

# CGS PEACE REPORT

*an initiative of BPO*

 CENTRE FOR  
GENOCIDE  
STUDIES  
UNIVERSITY OF DHAKA



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September-October 2018



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

**New Voters and the  
Eleventh General Elections  
in Bangladesh**

**Electronic Voting  
Machine (EVM)**

**Understanding Electoral  
Violence through  
Micronarratives:  
Mymensingh and Jhalokati**

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**BPO- Bangladesh Peace Observatory**



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**September - October 2018**

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## Contents:

From the Editor's Desk.....	1
Crime and Violence in Bangladesh: An Analysis from BPO .....	3
Part A: Violence Update: (August - September 2018) .....	3
Part B: Incidents Recorded by BPO on Electoral Violence.....	9
Electronic Voting Machine (EVM).....	13
Technical and Operational Aspects of EVM in Bangladesh.....	16
Key Features of EVM in Bangladesh.....	16
The Future of EVM in Bangladesh .....	18
New Voters and the Eleventh General Elections in Bangladesh .....	20
New Voters: A Global Perspective.....	20
Perception of the New Voters in Bangladesh on Election: Findings based on FGD.....	21
Understanding Electoral Violence through Micronarratives: Mymensingh and Jhalokati .....	24
Part A: Mymensingh District .....	24
Part B: Jhalokati District .....	27

## Figures:

Figure 1: An Overview of Incidents (August- September 2018).....	3
Figure 2: Bi-monthly Comparison of Number of Incidents.....	4
Figure 3: Consequences of the Violent Incidents (June-July 2018).....	5
Figure 4: Consequences of the Violent Incidents (August-September 2018) .....	5
Figure 5: Comparative Analysis of Incidents (August- September 2018).....	7
Figure 6: Divisional Distribution of Incidents (August-September 2018).....	8
Figure 7: Geographical Overview of Electoral Violence (January 2017- August 2018) ....	10
Figure 8: Divisional Distribution of Incidents of Electoral Violence (January 2017 - August 2018).....	11
Figure 9: Actor-wise Distribution of Incidents of Electoral Violence (January 2017 - August 2018).....	11
Figure 10: Types of Electoral Violence (January 2017- August 2018).....	12
Figure 11: Consequences of Electoral Violence (January 2017- August 2018).....	12
Figure 12: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis of Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) in elections.....	19

## Maps:

Map 1: District Map of Mymensingh.....	24
Map 2: District Map of Jhalokati.....	27

## From the Editor's Desk

Election season has once again arrived in Bangladesh. But as in the past there is as much apprehension as joy. There are good reasons for this. In the last six national elections since 1991 a mapping of the print media of three weeks prior to the Election Day and one week after the election showed that the elections were not free from violence. Altogether 532 people were killed and 20,250 people were injured in electoral violence in the four-week election period, which on the average would mean nearly 88 people killed and 3,375 injured in every national election. It may be mentioned that the highest number of killing and injury occurred in 2001 national election, with 248 death and 11,074 people injured. And this is what fuels the fear.

Polarized politics is certainly to be blamed, but so is the case of an electoral system or 'democracy' that can be best labeled as 'majoritarian' or 'winners take all'! One cannot help being reminded here of the remark made by Mahatma Gandhi on this: "I do not believe in the doctrine of the greatest good of the greatest number. It means in its nakedness that in order to achieve the supposed good of 51 percent the interest of 49 percent may be, or rather, should be sacrificed. It is a heartless doctrine and has done harm to humanity." This is precisely the reason why the tyranny of the majority is an inherent weakness of (electoral) democracy and countries across the world for centuries have tried and are still trying to deal with it. US, as one of the earliest democracies in modern times, would be a good example in this case.

The Constitution of the US, for instance, is essentially 'anti-democratic.' This is in the sense that the authors wanted not to empower but to limit the power of the majoritarian masses! This is what the Balance of Power is all about in the US Constitution, with the Senate, House of Representatives, and the President getting elected through a cumbersome process, partly territorial, partly numerical, and as far as the President is concerned not even directly but indirectly elected via the electoral colleges. But more importantly, the Judiciary and the Executive or the entire policy-executing team of the President, the 'ministers' or 'Secretaries,' as they are called, are not elected but nominated by the President and then confirmed by the US Senate, whose representation incidentally is more territorial than demographic. So among the three branches of the government, only the President or head of the Executive branch and members of the Legislative are elected by the masses. This was done mainly to contain the power of the majoritarian masses or 'brute majority,' as it is called. But then given the current experience of electoral democracy in the US, where a President came to be elected with less than three million votes from his nearest rival and, as it is alleged, with some help from a foreign power, it

now looks that another round of creative constitutional amendment is required to reproduce a less suffocating democracy in the US.

But then despite the deficit in holding peaceful elections in Bangladesh we tend to forget that national elections in the country are nothing less than a festival. In fact, when it comes to actual voting there is 'democracy surplus' in the country. Indeed, if we take the last three 'fully acceptable' national elections, the voter turnout has always been over 70 percent. More precisely, 74 percent in 1996; 74.88 percent in 2001; and 87 percent in 2008. One could certainly credit the 'politically conscious' Bangladeshi voters for this, but at the same time this is one occasion where even the economically and politically disempowered voters feel 'empowered,' at least for a day, with the candidates coming and shaking hands with them, at times literally touching their feet for the vote, and this is one fanfare few of them want to miss!

Does this give us hope? It certainly does. Not to go unnoticed is the fact that this is for the first time all the registered political parties have agreed to participate in the national election whose formula has been chalked out by an election-seeking ruling party. This could be a turning point or the country following the election could slide back to square one and face another round of intransigent politics if not violence. In moments like this I can only seek solace in the wisdom of Rabindranath Tagore, “মানুষের প্রতি বিশ্বাস হারানো পাপ, সে বিশ্বাস শেষ পর্যন্ত রক্ষা করব (I shall not commit the grievous sin of losing faith in humans).” Let us then nurture and welcome the biggest political festival of the country!

**Imtiaz Ahmed**

Director  
Centre for Genocide Studies

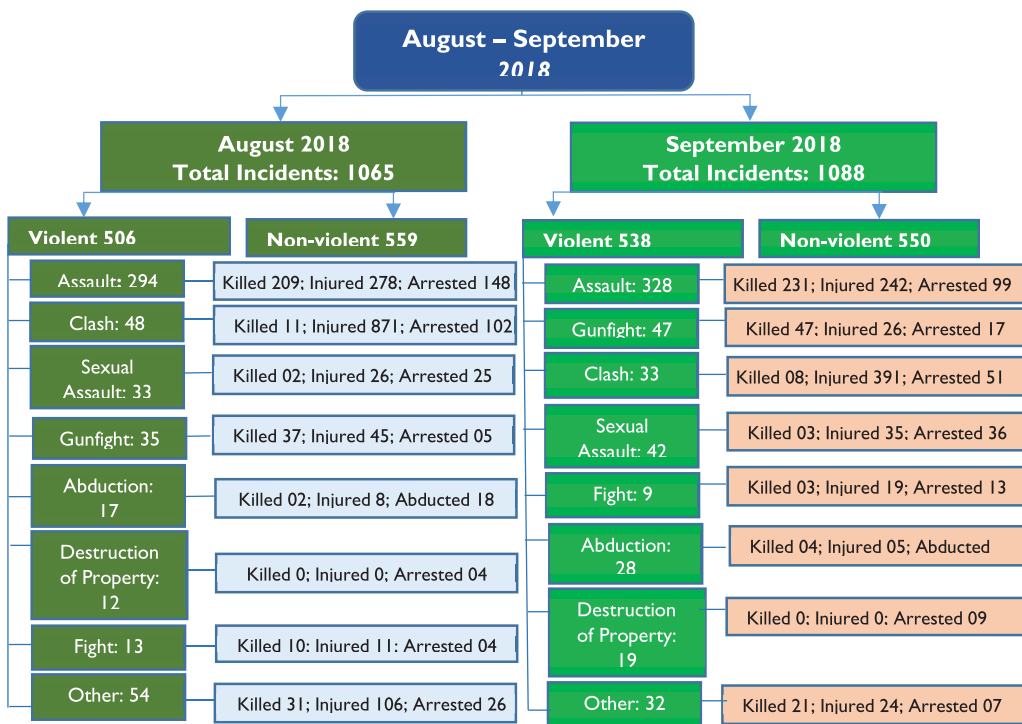
# Crime and Violence in Bangladesh: An Analysis from BPO

## Part A: Violence Update: (August - September 2018)

The Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) brings together different streams of publicly available data on violence using news reports from prominent national dailies. From August to September 2018,

BPO recorded 2153 violent<sup>1</sup> and non-violent<sup>2</sup> incidents all over the country. **Figure I** segregates these incidents into some general categories by type of violence.

**Figure I: An Overview of Incidents (August- September 2018)**



<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

According to BPO data, the number of incidents is on the rise in recent months in Bangladesh. The combined frequency of incidents during June-July 2018 was 2052, which increased by 4.90% in August-September 2018 (**figure 2**). Previously, there was a 30% rise in the period of June-July 2018 compared to April-May 2018. Figure 2 makes some observations on the critical areas of incident prevalence. First of all, despite the increase in the total number of incidents, there is a significant decrease in the number of gunfights in August-September 2018. During August-September 2018, a total of 82 gunfights reportedly occurred in Bangladesh during which 84 persons were killed, 71 were injured and law enforcement agencies arrested 22 in this connection. Compared to the previous months of April-May 2018, this shows a 41.84% decrease in incident prevalence, 43.62% decrease in the number of deaths, and 45.80% decrease in the number of injuries in August-September 2018. Secondly, along with

gunfights, offenses like clashes, fights, and sexual assaults have also decreased in this period. However, there is a rise in some other types of violence. For example, with a 4.89% increase in the number of assaults, the number of injuries increased to 19.63% resulting in 2187 injured in violence. Also, in August-September 2018, out of the 622 incidents of assaults, a total of 157 bodies were recovered with perpetrators unknown. In terms of societal violence, 144 committed suicide, out of which 58 were female. In terms of gender-based violence, 70 women were killed, 74 sustained injuries and 87 were victims of sexual assaults. Last but not least, the number of arrests decreased significantly in August-September 2018 compared to June-July 2018 (**figures 3, 4**). In June-July 2018, a total of 7553 people were arrested while in August-September 2018, the number of arrests was 5574, indicating a 23.55% decline during the period in question.

**Figure 2: Bi-monthly Comparison of Number of Incidents**

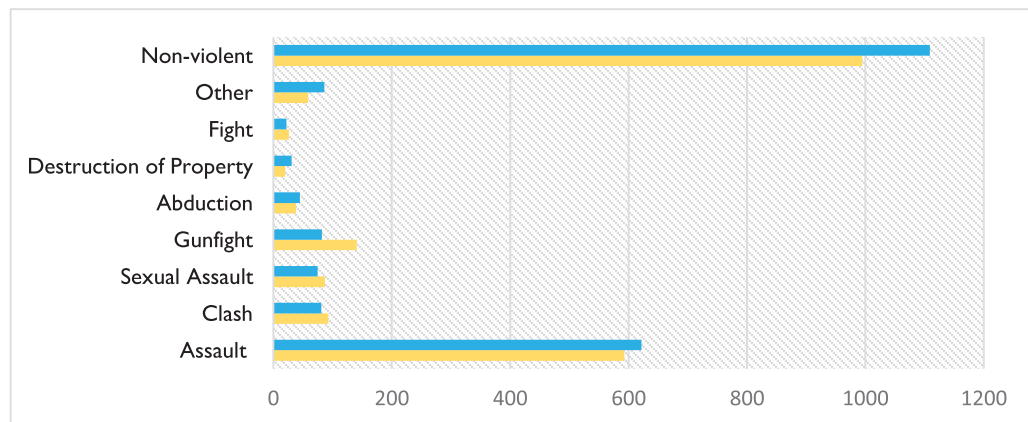


Figure 3: Consequences of the Violent Incidents (June-July 2018)

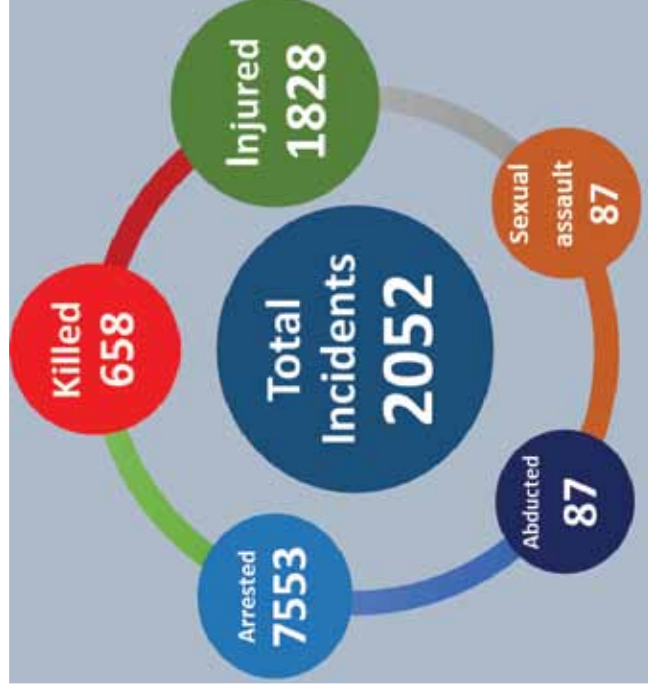


Figure 4: Consequences of the Violent Incidents (August-September 2018)



A monthly breakdown of August and September 2018 reflects a gap by incident prevalence and consequences (**figure 5**). In September 2018, there is a noticeable difference in the number of injuries compared to the previous month. A staggering number of 1345 people were injured in 208 reported incidents in August 2018 while 842 people were injured in 204 reported incidents in September 2018, indicating a 37.39% decline in the number of injured people. The key reason behind this difference is the *Road Safety Protests* during August 2018. The *Road Safety Protests* took place from 29 July to 8 August 2018, sparked by the deaths of two high-school students in Dhaka struck by a bus driven by a driver without a license who was racing to collect passengers. Students began to demand safe roads and strict implementation of traffic laws. The protests were peaceful until 4 August, when demonstrators were dispersed with tear gas along with attacks by miscreants on protesters and journalists. During 4-6 August 2018, about 392 people were reportedly injured in the violent clashes and attacks.

Apart from the *Road Safety Protests*, some other major incidents contributed to the

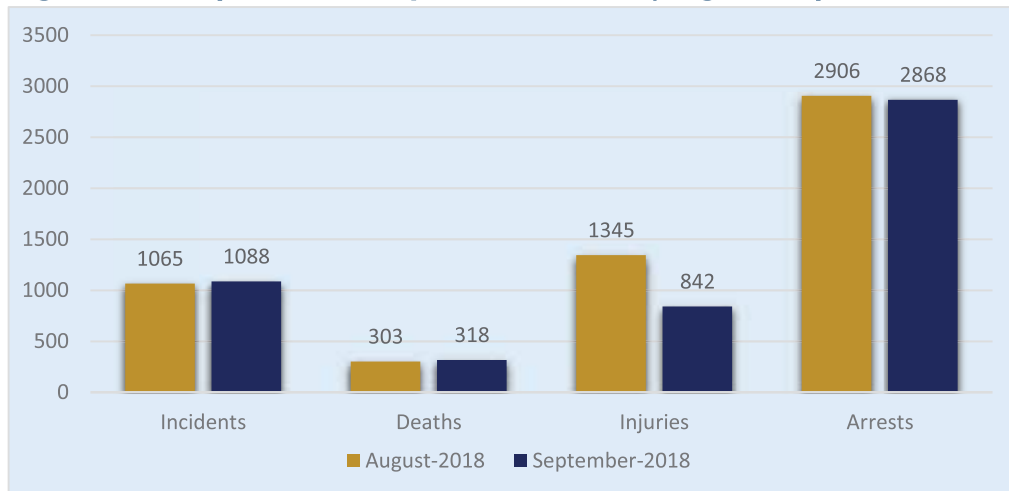
increased number of injuries. For example, there were eight incidents of major clashes (clashes where more than 20 people were injured) between rival groups in August 2018, in which 315 people were injured, and ten incidents of major clashes in September 2018 in which 342 were injured, contributing to the total number of injuries for these months. Figure 5 also indicates an increase in the number of total people killed in violence in September 2018 compared to August 2018. A total of 303 people were reportedly killed in 284 incidents of violence in August 2018, while 318 were killed in 288 incidents of violence in September 2018. Although in August 2018 the number of deaths was less by 15 than that of September 2018, a serious incident of multiple casualties occurred in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). On 18 August 2018, in the Khagrachhari Sadar Upazila, a total of seven activists of United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF) were killed and three others were injured in a brushfire by miscreants. The victims blamed *Parbatya Chattogram Jano Sanghati Samity* (PCJSS) for the incident.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *The Daily Purbakone* (2018). “রক্তাক্ত পাহাড়ে ফের ৭ লাশ (7 Dead Bodies again in Bloody Hill).” Accessed: 17 November 2018. Available at:

[http://www.edainikpurbokone.net/content/2018/2018-08-19/zoom\\_view/1f.jpg](http://www.edainikpurbokone.net/content/2018/2018-08-19/zoom_view/1f.jpg),  
[http://www.edainikpurbokone.net/content/2018/2018-08-19/zoom\\_view/11h.jpg](http://www.edainikpurbokone.net/content/2018/2018-08-19/zoom_view/11h.jpg)

**Figure 5: Comparative Analysis of Incidents (August- September 2018)**

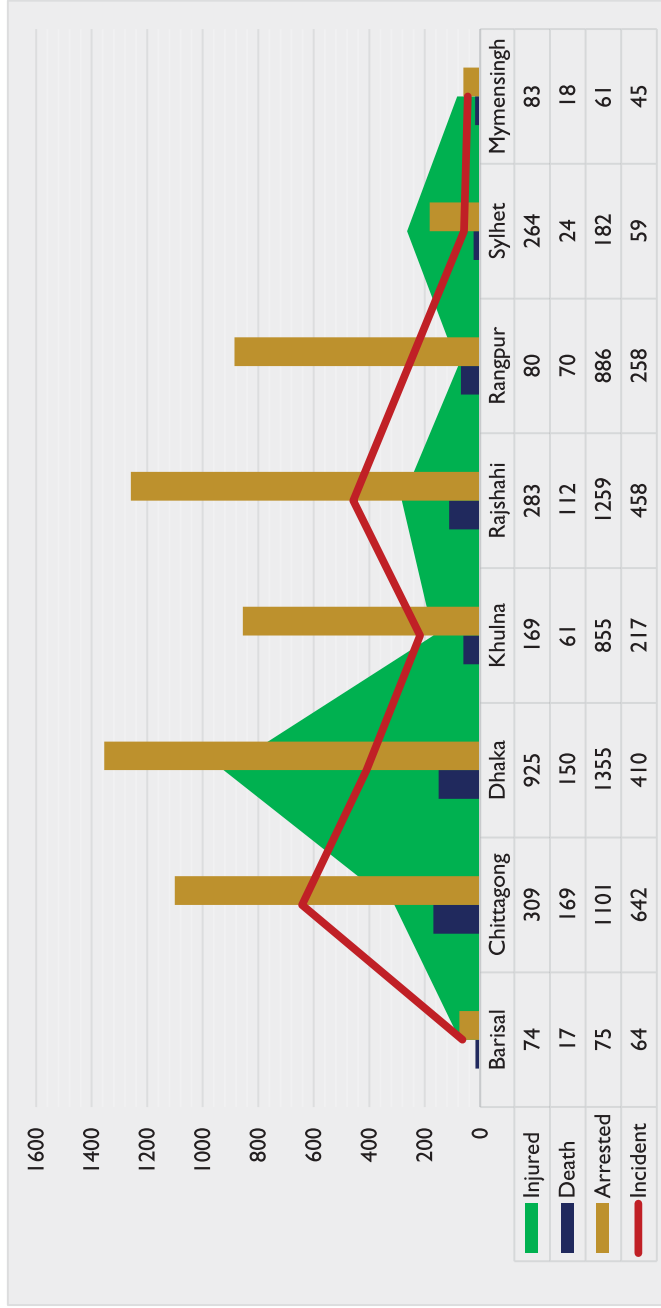


**Figure 6** provides a spatial glimpse through divisional distribution of the recorded incidents in BPO and their consequences. The figure indicates that in some cases, despite the relatively lower frequency of incidents, there have been far-reaching consequences. For example, Rangpur and Khulna have recorded 258 and 217 incidents respectively during August-September 2018 compared to Chittagong (642), Rajshahi (458), and Dhaka (410) division. However, the divisional data indicates that there have been widespread arrests in Rangpur and Khulna. BPO data suggests that, in Rangpur, 685 people were arrested on charges of drug-related offenses and subversive activities in 90 different cases of arrests and raids. Similarly, in a special drive against drugs and subversive activities, a total of 629 people were arrested in Khulna in 79 cases of arrests

and raids. Also in Rajshahi, 727 people were arrested in 112 incidents of arrests and special drives against drugs, subversive activities, and combing operations by law enforcement agencies.

In addition to arrests, in case of injuries, Dhaka has the maximum number of people injured for being the epicenter of the *Road Safety Protests*. However, overall, in 86 incidents, a total of 925 people were injured. On a different note, in four separate incidents in Gopalganj, Faridpur and Kishoreganj, a total of 127 people were injured in a clash triggered by scuffles over a friendly football match. Of all divisions, Chattogram has the highest number of incidents and deaths during August- September 2018. A total of 169 people died in 151 violent incidents including the death of seven UPDF members in Khagrachhari district.

**Figure 6: Divisional Distribution of Incidents (August-September 2018)**



## Part B: Incidents Recorded by BPO on Electoral Violence

Elections are considered to be the hallmarks of democracy. Elections facilitate peaceful change in government and provide political legitimacy to the government. Observed from this prism, elections represent the expression of the sovereign will of the people. However, the conduct of elections in a country such as Bangladesh is often fraught with animosity and violence. At the core of this animosity is the struggle for power among contesting political parties. The electoral experiences in Bangladesh are replete with narratives of flawed and disputed elections that have turned violent, resulting in numerous fatalities and reversing attempts at democratic consolidation.

The status and dynamics of electoral violence in Bangladesh in the last ten years have changed over time and it has been observed that more violent incidents occurred in local and municipal elections. Violence has also been prevalent not only during elections but also in the pre and post-election times. It was found that 19 people were injured, including four sustaining bullet injuries, in a clash between two groups over an upcoming

Union Parishad election in Narail.<sup>4</sup> In another incident, 15 people were injured in a post-Union Parishad election clash between two candidates' supporters in Brahmanbaria.<sup>5</sup> In a spate of pre-election violence, 20 were injured, including a policeman, in a clash over the mayoral post in Sunamganj municipality.<sup>6</sup> The intensity of violence might differ in varying degrees, but it is widespread in different parts of the country. A total of 52 incidents have been recorded at the BPO platform related to election violence within the timeframe starting from 1 January 2017 till 31 August 2018. **Figures 7-11** represent the data in different ways for a better understanding of electoral violence in Bangladesh in terms of spatiality, actors involved, typology, and consequence.

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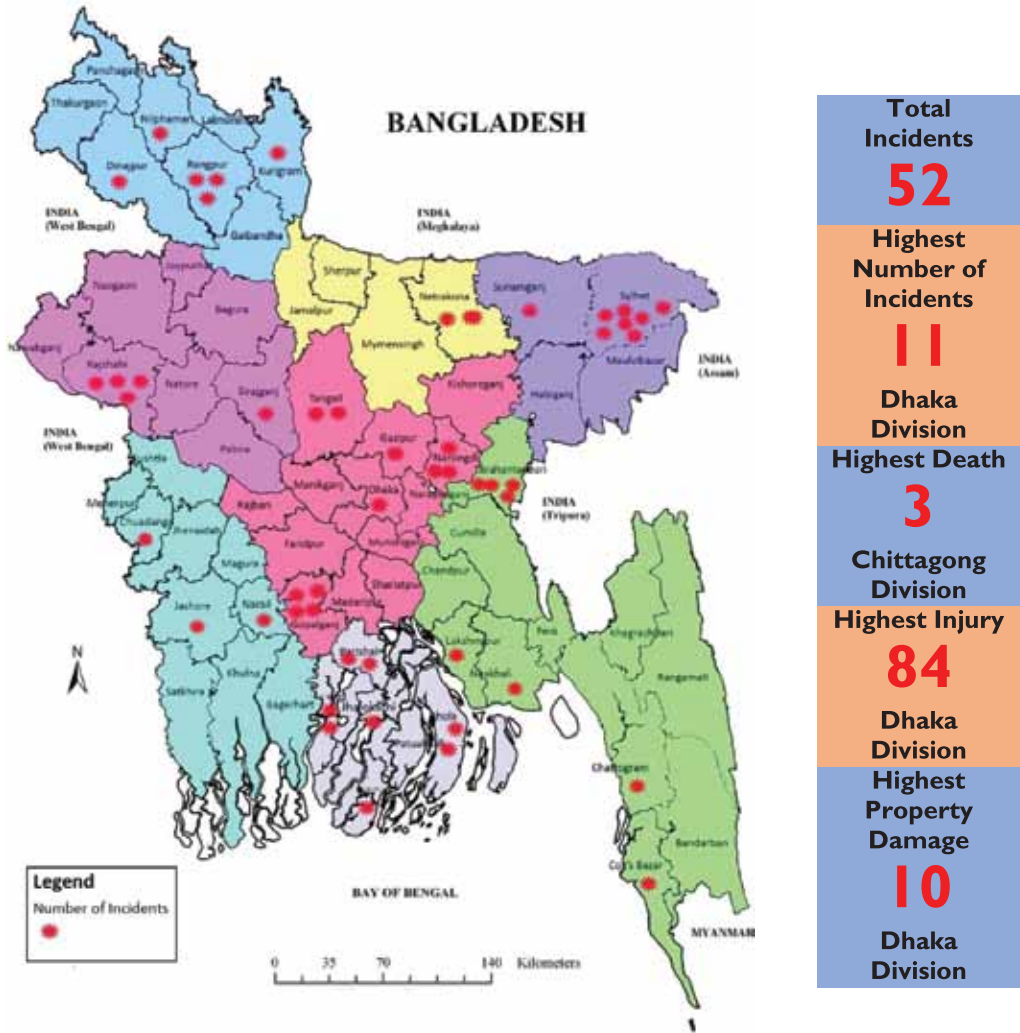
<sup>4</sup> *The Daily Ittefaq* (2017). Accessed: 17 November 2018. Available at: [http://epaper.ittefaq.com.bd/2017/03/13/images/20\\_109.jpg](http://epaper.ittefaq.com.bd/2017/03/13/images/20_109.jpg), [http://epaper.ittefaq.com.bd/2017/03/13/images/02\\_107.jpg](http://epaper.ittefaq.com.bd/2017/03/13/images/02_107.jpg)

<sup>5</sup> *The Daily Prothom Alo* (2017). Accessed: 17 November 2018. Available at:

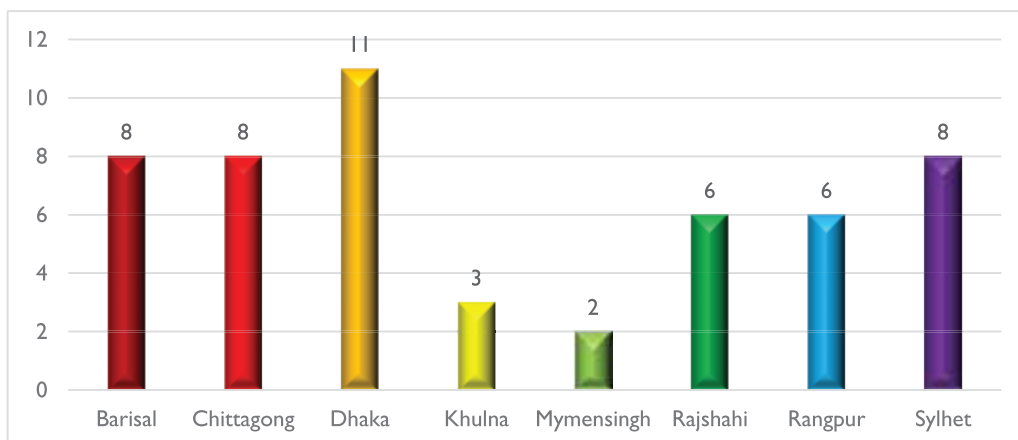
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<sup>6</sup> *The Daily Star* (2018). Accessed: 17 November 2018. Available at: [http://epaper.thedailystar.net/contents/2018/2018\\_03\\_30/content\\_zoom/2018\\_03\\_30\\_6\\_1\\_b.jpg](http://epaper.thedailystar.net/contents/2018/2018_03_30/content_zoom/2018_03_30_6_1_b.jpg)

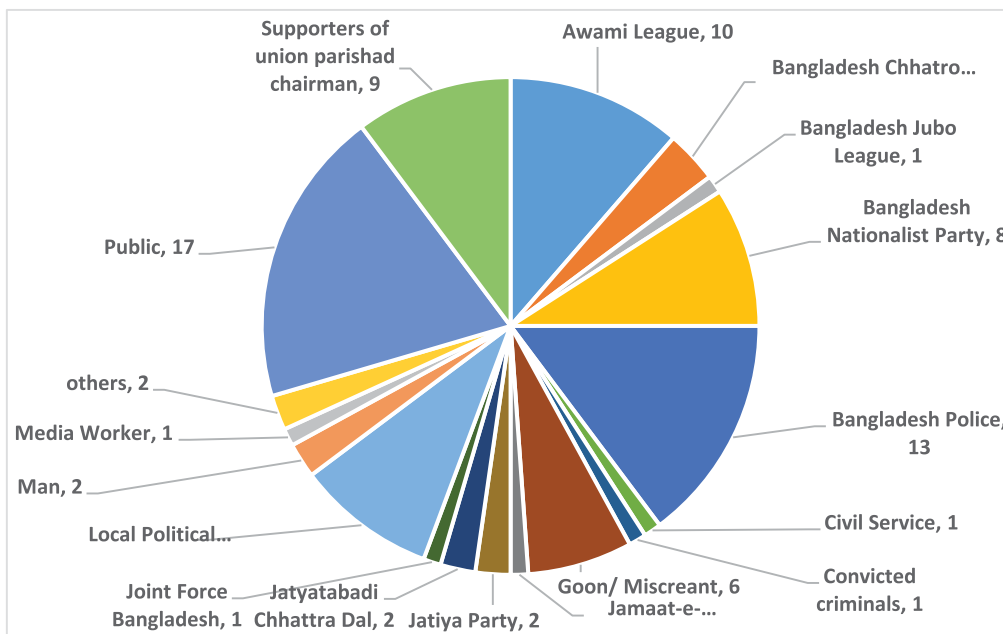
**Figure 7: Geographical Overview of Electoral Violence (January 2017- August 2018)**



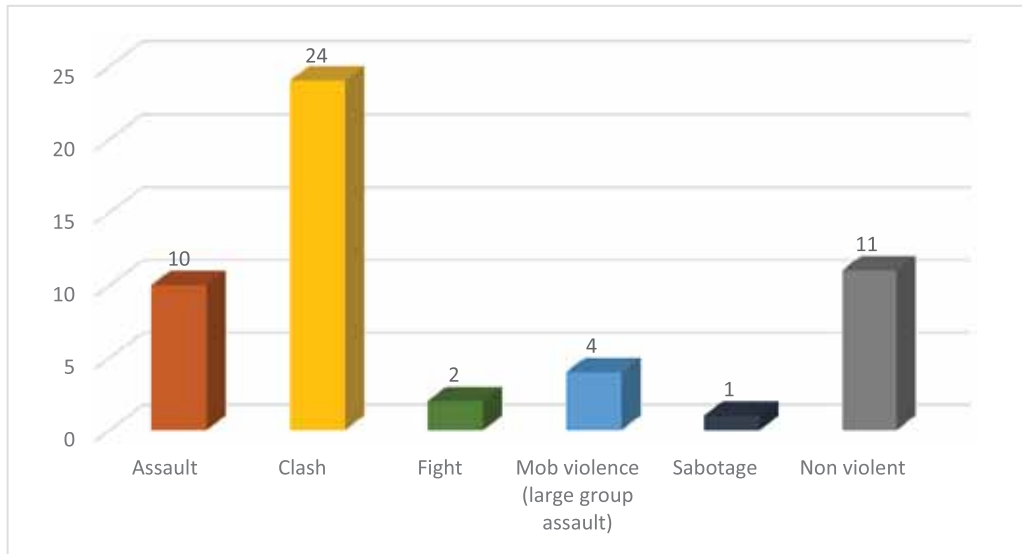
**Figure 8: Divisional Distribution of Incidents of Electoral Violence (January 2017 - August 2018)**



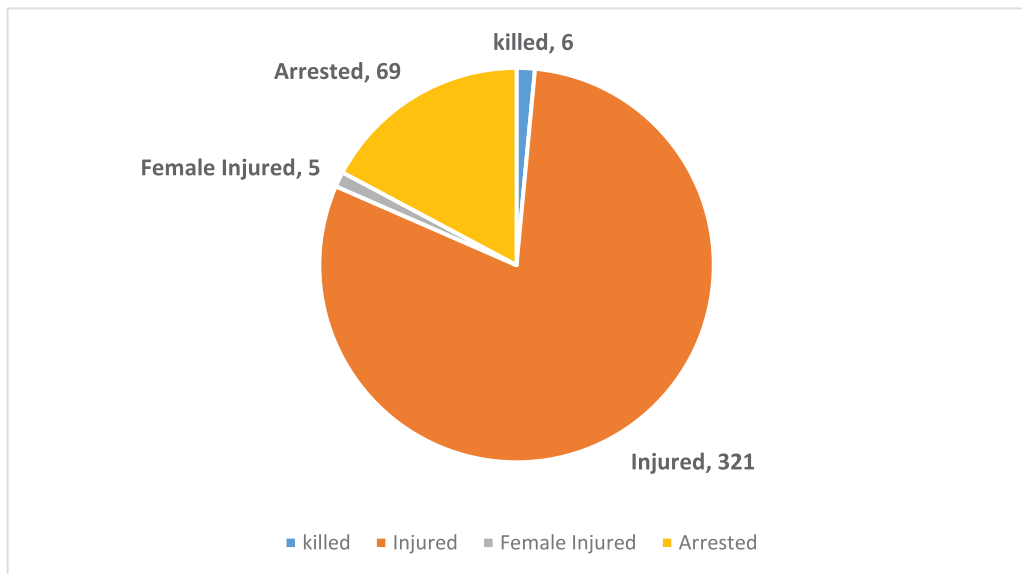
**Figure 9: Actor-wise Distribution of Incidents of Electoral Violence (January 2017 - August 2018)**



**Figure 10: Types of Electoral Violence (January 2017- August 2018)**



**Figure 11: Consequences of Electoral Violence (January 2017- August 2018)**



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## Electronic Voting Machine (EVM)

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Through an Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) or Digital Voting Machine (DVM), one can cast an electronic vote from polling stations via intranet or remote location via the internet (i-voting).<sup>7</sup> The Election Commission of Bangladesh (EC) has decided to use EVMs in the upcoming 11th parliamentary election. According to a press briefing by the EC on 24 November 2018, EVMs will be used in all centers of six parliamentary seats in different city corporation areas across the country. The six seats were decided on 26 November 2018, in the presence of media workers.<sup>8</sup> Approximately, there will be around 150 to 900 centers for the six seats. In 2018, the EC created a project of Taka 3,821 crore for the purchase of EVMs. Under this project, 1.5 lakh EVMs will be bought in the first phase. In the meantime, thousands of EVMs have been

supplied by the Bangladesh Machine Tools factory from the suppliers.<sup>9</sup> The EVM is usually considered an environment and budget-friendly vote casting system but in the case of Bangladesh, one unit will cost around 234,000 Bangladeshi takas. This amount is eleven times higher than neighboring country and Bangladesh's EVM vendor India.<sup>10,11</sup>

### Global Overview of EVM

Globally, 32 countries in the world use EVM. Among these countries, India, Brazil, Bhutan, and Venezuela used EVM for general elections and 11 countries used it for local elections. EVM technology is currently going through piloting in five countries while eight countries did not continue after piloting. Germany, Netherlands, and Paraguay used EVM for a number of elections but later discontinued

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<sup>7</sup> Zissis, D.; Lekkas (2011). "Securing e-Government and e-Voting with an Open Cloud Computing Architecture". *Government Information Quarterly*. 28 (2): 239–251. Accessed: 13 November 2018.

Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0740624X10001383?via%3Dihub>

<sup>8</sup> The six seats are: Dhaka-13, Dhaka-6, Chittagong-9, Rangpur-3, Khulna-2 and Satkhira-2 (Source: <https://www.banglanews24.com/election-comission/news/bd/687581.details>)

<sup>9</sup> *The Daily Prothom Alo* (Online) (2018). "৬ আসনের সব কেন্দ্রে ইভিএমে ভোট (EVM vote in all the 6 constituencies). Accessed: 24 November 2018. Available at:

<https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/article/1566563/>

<sup>10</sup> *The Daily Dhaka Tribune* (2018). "What are the Features of EC's new EVM?" Accessed: 13 November 2018.

Available at: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/election/2018/05/13/what-are-the-features-of-ec-s-new-evm>

<sup>11</sup> *The Daily Prothom Alo* (2018). "ভারতের চেয়ে ১১ গুণ বেশি দামে ইভিএম (EVMs prices are 11 times higher than India)" Accessed: 5 October 2018.

Available at: <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/article/1561364/>

it.<sup>12,13</sup> For a comparative understanding, electronic voting systems of four countries from different continents are briefly discussed below.

- **Brazil**

Brazil, the largest country in South America, started using EVM since 2000. Brazilian voters used EVM with the feature that shows the candidates on a screen and allows the voters to choose the candidate by just pressing a button. Voters can also confirm and reject, choose another candidate or start the selection process again using the EVM. The Brazilian EVM technology also produces both digital and printed reports of the poll by tally.

- **India**

In India, EVM was first used in the 2004 elections. The Indian EVM comprises two units, a control unit regulated by the polling staff and the ballot unit for the voters. Voters press the button of the ballot unit next to the candidate's name and symbol and the control unit records the vote. To confirm the vote a light glows, and a short beep sound follows. The polling officer then presses a switch

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<sup>12</sup> Superior Electoral Court (2018). "Electronic Voting is Already a Reality in More Than 30 Countries" Accessed: 24 November 2018. Available at: <http://english.tse.jus.br/noticias-tse-en/2018/Marco/electronic-voting-is-already-a-reality-in-more-than-30-countries>

<sup>13</sup> Quora (2018). "How Many Countries Use EVM Machines?" Accessed: 24 November 2018. Available at: <https://www.quora.com/How-many-countries-use-EVM-machines>

to clear the machine for the next voter. India prefers EVM for its coverage, battery life, and portability to remote areas.

- **United Kingdom**

United Kingdom started using EVM in 2002 across jurisdictions. Some jurisdictions allowed voters casting their ballots using electronic methods, such as interactive voice response (IVR), PC-based systems, and handheld mobile devices. Some of these jurisdictions also allowed voters to cast ballots from personal computers or kiosks in public places such as shopping centers. The EC's report on the e-voting trials was found successful without any significant problems or evidence of fraud during the pilots. But due to concerns about potential security and privacy breach, UK discontinued using EVMs.<sup>14</sup>

- **Kenya**

The Kenyan government introduced EVM in 2013 for a free and fair election. In Kenya, voter IDs are checked on handheld devices and results are transmitted to

<sup>14</sup> Kumar, Sanjay et al. (2011). "Analysis of Electronic Voting System in Various Countries." *International Journal on Computer Science and Engineering (IJCSE)*. 3 (5): 1825-1830. Accessed: 13 November 2018. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267235287\\_ANALYSIS\\_OF\\_ELECTRONIC\\_VOTING\\_SYSTEM\\_IN\\_VARIOUS\\_COUNTRIES](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267235287_ANALYSIS_OF_ELECTRONIC_VOTING_SYSTEM_IN_VARIOUS_COUNTRIES)

the capital, Nairobi through text messages. But during the elections, biometric identification kits for scanning people's fingerprints broke down; a server became overloaded with 33,400 voting centers' SMS (which are used to receive the final result of the election), and some election operators forgot the passwords and PIN numbers of software. Polling centers went back to hand counting ballots and results were delayed almost a week, until 9 March 2013, when Uhuru Kenyatta's win was announced.<sup>15</sup> However, the Kenyan parliament is still considering using EVM in their upcoming 2022 elections.<sup>16</sup>

The above cases indicate that the worldwide trend of using EVM differs from country to country. While European and North American countries are discontinuing EVMs because of security issues, South American, African, and Asian

countries are showing their increasing interests in using EVM.<sup>17</sup>

### Technical and Operational Aspects of EVM in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, EVM is comprised of three parts: one control unit, three balloting units and a display unit<sup>18</sup>, connected by a 5-metre wire. The control unit is the EVM's 'brain' and the balloting unit is turned on only after the polling officer presses the 'Ballot' button on it. The control unit is with the EC-appointed polling officer; the balloting units are in the voting compartments into which the voter enters to cast anonymous votes by pressing the button against the name and symbol of the candidate of choice. The EVM runs on a 6-volt single alkaline battery fitted in the control unit, and can even be used for about 48 hours<sup>19</sup> in the areas that have no electricity.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Quartz (2013). "Electronic Voting is Failing the Developing World While the US and Europe Abandon it." Accessed: 13 November 2018. Available at:

<https://qz.com/61209/e-voting-is-failing-the-developing-world-while-the-us-and-europe-abandon-it/>

<sup>16</sup> *The Star* (2017). "IEBC Plans Electronic Voting in 2022 Polls." Accessed: 13 November 2018. Available at: [https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2017/08/18/iebc-plans-electronic-voting-in-2022-polls\\_c1618816](https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2017/08/18/iebc-plans-electronic-voting-in-2022-polls_c1618816)

<sup>17</sup> National Democratic Institute (2013). "Electronic Voting and Counting Around the World." Accessed: 13 November 2018. Available at: <https://www.ndi.org/e-voting-guide/electronic-voting-and-counting-around-the-world>

<sup>18</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WeOAFv5pJcc>

<sup>19</sup> *The Daily Prothom Alo* (2018). "ভারতের চেয়ে ১১ গুণ বেশি দামে ইভিএম" Accessed: 12 November 2018. Available at:

<https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/article/1561364/>

<sup>20</sup> *The Indian Express* (2017). "What is an EVM? How does it work?" Accessed: 12 November 2018. Available at:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/what-is/election-commission-evm-tampering-row-nasim-zaidi-aap-4653104/>

## Key Features of EVM in Bangladesh

EVM offers a state of the art security system and many other benefits over the traditional paper ballots system. All EVM units have built-in password protection and complete access control. EVMs with one control unit and three ballot units were used for city corporation elections, but EVMs to be used for the upcoming 11<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election will have one control unit and one ballot unit.<sup>21</sup> The key features of the EVM are given below:

- **Time locked access control**

As the first layer of security, a time lock will ensure the EVM machine remains inoperable till 8 AM, when voting usually begins in Bangladesh. These machines will be locked before the scheduled voting time to reduce the possibility of vote-rigging.

- **Mandatory use of SD and audit cards**

An EVM will only be ready for voting once an SD card containing voter data, and an audit card containing information on the presiding officer, assistant presiding officer, and polling officer stationed at a particular polling center is inserted into the control unit.

- **Secured PIN**

After insertion of both the correct SD (memory) card and the audit card, the operator will have to type in a PIN number unique to each EVM and that PIN will only be provided to the presiding officer.

- **Secured password protection**

The assistant presiding officers can only operate EVMs after selecting their names and typing in a unique password, which they will receive through an SMS just before the scheduled voting. Operating the machine is nearly impossible without authorization<sup>22</sup>.

- **Biometric security system**

The operators have to provide passwords and fingerprints to use the EVM. Thus, even if someone has the password, the individual will not have access to the machine without a matching fingerprint.

- **Voter identification**

After accessing the EVM, a list of voter data will be visible on the screen of the machine. Voters can be identified by three ways: smart cards, voter ID numbers, or fingerprints. To identify voters, multiple options can be used, but fingerprint verification is mandatory.

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<sup>21</sup> *The Daily Dhaka Tribune* (2018). "Watch: A beginner's guide to Electronic Voting Machines". Accessed: 12 November 2018. Available at: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/election/2018/07/20/a-beginner-s-guide-to-electronic-voting-machines>

<sup>22</sup> *The Daily Dhaka Tribune* (2018). "What are the Features of EC's new EVM?" Accessed: 13 November 2018. Available at: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/election/2018/05/13/what-are-the-features-of-ec-s-new-evm>

- **Zero risks of hacking**

The EVM units will not be connected to the Internet, but to the EC's closed Nationwide Private Network (NPN). Using a closed network significantly lowers the risk of remote hacking attempts. After voting is concluded, a result showing the number of votes cast will be printed out. The printout, if made

### **The Future of EVM in Bangladesh**

Bangladesh first used EVMs in the Chittagong mayoral election in 2010 (present day Chattogram City Corporation) and is about to introduce it for general elections in the upcoming 11th national parliamentary elections. There is a debate over the effectiveness of the EVMs. In 2017 in a dialogue with the EC, 35 of the registered political parties, including BNP, opposed the use of EVMs in the next general elections. However, on the request of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the EC considered the possibility of using electronic voting in the upcoming general elections. Later, the EC approved a project to procure 1.5 lakh EVMs in three phases in the next five years at a cost of 3,825 crore taka from India.

before the scheduled vote, will show zero results, thereby ensuring fair elections.

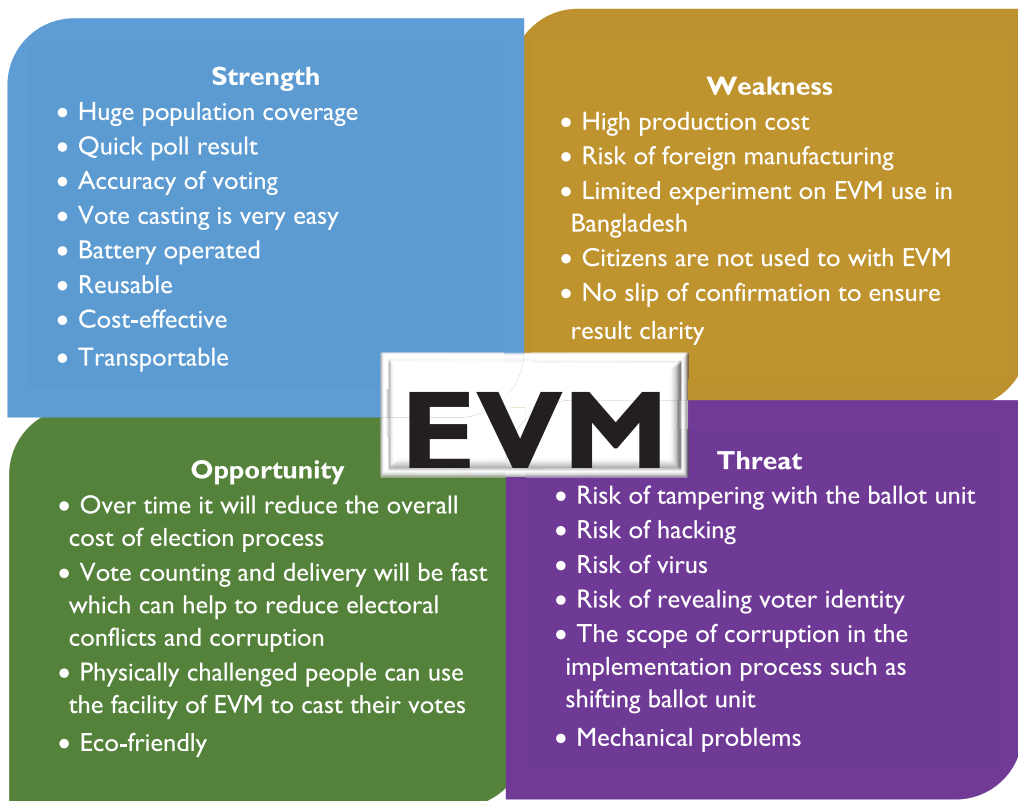
The EC did not consider using locally made EVM devices but instead opted for purchasing from the neighboring country at a cost that is 11 times higher. The draft rules for EVM use in the general polls are also finalized by the EC for the future elections. As the pilot experiments of EVM in some city corporation election was boycotted by the opposition, the effectiveness of the technology still remains experimental.<sup>23,24</sup> Overall, EVM has several merits along with risk factors (**figure 12**) which requires consideration when applying the EVM with proper trials and subsequent improvements to ensure credibility.

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<sup>23</sup> *The Daily New Age* (2018). "EC Finalizes Draft Rules for EVM Use in JS Polls". Accessed: 15 November 2018. Available at: [http://epaper.newagebd.net/images/05\\_11\\_2018/regular\\_37305\\_news\\_1541363466.jpg](http://epaper.newagebd.net/images/05_11_2018/regular_37305_news_1541363466.jpg)

<sup>24</sup> *The Daily Prothom Alo* (2018). "উন্নত দেশে কাগজের ভোটে ভরসা কেন? (Why Developed Countries Rely on Paper Vote?)". Accessed: 15 November 2018. Available at: <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/loginuser.php>

**Figure 12: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis of Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) in elections.**<sup>25, 26, 27, 28</sup>



<sup>25</sup> Smartmatic (n.d.). “Benefits of Electronic Voting”. Accessed: 14 November 2018. Available at: <http://www.smartmatic.com/voting/electronic-voting/>

<sup>26</sup> BBC (2010). “US Scientists ‘Hack’ India Electronic Voting Machines”. Accessed: 14 November 2018. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/10123478>

<sup>27</sup> World Blaze (2017). “Top 10 Advantages and Disadvantages of Electronic Voting Machines (EVM).” Accessed: 14 November 2018. Available at: <https://www.worldblaze.in/advantages-disadvantages-of-electronic-voting-machines-evm/>

<sup>28</sup> New Age (2018). “EC Finalizes Draft Rules for EVM Use in JS Polls”. Accessed: 15 November 2018. Available at: [http://epaper.newagebd.net/images/05\\_11\\_2018/regular\\_37305\\_news\\_1541363466.jpg](http://epaper.newagebd.net/images/05_11_2018/regular_37305_news_1541363466.jpg)

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## New Voters and the Eleventh General Elections in Bangladesh

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The total number of voters in the eleventh parliamentary elections in Bangladesh is approximately 104.40 million. Of these, the number of voters aged between 18-35 years is 42 million. And if the age limit is considered 18 to 40 years, then more than half of the total voters are young. Over the past decade, the number of young voters aged between 18-28 years in the country has increased by more than 2.5 million.<sup>29</sup> According to the draft voter list, the number of new voters was 3,332,593. After updates in the last year, this number stood at 4,294,889.<sup>30</sup> Overall, since the 10<sup>th</sup> parliamentary elections, a total of more than 12,100,000 new voters have been listed to cast their vote in the upcoming elections. Considering the number, according to news sources, the youth are going to play a crucial role in determining which party will sit in power.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, reportedly, political parties, including the ruling Awami League, are considering emphasizing youth-

centered campaigns and manifestoes. This fresh voting population holds substantial power to change both the future trends and attitudes towards the nature of politics. Besides, due to the youth-led socio-political uprising and movements occurring in recent years, the issue of the new voters has drawn significant attention from the political parties.

### New Voters: A Global Perspective

The voters who are taking part for the first time in a national election are always a force to be reckoned with. This is why political parties all over the world offer special attention to this important population. For example, in India new voters constituted 13% of the total voting population in the elections of 2014, and they showed immense support for Anna Hazare in 2011 in his fight against corruption. This led to a new wave of attention from the political parties in India

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<sup>29</sup> *Voice of America* (2018). "Communion: Young Voters Thoughts on Eleventh Parliamentary Elections in Bangladesh (আলাপন: বাংলাদেশে তরুন ভোটারদের ভাবনায় একাদশ জাতীয় সংসদ নির্বাচন)." Accessed: 24 November 2018. Available at: <https://www.voabangla.com/a/bd-elec-19nov18/4665085.html>

<sup>30</sup> *The Daily Manabzamin* (2018). "New Voters 33 Lakh 32 Thousand 593 (নতুন ভোটার ৩৩ লাখ ৩২ হাজার ৫৯৩ জন)." Accessed: 24 November 2018. Available at: <http://www.mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=146273>

<sup>31</sup> *The Daily Ittefaq* (2018). Accessed: 24 November 2018. Available at: <http://archive.ittefaq.com.bd/national/2018/10/25/175883.html>

towards its youth<sup>32</sup>. On the issue of Brexit in the UK, many surveys showed that approximately 70% of young voters (18-24-years-old) voted for *Remain* (in European Union), and 40% of the voters aged 65 and over supported *Leave*. On the basis of this and a survey of average of polls conducted during May-July 2018, it is predicted that the result would change if the referendum had been held again as 82% of 18 to 24-year-olds with a voting preference said that they would vote *Remain* in a second referendum.<sup>33</sup>

### Perception of the New Voters in Bangladesh on Election: Findings based on FGD

A CGS research team conducted a nine-member focus group discussion on 1 November 2018 comprising of students from the University of Dhaka in the university's Teacher-Student Centre<sup>34</sup> to understand the perception of the new voters on ongoing political happenings in pre-election times and their overall

thoughts on the election process and stakeholders. The key topics for discussion were the willingness to participate in the election, features they are looking for in candidates, and the present political trends in Bangladesh.

- **Interest and Willingness to Cast Vote**

Although the number of registered voters is huge, there is a question of how many of them would turn up on Election Day. In 2008, voter turnout was far higher than previous elections (87.13% of the total vote)<sup>35</sup> but the next election in 2014 saw much lower voter turnout (40.04% of the total vote)<sup>36</sup>. Living far from their designated voting centres in order to pursue higher education makes it difficult for many youths to cast votes. It is time-consuming for them to travel to their towns, and that can affect their willingness to vote. New voters are also concerned about the security at the voting stations, as they fear violence may occur and most

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<sup>32</sup> Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (2014). "The Limits of the Youth Vote in Indian Elections." Accessed: 24 November 2018. Available at: <https://www.boell.de/en/2014/03/19/limits-youth-vote-indian-elections>

<sup>33</sup> BBC (2018). "How young and Old Would Vote on Brexit Now." Accessed: 24 November 2018. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-45098550>

<sup>34</sup> Group members of FGD taken by CGS: Tahsin, Jahirul Islam, Tanzid Ahmed Zahid, Durjoy Mollik, Reza, Sobnoor-A- Jannat, Kurrtaul Ain al Nahian, Maisha Khan, M.H. Mahmud. All are students of

University of Dhaka and fresh voters in the upcoming election.

<sup>35</sup> Bangladesh Election Commission (2012). "Statistical Report: 9<sup>th</sup> National Parliament Election." Accessed: 24 November 2018. Available at: <http://www.ecs.gov.bd/files/14jjeif2OAZDbJifbCrdFE2yZ6Ed0XLXfSMelHCJ.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> Bangladesh Election Commission (2015). "Statistical Report: 10<sup>th</sup> National Parliament Election." Accessed: 24 November 2018. Available at: <http://www.ecs.gov.bd/files/PjkqznV62UnbChDNA47y6iZovaHngtTnP6doAfwez.pdf>

of them considered it to be potentially life-threatening despite security assurances. In addition to security, the new voters demand a fair election to be held. Referring to the various incidents like vote rigging, their sense of reliability on constitutional institutions is shaky and uncertain. There is a fraction of new voters who are involved in student politics and have a greater interest in casting their votes. In their cases, political motivations drive voting enthusiasm, unlike non-political new voters. Despite all these factors, many youth consider the general elections to be a festival and acknowledged how politicians accommodate youth's preferences into their key agenda. In a study conducted on the voting behavior of the people of the United States of America, which gave some recommendations for increasing participation in elections, it pointed out the necessity of making the voting process convenient<sup>37</sup>. This idea can be relevant to the Bangladeshi youth's concern about their problems of distance from the registration spot. Therefore, if this issue is addressed along with ensuring security and fair election, these can remove obstacles to young voters' turnout in elections.

- **Youth's Evaluation of Electoral Candidates**

The new and young voters assess politicians mostly by their actions, based on their efficiency in implementing their pre-election commitments. They are more likely to judge their candidates by action rather than being moved by the party symbol and its legacy. Interestingly, young voters coming from the rural areas have a different set of preferences for candidates. It is mostly shaped by their family choice that runs from generation to generation within their family. It creates a barrier to establishing their own understanding of politics. Their family choice often becomes their choice, which is hard to go against in many cases.

In general, youths mostly prefer young politicians from a belief that they can perform with greater spirit and a higher level of enthusiasm. They look for basic qualities among politicians with skills in implementing their commitments. Young voters consider young leaders more likely to have a better understanding of the contemporary world than the older politicians. They also believe that young politicians are good in rapport-building with the young generation as they are better at understanding their views and demands, and hence are more successful in drawing their attention. They expect that young leaders will keep more space for the youth in policymaking. They are also concerned about the young politicians' educational backgrounds and

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<sup>37</sup> Center for American Progress (2018). "Increasing Voter Participation in America." Accessed: 24 November 2018. Available at:

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2018/07/11/453319/increasing-voter-participation-america/>

whether it goes with the political sector to which they are committed.

- **Views on Recent Political Trends**

This year, Bangladesh has witnessed two major movements staged by the younger generation on quota reform and road safety. According to the respondents, these movements ended up with mixed reactions. On the one hand, according to news reports, politicians of ruling parties are worried about its adverse effects on this upcoming election, fearing that youth might turn their backs towards them<sup>38</sup>. Therefore, politicians' thoughts on the demands of those movements may play a vital role among the new voters.

The ongoing electoral activities of the political parties make it clear that they are trying to draw the attentions of young people in the upcoming elections. Political parties are trying to impress the young and new voters by promoting youth leadership and youth-oriented campaign promises. For example, during the recently finished

Barishal City Corporation mayoral election in July 2018, candidates of different political parties focused on campaigns intended to improve the lives of youngsters in the area. The mayoral candidate from the Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD), promised to increase employment opportunities, and create library and sports facilities for the socio-cultural, mental, and physical development of the youth; BNP's mayoral candidate promised young voters on the development of sports and body-building facilities in the city; and the Awami League candidate promised young voters to work with them to make the city more youth-friendly, to construct an international-standard stadium, and develop facilities for their cultural potential<sup>39</sup>. Also very recently, Awami League Chairperson and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stated, 'We dedicate our present for your future'<sup>40</sup>. Therefore, the upcoming election manifestoes and campaigns by different political parties may become more youth-centric.

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<sup>38</sup> *The Daily Dhaka Tribune* (2018). "How Crucial is the Youth Vote for the Ruling Alliance?" Accessed: 24 November 2018.

Available at:

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/election/2018/09/14/how-crucial-is-the-youth-vote-for-the-ruling-alliance>

<sup>39</sup> *The Daily Dhaka Tribune* (2018). "Political Parties Trying to Woo Young Voters for the Upcoming Elections." Accessed: 24 November 2018. Available

at:

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/feature/youth/2018/09/04/political-parties-trying-to-woo-young-voters-for-the-upcoming-elections>

<sup>40</sup> *The Daily Ittefaq* (2018). "Now New Voters One Cr 21 Lakhs (এবার নতুন ভোটার এক কোটি ২১ লাখ)." Accessed: 24 November 2018. Available at: <http://www.ittefaq.com.bd/national/2018/10/25/175883.html>

## Understanding Electoral Violence through Micronarratives: Mymensingh and Jhalokati

The Centre for Genocide Studies (CGS) conducted 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 Mymensingh and Jhalokati are only highlighted here.

### Part A: Mymensingh District

Map 1: District Map of Mymensingh



Source:

<http://www.mapsofbangladesh.com/mymensingh-district.html>

Mymensingh is a divisional district located in the northern part of Bangladesh. It is bordered on the north by the Meghalaya state of India and the Garo hills, on the south by Gazipur district, on the east by the districts of Netrokona and Kishoreganj, and on the west by the districts of Sherpur, Jamalpur, and Tangail. Mymensingh town is the district headquarters. The district currently holds its representation in the national assembly with eleven constituencies named as Mymensingh-1, Mymensingh-2, Mymensingh-3, Mymensingh-4, Mymensingh-5, Mymensingh-6, Mymensingh-7, Mymensingh-8, Mymensingh-9, Mymensingh-10, and Mymensingh-11. The grand alliance led by Bangladesh Awami League got seven seats and Jatiya Party held four seats in the 10<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election in 2014. In the 9<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election, all the seats of Mymensingh were represented by Bangladesh Awami League. Bangladesh Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist party both held five seats and one seat was won by an Independent Party in 2001, in the 8<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election of Bangladesh.

“The 2008 election environment was not festive in Mymensingh as people were in fear due to the presence of the Army. Proxy votes and throwing out of the agents from the poll centres occurred in some of the centers. But overall, the election was fair and acceptable. The post-election environment was not so violent in the city... The 2001 election environment was a little bit violent. Spreading fear in election centres, throwing cocktails, and threatening Hindus were evident. Awami League offices were vandalized after the election in Mymensingh Sadar. In 1996, a violent environment prevailed during the protest movement for a caretaker government before the elections. The 1991 election was the most festive of all the elections that I have ever seen in my life. The environment was very peaceful during and after the election... If we want a good election environment, then we have to change our whole electoral culture.”

**Ferdous Ara Mahmuda, Mymensingh Sadar**

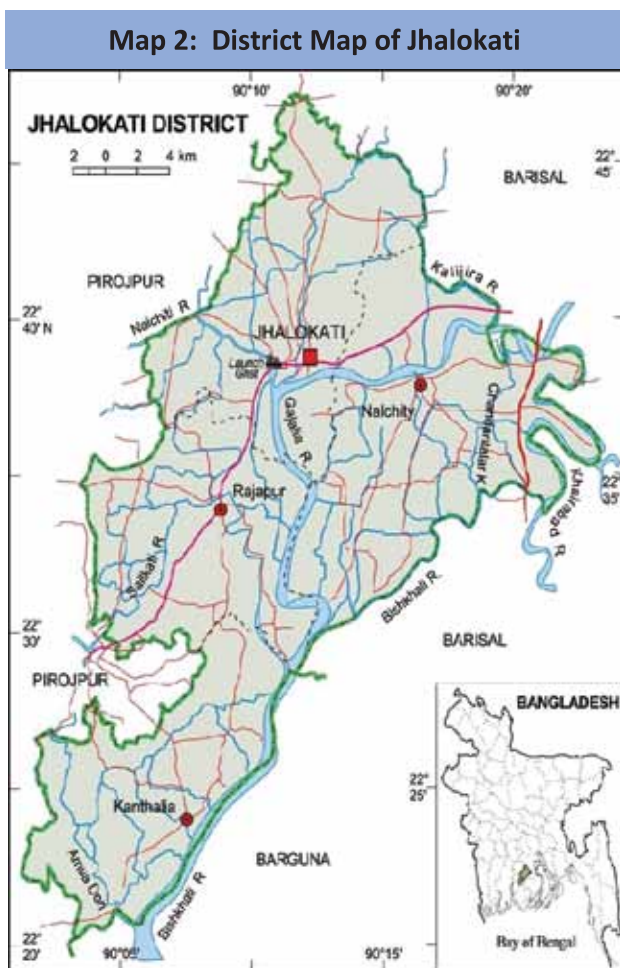
“The 1991 elections was the first election after the collapse of the Ershad Government. So people were happy and the environment was also convenient to cast votes. BNP ruled for two terms but there was a vast difference between the period of 1991 and 2001... Majority of the people were linked with Awami League, so pre-election violence of 2001 was almost at zero level. But the post-election violence was beyond imagination as the alliance of BNP and Jamaat won. Murders, disappearance, torturing Hindu communities and women, grabbing property, political revenge-based tortures and other heinous activities were predominant at that time.... The election environment was quite calm and fair during the 1996 election except for some isolated incidents... Elections were held in our Gafargaon in 2014 despite the boycott of BNP and there was not any type of violent incident during elections. Violence occurred in the Upazila Parishad Election after 2014 over intra-party disputes and conflicts over nomination in Gafargaon.

**Umar Faruk,  
Gafargaon, Mymensingh**

“The 1991 election was festive and colorful. There was no violence in our area during elections. Overall, the election was fair and good. Violence was not at an extreme level during the 1996 election as well. Incidents of proxy votes, problems in polling, kicking out the polling agents, and fighting occurred in the election day but afterwards, environment was very normal in Phulpur...Again, there was no violence before and after the 2001 election. Defeated parties always remain silent or leave the area. But there was an extreme level violence in some of the upazilas like Gafargaon. In 2008, there was a shootout for establishing dominance on the election day at Purbadhola, in Phulpur. Jamaat-Shibir supporters are very few in numbers here so there was no violence after the verdict of the war criminals and the environment was quite normal during the 2014 election.”

**Nazrul Islam Fakir, Phulpur, Mymensingh**

## Part B: Jhalokati District



Source:

<http://www.jhalokati.gov.bd/site/page/792b9809-17a2-11e7-9461-286ed488c766/>

winning both seats in the general election. Finally, in the 2014 election, Awami League candidates sustained in both seats.

Jhalokati is a district in South-Western Bangladesh. It is a part of the Barisal division, bound by Barisal district to the north and east, Barguna district and the Bishkhali River in the south, and Lohagara upazila and Pirojpur district to the west. The administration of Jhalokati Sub-division was formed in 1972 and it was turned into a district in 1984. It consists of 2 municipalities, 18 wards, 4 sub-districts and 32 union parishads. The 4 sub-districts are Jhalokathi Sadar, Kanthalia, Nalchity, and Rajapur. The district is currently holding its representation in the national assembly with two seats: Jhalokati 1 and Jhalokati 2 under 125 and 126 in the constituency of the parliament.<sup>41</sup> In the 1991 general election, BNP nominated candidates won in both seats, in 1996 general election Jatiya Party candidates won in both seats, again in 2001, BNP won both the seats. Awami League came into power in Jhalokati in 2008 by

<sup>41</sup> "Parliament Election Result of 1991, 1996, 2001 Bangladesh Election Information and Statistics". Vote Monitor Networks.

“In the 2014 general election, I went to Nalchiti and observed that people were not excited about the election. There was no eagerness to cast votes in the election among the locals – it was as if they had forgotten about the election. This situation occurred mainly because of the absence of opposition parties in that election. Here, in Jhalokathi, election violence and internal political clashes are relatively lower than other districts. Because no matter what political ideology we believe in, at the end of the day we all tend to live harmoniously and peacefully. If there are any conflicts regarding trivial matters, it doesn’t affect our social lives.”

**Syed Hossain Ahmed, Rajapur, Jhalokati**

“In Jhalokati, there is rarely any incident of oppressing ethnic and religious minorities during the elections. We live together harmoniously and people here do not victimize or vandalize the minorities or Hindu communities during election time. In fact, due to the strong and longtime influence of politicians, many Hindu people have joined in and support different parties. Due to a tolerant political environment, unlike other districts, Hindu minorities here are free to support any party. In Rajapur, the Hindu residents are low and in Kanthalia, the number of Hindu minorities is very high but their safety is ensured by all and overall violence rates are low in these areas. That is why election-related violence is also quite low here.”

**Mainul Islam, Jhalokati Sadar**

“After Jatiya Party, candidates from Bangladesh Nationalist Party were mostly elected in this district. Since 2008 election under the caretaker government, Awami League won the two parliamentary seats from Jhalokathi. But the 2014 election was not an election in many aspects since BNP didn’t take part in the election and Awami League dominated the whole district. We already knew then who would win and that’s why nobody went to cast his or her votes in 2014. Here, people are very peaceful and also love to discuss political issues. Unlike many other districts, there are no adversarial relations between political leaders or BNP-AL conflicts. Electoral violence occurs here in every election, but relatively on a very small scale and no massive violence, including violence against minorities, has taken place as far as I know.”

**Kausar Ahmed, Rajapur, Jhalokati**



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