-over-rpo-amendment-polls/>



Interview:

Dr. Tofail Ahmed⁹⁴

What is your overall observation on our culture of election manifestation/manipulations and electoral violence cultivated in the society over the years?

I would say, election is not a full-proof system to choose government or leadership for a country. There are many built-in limitations in electoral system. In spite of those limitations, we have no better alternatives but to rely on 'election' for democratically choosing government or peaceful transfer of power. We are yet to find other means for overcoming the limitations of election. Until then, we have to go by the existing rules of election and electoral processes.

The elections in western developed societies and developing societies like ours differ in letter and spirit. We do not consider election as a means of democratic practice but a means to achieve an end and that 'end' is getting control over political power. It does not necessarily mean that 'means' should be 'fair'. In our current political culture, end justifies the means. Political power in this country can give you everything. Political power has become the

key to earn quick money, lucrative business, social prestige, importance, influence and enrichment. Above all, the economic implication of politics is immense.

“We do not consider election as a means of democratic practice but a means to achieve an end and that ‘end’ is getting control over political power.”

In the absence of democratic moral, culture and values, election naturally become the battle of forces. At best election could have been games under certain rules. When it is taken as battle of annihilation of opponents by any means fair and foul; manipulations, intimidation, violence are natural weapons of the election battles. In Bangladesh at the current juncture, election is a battle of forces often violent rather than a process of knowing people's consent in the games of governance.

⁹⁴ Professor (Adjunct), Department of Political Science and Sociology, North South University, Dhaka.

What is your observation on general elections in this regard?

The first election in independent Bangladesh was held in 1973. And it was a violent election. That time during the post-liberation period, arms were available at civil hands and it was indiscriminate and widely used. This I think is the beginning of electoral violence in Bangladesh. I also think that present-day general elections are less violent compared to the elections in the 1970s and 1980s considering the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of small weapons. The idea of Caretaker Government was introduced because of that situation. Governments in power were always influencing elections and ensuring their victory by any means.

Since 2014, during 10th parliament election, nation went back to the pre-care taker partisan or election under ruling regime system. The process and outcome of elections national and local both have become very different.

“Political parties do not practice democracy within and seem bankrupt in terms of idea, ideal and ideology.”

People’s minimum constitutional rights are not respected, elections are fraudulent, opposition are almost in the process of annihilation, constitutional bodies including

judiciary are in disarray, there prevails a gross political apathy among the citizen and resultant ‘culture of silence’ in the public domain including media made whole environment unpredictable and alarming. National election under such a situation would merely be “God’s will”.

How elections affect the intra-party dynamics of different political parties in Bangladesh?

If we talk about intra-party or inter party situation in Bangladesh, two very funny systems are emerging. Situation-1, big political parties are in the process of transforming themselves into a ‘corporate house’. One single person or family owns it and few others are appointed as subordinates like directors, deputies and in many more subordinate positions. Policy debate and discussions are almost absent. Just a culture of loyalty prevails. Situation-2, the smaller parties are gradually taking the shape or fate of becoming ‘cottage industries’. They manage their parties by using mostly family labor. They often work as a sub-contractor of big parties. Also, big parties often favor the small parties by providing some manpower to do rallies and programmes to sustain their existence.

Political parties do not practice democracy within and seem bankrupt in terms of idea, ideal and ideology. Parties look like sum total of innumerable splinter groups and fractions under chiefs and sub-chiefs. They mend and fend their respective fractions and utilize their group force as and when required. During elections candidates

largely depends on their groups not very much on party basis. They need party only for party's electoral symbols. So when one stands as a candidate for any election, other groups automatically becomes belligerent. The supporters also only follow the group leader, not the party. You may have a look at the political posters. Posters are not printed by parties but by individual leaders. Each of the poster contains 6-7 pictures of different sizes starting from the party chiefs, their sons and daughters, local patrons and lastly the biggest picture in the poster is of the person who printed it. This is the manifestation of erosion of party discipline and rise of patron-client personalized politics.

“Political parties must respect their own constitutions and have to have manifesto, vision and programmes from which voters will choose their representatives to run the country.”

In the absence of healthy and democratic policy debate, the party management depends on group leadership. Local parties' remains in the pockets of few group leaders. Group leadership depends

on their respective group strengths. The central party also evaluate the local leaders on their group strengths. Depending on the situation where group interest suffer they become violent. If other group of the same party even come to their way, they will not hesitate to resort to violence and crush them.

The parties which are ideologically organized have a degree of intra-party solidarity. Whether you like it or not, there are no intra-party violence in the Communist party and Jamaat e Islami. They are organized under ideological umbrella, follow a disciplined hierarchy and can impose that at different rank and file of the party.

Do you think democratic practice within political parties can help to reduce electoral violence?

Political parties are the vehicle to carry forward politics. Political parties must respect their own constitutions and have to have manifesto, vision and programmes from which voters will choose their representatives to run the country. But now the degeneration of political parties is fathomless. I do not know whether it is good or bad, the monolithic system of political parties is a history. Following ideology or legacy of a leader is also the issue of the past. So what binds them together? The answer is Personal interest. And the politics only create a shield around you to protect your personal ambition, business interest, cover-up crimes and shelter from opponents.

In political science, there are different categorization of political parties. Political parties in Bangladesh indeed falls in general categorization of political science. However, let me make a category based on political realities of Bangladesh. We have multiparty and dominant party system. But now we have reached into a single dominant party system according to the structure of the present parliament. The crisis here is not to determine who will form the government. The crisis here is to find opposition. Not a tame domesticated opposition but a vocal and active opposition. In our political system, there is no stake for the opposition. Therefore, no matter which party comes in opposition, they boycott parliament. As a result, the parliamentary system is failing to make government accountable.

Once elected, a member of parliament enjoys immense luxury and facilities far more than their electoral expenses. The parliamentary committees are also aligned with the ruling party and in many cases there are conflict of interest among the chairs and members of the committees. So there left no separation of power amongst the legislature, judiciary and executive. A member of parliament can practice executive power by force and persuasion without holding office. For example, to my knowledge, the government has undertaken four projects to give advantage to the sitting MPs in the upcoming election worth almost 30,000 crore taka. While the task of Member of Parliament was to make government and executives accountable

for all state expenditures, MPs themselves are spending money directly to appease their constituencies.

“In our political system, there is no stake for the opposition. Therefore, no matter which party comes in opposition, they boycott parliament. As a result, the parliamentary system is failing to make government accountable.”

How do you perceive the role of observer groups and media in preventing electoral violence?

Once observer groups had a significant role more or less during Caretaker Government (1991-2008) and Ersahd (1981-1990) period. But gradually their roles shanked over time. Initially, observers used to observe election without any foreign assistance. Gradually it has become a donor depended NGO activity. As NGOs are controlled by government through some legal and executive instrument, they are scared of politics and rarely make any statement that

may annoy government. The EC has also crippled the authority of observers by regulations. Bringing observers under the rule, the EC has restricted their observation authority and mobility.⁹⁵ Therefore, observer groups have become less relevant.

In the meantime, Media appeared as a dominant actor in direct reporting on elections. Their real-time news were highly appreciated and useful compared to the time-consuming, over cautious and timid reports of observer groups. But the self-censorship of media starting from last five years has put a limit their role and capacity. Print media is somehow still active in playing a crucial role but electronic media is severely constrained. People, therefore, cannot get to see the actual happenings. I assume that unlike previous elections, this time the coverage of voting news will be less in number. The professionalism of media is compromised for job security and

for the interest of the media house owners.

A section of press is also voluntarily absorbed in the politics and compromises objective reporting.

In this context, how do you evaluate the role of social media?

In social media, you may see a lot of things but the distorted and concocted presentation of information should not be relied on. People can post anything uncensored. It can create an impact. But this is not an articulated and positive thing. Fake news is created and organized groups spread those purposefully. There are some recent incidences of violence which were results of the fake and motivated news. Therefore, in the context of Bangladesh, social media is not unquestionably a reliable source. But still it is useful, it is of course a medium of voiceless unorganized

⁹⁵ According to the Guidelines for Foreign Election Observer, 2013- foreign election observers are obligated to follow these code of conducts:

- Respect Sovereignty and International Human Rights.
- Respect the Laws of the Country and the Authority of Electoral Bodies.
- Respect the Integrity of the International Election Observation Mission.
- Maintain Strict Political Impartiality at All Times.
- Do Not Obstruct Election Processes.
- Provide Appropriate Identification.
- Maintain Accuracy of Observations and Professionalism in Drawing Conclusions.
- Refrain from Making Comments to the Public or the Media before the Mission speaks.
- Cooperate with Other Election Observers.

- Maintain Proper Personal Behavior.

Every person who participates in the election observation mission must read and understand this Code of Conduct and must sign a pledge to follow it. If a serious violation is found to have occurred, the observer concerned may have their observer accreditation withdrawn or be dismissed from the election observation mission. The authority for such determinations rests solely with the leadership of the election observation mission. According to the Guidelines for Local Election Observer, 2013- local observers also have to abide by a number of regulations. Determined by the Commission, the key goal of allowing observers is to identify any possible faults in the election by observing the voting process. So that if there is any mistake, it could be resolved in future on the basis of the feedback.

people which need to be allowed and cautiously heard.

In your understanding, what is the role of civil society in this context?

I can quote Gramsci or refer to western concepts of civil society and interest groups or pressure groups. Practically, what is civil society? Those who are not related with power? Is civil society an organized force? No it is not. For example, the people who can write and speak, mostly intellectuals are considered members of civil society. Do these intellectuals will ever work to attain any specific goal? If we talk about teachers, especially university teachers, do they play any specific role as civil society member? Is there any national organization they belong? Same goes for lawyers and journalists. Once their associations had significant role in shaping and reshaping public opinion. But now they are divided in party lines.

Some of the donors consider NGOs as civil society organizations. Actually they are not. They organize project-oriented programmes such as roundtables. These roundtable discussions are orchestrated and rehearsed activities. It is also true that civil society role has become marginalized globally. Once civil society used to be considered as the conscience of the nation and voice of the people. But now the scenario has been changed. The number of educated people and intellectuals were insignificant in the past. Therefore when they spoke, people used to listen. But now

quantity of intellectuals have increased and the idea of civil society has become a liquid substance. It has no distinct shape and color often speaks and dance in the tune set by the master who pays for the pipe. Still, I would praise the activities of Citizen for Good Governance (Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik -Shujon) for their relentless endeavor on various national issues including election.

“What is civil society? Those who are not related with power? Is civil society an organized force? No it is not.”

How do you evaluate the role of defense forces like Military and BGB during election?

The military can play a balancing role which police often cannot play. The problem is that, due to localization, police often tend to gang-up with local gangs and thugs (forget about political parties and vigilantes). In the time of an election, the same local agents of violence will come back in different identities. But the Army is not familiar with local people and takes actions against the criminal without being biased. Army actions are case to cases basis on spot incidents. But it entirely depends on the way and purpose of army deployment. There is a debate on inverse and adverse relationship between army

and democracy. I would ask, is not that, the army is functional under a democratic government? This is a legal and legitimate institution to apply force with the will of people on behalf of the state. In India, Central Reserve Police (CRP) plays that role and still the Indian Election Commission calls army in difficult situations.

How to do you assess the new voters and the pattern of their electoral behavior?

We may call it internationalization, but it is the sense of insecurity that politicians, businessmen, bureaucrats are sending their children and family abroad. Then what type of politics, administration and business they are engaged with where their own children's future is bleak in this country? And also, why many of them do not take treatment from Bangladeshi hospitals? These are just signs that the current politics in Bangladesh is cut from its root. This phenomenon should be closely examined. One very crucial factor we have to keep in mind that our education system is not producing active citizen. We are passing through a politically and socially 'lost generation'. This new generation neither can accommodate with the system nor have the initiative and intellect to overcome the situation. How will you teach them politics? The generation gap is world apart.

I now teach 120 undergrad students on whom I did a study. I asked them whether they have become voters or not. Hardly 5-

6 hands were raised who have registered as voters. Rests were indifferent. I later asked how many would appear for public service examination. Nobody responded. I also asked them a question and asked them to identify one of the crucial national problems. Their answers revealed their ignorance of the ground realities of the city and the country they live in. For example, the traffic jam was identified as a major problem. Is this a national problem, when I asked them again? There was a mysterious silence. This shows the limitation of perspective. It is certainly a problem of Dhaka dwellers, especially who use cars. So those who are complaining have actually created the problem by themselves. Therefore, new voters cannot be defined in general terms. One must differentiate amongst them.

“In general, new voters of urban affluent class, are less interested in the election while new voters of rural and general education background are relatively more interested.”

There are several categories of young voters too: urban middle class, urban affluent class, urban poor, rural middle

class, rural affluent class, and rural poor. We have to differentiate them and their voting behavior can also be seen from their own contexts. A private university student from affluent background as new voter could be indifferent towards politics and voting and may be found passive individualist. While a public university student as new voter from middle class background may be keenly interested in voting. Their level of social interaction determined by distinct social upbringings and social characteristics. In general, new voters of urban affluent class, are less interested in the election while new voters of rural and general education background are relatively more interested. One cannot predict the voting behavior of new voters in the coming national election in any definite direction right now. It can be said that they are not generally happy with the current political suffocation, more interested in social justice, equity and freedom of speech.

“In Bangladesh, EC can be powerful if civil administration and law enforcing agencies listen to them.”

For the upcoming election, what are the major challenges? How to overcome the challenges?

The election is not sure and certain yet. To have a proper, peaceful, impartial, inclusive

and acceptable election in Bangladesh itself is a big challenge.

In a game, a referee is needed. Without referee or with a biased referee there will be no fair game. In the political game rule of law is important. Absence of minimum rule of law is an anxiety everywhere. The impartial and professional role of bureaucracy is essential for smooth rule of law. It needs a high level of professionalism and unity among the bureaucracy and law enforcing agencies. If we take the example of India, a bureaucrat is a career professional who maintains balance between politics and rule of law. Indian bureaucracy is united, uncompromising and supreme within their own domain. Therefore, both politicians and bureaucrats try to refrain from interfering in each other's domain when the election is in question. So, in Bangladesh, EC can be powerful if civil administration and law enforcing agencies listen to them. That may one of the biggest challenges of next election in Bangladesh.

The other biggest challenge is the restoration of people's confidence in fair, free and impartial election which has been eroded to a large extent during the last 5 years.

Any final remarks?

In the upcoming election, the ruling party cannot afford to lose. That may make the election over heated. On the other hand, for the sake of existence, major opposition

BNP cannot afford to keep them away from electoral process too. That may create silver line for inclusivity but create an environment contentiousness and confrontation. The level of compromise between these two contenders will be spectacular which is yet to be seen or may not be seen at all. The seeds of violence will be sowed within the means to attain their respective ends. By violence, I do not mean bloodshed. Instead, repression, intimidation, silencing, censoring, controlling media/ civil society- an invisible reign of terror overall may is a possibility from one end and elimination of potential contenders from electoral contest by all means may be another possibility. Even intra party conflict may also become fierce at times.

The role of Judiciary before, during after the election is also very crucial .The event of mass scale arrest, institution of police cases, harassment, acceptance and rejection of bail petitions etc. may determine the fate of many voters and candidates. The safeguard of judiciary is

important for ensuring rule of law and protection of citizen's fundamental rights.

Inclusive election as we talk all the time is to some extent misleading too. What do we mean by the word 'inclusive'? It may mean the participation of all registered political parties only. But that is not entirely true. Only participation of political parties do not ensure in the Inclusivity in the election. It should mean ensuring an environment in which all parties as well as all classes of people can freely exercise their voting rights. An incomplete assessment of inclusivity limited to parties by excluding the people cannot ensure a fair election. Because political parties do their own electoral math and may join either of the front of bigger parties to ensure seats in the parliament. This may end in 'horse trading' and favor distribution among the political elites. This is not at the end inclusivity if it does not ensure inclusiveness of general masses of voters. Without ensuring overall inclusivity, a free and fair election cannot be ensured.



Interview:

Brig. Gen. M. Sakhawat Hussain (Retd.)⁹⁶

We are observing a change in dynamics in electoral violence nowadays. What is your observation on this matter?

Actually, if we are talking about electoral violence, this is altogether a different subject. There are lots of quality research works on this issue. But mainly those are based on North African or Latin American countries where violence has a different pattern based on ethnicities, minorities etc. In our country, we do not have this kind of research. It is said that, in emerging democratic countries or emerging democracies, violence has become a part and parcel of the electoral process due to corruption or hazard. Every country or region has a different reason for such violence. When we talk about electoral violence, we have to keep in mind what is the electoral period. That is from the declaration of schedule to tabulation of result and the validation of the result. That is more or less we call the electoral period. But if we take the whole thing, we call electoral violence; it starts from the making of the electoral law, or amendment of the electoral law. From there, the dispute is evolved of that particular election. If the whole period is taken than it becomes different, if we take violence

and this then there is different kind of violence. Whether it will be called electoral violence, or electoral governance violence, it's a different story. Governance period is that are these three periods we are talking about. Now, in many countries, violence erupts because of the changes in electoral format and the process, for example in Bangladesh. The violence erupted after 15th amendment. What would you call, would you call it electoral violence? So, the electoral violence, either we define it as a governance violence or we talk about electoral violence. If we take it as governance violence than we have to consider it from day one, the day of 15th amendment to till date or 4th January election and result in 2014 and thereafter. Now, this type of study is not available in our country, particularly like 2014 election. Were they have been studied? I haven't seen any. We hear that somebody set fire, somebody killed people, did this, did that, BNP did this, Awami League did not do anything and so on. So, these rhetoric we are hearing, but there is no particularly empirical study. If we leave this scenario and take normal situation, when, violence in emerging democracy seems like a common feature. This is more or less negligible in matured democracies. To me, Bangladesh is not a matured democracy, it's a fragile democracy. Not even emerging

⁹⁶ Former Election Commissioner of Bangladesh Election Commission (2007-2012).

democracy. In my theory, Nepal is an emerging democracy. We are not emerging but fragile. So, if you see, from 1975 to 1991 on one form, 1972 to 1975 and 1991 to till date on another form, we see that this is a fragile democracy. When it will become matured, we don't know. Bangladesh is violence prone in electoral period. There are ups and downs, more and less time to time. But there is violence, whether it is low key violence or high key violence. Now, elections in Bangladesh, again you have to divide it into different strata. One is local elections, another is national election. Violence patterns changes with these two types. From overall observation we see that, in Bangladesh there are few national elections held without violence, if we say 4-5 people were killed.

“The aim of this (electoral) violence is to create influence or influence the outcome of the election...”

Would you please give us some examples?

The elections under caretaker government, 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2008 could be the best examples. You have to separate those and examine why the violence is less and why the violence is more. Before we jump toward that factor, let's see in what stages we are observing violence. One is pre-poll violence that is an electoral process of beginning. But again I

say, there are different types of violence inside the governance process. The violence during the electoral process can be divided into three parts. First is the pre-poll violence. Second is the polling day violence and last is the post-poll violence, if we consider from the perspective of Bangladesh. These patterns are different. What is the aim of this violence? The aim of this violence is to create influence or influence the outcome of the election, which is for polling day and pre-poll violence. So, in pre-poll violence the first aim is one kind of intimidation for voters who are kind of neutral voters, non-partial voter and the weaker section, such as female voters and minority voters, of the population. So, the violence mostly affects these two vulnerable people.

The second aim is to disturb the electoral process where somehow, someone wants to stop the election and indulges into the violence. So these create a situation where election becomes impossible. These are the major aims that I see. During the poll violence what happens is, for a particular candidate, this violence normally happens to influence the result of the election. Now, what is this violence? It is not only killing people or injuring people. It could range from capturing, snatching ballot boxes, kidnapping electoral officials or intimidating them by force or anything that you know by the definition of violence, it's not always bloodshed; the violence could be anything such as mental and physical sufferings. So, the violence takes place at that time that is particularly to influence the result, for or against or simply to stop or disturb the electoral process. It is like, maybe there is no violence in the campaign

or no pre-poll violence, all on a sudden we find on the day of election, the gun rattling; that is another kind of violence; that is to influence the result for or against someone.

Third category of violence observed in our country that is post-poll violence. This is targeted violence which is against weaker section of the population. In those three categories, the violence has been seen as the manifestation of electoral violence in our country. In case of National Election, we observe when there is a neutral government, the violence is less. But, in the election under a political party government, all kinds of violence are found.

In Bangladesh, serious violence occurs all the time in local body elections. In local

body elections, again the same three categories, pre-poll violence, polling day violence and post-poll violence prevail. Why does it take place in local body election? Because empowerment of very influential people or group or even family at the grass root level, village etc., is related. Empowerment in a sense that there are empowerments in the national parliament election but it is not enough to be empowered by self, you have to have a political party. Sometime, one can argue that the national election is more serious than local election. But actually it's not. Local elections are more serious. Luckily we don't have any serious ethnicity problems except a very small part in Chattogram hill tracks. So, we do not have that kind of communal or ethnical violence, our violence is totally political.

“In case of National Election...when there is a neutral government, the violence is less. But, in the election under a political party government, all kinds of violence are found.”

Sir don't you think that in local elections, there are some clan related issues?

Yes I am coming to that part. What do we mean by clan violence? Suppose, I live in Gazipur, I am Bangali, I am either Muslim or Hindu, I talk in same language, etc; I am not Tipra, Chakma; in Hill Tracts there are some clans. What is clan/community? Chakma is a clan/community; Tipra is one

clan/community. So, they have a different culture. When we say Hill Tract culture, there are 14 prevalent cultures in there that we forget. There are big tribes and small tribes. We say it in general term. Hill Tract culture is not one culture. There are Hindus, there are Buddhists and Christians, and of course Muslims. They have fractions among themselves. So, I leave it. What do we understand by clannish? It's like my children, my siblings.

It's not a clan, it's a family or my relative. It won't be right to call it a clan. Definition of clan is different. If I say my close relatives to run in the election, I don't think it is clannish. It is not relative to clan or community; it can be relative to family at best. Suppose, when it runs from father to son or daughter and then to his grandchild, it is a family rule or family influence. One family or another family is struggling, which we are seeing in national level also. So at the top, I look at it as the family problem. So, we see more violence in local body elections. That is because the local body is very intense about the family affair. So, the violence is clash within families. Sometimes clash takes place inside family. So, I don't perceive it as clannish or ethnic clash. It is clash of influence. This violence takes place to create influence or maintain influence, associated with power, corruption and money. What can we call it, clan or regional? We can call it as regional. In the case of local body election, regional issues come more. Yes, like, villages defined by family name and the chairman is elected on the basis of family line. I don't know how you explain but that is what it is.

“We may see more violence in next election, and those might be more targeted... If you ask for empirical studies and statistics, I will say nothing is available.”

In Bangladesh, violence level is high in local level election. For example, in last Union Parishad election, some says 120 or 110 people were killed. In 2003, there were 103 or 110 people were killed, as reported in media. That was highest number at that time in 2013 that surpassed and death was highest so far. So this is the violence pattern in general. This violence is going to increase at the Union Council level, because it now getting party based. So, when it is party based, the violence on the weaker section will increase. Such as, group alignment with a particular party. Even at village level. So, we may see more violence in next election, and those might be more targeted. So this the overall picture of violence in Bangladesh. If you ask for empirical studies and statistics, I will say nothing is available.

But in national election, given the extent of the power transformation, the violence should be higher than the local election. Why we are seeing the opposite?

Yes, it is supposed to be higher, when it (election) happens under ruling party government. The worst possible scenario is 2014. In the history of Bangladesh, it is the worst among the national assembly elections. It started from the change of the Constitution. Violence took place on the streets. That was pre-election that means when we came to change in the rules of election, again I am focusing the governance part of it. When the rule changed, the violence started.

Now, why the violence was lower under the caretaker government? In Bangladesh, another reason for violence is politicization of bureaucracy, politicization of law enforcement agencies and the institutions. We see violence for these three reasons. When there is a neutral government, then bureaucracy becomes depoliticized. Because they don't know whose is going to form the government next time. And the government is also not interested as they know it's a three month affair. So, the institutions remain more or less free of influence. This is proven in Bangladesh. It's not theory, it's practical. So, you have a bureaucracy which is more or less neutral, law enforcement agencies also remain neutral because they have no one to dictate to them. For these reasons we see that four among ten elections in Bangladesh, were more or less violence free. If you consider 1991 election, hardly mentionable violence, likes 4 or 5 casualties at most. In our country, in a peaceful election there will be 4-5 casualties. I don't have proven record but I will say in these elections on an average 5-6 people were killed on various occasions, the booth capturing was less, I won't say it did not happen, but it was less and violent booth capturing did not happen. It happened on some areas like Narayanganj. Because hundred percent fair election, what is pristine election, it happens nowhere in the world. Some countries in the world have systematic problem and some countries have systemic problems. In our country it is systematic problem.

Now if we see the elections under the political parties, 6 elections were held

under the political party. In 1973, we had seen what happened and those all are in record. Then, there was not much violence since not much political activities were there. So if we take that period in consideration, there was not much violence. Political parties did not take part let alone involve in violence. 1991 was same. Then we see 1996, February election. It was a violent election since the opposition party went into total violence. In 2006, people are beaten on the roads. I am not saying that AL did that or BNP, everybody was involved in that violence. So, the violence pattern we see during that. And after 2001, there was huge post-election violence against the minorities which was well recorded, well documented, internationally documented. What we saw in 2014, it was more or less same thing happened in 1996. And there is of course as I said in 2003, the union council election was the most violent election of that time, later surpassed by 2013. Everything centered on the electoral or election result. And we also saw that national assembly election went smoothly, 4 were violence free as I said, but after that the elections held under the ruling party, they did not go as smoothly.

How could Election Commission (EC) play more effective role in preventing violence?

Yes, EC is the central organization for holding an election. But EC alone is not responsible for the election. Everybody makes EC responsible and they are responsible. But we forget that, EC alone does not conduct the election. There are stake holders, and main stake holder is the

government. There are other stake holders like Civil Society Organisations (CSO), media and of course the political parties. They are all stake holders. Election is not only EC's affair, it is a combined affair of everybody, including if I say parliament and judiciary, and they have a role. Now, if Parliament makes a law that for example, no caretaker government, the election has to be held under our supervision, then already a violent scenario is created. And the others are protesting against it. So these stake holders are very important for prevention and initiation of violence.

“In our country the biggest problem in EC is there is no methodology by which EC is constituted.”

When EC ask for army deployment, we say no, it not needed or required. Why do we need army? I said again and again that this is a force that should be less politicized. When they come out, their interest is corporate interest. You cannot politicize hundred percent of the army people. So, the less politicized I would say is best. For this reason people have faith on them that when they come out, they will remain neutral.

Sometimes EC ignores the violence and do not take action, at least whatever power is given to them, and they don't want to implement that. Implementation might not be hundred percent effective, but the very fact that some kind of actions have been taken gives people a lot of confidence. So, if the EC don't implement in here, they

don't take action, then of course EC is responsible. Now, for example, in our election system, we still don't have any manual or system on how to give security based upon data and statistics of the violence prone areas. But in our country the biggest problem in EC is there is no methodology by which EC is constituted. In the subcontinent, except Bangladesh and India, every country has methodology. In India there is no methodology exactly like Bangladesh, but Indian institutions are very strong. If they put the weakest person, the institution will function properly. The bureaucracy is very strong. It is very difficult for certain government to influence bureaucracy. Because it's a federal system on the contrary we have unitary system. These are the main reasons why India and Bangladesh is not comparable, moreover India is a matured democracy and judiciary acts as guardian. Latest such example is Karanataka.

Do you think EC can rightly evaluate the role of observer groups, media, and civil society in preventing electoral violence?

Media in our country, particularly print media is playing a role.

There is a guideline for the observers. But it does not restrict their independent observation. Guideline is to tell them how and where they should be. Otherwise, everybody becomes an observer.

There is a topic of registration for the observers.

Yes, the registration rule was initiated because there are so many in numbers, it

has become a business. Observation has become a business. There are management issues in an election. In India, there are no observers like CSO. There, EC put observers, from services in different places. They are EC observer; they give update in every hour. We wanted to initiate this system in here, but to whom we should give the job. Everyone is from government. That is why the observation facility is limited. Civil society like *Sujon*, they propagate enough. If anyone propagate them, the voters are sensitized, the people are sensitized, even the personnel who are linked to the election, they are sensitized. There are obviously positive roles of civil society, observers and media.

How would you overall evaluate the military deployment?

As I told already, I am with military deployment for three reasons. One, we don't have that much force to deploy everywhere, in the vulnerable places. Two, perceptive trust; people do not trust police and other forces that much. In people perception, according to survey, the one institution is above all is the armed forces; they have faith particularly in Bangladesh since they are from the same society and the Public ask for them in the Election time. And the third one is, if there is a superior force, we call it the stabilizing force. The very presence of the force stabilizes the situation. So, these are three reasons; augmentation, public perception and stabilizing force. Some call it reserved force now. So, for these three reasons, a superior force is needed. In India, there is central reserved police (CRP), a different

organization altogether, a central government force which is placed under EC.

“I am with military deployment for three reasons. One, we don't have that much force to deploy everywhere, in the vulnerable places. Two, perceptive trust; people do not trust police and other forces that much....Third one is, if there is a superior force, we call it the stabilizing force.”

Don't we also have the similar provision?

In election time, everything is placed under EC as per the law. The EC deploy forces. All bureaucracies are supposed to be helping the EC. But the fact remains that there are gaps in paper and in practice, it is not the same. Here, in Bangladesh, the character of institutions varies from man to man. It's not institution as such. If there is a person with strong personality in position then it (institution) becomes forceful, if the person becomes dull, the

institution becomes dull too. And there is no supporting institution for this person. Our institutions have not grown. Here, institutions are person oriented. If someone is strong then it is right. So, the institution has to be strong, so that man cannot do whatever s/he feels or likes. This is happening now. Court is divided in taking decisions. Sorry but the facts are fact. The Anti-Corruption Commission

(ACC), calls few people and leave others. These institutions, they have to remain neutral, but it does not happen in our country. Now, there is a relatively strong person in ACC, calling some big shots. On whom citizens have faith including EC. But the end result is same. Therefore, first priority is the development of institutions, and proper selection with people.

Understanding Electoral Violence through Micronarratives: Chattogram and Sirajganj

Very recently, Centre for Genocide Studies (CGS) teamed up with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to conduct a study on a number of districts in Bangladesh, which included collecting 'life stories' or micronarratives

related to electoral violence. The following is a representation of the life stories. Out of the selected number of districts, micronarratives from Chattogram and Sirajganj are only highlighted here.

Part A: Chattogram District

Formerly known as Chittagong, Chattogram district is located in the south-eastern region of Bangladesh. The district shares its borders in the North with Feni; in the South with Cox's Bazar; in the East with Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachari; and in the West with Noakhali and the Bay of Bengal. Because of the natural harbor, Chattogram had been an important location for trade since the 9th century AD.⁹⁷

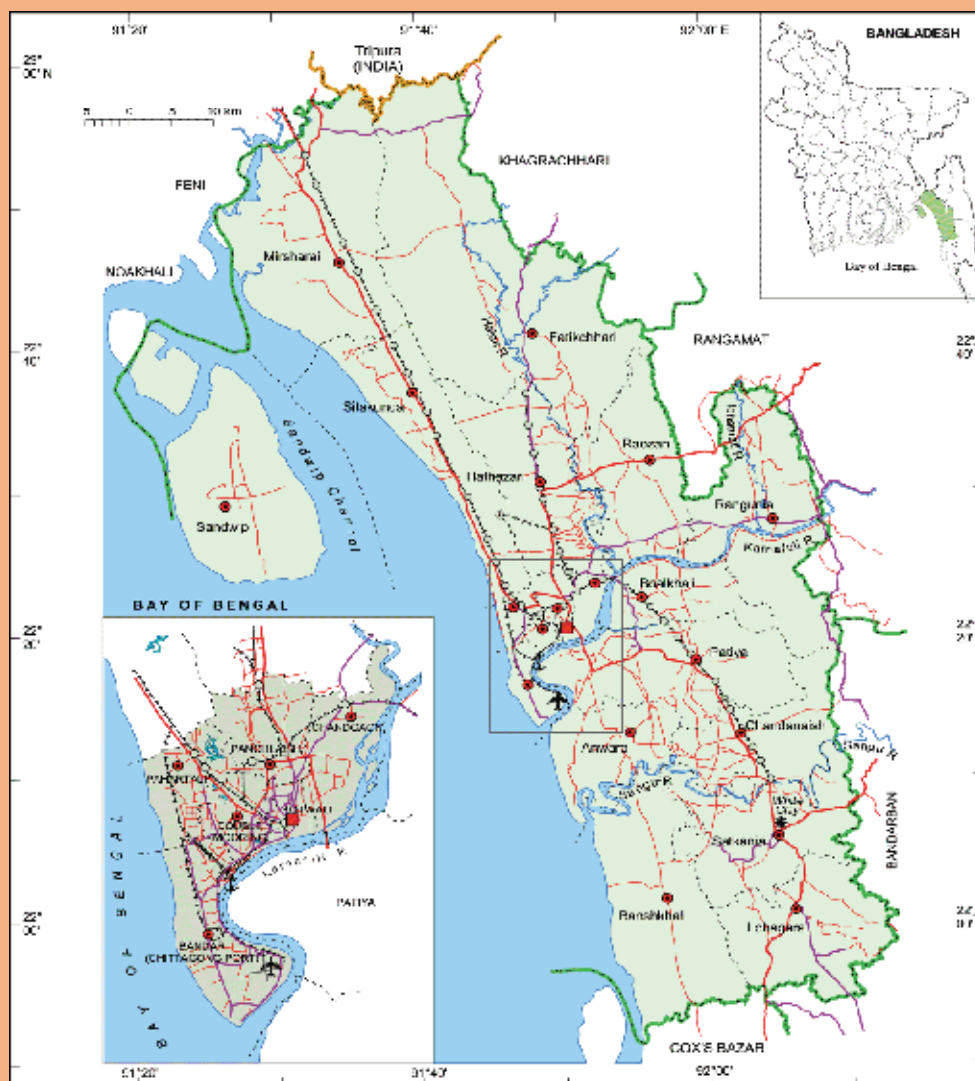
The district consists of only one City Corporation and 16 parliamentary constituencies. All of the seats belong to the Awami League (AL) and its allied parties following the 10th Parliamentary

Election in 2014. In the 9th Parliamentary Election the number of seats belonging to AL and its allies were 11 and in the 8th Parliamentary Election, the number was only two among the 15 constituencies of that time.⁹⁸ Having its geographic, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity as well as geo-strategic and economic importance, Chattogram has always been considered significant in terms of possessing dominance and influence to all the political parties. The narratives from Chattogram reflects the prevalence of violence in varying types and degrees in different elections, both at the national and local levels.

⁹⁷ Mohammad Mahibullah Siddiqi (2012). "Cox's Bazar District". In Sirajul Islam and Ahmed A. Jamal. *Banglabeedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh* (Second ed.). Asiatic Society of Bangladesh.

⁹⁸ Official Website of Bangladesh Parliament (n. d.). "List of Members of Parliament". Accessed: 31 May 2018. Available at: <http://www.parliament.gov.bd/index.php/en/mps/members-of-parliament>.

Figure 9: District Map of Chattogram



Source: <https://www.thebangladesh.net/chittagong-district.html#maps>

“I have never been a political activist, but my elder brother was and I had seen him going to jail several times and passing through tough times due to political rivalry. At present younger people work for the ruling party and they never tested the pain of doing politics of the opposition party. If they could, they would learn how tough it is. They are all enjoying the benefits of good times.... In our area caring attitude to the general population matters since the personal visits of the leaders to the houses of the commoners proved to be the main difference in the election of 1991. The activists of BNP and Awami League had a peaceful coexistence here in the past which got damaged in the last few years. I think this happened because of financial interests. In 1996 we observed chaos which was practically a single party election. During that time I also indulged in chaos, we seized the ballot boxes of our polling centre. We also displaced the police.... We didn't have arms but we shot bullets of heated charcoals.... Police came up with more forces to control the situation, but could not survive for long.... Nowadays, politics is all about fighting and violence. All mannerism disappeared. Administration is also sold out at the time of election. But if the Administration want, they can conduct violence-free and fair election.”

- **Mohib Ullah, Kotwali Thana, Chattogram**

“I voted for the first time in the 2014 election. In the last local election, I couldn't go to the polling booth as my husband said that there were fighting and chaos in our polling centre.... I observed many elections since my childhood and I want to mention about one incident. That was in Rangunia, where a boy named Sazzad entered with firearm and captured the centre and rigged the voting altogether in the favor of the then BNP candidate. None were allowed to vote or even dared to say anything. I was in the centre with my mother and I was then in class 9.... People have interests to vote, but if the situations in the polling centres are not favorable, how can we go there?”

- **Rina Akter, Hathazari Upazila, Chattogram**

“I didn't see any notable violence in Fatikchari since BNP and its allied parties have had a stronghold here.... But there cadre groups which were created mainly due to the power struggles between Chattro League and Shibir. They caused numbers of violence in this area to spread influence. But these disappeared significantly after the operation of RAB started. In the time of Operation Clean Heart, top terrors were annihilated. Before that gunfights and murders were regular phenomena. The Administration took strong measures and managed the situation well.... At present, the ruling party is all in all here and hence violence is also less since there is none to create violence or even say anything against them.... If the Army is present on the Election Day, no violence will happen. They will not tolerate anything like that.”

- **Ripon Chowdhury, Fatikchhari, Chattogram**

Part B: Sirajganj District

Figure 10: District Map of Sirajganj



Source:

<https://www.thebangladesh.net/sirajganj-district.html#maps>

Sirajganj is considered as the gateway to the North Bengal. It is a part of the Rajshahi division. It is bordered on the north by Bogra district and Natore district; on the west by Natore district and Pabna district; on the south by Pabna district and Manikganj district; and on the east by Manikganj district, Tangail district and Jamalpur district.

In the National Parliament, the district has six constituencies, namely Sirajganj-1, Sirajganj-2, Sirajganj-3, Sirajganj-4, Sirajganj-5, and Sirajganj-6. All of these constituencies are currently represented by members from the ruling AL, following the 10th National election in 2014. In the 9th National Election, AL had five seats whereas in the 8th National Election, they got only one seat.⁹⁹ According to the narratives collected, both AL and BNP have strong support base in the district and hence violence is prevalent during election times.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

“Violence during election escalates due to many reasons such as intimidating the voters, hindering the opposition not to participate in the election, rigging the election, manipulating the voting system, and so on.... In the past few years, police suppressed the opposition in response to their protests against the 5th January election. The use of tear shells and water cannons was unprecedented during that time. A locality called Bahuli was almost vacant since people fled from there to avoid charges and arrests. My own cousin was arrested while he was chatting with friends.... We had paid to pay five lac taka to get him back.... Also in the 2008 election, violence was prevalent in almost all the centres; the supporters of BNP were barred from coming to the centres.”

- **Sodrul Islam, Sirajganj Sadar, Sirajganj**

“After the 2014 election, BNP called for strikes. Government wanted to suppress this and that is why they used police. Here at Bohuli police fired randomly to prevent the strike. During that time male persons of this village could not stay in their homes at night. But nothing happened to the real culprits who were responsible for the violence. Only the general people became the victims.... One day, my husband took our three sons to the barber shop in Bohuli bazar.... My husband instructed them to return home after hair-cut and he went back to his work.... Although our two younger sons came back home, but the elder went somewhere in search of water and never returned.... By the side of the crossroad there is a ‘shimul’ tree. There he was shot from behind (allegedly) by the police. Then the whole village became furious. The villagers started protesting the murder. Then with them, we went to the spot in search of my son’s dead body. But we couldn’t find him. My son’s body was already taken by the police to the station. Our Chairman and UP members then went to the police station and demanded that they show the body to us. However, by that time the post-mortem was done.”

- **Mst. Ashful Khatun, Bohuli, Sirajganj**

“As an Assistant Presiding Officer, I conducted many elections. Our duty is to conduct the elections in the prescribed manner. But we couldn’t do anything in the face of violence. Our lives come first when delivering our duties.... I heard of many fights and news of violence in different areas, nevertheless, my polling centre was free from those.... Sirajganj is the entrance of the northern part of the country. The rail lines were destroyed after the 2014 election which caused severe disruption to the communication system of the whole region. People suffered a lot.... Also, the use of bombs seemed alarming to me which happened during the election when Ershad was in power. The same kind of violence returned after the 2014 election.”

- **Farhana Sharmin, B. L. School, Sirajganj**



E-mail: cgs@du.ac.bd

Telephone: PABX 880-2-9661900, Ext. 4647



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