

# Ballot After Turbulence: Evaluating the 2026 Election in Bangladesh

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## Abstract:

The main objective of this article is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the 13th parliamentary election held in Bangladesh in the aftermath of the 2024 mass uprising. Particular emphasis has been placed on several key aspects, including the pre-election political situation, the nature of electoral competition, the participation of political parties, voter turnout, and the neutrality of the administrative machinery. In order to conduct this analysis, the study primarily employs a qualitative descriptive research design. The research is based on a combination of both primary and secondary sources of data. The findings of the study suggest that political competition in the 2026 election in Bangladesh was uneven. The actual influence of smaller political parties remained very limited, while the dominance of a few major parties and local popularity largely determined the electoral outcomes. The election also reflected the emergence of a new political polarization in Bangladesh. Instead of religious-identity based voting patterns, issues such as development, employment, and the prevention of corruption gained greater prominence in the electoral discourse. Above all, in order to prevent instability and disorder, the people participated in the democratic process of choosing their rulers, thereby contributing to the successful conduct of the election. Although the election achieved a certain degree of constitutional and democratic legitimacy, it was not entirely free from shortcomings. Several irregularities and weaknesses observed in previous elections reappeared in this election in new forms. Consequently, questions were raised regarding the role of the election commission, administrative neutrality, the political attitudes of parties and the freedom of public opinion.

**Keywords:** Bangladesh, Democracy, Election, Authoritarian, Election commission, Movement.

## 1. Introduction:

Bangladesh emerged on 16 December 1971 through a movement of resistance, with the ideals of establishing people's freedom, a welfare-oriented state, and democracy. The primary aspiration of the people of Bangladesh was to form a government nurtured by democratic principles rather than the authoritarian mindset of rulers. From the post independence period to the present a total of thirteen parliamentary elections have been held in Bangladesh. An analysis of the results of the first twelve elections shows that the Awami League formed the government six times, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) four times and the Jatiya Party twice. Although each political party, in its constitution claims to prioritize democracy an examination of their practical functioning reveals that none of the governments have consistently upheld genuine democratic practices. Parties often come to power by invoking the rhetoric of democracy. Yet once in office they tend to undermine it; when out of power, the

same parties once again advocate democratization. Over the 55 year history of Bangladesh, this duality has remained a persistent feature. The words military coups, counter coups, mass uprisings, autocracy and authoritarianism have repeatedly resurfaced throughout the political trajectory of the state. Some of these developments have contributed to the establishment of democracy, while others have weakened democratic institutions.

In the history of Bangladesh, the mass uprising of 2024 represents a popular awakening against authoritarian rule. Although the quota reform movement initially emerged in early July around a specific demand raised by students, it gradually transformed into a broader mass movement due to the repressive policies and authoritarian attitude of the ruling regime. The accumulated public anger against the government eventually erupted into a massive popular outburst. As in previous political movements in Bangladesh, the student community played a leading role in this uprising. Facing the intensity of the movement, the Awami League's rule in Bangladesh came to an end, and Sheikh Hasina left the country and sought refuge in India. One of the most significant achievements of the July uprising is the renewed possibility of democratic revival. For a long time, Bangladesh had been facing crises related to elections, freedom of expression and political accountability. This movement strongly demanded the resolution of these issues and created new hopes for their realisation. With these aspirations, initiatives have been taken to organise new parliamentary elections. Through this uprising, the people overthrew an authoritarian government. The uprising represents not only a form of protest but also a symbol of hope and expectation. The people of Bangladesh have once again shown their eagerness to reclaim democracy they aspire to exercise their voting rights and restore their authority to choose their leaders. As Bangladesh moves once again toward the path of democratization, the 2026 national parliamentary election stands as a critical turning point for shaping a new chapter in the country's political history.

## 2. Literature Review:

Nazma Akter (2023), in her research article, she analysed the role of the election commission in Bangladesh's 11th national parliamentary election and stated that EC performed its duties in the currently endangered election system, has not been able to complete an acceptable election despite giving the whole nation the assurance of a participatory, acceptable, neutral election. Seeing the continuous crisis of independence and neutrality of the election commission in Bangladesh the voters are worried about the future of democracy. Therefore, she argues that in order to maintain Bangladesh's image in the democratic world, the government should take the necessary measures, in consultation with various political parties, to ensure that the election commission can perform its responsibilities efficiently and impartially within the parliamentary system.

Al Masud Hasanuzzaman(2018), in his book, analyses the importance of elections as a fundamental component of the democratic system. He argues that there is no alternative to elections for conferring legitimacy on governments and ensuring the peaceful transfer of power. Through regular, free and competitive and multiparty elections, the will and performance of the people are expressed, which directly influence social and political processes. However he also points out the current electoral system, in Bangladesh as well as in several developing countries around the world, is afflicted by multiple problems and challenges. He believes that the essay included in his book will help readers better understanding the various issues and challenges related to the electoral process.

Dr. Nazmul Ahsan Kalimullah and Dr. Saber Ahmed Chowdhury (2020), in their book, they review democracy, elections and the role of election commissions in different democratic states. They argue

that the diversity found in electoral systems across democratic countries is also visible in the countries of South Asia . Although the majoritarian electoral system is predominant in this region, proportional representation and mixed electoral system are also practiced .At the same time, they argue that it is necessary to examine the electoral system and the effectiveness of the election commissions across different states as such an assessment would be essential for the development of the political systems of democratic countries in South Asia. In this section the authors primarily review issues related to elections and election commissions in eight South Asian countries.

MD Jaynal Abedin (2020), in his article, he analyses the legitimacy crisis that emerged surrounding the 2014 election in Bangladesh and offers several recommendation to overcome this problem. He argues that due to certain misguided initiatives by the ruling government, the legitimacy of the government faced serious questions. According to him, unless certain conditions are fulfilled such as the participation of all major political parties in the election, a free and fair electoral environment, and a strong and neutral election commission - the electoral process will gradually lose its democratic legitimacy overtime.

Syed Magfur Ahmed and Fahmida Nasrin(2026), in their article, they demonstrate that the increasing prevalence of corruption in Bangladesh during the period 2009 - 2024 has weakened the institutional capacity of the state.As a result public trust in the government has declined, economic development has been hindered and administrative transparency and accountability have been reduced.These developments have ultimately weakened the country's institutions, economy and democratic system.Therefore they argue that deep structural reforms are necessary to established good governance.

Md. S. Rana, S. Sharmin, M. B. Amin, J. Olah. (2026), in their article, they show that although the movement in Bangladesh in July 2024 began under the leadership of students, it gradually turned into a large scale mass movement due to political dissatisfaction, economic pressures, corruption and the influence of social media.

Political instability, mass movements, mass uprisings, the electoral system and different parliamentary elections in Bangladesh have been widely studied in previous research. However, the national parliamentary election and referendum held in Bangladesh in 2026 after the 2024 uprising have not yet been properly evaluated. This research paper aims to fill this gap in the existing literature.

### 3. Theoretical Framework:

According to Robert A Dahl a key characteristic of a democracy is the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preference of a citizens. In order to ensure such responsiveness citizens must have opportunities-(1) To formulate their preferences. (2) To signify their preference to follow citizen and the government. (3) To have their preferences weighed equally. Dahl further argues that democratization depends on two key dimensions - public contestation and participation, which together constitute the institutional foundation of polyarchy. The institution of polyarchy include freedom to form organisations, freedom of expression, the right to vote, eligibility for public office, free and fair elections, and alternative sources of information.

The ideas of Seymour Martin Lipset on political legitimacy and democratic stability are highly significant. According to him democracy is defined as a political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials. The stability of democracy largely depends on economic development and political legitimacy. The various indices of economic development - wealth, industrialization, urbanization, education and the expansion of the middle class.

The legitimacy involves the capacity of a political system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate or proper ones for the society. The extent to which contemporary democratic political system are legitimate depends in large measure upon the ways in which the key issues which have historically divided the society have been resolved.

In light of the above theoretical discussion, it can be argued that political competition, citizen participation and the legitimacy of the political system are crucial elements in evaluating democratic elections. The theoretical perspective of Robert A Dahl provides an important framework for understanding the nature of democracy through the dimension of political participation and public contestation. At the same time Seymour Martin Lipset emphasizes the significance of political legitimacy and the social foundations that sustain democratic stability. Therefore, this study draws upon these theoretical perspectives to examine the nature of political competition, the level of participation and the question of electoral legitimacy in 2026 parliamentary election in Bangladesh.

#### 4. Methodology:

The study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design to examine the evolution of the 2026 parliamentary election in Bangladesh in the aftermath of the political turbulence of 2024. Primary source will include archival newspapers, official records, political statements. Secondary source will comprise scholarly books peer-reviewed journal, articles and report published by national and international organisations.

**4.1. Background of 2026 National Election:** The student- people's movement known as the "July Revolution" in Bangladesh emerged as a democratic mass uprising in Bangladesh. Taking place between 5 June to 5 August 2024, the movement involved immense public sacrifice and ultimately brought an end to nearly 16 years of authoritarian rule. The initial momentum of this historic uprising began with protests demanding reforms in the quota system for government jobs. However, the government's rigid and uncompromising stance further intensified the movement, which eventually reached its climax on 5 August 2024. After the sacrifice of nearly 1500 people, the long- standing rule of Sheikh Hasina which had continued for around 15 years came to an end. Sheikh Hasina resigned from office and reportedly sought refuge in India. Following the fall of the government, and amid strong demands from political parties, the president of Bangladesh, Mohammad Shahabuddin dissolved the jatiya sangsad. During this turbulent period, the country witnessed widespread unrest and destruction. In a national address, the chief of army staff Waker- UZ-Zaman announced the formation of an interim government. He also appealed to the public to remain calm and assured that all incident of killing during the movement would be thoroughly investigated.

In an attempt to restore stability aimed the prevailing unrest an interim government was formed. However, this process created a new constitutional challenge. Previously, the constitution of Bangladesh had provisions for a "Caretaker Government" as an alternative arrangement to oversee the elections in the absence of an elected government. Latter the supreme court of Bangladesh declared this provision unconstitutional. Subsequently, during its tenure, the Awami League- led government abolished the caretaker government system in 2011 through the fifteenth amendment of the constitution of Bangladesh. In this context the constitutional complications surrounding the formation of a new government without election were referred to the country's highest court for resolution. Eventually, the appellate division of the supreme court of Bangladesh, under the leadership of chief justice Obaidul Hassan issued a positive directive supporting the formation of an interim government. Following this decision on 8 August 2024

Muhammad Yunus assumed office as the chief adviser of the interim government (Dhaka Post,2024). After the formation of this government, demands soon emerged from various quarters for the organisation of a free and fair election under its supervision, with the aim of establishing a democratically elected government in the country. Although demands were raised for the formation of an elected government, disagreements soon emerged between the interim government and various political parties over whether institutional reforms should precede elections or whether elections should be held first. As a result, the prospect of holding elections gradually became uncertain. At the same time the country witnessed a serious deterioration in law and order in Bangladesh. After the government led by Muhammad Yunus assumed office, there were frequent reports of mob violence across the country. Attacks targeted leading national newspapers, while several cultural centers and memorials associated with the Bangladesh Liberation War were vandalized or destroyed. During this period, the number of unidentified bodies increased and allegations of deaths in custody, interference in women's freedom and broader violations of human rights became matters of public concern.

Following the announcement of the schedule for the Bangladesh national parliamentary election and a proposed referendum, the situation further escalated when Osman Hadi the convener of Inquilab Mancha and a prominent leader of the student movement, was shot dead in broad daylight. The incident intensified the already volatile political climate. During this phase, incidents such as arson attacks on the homes of ordinary citizens and cases of alleged religious desecration also increased. The killing of Dipu Chandra who was beaten and burned to death in Bhaluka, along with the successive murders of several Hindu businessmen, created deep anxiety among minority communities. Consequently, the country appeared to descend into a state of leaderless disorder. Under such adverse socio-economic and political conditions, the prospect of holding a national election seemed almost like an impossible dream.

However, the only viable way to overcome this deteriorating socio-economic environment was through the holding of democratic elections. In this context, Tarique Rahman the son of former prime minister Khaleda Zia, returned to Bangladesh. Although the activities of the Awami League had been banned a renewed spirit of electoral competition began to emerge among other political parties in the country. This development effectively strengthened the prospects of organising elections as a democratic exercise. Alongside the initiatives of the Election Commission of Bangladesh, reform proposals were finalized through the National Unity Commission. Following these developments, the parliamentary election and referendum on constitutional reform were successfully completed on 12th February.

**4.2. Electoral Competition and the Referendum:** The political future of the country largely depends on the 13th parliamentary election held after the fall of the Awami- League government following the July mass uprising. The context of the 13th national parliamentary election was quite different with the end of long rule of the Awami League a new political polarization has emerged in Bangladesh. Although the BNP remains one of the major political forces, its main competitor has changed. Jamaat which previously played a secondary role in Bangladesh politics, has now emerged as a direct major rival. In the election, jamaat formed an 11 party alliance based on seat sharing arrangements, in which the number of Islamic parties is relatively high. The National Citizen Party(NCP) led by young leaders who participated in the mass uprising, is also allied with jamaat. BNP has shared seats with some of its allies. The national parliamentary election in Bangladesh was held on 12 February in 299 constituencies. Voting in the Sherpur- 3 constituency was postponed due to the death of a candidate. According to the Bangladesh Election Commission, a numerical analysis of the final list of valid candidates shows that although several political parties, including the banned Awami League could not participate in the

election, a total of 1755 candidates from 50 political parties and 273 independent candidates contested in the election. Altogether, there were 2028 candidates competing for 299 seats (Bangladesh Election Commission, 2026).

This time, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) one of the country's major political parties, fielded the highest number of candidates with 291 nominees. In terms of the number of candidates, Islamic Andolan Bangladesh ranked second with 258 candidates. In addition 224 candidates from Jammata-e-Islami, 200 from the Jatiya Party, 94 from Gono Adhikar Parishad and 32 from the National Citizen Party along with a specific number of candidates from other political parties, participated in this election. However, no political party was able to nominate candidates in all constituencies in this election. Although the election witnessed one of the highest number of candidates in a national election, the participation of women candidates was disappointingly low. Out of the 50 political parties, 30 parties did not nominate any female candidates. In total 63 female candidates from political parties and 20 independent female candidates contested in the election. This accounts for only 4.02% of the total candidates. Therefore, it can be said that no political party was able to meet the target for women's participation in parliament as proposed in the July charter.

Alongside the national parliamentary election in Bangladesh on 12 February, a referendum on the July charter was also held. According to the chief adviser of the government Muhammad Yunus, the July charter is a consolidated framework of the proposals put forward by the Reform Commission for building a welfare-oriented state, on which the political parties have reached consensus. The charter mainly includes recommendations for reforms in the constitution, the electoral system, the judiciary, public administration, the anti-corruption commission and several other fundamental institutional structures of the state. According to an ordinance issued by the interim government, the referendum was conducted on the basis of 84 proposals covering four major areas. Among these 47 proposals are constitutional in nature, while 37 are to be implemented through ordinary laws or executive orders. However, political parties have expressed different objections to various parts of these proposals. Therefore the National Consensus Commission has documented these objections (Note of dissent) according to the respective positions of the political parties (Anandabazar Patrika, 2026).

**The referendum was mainly organised around four key issues:**

(4.2.1) Formation of institutions: During the election period, a caretaker government, the election commission and the other constitutional institutions will be formed according to the procedures described in the July charter.

(4.2.2) Bicameral parliament: The next parliament will be bicameral. In addition to the national parliament a 100 member upper house will be formed based on the proportion of votes received by political parties in the national parliamentary election. Any amendment to the constitution will require the approval of the majority of members of this upper house.

(4.2.3) Institutional and democratic reforms: The political parties that win the election will be obliged to implement the 30 reform proposals agreed upon in the July National Charter. These include increasing women's representation in parliament, electing a deputy speaker from the opposition, appointing parliamentary committee chairpersons from the opposition, limiting the tenure of the prime minister, enhancing the power of the president, expanding fundamental rights, ensuring the independence of the judiciary and strengthening local government institutions.

(4.2.4) Other reforms mentioned in July charter: Additional reforms outlined in the July charter will be implemented according to the commitments made by political parties. One of these provisions states

that any individual serving as prime minister cannot simultaneously hold the top leadership position within their respective political party.

In the referendum, citizens will have two options to express their opinion Yes/ No. If the referendum results in a majority of 'Yes' votes the newly elected government will be required to implement the July charter within 180 days. However, if the majority votes 'No' the implementation of the charter will remain suspended.

Previously, three referendums were held in Bangladesh in 1977, 1985 and 1991. However in those cases the referendums were conducted separately from parliamentary election ( Prothom Alo, 2025). Prior to the third referendum in 1991 a referendum law was enacted under article 142 (1A) of the constitution. But in 2011 the Awami League government abolished the provision of referendum through the 15th amendment to the constitution. After the July uprising, on 17 December 2024 the high court, while hearing a case challenging that amendment ruled in favor of restoring both the caretaker government system and the provision for referendum.

**4.3. Party Manifestos and Electoral Campaign Strategies:** The 2026 election was highly competitive. For political parties, it was a struggle to consolidate their political base and gain public support. On the other hand for the citizens of Bangladesh the election represented an important opportunity to establish a fair, stable, and democratic system of governance. Therefore, in order to gain the trust and confidence of the people, political parties adopted different strategies, political slogans and policy approaches. In this context the political commitments of the parties were particularly significant.

One of the major political parties of Bangladesh BNP adopted the "Bangladesh First (sohar age Bangladesh )" and "We Will Work, We Will Build the Nation( Korbo Kaj Gorbo Desh)" as the guiding principles of state governance in its election manifesto. Among the key promises included in the manifesto were providing financial assistance of 2,500 Taka to marginal and low income families through a family card, issuing farmer cards for farmers, fish farmers and livestock readers, creating employment opportunities, promoting religious and social harmony, ensuring the trial of crimes against humanity committed during the fascist regime and giving importance to their previously declared 31 point demands (BBC News Bangla , 2026).

Another major contender in this election was Jamaat-e- Islami. In its election manifesto the party emphasized several key principles including honesty, unity, justice, efficiency and creation of employment opportunities. It also pledged to address women related issues from a humane and empathetic perspective. Furthermore, the party promised to work toward building a Bangladesh freedom from corruption, fascism, domination, unemployment and extortion (BBC News Bangla, 2026).

The National Citizen Party formed by the young leaders who played a significant role in leading the July uprising in Bangladesh, highlighted several key priorities in its 36 point election manifesto. These included lowering the voting age to 16, creating 10 million dignified employment opportunities within the next 5 years, completely eliminating extortion, making 6 month internships mandatory, encouraging talented professionals to return to the country, and ensuring 6 months of mandatory maternity leave and one month of paternity leave (BBC News Bangla, 2026).

An analysis of the election manifestos of the political parties shows that each party placed significant emphasis on the demands and aspiration of the new generation. At the same time they also highlighted the principles of equality, discipline security and establishment of a corruption free Bangladesh. The 2024 mass uprising played a crucial role in the fall of the authoritarian government, and the student community of Bangladesh had a major role in this movement. In this phase the traditional political

parties of Bangladesh could not claim credit for overthrowing the authoritarian regime. Rather the events demonstrated how powerful the demands of the youth can be. It also showed that if these demands are not understood and addressed through democratic processes, and if alternative methods emerge, they can pose serious challenges to the existing political system and institutions. Therefore almost every political party in Bangladesh attempted to frame its election manifesto in a way that would appeal to and satisfy the aspirations of new generation.

However political parties did not only modernise their election manifesto; they also introduced new approaches and variations in their campaigning strategies and methods of electioneering. Bangladesh election campaign landscape has fundamentally shifted from traditional posters to a high stakes digital battle ground. With revised electoral rules banning physical posters, major party such as the BNP, Jel and the NCP have invested approximately TK 2.8 crore (USD 233, 331) in meta advertisements alone. This technology driven approach specially targets the Gen-Z vote, as nearly 44% of the electorate is under 35. The digital transformation marks the 2026 election as the most technologically sophisticated in Bangladesh's electoral history, in which social media influencers and information technology firms have effectively supplanted traditional street-level organisers as the primary drivers of the political narrative. Slogans have played a significant role in politics of Bangladesh, weather during the Language Movement, the 1971 Liberation War or the Mass Movement of 2024. Throughout Bangladesh's political history, there is ample evidence that appealing and language based slogans have the power to strongly influence public opinion and popular sentiment. Therefore in this phase political parties sought to popularize issue-based slogans in order to win the hearts and minds of the people.

In this election political parties used different slogans focusing on theme such as communal harmony, youth empowerment, economic commitments, the establishment of democracy and justice, nation-building and strengthening party morale. The slogan of Bangladesh Nationalist Party was "Hindu Musalman Milemishe; Vote Debe Dhaner Sishe (Hindu and Muslims united shall cast their votes for the paddy sheaf)", "Tarunyer Prothom Vote; Dhaner Sisher Pokhe Hok (Let the first vote the youth be in favour of the paddy sheaf)", "Satero Bachor Dieni Vote, Ae Bar Dibo, Dhaner Sishe Vote (I have not exercised my vote in 17 years; this time I will vote for the paddy sheaf)", "Amra Kaj Korbo Gorbo Desh; Sobkichur Urdhe Bangladesh (We will work, we will build the country; Bangladesh comes above all)" The paddy sheaf is the party symbol of the BNP (Bagh et al, 2026).

Key slogan used by Jamaat-e-Islami was "Hare Krishna Hori Bol; Daripalla Taina Tol (Hare Krishna, Hare Bol; lift the balanced scale)", "Tarunyer Prothom Vote; Daripallar Pokhe Hok (Let the first vote of the youth be cast in favour of the balanced scale)", "Deshar Unnyon, Sikha, Kormasthan; Daripallay Hobe Sob Samadhan (the country's development, education and employment -all solutions will be found through the balance scale)". The balance scale is the party symbol of Jel (Bagh et al, 2026). On the other hand the National Citizen Party (NCP) adopted the slogan, "Jagche Tarun Asche Alo; Shapla Kolite Shil Maro (The youth are awakening, the light is coming; affix your seal to the water lily bud)", "Gano Vote Haa Boli; Marka Ebar Shapla Kolite (We say yes in the referendum; the symbol this time is the water lily bud)" etc. The party symbol of the NCP is the water lily bud (Bagh et al, 2026).

**4.4. Electoral Result and Party Performance:** In the parliamentary election and the referendum the total number of voters was 117,711,895. Among them 64,825,151 were male voters and 62,885,624 were female voters. In addition, there were 1,120 third gender voters. Among the 299 constituencies the lowest number of voters was in Jhalkathi-1 with 228,431 voters while the highest number of voters was in Gazipur-2 with 802,333 voters. The results of the national parliamentary election and the referendum

on the July charter published by the election commission of Bangladesh are highly significant. Out of 299 constituencies, the EC has announced the parliamentary election results for 297 seats. The results for Chattogram-2 and chattogram-4 will be declared after the resolution of pending court cases. According to the results announced by the EC 77,695, 000 voters cast their votes out of total 127.7 million voters in this election. In 297 constituencies, the voter turnout was 59.44% .In the referendum held across 299 constituencies, the turnout was 60. 26%. If we analyse the election results from a gender perspective, it can be observed that out of 297 seats, male candidates won 290 seats, while female candidates secured only 7 seats. Among these seven Victorious women, 6 were elected under the BNP symbol, and one won as an independent candidate. Furthermore, if we examine the success rates of male and female candidates using a mathematical approach, it is evident that 8.43% of total female candidates were elected, whereas 14.91% of the total male candidates achieved victory. The highest voter turnout in the parliamentary election was recorded in Chuadanga-2 with 78 .77%. While the lowest turnout was in Dhaka -12 with 37.42%. In the referendum the highest turnout was in Pabna-2 with 82.58%, while the lowest turnout was again recorded in Dhaka-12, with 37.34%. In the referendum, 48,074,429 votes were in favour of 'Yes" while 22, 565,627 votes cast in favour of 'No'. Out of 299 constituencies the 'Yes' vote won in 288 constituencies. Where as the 'No' vote won in 11 constituencies (BBC News Bangla, 2026).The election commission explained that the difference between average voter turnout in the referendum and the parliamentary election occurred due to two main reasons-(1) The election results in two constituencies are still suspended and have not yet been officially declared. (2) Some voters participated only in the referendum but did not vote in the parliamentary election.

**Table:1, Summarizes the distribution of seats along with the percentage of votes obtained by each political party in the 2026 parliamentary election .**

SL NO	POLITICAL PARTY	SEATS WON	VOTE SHARE(%)
1	Bangladesh Nationalist Party	209	49.97
2	Jamaat-e Islami	68	31.76
3	National Citizen Party	6	3.05
4	Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis	2	2.09
5	Islami Andolan Bangladesh	1	2.70
6	Gono Odhikar Parishad	1	0.33
7	Bangladesh Jatiya Party(BJP)	1	0.14
8	Khelafat Majlis	1	0.76
9	Gono Sanhati Andolon	1	0.14
10	Independent Candidate	7	5.79

If the results of the 13th national parliamentary election are analysed based on the margin of victory, it can be observed that the BNP candidate from Rangamati constituency, Dipen Dewan won by the largest margin. He defeated his rival independent candidate Sohel Chakma by 170, 322 votes. On the other hand the smallest margin of victory was recorded by Saiduddin Ahmad Hanzala a candidate from the Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis. He won the election by a margin of only 385 votes, defeating the BNP candidate Nadira Akhtar.

Another important aspect of this election is that BNP candidates won in constituencies traditionally considered strongholds of the Awami League. Although the voter turnout was relatively low in this regions, the election results indicate that most of the votes cast went in favour of BNP candidates. Evidence of this can be seen in the results form Kishoreganj where BNP nominated candidates won five constituencies and in Gopalganj district, where BNP candidates secured victory in all three parliamentary constituencies. If the results of the referendum are analysed, it can be seen that the 'No' vote won in the three constituencies of Gopalganj, Khagrachhari, Rangamati, Bandarban, Jhenaidah-1, Sunamganj-2, Chattogram-8, Chattogram-12, and Rajshahi -4. It has been also found that among the 11 constituencies where the 'No' vote won, BNP candidate were elected in ten constituencies and a jamaat candidate was elected in one. Supporters of the Awami League were opposed to a referendum or any kind of reforms from the very beginning of this selection. As a result it is practically clear from the results of the parliamentary election and the referendum that those Awami League supporters who participated in election placed their trust in BNP in this election.

**Table: 2, Alliance-wise seat distribution and vote share in the 2026 parliamentary election in Bangladesh.**

Alliance Name	Seats Won	Seat Share(%)	Vote Share (%)
BNP Alliance	212	71.38	51.07
Jamaat Alliance	77	25.92	38.62

An analysis of the number of competing candidates, party symbols, and the percentage of votes received by the political parties participating in the election clearly shows that this electoral contest reflected a multidimensional but unequal competition. On one hand, there was the dominance of major political parties, while on the other hand many smaller parties maintained only by a symbolic presence. The long-standing player in national politics Jatiya party (with the electoral symbol of Plough), fielded 199 candidates but received only 0.89% of the total votes. Compared to previous elections, this percentage is significantly lower, indicating a substantial decline in the party's popular support. In addition, several small and medium-sized parties received limited votes. Among them were Bangladesh Islami Front (0.45%) and Communist Party of Bangladesh (0.08%). Most of the smaller parties received between 0.0% and 0.10% of the vote, which in practice failed to create any significant impact beyond symbolic presence. Although many parties nominated more than a hundred candidates their vote share remained close to zero indicating the weakness of their organisational structure and popular support base. Independent candidates collectively secured 5.79% of the total vote, suggesting that local popularity still functions as an important factor in electoral politics. Overall, the total number of contesting candidates was 2028. An analysis of the results reveals three clear trends- Firstly, the votes were largely concentrated in a single major party. Secondly, the religious-based parties collectively received a notable share of votes, though these votes were fragmented among them. Thirdly despite the large number of smaller parties, their actual political influence remained very limited (Dainik Naya Diganta, 2026). Fourthly, the election results provide clear evidence that the people of Bangladesh have rejected the misogynistic attitudes of hardline political parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami.

#### **4.5. The Role of the Election Commission and Electoral Controversies and International Reaction:**

In any democratic state, election are held at regular intervals as one of the most important and festive processes to sustain the continuity of democracy. To ensure that this electoral process is conducted in a

free, fair and peaceful manner, the presence of an independent Election Commission recognised by the constitution extremely essential. And in recognition of this principle article 118- 126 of the constitution of Bangladesh provide guidelines for the formation of election commission for conducting all the activities related to the conduct of election as well as rules and regulation for determine in its power and scope. The Constitution of Bangladesh, the Representation of People Order (1972) , and various regulation have given EC enough power to hold a fair election. But the EC of Bangladesh is not able to play an effective role in the smooth conduct of the parliamentary elections and the elections of local government institutions (Akter, 2023). If we make a comparative discussion of the past election in Bangladesh, it can be observed that the role of the ruling government was dominant in conducting the elections, while the role of the election commission remained secondary, which is never desirable in a democratic system. Moreover due to this one sided role of the election commission, demands for reform of this institution have been raised many times. However, no ruling party or government has given serious importance of these demands.

After the 2024 uprising, in a turbulent and unstable Bangladesh organizing a free and fair election was essential for the establishing an independent democratic government. At the same time, it was equally necessary for the election commission to assume an independent and autonomous role in order to conduct this electoral process properly. Therefore, the role of the election commission in the national parliamentary election in Bangladesh come under observation not only domestically but also at the international level.

On 11 December, the schedule for the 13th National Parliamentary Election was announced by the chief election commissioner, A.M.M Nasiruddin through a national address. According to the election commission, nearly 8000,000 officials performed electoral duties to ensure the smooth conduct of voting and a total of 42, 779 polling stations across the country. Election Commissioner Abul Fazal Mohammad Sanaullah stated it that around 958,000 members of law and enforcement agencies were deployed during the national parliamentary election to maintain law and order. In addition, for the first time UAV (unmanned Aerial Vehicle), drones and body worn cameras were used to ensure election security. Moreover expatriate Bangladeshis, election related officials and prisoners were able to cast their votes through postal ballots for the first time. According to the statement of the election commission in order to observe whether the election and the referendum were conducted in a credible, transparent and inclusive manner, along with 55000 domestic observers, foreign observers and journalist were also invited. About 394 observers and 157 journalist from 80 international organisations and foreign countries such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the Commonwealth, the European Union and the Asian Network for Free Elections -played an important role in observing the voting, vote counting and result consolidation processes (The Daily Star, 2026).

Along with the political parties, the Election Commission also introduced and promoted the practice of slogans in order to make the election successful. In this election, the slogan that the election commission tried to spread among the people was: "Love the country, boycott the corrupt in elections; let the youth's first vote be against corruption; elect honest and competent candidates and build a safe and corruption free Bangladesh (Desh Ke Bhalobasun Nirbachone Durnitibajder Boycott Korun; Durnitir Biruddhe Hook Tarunner Pratham Vote Ebong Sat O Jogyo Parthi Nirbachon Kori, Surakhito Durniti Mukto Bangladesh Gori)". Another slogan used by the election commission was "The power of voters is the liberation of democracy (Voterder Shakti, Ganatanter Mukti)".

Despite undertaking all these initiatives and arrangements, the role of the election commission could not rise above criticism. In this regards the first allegation against the election commission is that there was a significant lack of adequate planning in conducting the referendum in a proper manner. Where the referendum could have reflected the people's unambiguous participation and their involvement in national decision making, it instead appeared as a confusing and unclear event to many people in Bangladesh. Observations at the grassroots level revealed that many voters who participated in the election did not even know what changes would occur in the overall governance structure of the country if either the 'Yes' or 'No' option won in the referendum and what aspects would remain unchanged. The election commission cannot avoid responsibility for this situation in any way. Alongside the role of the election commission, incidents of irregularities and malpractice were also observed in this election. According to the Transparency International Bangladesh, in this election 35.7% of constituencies witnessed voters being forced to vote for a particular electoral symbol .In 46.4% of constituencies, voters were threatened, driven away, or obstructed from entering the polling centres. Incidents of fake voting occurred in 21.4% of constituencies. In 10.7% of constituencies, ballots were stamped even before the voting began, opposition polling agents are prevented from entering the centers and polling booths were captured. Additionally allegations of fraud in vote counting were raised in 7.1% of constituencies. According to the information of the election commission 7, 402,285 invalid votes were cancelled in the referendum. The highest member of cancelled votes was recorded in Sunamganj-1 constituency .Moreover, nearly 99% of the candidates violated some form of electoral code of conduct and the limits of campaign expenditure (both online and offline) were widely violated individually as well as jointly. The level of these violations was the highest among the candidates of the two major parties BNP and Jamaat.( BBC News Bangla, 2026).

Therefore, it can be said that eager public in the electoral field at least hoped this time that the widely familiar terms such as "vote rigging" , "vote robbery " , "electoral fraud", " night voting", "fake voting", " booth capturing" and "farcical election", would no longer be heard in relation to elections. However , like the previous elections, the election commission could not remain free from responsibility this time either. Various allegations have been raised . However there has been some change in the terminology. For example, some political parties claim that "election engineering" or "manipulation" has taken place, meaning that the election results were arranged or artificially produced. Some parties have alleged "result tempering" or change in the result as well as "planned fraud" .Others have described this election as a "managed vote"( Hossain, 2026).

Despite various irregularities and shortcoming in Bangladesh 13th parliamentary election, all participating political parties accepted the people's verdict and, at least ostensibly recognised the election as a legitimate. At the same time, neighboring countries have expressed their interest in working collaboratively with the parties representatives who achieved success and secured a majority in the election.

**4.6. Democratic Evaluation and Critical Assessment:** Since independence, the state of Bangladesh has passed through various upheavals and challenges. The country has been most severely affected by the authoritarian mindset of its rulers. Although regular elections have been held in this state to overcome political deadlock, resist authoritarianism, and create a democratic environment, they have often failed to produce meaningful outcomes in reality. In particular, the elections of 2014, 2018 and 2024 effectively turned public opinion into a farce by making the electoral field almost opposition free .The elections held during the rule of the Awami League in 2014 and most recently in 2024 were

widely regarded as one sided elections. This was mainly because major opposition parties such as the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Bangladesh Jamaat -e-Islami were kept outside the electoral process. In these elections, people were unable to cast their votes, and there have been allegations that the electoral system was deliberately and undermined. The 2014 election came to be known as a "One sided election" the 2018 election as a "Night election" and the 2024 election as an "Army- dummy election. Therefore the restoration of a democratic environment, the removal of political instability and the establishment of corruption free elections have become fundamental demands of the people at all levels of society in Bangladesh.

From the analysis of the 2026 election, it can be seen that a new polarization has emerged in the politics of Bangladesh centered on the politics of establishing in peace and order. If we analyse the results of the 13th parliamentary election on the basis of forming the government and attaining the status of the opposition party, then we will see that after almost two decades the BNP is going to form the government with an absolute majority. Earlier in 1991, 1996 and 2001 the BNP lead government was headed by the party's late chairperson Khaleda Zia, who served as prime minister. The current BNP chairperson Tarique Rahman has won in the Dhaka-17 and Bogura -6 constituencies and it has already been clearly stated from the party that he will become the prime minister. From the analysis of BNP's results it has been seen that among the party's victorious members there is diversity in terms of religion, gender and the presence of both young and senior members. Among the elected BNP members there are 6 women member, which is not seen in the other parties (Dainik Ittefaq, 2026). After ending 17 years of exile and landing at Dhaka airport, Tarique Rahman said in the style of the American black leader Martin Luther King Jr. "I have a dream" , within just one and a half months of arriving in Dhaka, he has reached the very peak of power. Therefore, how far he will be able to make possible the trust that the citizens of Bangladesh have placed in him to established the rule of law in Bangladesh, restore peace and order, create employment, implement the July charter, remove economic backwardness, and establish proper foreign relations will remain under deep consideration and evaluation.

After a long time, the national parliament is going to have a relatively large opposition party. In 1991 the Awami League had 87 seats and 1996 the BNP had 116 seats while playing the role of the main opposition party. In 2001, the Awami League had 62 seats as the opposition party. In the subsequent parliament the number of members of the main opposition party could not cross 30. In the three controversial elections of 2014, 2018 and 2024 the Jatiya Party played the role of the opposition party with only a small number of seats. At the same time, leaders of the Jatiya Party were also seen serving as ministers in the government. For this reason, they were often described as a "domesticated opposition" or "tame opposition".

That is after 1996, it is this time that Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami and its alliance have assumed the role of the main opposition party with the highest number of members. Although the hardline party Jamaat-e-Islami has not been able to capture state power, it has set a new record in terms of the number of parliamentary seats won. Earlier, in the 1991 election Jamaat candidates had won a maximum of 18 seats. This time at least four times that number of seats have gone to them. At the same time due to the generosity of the government led by Muhammad Yunus, several of their proposals that were included in the July charter were approved in the referendum (Bonik Barta, 2026). Thus, from opposing the Liberation War to attaining the status of the opposition in parliament, this political party called Jamaat-e-Islami, along with its allied parties, will have to demonstrate to what extent it can, as an opposition force in Bangladesh, exert pressure on the government on issues such as minority security, ensuring

women's rights and safety, and socio- economic development, and how far it can resist the government's anti- democratic activities -this will gradually become clear in the future.

A notable aspect of the 13th parliamentary election of Bangladesh is the non- participation of the Awami League, one of the most significant political parties in the country, and the declaration banning its activities. This has raised questions about whether the election can truly be considered inclusive. Generally an inclusive election refers to an electoral process in which all political parties, candidates and voters in society can participate with equal opportunity and freedom. The question of whether the election in Bangladesh was inclusive became even more prominent when the unelected interim government took the initiative to ban the activities of the Awami League. However, the Interim Government, the Election Commission of Bangladesh and Transparency International Bangladesh have presented a very clear position on whether the election was inclusive. According to them, the 13th national parliamentary election was free, competitive, participatory and inclusive. Although the Awami League was barred from participating in the election and therefore called for an election boycott, grassroots leaders activists and supporters of the party nevertheless took part in the election and supported and helped elect candidates from alternative political parties. According to these institution since there was significant public participation in the election and a large number of registered political parties took part, the election can be considered participatory and inclusive. The statement of rebel BNP candidate and independent winner Rumin Farhana is somewhat different in this regard. According to her, the BNP was absent in the previous three elections and for that reason those parliaments were often described as "One Sided Parliaments" in the same way, in this election the Awami League did not participate. Therefore from that perspective, nearly 30% of the people of Bangladesh do not have representation in this parliament. Hence the question of whether this election can truly be considered inclusive in not an unreasonable one.

However if one reviews the 55 year history of Bangladesh, it can be seen that in almost every election one or another political party was either banned or boycotted the election. Therefore, the question of evaluating an election solely on the basis of the participation of political parties has never received much importance there.

**Table: 3, A comprehensive list of voter turnout rates in Bangladesh's National parliamentary election.**

YEAR	VOTER TURNOUT(%)
1973	55.62
1979	50.94
1986	61.31
1988	54.93
1991	55.45
1996 (Feb)	26.58
1996 (June)	74.96
2001	75.59
2008	87.13
2014	40.04
2018	80.20

2024	42.04
2026	59.44

If we analyse the recent in Bangladesh on the basis of voter turnout compared with previous elections, it can be seen that the public participation in this selection was relatively higher than in at least seven past elections. However, evaluating the outcome of elections and democracy solely on the basis of voter turnout and the number of seats won would lead to a misleading interpretation, and the history of Bangladesh itself provides a clear example of this. In previous elections, there was participation and even overwhelming control of power by certain parties, but there was no real solution to the people's deprivation grievances and legitimate human demands. The tendency to present an undemocratic mindset under the guise of democracy must be eliminated. Every political party, elected representative ruling authority and government institution must focus on nurturing democratic culture through the protection of civil liberties, electoral pluralism and political participation. Only then will a genuine democratic environment develop in Bangladesh. They must remember that the legitimacy of forming a government does not come solely from elections; it must also reflect the will of the people. If this expression of the people's will does not occur through elections, the people themselves may directly take power into their own hands.

### Conclusion:

Along with the discussions and criticisms on these issues, the main point that we must pay attention to is how far the goals of the people of Bangladesh are achieved. Despite various obstacles, the citizens of Bangladesh placed their trust in the elected candidates in the parliamentary election and chose their rulers and in the referendum they ensured the victory of the "Yes" option. The key questions is how far these goals are successfully realised. In other words, it is important to observe how willing and successful the ruling authority will be in establishing the rule of law in Bangladesh, ensuring the security of minorities, preventing corruption, creating employment opportunities, implementing the July charter, and improving the socio-economic conditions of the country. It should also be noted that the 13th parliamentary election of Bangladesh was not a routine election; rather it was a means to overcome the atmosphere of instability that emerged after the July mass uprising. In this context the most important issue is how far the ruling authority will maintain a democratic environment in its governance and within the country. Otherwise due to the distortions of time and the arrogance of majority power they too may once again assume the character of an authoritarian ruler. Alongside the ruling authority, the role of the victorious opposition and independent candidates in the election will also remain under close scrutiny for the bright future of the nation. It remains to be seen to what extent these victorious candidates will criticize any unilateral or undemocratic decision of the government, or whether they too will become merely the shadow of the ruling power. These questions will open a new horizon for future research.

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