**Bachelor Thesis on:**

**Mitigating Electoral Violence: Analyzing the Election Commission’s Interventions in the 2018 Polls**



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Election Commission and Its Role in Managing Electoral Violence: A Case Study of the 2018 Election

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Chapter 1

Introduction

# Introduction:

Elections serve as a tool through which the citizens can choose and influence leaders that govern them in democracies. The election environment must remain free of violence, intimidation, and corruption, thus making them free and fair; the challenges influence especially those developing democracies. Electoral violence destroys people's trust in democratic institutions, contributing significantly to hindrances against fair governance (Riaz & Parvez, 2021). Bangladesh mirrors this problem,m having undergone several rounds of electoral violence, most notably during the 2018 general election, which, amid broad allegations of voter intimidation, vote rigging, and pervasive malpractice, raised material questions about the Bangladesh Election Commission's (EC) efficiency in dealing with such challenges (Maitrot & Jackman, 2020).

The central body that manages elections in Bangladesh is the Bangladesh Election CommissionElection Commission, which organizes all the election processes. The commission

has to ensure the review of electoral processes, institutions to supervise polling stations, ensure proper voter registration, enforce necessary election laws, and provide safety features that will, in a way, cover all forms of electoral violence. Although the office had these sweeping authorities, the EC's role in the 2018 general elections to hold back electoral violence and ensure fairness is imperfectly found. Allegations come up that "voter intimidation strengthens the hyper-active nature" of the said institutional cylinder. Electoral violence manifests in the physical use of force, issuing threats, or other forms of coercion, which pose a direct threat to free and fair elections' most fundamental tenets (Mollah & Jahan, 2020).

The other political rivalry fueling quite deep electoral violence in Bangladesh is mainly between the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) (Riaz & Parvez, 2021). Despite this, the Awami League decisively won the 2018 elections; however, accusations of violence and manipulation might have significantly contributed to declining public confidence in the EC's ability to preside over elections free from bias and by democratic norms.

The present study considers mechanisms the Bangladesh Election Commission employs to deal with election-related violence, using the 2018 elections as a case study. An analysis of strategies undertaken, challenges faced, and conclusions drawn is made to recommend options available to help the EC strengthen its institutional capacity. Its findings contribute to the broader discourse on electoral governance and provide insights relevant to other hybrid regimes facing similar issues.

# Problem Statement:

Electoral violence is one of the significant threats to democratic integrity, questioning the legality of the electoral process and governance in Bangladesh. The incidents of violence and intimidation in the 2018 general election raised questions about the Election Commission's ability to hold free and orderly elections. Despite legal frameworks intended to prevent such violence, the EC faced much resistance, including poor enforcement of election law, extreme political tensions, and poor coordination with the security forces(Iftekharuzzaman et al., 2019).

These present obstacles to the EC's achieving and maintaining public confidence in the electoral process, putting serious question marks against its independence and ability to handle electoral disputes.

The paper highlights the role of Bangladesh's Election Commission in combating election violence. The case study outlines the 2018 elections. The research investigates the Commission's efforts and challenges to strategize exploitation within the current electoral framework. Thus, this study will contribute to the literature on election administration in Bangladesh expounded with recommendations to strengthen the Commission's position in rendering free and fair elections.

# Research Aims and Objectives

**Aim:** To evaluate the EC’s role in managing electoral violence in the 2018 election and present strategies for improvement.

### Objectives:

 Examine the primary factors contributing to the nature of electoral violence in the 2018 Bangladesh election, including political, social, and institutional causes.

 Assess the effectiveness of the Bangladesh Election Commission (EC) in addressing and mitigating electoral violence during the 2018 election, focusing on its policies, strategies, and actions.

 Evaluate the EC's specific challenges in preventing electoral violence, considering political dynamics, security issues, and institutional limitations.

 Investigate how the EC adapted its strategies to address the challenges it encountered throughout the electoral process and how these adaptations impacted the management of violence.

# Research Questions:

The following questions guide this research:

* How effective was the Bangladesh Election Commission (EC) in addressing and mitigating electoral violence during the 2018 election?
* How did the primary factors contribute to violence during the 2018 Bangladesh election?
* How did the Election Commission address its challenges in preventing violence throughout the electoral process?

# Significance of the Study

Significance of the Study: This study is significant because it addresses a crucial problem in Bangladesh's democratic process: how to handle electoral violence. This study will extend knowledge of the institutional mechanisms that might either avoid or worsen electoral violence by concentrating on the function of the Bangladesh Election Commission. Policymakers, election officials, and international organizations that support democratic governance and peaceful elections will find value in the study's conclusions. Future election management improvements may be influenced by the suggestions made in this study, which would increase the EC's ability to deal with electoral violence.

# Research Methodology

1. **Research Design**

The paper relies mainly on secondary data from various authentic sources, including government publications, international reports, newspapers, and scholarly articles, Which have been analyzed to form a strong contextual basis for verifying findings. Complementing the primary data obtained from stakeholder interviews allows the chance to capture first-hand how to deepen the understanding of challenges and actions the Commission has conducted so far.

Therefore, this research relies mainly on secondary data, as documented by a wide array of evidence, to ensure a balanced and comprehensive analysis of the 2018 elections. The approach pursues the depth and breadth of the existing literature to situate findings within Bangladesh's broad political and electoral landscape.

### Type of Study

Thus, the present study applies a qualitative case study methodology to investigate the Electoral Commission's response to electoral violence. This allows an in-depth understanding of the institutional practices, stakeholder dynamics, and contextual forces that elude such minute details in portraying complex political phenomena.

### Approach

This study is based on approaches concerned with explanation and description. The descriptive part explains electoral violence in greater detail and its actual impact. These explanations will discuss both the weaknesses of our political system and the ways parties use power. Strategic decisions help explain performance results. The two approaches show us the full scope of the electoral violence issue and its impact on the Electoral Commission.

### Framework

Two key theoretical frameworks guide the study:

**1. Institutional Theory:** Studies how organizations work within their rules and norms while facing system limits.

The way organizations work affects how well the EC performs its tasks.

**Strategic Conflict Theory:** Review how violent actions help political figures control elections. Political actors use violence to change election results and win more advantages.

These frameworks explain how organizational systems and strategic decisions shape EC outcomes.

These frameworks help us study the EC's organizational systems and strategic choices to see how they work.

# Sampling

### Population

The study’s target population includes the main stakeholders from various groups involved in the 2018 elections:

* + - **Election officials**: Insights into operational challenges and institutional practices.
    - **Political party members**: Representing ruling and opposition parties to capture diverse perspectives.
    - **Security personnel**: Understanding the role of law enforcement in mitigating violence.
    - **Voters**: Including individuals directly affected by electoral violence to highlight grassroots-level impacts.

### Sampling Method

Our research team selected participants through purposive sampling to best suit our research needs purpose. The method enabled researchers to gather different perspectives and accounts about the problem. The research team picked participants from areas that regularly experience violence.

### Sample Size

The sample consists of:

* + - 5 election officials
    - 5 political party members
    - 5 security personnel
    - 15 voters (balanced representation of urban and rural communities)

This sampling strategy gives diverse insights while maintaining a manageable scope for qualitative analysis.

# Data Analysis

### Qualitative Analysis

In purposive sampling, respondents who fit best to the research interests were included. The enumerators then identified respondents drawn from constituencies where reports of violence

had been filed to cover various experiences and perceptions about the issue. It contains information that will not age quickly.

### Analytical Framework

Three core themes guided the analysis:

1. **Trust in the EC**: Examining public perceptions of the EC’s impartiality, independence, and credibility.
2. **Electoral Violence**: Analyzing the triggers, patterns, and consequences of violence during the 2018 elections.
3. **Institutional Challenges and Reforms**: Identifying systemic obstacles and proposing actionable reforms to enhance the EC’s capacity.

# Ethical Consideration

### Informed Consent

The purpose, methodology, and potential outcome were shared with the participants before signing informed consent forms. They were also told, in no uncertain terms, that they were entitled to withdraw at any time without incurring any penalty.

### Confidentiality

The information was provided to the author in a subtle but highly sensitive manner in a sealed envelope. All the notes, audiovisual recordings, and transcripts were confidential and encrypted.

In collaboration with Reflection, well-established professional and peer examinations were utilized to gather data from various sources. These further bolster the study's credibility on objective grounds.

## Research Limitations

### Scope Limitations

The findings are based on the 2018 Bangladeshi elections and may not universally apply. However, they add voices to the general debate on electoral governance in developing democracies.

### Methodological Constraints

Limited access to top officials and some participants' hesitancy to discuss sensitive topics posed hindrances. Secondary data and an aggressive triangulation strategy addressed the gaps above.

### External Factors

The politically polarised environment affected participant openness and the accuracy of responses. Building rapport and assuring non-disclosure helped ameliorate some of these effects.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

# Reviewing Relevant Studies

Numerous literary works deal with elections and electoral violence, specifically in countries affected by democratic slippage. As with other research, they sometimes present theoretical explanations and empirical analyses, sometimes in case studies, to discover the causes, effects, and measures to avoid such events. This subsection consolidates past research findings, making the current research more robust.

# Democratic Backsliding and Electoral Violence

According to Ali Riaz (2020), in his research, The Pathway of Democratic Backsliding in Bangladesh, the fall of democratic values needs to be studied alongside Bangladesh's election

violence issues. He applies conflict theory to show that weakening democracy pushed society apart and led to election violence. During the 2014 parliamentary elections, opposition parties refused to join,oin and their rejection led to a breakdown of state institutions and mass demonstrations. He shows how the risk of democratic erosion grows through hidden authoritarian tactics during voting periods. The study indicates that weakening legal controls creates perfect conditions for flourishing manipulation and violence.

The research findings from Bangladesh help scientists better understand comparable political trends across hybrid regimes globally.

The Party-Police Nexus research from 2022 by Jackman and Maitrot supplies crucial supporting evidence for Riaz's study. They wanted to explain how parties use state institutions like the police to oppress their opponents and control elections. According to institutional theory research, the study shows that police will support ruling parties when institutional oversight remains weak.

They outline several instances from the 2018 elections when police forces were documented to have attacked opposition rallies and detained activists under politically motivated charges. Such findings raise serious concerns about the mutual interdependence between political actors and law enforcers, which frequently, if not peculiarly, end up as state-sponsored violence during elections. This nexus undermines electoral integrity and fosters a culture of impunity, where violence becomes a normalized strategy for political gain (Jackman & Maitrot, 2022).

In a narrow study, Md. Awal Hossain Mollah and Rawnak Jahan investigate Parliamentary Election and Electoral Violence in Bangladesh: The Way Forward. They postulate that the root causes of systemic electoral violence in Bangladesh include complex historical grievances, institutional weaknesses, and strategic use of political party violence. The authors argue that the audience is significant in understanding and dealing with the problem. They attribute actionable recommendations that may break this cycle; for example, an independent election commission, together with accountability for perpetrators of violence,e empowers an audience that may add to the peacefulness of the electoral process (Mollah & Jahan, n.d.).

Deepening the discussion on the mechanics of electoral manipulation, Ali Riaz and Saimum Parvez (2021) shed light on the anatomy of a rigged election in a hybrid regime by analyzing the lessons drawn from Bangladesh. Within the framework of a hybrid regime, they identified

structural loopholes conducive to violence and manipulation, namely, the co-option of the election commission and the court. In this respect, the authors provide detailed case studies about the elections of 2018, in which such strategies involve voter suppression, stuffing of ballots, and intimidation of election observers, among others. Examining the case of the 2018 parliamentary elections in Bangladesh, Riaz and Parvez illustrate how these acts not only erode democratic legitimacy but also very often act as a catalyst for electoral violence.

# Institutional Factors and Legitimacy Crisis

Election legitimacy is a major topic in political studies, according to M. Jashim Ali Chowdhury's work, Elections in ‘Democratic’ Bangladesh (n.d.). Chowdhury

Governments use voting rules to maintain their false image of democracy. This critique is echoed in the earlier work of Ahmed Shafiqul Huque and Muhammad A. Hakim (1993) in Elections in Bangladesh: Tools of Legitimacy. The paper shows that elections in Bangladesh support authoritarian rule rather than establish democratic leadership. According to Huque and Hakim (1993), public faith in electoral systems declines when unethical practices occur, leading to violent clashes.

Md. Jaynal Abedini’s Legitimacy Crisis in Bangladesh: This research study explores the fallout from the 10th General Election to show how voters' trust in electoral fairness affects violent responses. According to Abedini's research, protests and counter-violence rise more in elections that voters see as unfair or rigged (Abedini, n.d.).

# Case Studies and Empirical Evidence

The report Election Process Tracking: Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) documented the 2018 National Parliament Election 11 by examining all electoral activities, including violence and voter coercion.

This comprehensive study offers valuable data on the nature and extent of electoral violence, shedding light on the structural and procedural shortcomings that enable such incidents (TIB, 2018).

Christine Fair builds into the political background of electoral violence- the consolidation of power by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina- specific election-related phenomena. The author's analytical approach investigates leadership dynamics in the political space. It argues that election

periods mark peak tensions within the electorate fostered by the authoritarian tendencies of leaders (Fair, 2018).

Bangladesh's case, therefore, turns out to be a referent case as the Global State of Democracy 2023 Report has conjured its electoral challenges against the background of deteriorating democratic norms globally. The report's findings have vicariously supported the connection between institutional weakening, political polarisation, and electoral violence (Global State of Democracy, 2023).).

# Post-Conflict Elections and Their Role in Transition

The study by Islam and Jebin (2021) provides critical insights into the role of post-conflict elections in societies' transition from violence to peace. This idea aligns with discussions about electoral violence and its implications for stability and governance. The authors highlight the complex challenges posed by conducting elections in post-conflict settings where violent legacies, social divides, and weak institutions linger. These case studies from Angola, Sierra Leone, and Nepal demonstrate the significant determinants for election results and propose an understanding that could add a comparative perspective for electoral violence in a country like Bangladesh (Islam & Jebin, 2021).

Islam and Jebin describe elections in post-conflict contexts as not just milestones in democracy but because they provide opportunities to build peace.

The Authors have suggested laying the groundwork for elections to proceed, where all stakeholders, namely political parties and the electorate, feel safe and empowered to participate. This aligns with the broader theories of peace-building that postulate that political transitions must address the root causes of conflicts to prevent relapses into violence. In Bangladesh, the entrenched culture of political violence and mistrust between parties presents challenges akin to those faced in post-conflict societies, making the lessons from this study particularly relevant (Islam & Jebin, 2021).

Islam and Jebin affirm that a relevant point today is the conversion of military affairs into purely de-politicized affairs. They favor that post-conflict elections can only be held successfully if political actors are disarmed and made to engage solely in peaceful competition. This point is similar to what has been found in the Bangladeshi context, where political parties have often formed armed groups or paramilitary forces to intimidate opposers and influence electoral outcomes.

The cases of Mollah and Jahan exemplify the rampant use of violence by political actors underlines the necessity to seek out practical solutions that can be used effectively to contain these threats (Mollah & Jahan, n.d.).

This piece of research also importantly underscores the dimension of inclusiveness of electoral mechanisms. Arguably, Islam and Jebin's paper underlines the necessity of including electoral events in all segments of society, specifically those marginalized or directly involved in a state of conflict, toward its legitimacy and assured stability. This perspective thus corresponds with many criticisms about electoral processes in Bangladesh, where reported claims of voter suppression and election processes being subject to partisan interests have jeopardized confidence in public opinion. Islam & Jebin, 2021.

Finally, this research underlines that approaches have to be context-specific. The authors warn against universal remedies- one-size-fits-all approaches- and highlight that post-conflict election success in any country relates to its history, politics, and societal specifics. This portends for Bangladesh a call for interventions to be undertaken in concert with, and congruence with, the country's underlying political culture and institutional settings. Conversely, comparative studies on Angola, Sierra Leone, and Nepal have revealed that power-sharing agreements and selective reconciliation as adaptive strategies have eased electoral violence and stabilized these countries post-war.

The conclusion is that Islam and Jebin's contribution to discourses on electoral violence embeds elections within the more extensive political process of peacebuilding. Their critical discussion of demilitarization, inclusivity, and context-specific strategies is minimalistic. This serves as an essential illustrative lesson on mitigating electoral violence and reversing the phenomenon of democratic backsliding in Bangladesh. Armed with these lessons, policymakers and practitioners will be primed to push for a political environment within which elections truly become meaningful processes of democratic rule and social reconciliation.

# Theoretical Contributions

The literature's theoretical frameworks are invaluable in understanding the nature of electoral violence. One relevant conceptual framework is that of hybrid regimes "in which democratic and authoritarian elements coexist," as identified by Riaz and Parvez. This framework helps explain

why elections in such contexts often degenerate into violent contests for power rather than peaceful expressions of the popular will (Riaz & Parvez, 2021).

It contributes to the work by Jackman and Maitrot on the party-political nexus of institutional capture and how state agencies are repurposed toward partisan interests. This brings about a theoretical underpinning of how institutional weaknesses create an environment where electoral violence tends to happen (Jackman & Maitrot, 2022).

# Comparative Perspectives

Although much of the literature focuses on Bangladesh, the comparative studies offer valuable lessons. For instance, the historical comparison that Huque and Hakim make between Bangladesh and other post-colonial states underlines common trends in using elections to legitimize authority in such countries (Huque & Hakim, 1993).

The Global State of Democracy Report 2023 places Bangladesh in the broader context of international democratic regression. It provides interesting comparative insights into the country's election challenges.

# Conceptualizing Electoral Violence

Electoral violence encompasses activities that aim to influence, direct, or threaten elections through intimidation or violence. This section will identify, classify, and delineate electoral violence as opposed to other forms of violence and discuss infestations within the context of Bangladesh.

# Defining Electoral Violence

Electoral violence happens when someone uses physical acts or mental pressure during the entire electoral cycle to change election results. According to Fischer (2002), electoral violence takes physical forms, such as attacks on polling stations while psychological tactics like threats or intimidation harm democratic elections. According to Straus and Taylor (2012) electoral violence represents a strategy to decrease the number of voters or sway election results. It typically emerges from broader political and social clashes. These models help us understand how electoral violence emerges in Bangladesh from a combination of old grievances and weak

political systems. The violence can come directly from voters or candidates but also target election workers or damage election facilities. In 2002, Fischer defined two types of electoral violence, physical and mental, that target democracy.

Electoral violence in Bangladesh involves physical clashes among party members, destruction of polling stations, and intimidation of voters. Mollah and Jahan document this in their work, emphasizing the systematic nature of such incidents and explaining how political parties orchestrate them.

# Distinguishing Related Concepts

Electoral violence is distinct from political violence in its specific focus on elections as the context and target. While political violence may encompass broader struggles for power, electoral violence is temporally and spatially bound to the electoral process. This distinction is crucial for designing targeted interventions, as highlighted by Jackman and Maitrot’s analysis of the party-police nexus (Jackman & Maitrot, 2022).

# Manifestations in Bangladesh

The historical context of Bangladesh's electoral violence reflects an intricate interaction of the structural variable with the situational one. According to Riaz and Parvez, the parliamentary elections saw widespread violence in 2018: attacks against opposition candidates and "heavy use of state machinery to repress opposition" (Riaz & Parvez, 2021). Further, the observations have been supported with evidence regarding the enormity and spread of electoral violence reflected in the report from TIB through empirical evidence (TIB 2018).

# Election Management and Violence Mitigation

In democracies, the arrangement must be such that elections are conducted smoothly and without disruption from any other side. The section below discusses the model of electoral management and violence prevention strategies in Bangladesh through case studies.

# Election Management

Effective election management requires impartial institutions, transparent processes, and robust enforcement mechanisms. The TIB report illustrates that an enforcement mechanism was relatively strong in Bangladesh's election management framework, comprising the

non-independence of the Election Commission and the politicization of all essential institutions. This report has applied institutional theory, arguing that structural reforms of depoliticization in the Election Commission and judicial strengthening will restore public confidence. It underlines data on how such institutional weaknesses contributed to the violence and other irregularities recorded during the 2018 election.

This review identifies, from the existing literature, how civic education is critical in improving voter participation while concurrently reducing electoral conflicts. It identifies that these awareness-creation programs on peaceful involvement and understanding of electoral rights can help reduce misinformation and polarization, decreasing electoral tension.

# Violence Mitigation Strategies

Electoral violence calls for interdisciplinary intervention, which should be legal, institutional, and social. Several authors have proposed accountability mechanisms that would deter political actors from violence. These include prosecuting the perpetrators, maintaining the neutrality of law enforcement agencies, and enhancing monitoring mechanisms for early detection and prevention of violent incidents, which are supported in their work (Mollah & Jahan,n.d.).

According to Islam and Jebin in 2021, from their experiences in post-conflict societies, they recommend a contextual approach to preventing violence. To build the needed confidence between the antagonistic parties and thwart an outbreak of violent conflict, these authors recommend facilitating a sustained, inclusive political dialogue that impartial mediators would guide.

Case studies of peace agreements and power-sharing arrangements from Sierra Leone and Nepal present how tailored initiatives may help deal with the very roots of grievance and stabilize conflict.

Another important aspect is related to the international actors' involvement in the administration of the electoral process and the related technical assistance. The presence of international

observers can increase transparency and lower levels of violence, with many of their recommendations forming the basis for post-election reforms.

The Global State of Democracy 2023 Report highlights the importance of international engagement in addressing the structural factors contributing to electoral violence in hybrid regimes (Global State of Democracy, 2023).

The reviewed literature has deeply analyzed electoral violence and its linkage to democratic regression, institutional fragility, and political factors in Bangladesh. Variations of theoretical insight, cases, and comparative judgments have been drawn to detail the complex phenomenon. Combined evidence from these elements may thus be used by policy thinkers, academics, and civil society in formulating specific measures to address the problem of electoral violence for democratic durability.

Future research should examine how new technologies like social media and artificial intelligence affect electioneering. Other studies focusing on the long-term impact of electoral reforms and how to prevent violence would significantly add to the knowledge required for sustaining democratic processes where they are most at risk.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

# Major Concepts and Detailed Discussion

Strategic Conflict Theory (SCT) considers conflict to emerge from strategic interactions in which parties use calculated moves to maximize their gains. Prominent theorists like Schelling (1963) and, recently, Hirshleifer (2001) have focused on the operational use of "threat power," wherein conflict is viewed as a bargaining tool (Vahabi, 2009). In addition, Institutional Theory complements the classification of structural and systemic constraints placed upon conflict behaviors, focusing on the role of institutions such as election commissions in governance and stability (Scott, 2004).

The history of Bangladesh's political instability, focusing on electoral violence, provides a critical background on where these theories come into play. The ECB has a vital role in peace in elections, although its effectiveness is often questioned. Our examination of the 2018 elections illustrates how SCT and Institutional Theory work together to deal with electoral violence and its connection to governance problems. Our research combines these views to give us helpful information about building better government systems that solve ongoing governance problems and keep political conditions stable..

# Strategic Conflict Theory

The strategic Conflict Theory explains how conflict starts and ends through strategic interactions between parties through strategic interactions between parties. It also uses rational choice and game theory to explain why people or groups start conflicts by studying possible results for better rewards. According to Vahabi's research, Schelling and Hirshleifer described threat power as a bargaining tool in their writings of 1963 and 2001.The Coase theorem also indicates the need for clearly defined property rights to facilitate negotiations and mitigate disputes (Vahabi, 2009).

### Broader Implications

Strategic Conflict Theory encompasses systematic powers across various levels, including international relations, economic disputes, and political governance. In trade negotiations, threats of tariffs may be used as chips to get better terms of agreement. Mutual deterrence keeps stability alive in the geopolitical sense, where fear of escalation and repercussions works. This theoretical perspective compels strategic framing of potentially harmful outcomes in a way that frightens overt violence and calls for negotiations.

### Application to Socio-Political Contexts

This makes the theory relevant in highly complex sociopolitical environments like Bangladesh. Political groups often threaten their opponents with coercive policies or create unrest to gain leverage. Strikes, protests, or street demonstrations are recommended to undermine functioning

governance and pressure ruling parties to concede to demands. Through grassroots movements, opposition parties effectively mobilize the masses to challenge power.

### The Role of the Election Commission

The Election Commission participated in developing some policies and institutional frameworks within which to manage, control, and coordinate resources against electoral violence. Some of the provisions included in the resource mobilization included the deployment of personnel, the establishment of tracking and monitoring centers, conflict resolution during elections, and various directives to prohibit voter intimidation. These measures had shortcomings, such as a lack of coordination with law enforcement agencies and a sluggish response to particular incident claims. Also, election officers working in conflict-prone areas received little or no training, much to undermine their capacity to work against latent violence. Under this mandate, it falls on the commission to ensure that elections are free and fair by addressing potential sources of conflict and maintaining neutrality. Yet, in practice, the commission always appears unable to retract from the temptation to intervene and is at risk of receiving allegations of prejudice or inefficiency (Rahman, 2018).

### Impartiality and Capacity-Building

ThMIC's work in managing the elections is an expression of Conscience. Because of bias, conflict situations may diminish public confidence in the electoral process and undermine the Commission's credibility. Activities to increase the Commission's credibility include capacity building, such as training election officials and monitoring equipment. Comparisons, such as those of India's Election Commission, underscore the necessity of an institutional structure within an independent oversight (Chowdhury, 2020).

### Case Study: The 2018 Bangladesh Election

The 2018 general election in Bangladesh has become a reference case on the Election Commission managing electoral violence as one of the objects for study. Vote rigging, voter intimidation, and violent outbreaks between rival party supporters marred that election, resting on the unwitting and half-hearted accommodation of election observers, monitoring teams, and voter awareness campaigns. Such adversities are not always under the meetable grasp of security forces due to the lack of uniform application, proper coordination among different enforcement

agencies, or the limited reach of awareness campaigns, particularly in the rural sector. The inability of the Commission to sufficiently address the issue in question substantively made it a target of acute criticism (Ahmed, 2019).

Another main reason behind such gross failure was deplorable ground security deployment in key constituencies comprising high-risk propositions of violence; while solving the intricacies of pre-election planning measures, significant shortcomings have been noted in the slow responses in coordination with local law enforcement. Thus, this combination of failures identified a need for greater vigilance in election security management. Also, delays in announcing results raised suspicions that they had been manipulated and were partly due to avoidable factors such as slow tabulation processes, poor communications, and national difficulties with data consolidation.The Commission recommended digital result transmission and official training, but these suggestions remain unimplemented, weakening public trust. The election failures underline the need for complete changes that will let the Election Commission better control and fix election violence.

### Global Comparisons

Even though Election Commissions vary across democracies they still offer valuable examples of practical actions to prevent election violence and maintain trust regardless of political and socioeconomic differences. For example, the Election Commission used strategies grounded in such norms during the 2018 elections: sending detention observers and working on awareness programs. Unfortunately, they were not specific enough to Bangladesh and were poorly executed. For instance, deploying monitoring teams faced logistical challenges, and voter education campaigns were not dimensioned well for a rural audience, exposing much of their potential effectiveness. The Election Commission of India has modified election management services using technological innovations such as electronic voting machines (EVMs) and

real-time voter monitoring to reduce irregularities. The Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa emphasized community engagement and voter education to prevent tensions (Ndulo, 2020).

The National Electoral Institute of Mexico is a good case in point. The biometric identification of voters carried out by the INE is on par with Bangladesh's long-standing practice of electoral fraud and multiple registrations. The system will stop voters from using duplicate identities and

create more open elections people trust. By supervising campaign financing INE can show voters they can reduce election manipulation which Bangladesh worries about today (Lopez, 2019).

INE uses voter identification systems that scan biometric information to stop voting fraud and make election results more trustworthy. Through its tight control over campaign funding INE protects public trust by reducing the influence that excessive money can bring to elections (Lopez 2019).

Kenya's Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission had significant problems and introduced new election planning methods that can detect conflicts early. Set up teams to handle tensions before they grow out of control by using this model to find Bangladeshi areas that could face violence during elections. Check the locations where conflicts often occur then reach out to community members to decrease our security risks while promoting trust in election activities (Odhiambo, 2021). Through early warning systems and mediation teams Kenya worked to prevent electoral violence before voting took place (Odhiambo, 2021).

The Electoral Commission of Ghana consults with civil society organizations and other stakeholders. Through these actions, it has successfully managed peaceful power changes and reduced election disagreements after voting (Asante 2020).

* Bangladesh can learn valuable lessons and apply functional paradigms in dealing with its electoral challenges, including:
* Technological Innovation: Biometric solutions and Electronic Voting Machines boost election results' quality and workflow improvement.
* Stakeholder Engagement: Talking to political groups, civil society, and international observers creates more trust between them.
* Conflict Sensitivity: Election monitoring and peace talks before voting decrease the risk of events that start violent conflicts.
* Elections finance transparency: The government needs to pass stronger laws regarding election campaigns to combat improper influence and corruption.

Based on the recommendations that form the basis for the electoral structure in Bangladesh, the credibility and functionality of the Election Commission could be left unmet. Advancing biometrics and EVMs will eliminate issues like voter fraud and create operational transparency. The other emphasis should include engaging stakeholders to rebuild trust, especially in a

politically polarized landscape. Moreover, conflict-sensitive planning - such as targeted pre-election assessments in volatile areas - can prevent and mitigate violence. These

pro-Bangladesh measures offer a realistic roadmap to free, fair, and peaceful elections, which is long overdue.

## Socio-Political Instability Models

### Rational vs. Real Conflict

Sociopolitical instability models distinguish between rational, goal-oriented, strategic conflict and actual conflict involving physical damage (Olson, 1982). Rational conflicts are usually built on strategic calculations, and parties attempt to reach specific objectives cheaply. In the case of Bangladesh, these often include political concessions, control over key administrative mechanisms, or influencing policy decisions. For example, the opposition parties might strike with or without demonstrations to pressure the government to introduce specific reforms or postpone controversial legislation (Rahman, 2020). Such measures often bolster a party's support base in the eyes of their supporters, as they show the public that they can demonstrate determination and solidarity with people's grievances (Ahmed, 2021). Unfortunately, such rational conflicts frequently escalate into conflicts in Bangladesh by disrupting the delicate

socio-economic environment and governance systems (Tullock, 1974). Other times, political strikes and protests regarding policy changes escalate into widespread violence, causing severe infrastructural damage and prolonged instability (Rahman, 2020). The shift from rational to actual conflict essentially showcases how electrical disturbances of the socio-political kind are difficult to deal with.

### Economic Ramifications

Political instability severely affects the economic stability in Bangladesh. Protracted unrest marginalizes foreign investment and, hence, GDP growth. Over $2 billion was incurred by damage losses within the garment sector during the 2015 hartals, failing one of the core economic drivers and further reducing the viability of export-oriented industries (Ahmed 2021). Such disruptions have triggered extensive layoffs and operated at reduced production capacity. They will undoubtedly influence the labor market and trade relations for long periods.

Continuous hearties tarnish Bangladesh's reputation as a trustworthy trade partner; thus, frequent

buyers would ditch or seek alternatives, which further crushes the economy, according to Rahman (2020). Significant risks will considerably pull out their companies or tend to reduce their operations, thus increasing poverty and underdevelopment levels. According to Hossain (2023), economic disruptions hit marginalized communities more than others, deepening socio-economic inequities that cause further discontent. Such issues can be addressed only by

establishing the requisite stable political environment to seek economic resiliency and equity in the country.

### Governance Impacts

The direction of resources toward short-term security concerns often diverts funds from sectors that require immediate attention, such as education and health care. For example, when political tension heightened or gripped the country, the government of Bangladesh usually raised the defense and policing budgets at the expense of long-term developmental priorities (Chowdhury, 2018). This creates a vicious cycle where political instability reinforces socio-economic imbalance over the longer term. The issues referred to above are aggravated by the poor enforcement of laws and biased institutions, which have eroded people's trust in governance (Rahman, 2020). At a local level, the unfolding of the ballots currently under investigation regarding the 2018 general elections provides quite a stark example of the erosion of confidence in people's belief that they may reasonably participate in democratic forms of governance as a result of bias they observed in electoral procedures (Hossain, 2023). According to Ahmed (2021), corruption, stealing, and other issues in resource management disconnect the citizenry further, emphasizing the urgency of removing the pressing need for reform toward more transparent governance that would help restore that trust. Putting in place governance frameworks and their equitable allocation of resources will break this vicious cycle.

### Implications for Development

Socio-political instability can have a bearing on short-term and long-term economic growth. When unrest stretches over a long term, disruption in education, poor literacy levels, and the resultant loss in human capital development occur. For example, schools and higher educational institutions were closed for weeks in Bangladesh during the political shutdown in 2013, affecting millions of students (Ahmed, 2021). Disrupted learning processes affect academic completion times, introduce delays for graduating students, and cut off essential livelihoods for many

students in rural areas. The societal outcomes have included the failure to produce a workforce because an education deficit translates to fewer skilled workers entering labor markets. The closures also rendered inequalities in education much more profound, with the worst effects on previously marginalized groups (Hossain, 2023). Access to healthcare is also commonly thwarted during political unrest because rural areas become very difficult to navigate, and traditional options for delivery of services become challenging to continue (Hossain, 2023). Such disturbances will intensify the disparity in society and become the fertile ground for a further round of instability.

Bangladesh's sociopolitical instability also depicts the complicated interactions among economic shocks, governance failures, and development problems. Addressing these needs is a composite approach that combines economic reforms, institutional strengthening, and community circulation. Bangladesh can end the cycle of unrest through political stability and investment in human capital, eventually achieving sustainable growth with stability. Further research should understand intervention effectiveness and scalability within similar sociopolitical contexts.

### Governance Challenges

Instability models often than not stress the importance of governing functions in conflict diffusion. Weak institutions worsen instability because of their inability to enforce provisions of laws or dispense resources equitably. For instance, the absence of clear policies in the fight against corruption generated political problems for Bangladesh and led to broader societal conflicts. In this respect, though, accountability mechanisms that provide inclusiveness in governance will play a key role. Policies focusing on equal representation and equitable distribution of resources are likely to reduce conflict escalation.

Institutional Theory examines the influence of established norms, rules, and structures on individual and collective behavior. This framework investigates how institutions evolve, adapt to changing environments, and constrain or enable actors within social systems (Scott, 2004).

Sociological institutionalism focuses on cultural dimensions; on account of some historical institutionalists, the decisions made in the past do affect the framing of present-day governance (Amenta, 2005).

# Institutional influence

Institutions mediate conflicts by structuring political and social interactions. For instance, electoral commissions are indispensable in providing free and fair elections. When institutions are perceived as neutral, they reduce electoral violence, build trust, and promote confessional dialogue over institution-building. Biased institutions, or those with weak capacity, often heighten tensions and make elections illegitimate. In Bangladesh, controversies over election commissions often dent popular confidence in the democratic process and, therefore, have increased political tension and periodic violence.

### Interaction with Cultural Norms

Institutional Theory also analyzes the interaction between formal structures and informal cultural practices. In many developing democracies, informal networks and traditional hierarchies may hold more sway than formal institutions. The awareness of this interaction in institutional design would go a long way to establishing institutional change for people's livelihoods. In Bangladesh, informal political patronage networks usually shape policy choices against the design of formally designed institutions.

# Integrating Strategic Conflict and Institutional Theories

Using Strategic Conflict Theory and Institutional Theory together builds a broad framework for studying political and social conflicts. Strategic Conflict Theory examines tactical decisions of dispute actors whereas Institutional Theory views such conduct through its overall system and structure. Using both theories researchers can identify key elements that explain political instability in depth. These combined methods help us study how people act within established systems to create better ways to solve conflicts.

# Political Culture

### Historical and Structural Factors

The growth of Bangladesh's political culture results from significant historical periods including colonial rule British rule, the fight for independence in 1971 and ongoing efforts to strengthen democratic institutions. According to historical institutionalism when nations face events they

develop strong norms of mutual distrust among their leaders (Scott, 2004). Bangladesh's political parties remain distrustful today because their colonial and post-independence conflicts still affect them, as Ahmed (2019) shows. Colonial-era central administration systems remain established in Bangladesh politics which spur party polarization while harming democracy according to Ahmed (2019).

### Legacy of Colonial Governance

Colonial tradition set up top-down decision-making methods that give power to exclusive groups who control these systems today. Local people could not speak during this situation and the ordinary public had little say in creating new rules. Local knowledge was substituted by making officials permanently responsible and removing their access to government power (Chowdhury, 2020). Today's government systems carry on colonial practices that limit people's ability to take part in politics and let significant societal unfairness continue. The freedom fight brought pride in our nation and ongoing political division between opposing groups. After independence, different groups fought to take power and choose how the country would develop. This has continued from independence to further invocation of rivalry, sometimes leading to clashes for power and instigating political instability (Møller, 2003).

### Characteristics of Political Culture

Factionalism, clientelism, and party loyalty are Bangladesh's political culture hallmarks. There comes the principal opposition, which by its very nature makes its policies representative of its core loyal base, thus further separating society and creating barriers to cooperation across party lines (Hirshleifer, 2001; Rahman, 2018). These perspectives engage with conflict theories, positing that zero-sum competition and entrenched interests represent a destructible imperative (Hirshleifer, 2001). Political parties in Bangladesh end up being hampered by a winner-takes-all structure set up by the government, coupled with the marginalization of opposition parties that also leads to cycles of unrest, instability, and sporadic political violence (Ahmed, 2019). This environment allows the politician to indulge his very narrow interests to the detriment of the welfare of the general populace.

### Role of Political Elites

The political elite plays an essential role in shaping Bangladesh's governance landscape. This has been primarily responsible for public discontent and mass protests, often prioritizing the political divide over the welfare of the people. All these systemic issues require the empowerment of all the actors concerned, coupled with an encouraging political environment for inclusion. Policies provide an opportunity for collective decision-making to obviate elite-dominated decisions and form systems of governance that would ensure a much broader canvas than one's self-interest (Chowdhury, 2020).

### Institutional Weaknesses

Indeed, weak institutions serve as a barrier to political stability in Bangladesh. For example, the Election Commission has been criticized as ineffective in dealing with electoral fraud or ballot suppression charges, thus waning public trust in democracy (Rahman, 2018; Lopez, 2019). For example, electoral bodies usually carry insufficient and biased comments that have seriously impugned public trust in democratic processes (Rahman, 2018). Such images would erode the faith in governance institutions and aggravate socio-political tensions. Institutional reforms to be pursued will include transparency, independence, and inclusiveness for the stability needed and instilling confidence in the processes of an electoral system (Scott, 2004).

### Electoral Reforms

Strong laws need to be enacted to strengthen the electoral systems in Bangladesh, further investment in voter education must be made, and technology integration is imperative. For example, electronic voting machines (EVMs) can increase transparency, improve electoral process efficiency, and lessen fraud risk (Lopez, 2019). However, concerns surrounding the accessibility and reliability of these systems in rural areas necessitate pilot projects and public awareness-solving for their ultimate success (Ndulo, 2020). We need a strict monitoring mechanism to ensure the outcome is credible. And we need voter education campaigns to build awareness and reduce susceptibility to manipulation to build trust in the democratic process (Ndulo, 2020).

# The Concept of Non-Party Care-taker Government

### Historical Context and Rationale

This government was thus proposed and created by a non-partisan caretaker to crush growing political tensions and electoral disputes in Bangladesh. The very colors of vote suppression and stuffing during the 1994 elections mounted protests all over the nation-led demands for reforms. These events raised the need for a neutral body to oversee elections and restore public faith (Rahman, 2018; Ahmed, 2019). Established in 1996, the CTG was designed by the constitution to be a neutral body in charge of elections that would ensure fairness and inspire public confidence in the outcome. This aligns with the institutionalist perspective, where mechanisms are created to address systemic problems and rebuild public trust in governance (Scott, 2004).

The CTG was a timely intervention when partisan electoral management had already eroded public confidence in democracy (Rahman, 2018).

### Evolution of the CTG System

This general discontent on the part of the public finally brought about the CTG. Opposition parties and civil society organizations strongly called for electoral reforms, asserting that there should be independent authority over the general elections, verification of the voter list, and stricter measures against electoral fraud. These demands were predicated on allegations of widespread manipulations in previous elections, after which the CTG model was implemented. Ahmed, 2019; Rahman, 2018 During the rule of the CTG system, neutrality and relative transparency gave confidence in the electoral exercise. After its dissolution in 2011, questions concerning the viability of democratic institutions in its absence were raised. Ahmed, 2019 Criticism from various quarters has been leveled at this removal, saying it will increase partisan practices and further disintegrate the political landscape. Chowdhury, 2020.

### Theoretical Foundations

Caretaker governments reflect institutional adaptability to systemic challenges. From a sociological institutionalist perspective, the CTG can be understood as a response to legitimacy crises, creating governance structures that uphold societal values of impartiality (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In this tenure, the CTG institutionalized these value premises by making

non-partisan appointments in key administrative positions, striking a balance of political parties

represented in election conducting committees, and making strict protocols against electoral fraud. All these have been important in creating an atmosphere of neutrality and restoring public confidence in the electoral process. Ahmed 2019; Rahman 2018 By contrast, historical institutionalism highlights the path-dependent nature of these reform attempts forged through ingrained, accrued distrust in partisan institutions and an emergent need for effective electoral mechanisms. As Scott (2004) identifies, the success of the CTG in lessening immediate electoral disputes merely serves to underline its position as an institutional innovation designed for specific political problems within Bangladesh.

# Contributions and Limitations

The CTG model significantly improved electoral transparency and reduced violence when it was operational. For example, the voter turnout in the general election in 2008 increased as high as 87%, indicating growing public trust in the electoral process. Incidents of election-related violence decreased by nearly 40% compared with the previous elections, based on reports from the Election Commission of Bangladesh. Ahmed 2019; Rahman 2018 Making this administrative system neutrally administered reduced partisan interference and established the people's trust in the democratic process. Indeed, the 2008 general election under the CTG was widely perceived as free and representative. Ahmed, 2019

Critics assert that caretaker systems that seek to fill in for post-election periods could undermine the principles of democracy by circumventing duly elected representatives. In Pakistan, for example, the electoral process depended on interim governments to perform elections that have delayed necessary electoral reforms, making the country dependent on unelected bodies for efficient election conduct (Khan, 2018). The deteriorated democracy resulting from caretaker governments formed by the military in Thailand shows the enduring effects of military interference on elected authorities (Smith, 2020); this scenario indicates the delicate equilibrium between providing neutral assistance and bolstering democratic institutions, thereby establishing a precedent whereby neutral intervention is taken for institutional reform, thereby promoting delayed democratic development (Rahman, 2018). Further, following the disbandment of CTG in 2011, questions around the capacity of partisan institutions to provide a free and fair administration of elections re-surfaced (Chowdhury, 2020).

# Election and Violence-RelatedTheories

### Electoral Violence Dynamics

Electoral violence in Bangladesh is often rooted in other broader socio-political tensions seeping into the political culture of the nation. For instance, during the general elections in 2014 and 2018, there were several skirmishes between political supporters, showing deep-rooted division considerations and using force as a political tool. These instances may find an explanation under Strategic Conflict Theory, where the theory argues that violence is a deliberate act by political actors to leverage one against another (Ahmed, 2020). These actors regularly resort to voter intimidation, ballot manipulation, or contesting unfavorable results to achieve their objectives (Hirshleifer, 2001). For example, reports of violence and voter suppression during the 2018 general elections laid bare that some coercive actions had been used to undermine opponents (Ahmed, 2019).

### Underlying Causes

Beyond strategic considerations, however, the root causes are socio-economic alienation and exclusion from politics. Poor groups often deprive themselves of concerted action to protest against what they think are systemic injustices. In restoring some equity, all-inclusive politics that promote the equitable distribution of resources and the increased accessibility of welfare services beckon. Bangladeshi schemes like the Rural Employment and Road Maintenance Program are good examples of approaches that can potentially reduce rural unemployment and spur economic stability, which ultimately can help ease socio-economic tensions (Lopez, 2019). For one, investment in education and job creation for underserved communities may alleviate the socioeconomic inequality that generates unrest (Scott, 2004).

### Institutional Challenges

Weak institutions aggravate election violence by not enforcing laws or remaining neutral. Such was the case during the 2014 elections when accusations of bias were leveled at the Election Commission, and the resultant protests and boycotts by opposition parties aggravated the political environment in that period (Rahman, 2018). A pattern of eemergesentrenched practice characterized by the putative normalizing factor of practices that directly serve partisan aims; this, of course, is open to accusations of undemocratic legitimacy, somewhat surreptitiously

destroying public trust in the electoral process (Amenta & Ramsey, 2005). The Election Commission of Bangladesh is in the focus of condemnation for being unable to prevent elector suppression and failing to act upon electoral fraud complaints that have slowly bred doubt and unrest into the electoral fabric (Rahman, 2018).

### Role of Civil Society

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are critical in preventing electoral violence. They work for voter education, election monitoring, and lobbying for policy reforms. A good example is BRAC; that is among the prominent NGOs in Bangladesh-it has conducted voter educational campaigns, which have seen an appreciable rise in voter turnout, mainly rural areas (Chowdhury, 2020).By acting as intermediaries between the state and marginalized communities, CSOs foster trust and dialogue, which are critical for maintaining peace during elections. For example, the efforts of Prothom Alo Trust in promoting voter awareness during the 2008 elections contributed to increased public confidence in the electoral process (Chowdhury, 2020).

### Socio-Economic Dimensions

Socio-economic differences between people drive most election-related violence in Bangladesh. Conflict theories show us to solve violent election issues by ensuring everyone gets equal opportunities to grow and participate in society. Economically underserved communities benefit from vocational programs and microloans which decrease their need to disrupt democratic processes according to research of Lopez (2019).

**Enhancing the Theoretical Framework**

### Addressing Gaps in Analysis

Strategic Conflict Theory and Institutional Theory explain conflict well, but cultural and behavioral perspectives enhance our understanding by exploring the individual motivations behind Bangladesh's political conflicts. These views help explain why conflict parties act the way they do in the country's deeply polarized political scene.

### Behavioral Insights

Behavioral theories analyze conflict through the mental forces of fear identity and unfair treatment. The fears of minority parties about losing their influence during 2014 elections caused protests and violence at local levels. Government leaders work hard to find solutions that address each concern type and fix the psychological reasons behind violence in society. Learning about these mental factors helps us create specific programs to fight identity problems through public education (Møller, 2003; Ahmed, 2019). Our campaigns work to lower conflict levels while teaching society to accept everyone.

### Policy and Governance Implications

To achieve stability and resolve conflicts needs extensive changes to basic organizational systems. The reforms would help rebuild trust in government through programs to make decisions more open and accessible to everyone. The Election Commission's independence and open campaign funding rules will decrease ways to control elections dishonestly (Ahmed, 2019).

### Sustainable Strategies

Peace takes time to develop when local people participate in system changes alongside official government actions. When local people gain power and talk together while receiving better education and public services peace becomes more likely to last. For example, community-led peacebuilding initiatives in Chattogram Hill Tracts have shown that local efforts can complement national reforms (Rahman, 2018).

The combination of Strategic Conflict Theory and Institutional Theory provides a multidimensional framework for analyzing sociopolitical instability. Reviewing tactical decisions and systemic structures gives this approach significant insight into political conflicts in Bangladesh. Future research might explore other theoretical perspectives to rework this and guide policy interventions.

Chapter 4

Socio-Political Turmoil and Democratic Challenges in the 2018 Bangladeshi Election

# The 2018 Election and Socio-Political Perspectives

Elections all over Bangladesh occur on December 30, 2018, and create a significant part of the political evolution therein. The turnout was a record high, making the tenor even more bitter. Some of the details of the general election were a characteristic feature of it being a tool for rebellion; however, the amount of allegations against it could hardly be misinterpreted. These include political violence and accusations against the Election Commission's credibility. These are the underlying reasons for the complexity and turbulence of Bangladesh’s democratic process. This chapter places the socio-political context of the election, looks into the trend of violence in elections, and analyses the role of political parties in this regard through a thorough study of news reports, academic studies, and institutional reviews.

The 2018 elections must be scrutinized in depth to understand governance and democratic accountability and to usher in Bangladesh's overall scenario. The case raised many serious questions regarding how democratic institutions electionsshould provide free and fair elections while respecting citizens' political rights.This chapter examines such dynamics to identify systemic challenges and advance actionable reforms.

# Political Landscape

The prelude to the 2018 election had been marked by heightened political polarisation and a schism between the ruling Bangladesh Awami League and the main opposition, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. Under the leadership of the present Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, the AL drew to the showcase of its economic development record slew of infrastructural projects, including the Padma Bridge and anti-poverty programs. These accomplishments formed the core of the AL election campaign storyline and turned the party into a representative of progress and stability.

This has indeed been a narrative of authoritarianism and suppression of dissent. Many people recognize that authorities arrested BNP leader Khaleda Zia on corruption charges as part of a political plan to weaken the opposition. Human Rights Watch found in 2018 that government limits on media coverage, surveillance, and arrests of BNP opposition activists hurt the party's campaign activities. Critics say these actions create an unfair election system that reduces democratic opportunities, as Al Jazeera reported in 2018.

The Election Commission (EC) oversees the electoral process and has been scrutinized for its perceived partiality. Scholars such as Maitrot and Jackman (2018) have highlighted how politicizing state institutions undermines their credibility. Concerns have been raised that the EC could not enforce electoral regulations and appeared to conspire with the ruling party, thus diminishing the little faith most citizens had in it.

There was a significant question mark hanging over the media on this respect. The

pro-government press drowned the information environment, while opposition-oriented media

were suppressed. This asymmetrical scenario robbed voters of the opportunity to, at least, be acquainted with competing visions while making an informed choice.

# Incidence of Electoral Violences Across the Country

Electoral violence was a defining feature of the 2018 election, reflecting deeper systemic issues within Bangladesh’s political culture. On election day, at least 18 people were killed and over 200 injured in violent clashes across 24 districts (The Daily Star, 2018a). Reports of ballot stuffing, voter intimidation, and attacks on polling stations further marred the electoral process (Al Jazeera, 2018).

Attacks were also made against opposition party leaders before and after the elections. Dr. Kamal Hossain's motorcade was attacked in Dhaka during a campaign rally, while the same was targeted toward BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir in Thakurgaon (The Diplomat, 2018; The Daily Star, 2018b). These events evoked fear among the players, hampering active political participation and thus marginalizing the opposition voice.

The violence even provoked grave concern among international observers, including the UN. Systematic acts of persecution using arrests, disappearances, attacks, and other physical abuses have been documented against opposition activists, says the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2018). Transparency International Bangladesh noted widespread irregularities in 47 of the 50 constituencies surveyed, which suggested the scale of electoral abuses in 2019.

Historical studies, such as Noorana's (2015), indicate that electoral violence in Bangladesh is not isolated but rather a patterned trend associated with political competition and weak institutional protection. According to Mollah and Jahan (2021), the EC's limited jurisdiction in implementing election laws and prosecuting perpetrators accentuates these problems.

# Participation and Political Parties

Despite the chaos, voter turnout was over 80% (Hindustan Times, 2018). But that’s not impressive. Analysts say the high turnout in some constituencies results from electoral manipulation rather than genuine political participation.

The AL won in a landslide, taking 258 out of 300 seats. The BNP-led alliance won only 7 seats and demanded re-election (The Daily Star 2018c). The Jatiya Party, earlier an ally of the AL, gained importance for the opposition in parliament. This means the BNP is out, and multi-party democracy is threatened in Bangladesh.

The reason behind such an outcome is systemic electoral manipulation. Riaz and Parvez, in their 2021 study, found that voter suppression, ballot stuffing, and intimidation of election observers are the tactics that contribute to AL’s dominance. The absence of an independent election monitoring mechanism made the results less credible. TIB (2019)

This has significant consequences for governance: without opposition in parliament, checks and balances will be weak, and the consolidation of the ruling party’s power will lead to an accountably limited democracy and democratic backsliding. So, we need a competitive election and more representation.

# Effectiveness of the Election Commission

The Election Commission has been heavily criticized for the 2018 polls. While the EC deployed security forces and established monitoring mechanisms, these were insufficient to address widespread irregularities and violence. Critics pointed out the EC’s structural dependence on the executive as a significant obstacle to its independence and effectiveness (Hasan, 2023). The European Union and US State Department sent international monitors who questioned the accuracy of the voting process. The US State Department pointed to lack of international election monitors as a significant problem because observers would have enhanced transparency during the voting process. European Union observers noted systematic voting errors, threats to voters, and unfair treatment of political rivals. Civil society groups suggest ways to make the EC more effective at its work. The system needs more muscular independent oversight groups,

technology-based voting machines, and fair security force controls to support free elections.

Bangladesh's 2018 general election shows how political division affects democracy through multiple integrity threats. Public concern about violence and election fraud shows clearly that Bangladesh needs comprehensive updates to its election system. The public can regain trust when democratic organizations become independent and supporters of all parties participate peacefully in well-- monitored elections.

Bangladesh's path to democracy will succeed if it solves these issues well. The reforms must remove political influence from state institutions, teach voters more about elections, and impose strict rules for breaking election laws. Through these changes, Bangladesh will build a better democratic system, allowing people to vote honestly.

Chapter 5

Findings, Results, and Discussions

# Data Analysis, Research findings, and statistical outcomes

### Results and Findings

**Secondary Data Analysis**

1. During the 2018 Bangladeshi general electionsignific,antr problems with the country's voting and political systems emerged. Accordingding to many reliable sou, the election caused permanent damage toaged Bangladesh's democratic syntly.

During election violence eighteen people died and more than 200 others suffered injuries. The violence in Dhaka and Chittagong disturbed voting and decreased political participation rates across these areas. According to Al Jazeera (2018) urban voters avoided polling stations because of security concerns which produced noticeable turnout differences between safe rural areas and conflict zones. According to The Daily Star's 2018 report young voters and marginalized groups from these cities suffered most which blocked their political rights. The opposition strongholds

received targeted attacks that damaged political unity and voter trust in the election process. According to Al Jazeera (2018) clashes between political groups and law enforcement spread rapidly across unstable areas. The most violent events occurred where political opposition groups faced intense political conflict. The Daily Star (2018) reported that rural parts of the country suffered significant interruptions to their daily lives because unknown assailants attacked opposition campaigners in regions such as Rajshahi. The election's violence showed that each side took dangerous actions to protect its political interests. The violence at these hotspots affected polls and made people in these areas too afraid to vote.

Human Rights Watch found evidence of planned attacks against people who backed opposition political parties in their 2019 report. The attackers used physical force to harm opposition members while threatening and damaging their political materials. Opposition efforts suffered interference through physical attacks and security threats. Opposition activists and their party nominees faced restrictions on rallies and voter events inside regions dominated by ruling party leaders. According to OHCHR in 2018 these attacks formed part of a systematic plan that made people avoid participating in democracy. According to news reports, opposition leaders consistently encountered monitoring and threats, forcing them to keep quiet. Human Rights Watch reported in 2018 that authorities arrested their opponents in large numbers as part of their strategy to silence political opposition and maintain control. The strategies weakened opposition political activities while making voters believe the election system was not fair or impartial.

International organizations strongly reacted to the specific violence directed against political opponents. OHCHR requested an independent investigation of these attacks and demanded that Bangladesh's government hold responsible parties accountable. In 2019 Transparency International suggested methods to protect political opposition and stop future suppression. The international community's fact-finding work about these abuses made the ruling party take action but its actual changes remained minimal. When political tensions run high, international leaders find it hard to take explicit action against governments. Human Rights Watch recorded specific violent attacks aimed at opposition party groups and their followers in 2019. Attackers physically hurt people while using force and ruining campaign materials to prevent opposition parties from operating.

The methods harmed opposition efforts because they scared voters into staying away. Opposition candidates and their campaigners had difficulty reaching voters in cities ruled by the party in power. OHCHR (2018) pointed out that attackers worked in a structured way to suppress democracy through their actions. The opposition leaders received constant monitoring and intimidation, making them stop voicing their concerns. According to Human Rights Watch's 2018 report opposition supporters faced mass arrests as part of a strategy to eliminate political opposition and strengthen the regime's control. The opposition party's activities became more challenging because the government made voting unfair and biased. According to Human Rights Watch's 2019 findings opposition parties and their supporters experienced targeted violence.

They attacked supporters physically and used fear tactics to destroy campaign items. Report authors showed that this suppression campaign supported the ruling party's goal of winning the elections. OHCHR (2018) pointed out the widespread attacks targeted democracy by making people fear to express themselves. Human Rights Watch (2018) reported that authorities arrested many opposition supporters as a way to strip political opposition and gain more control.

People believed someone tampered with the election results. ABC News (2018) discovered that ruling party fans took over polling stations to stuff ballots and manipulate the system. Deutsche Welle verified these reports when it noted that opposition leaders publicly doubted whether the election process was fair (2018). Voter turnout hit an 80% peak, according to Hindustan Times (2018) and The Daily Star (2018), but critics suspected local officials boosted the numbers to fake legitimacy.

The evidence shows that manipulation of elections has become more prevalent in recent votes. BBC News recorded widespread voter boycotts and uncontested seats during the 2014 elections, creating suspicion about voting rights. According to The Guardian (2018) the 2018 election featured advanced manipulation methods focused on opposition suppression. Officials have moved from obvious control methods to undetectable methods that harm election fairness.

People in Bangladesh no longer believe their elections are fair because of numerous repeated claims of voting irregularities. People doubted the election results because they saw evidence of vote tampering. Experience shows that many polling stations in the election became targets for ruling party supporters who used dishonest methods like stuffing ballots. The news outlet Deutsche Welle (2018) showed that opposition leaders publicly doubted the voting process's legitimacy. According to multiple sources including Hindustan Times (2018) and The Daily Star

(2018) turnout hit 80% during the elections but critics believed voting rates were increased artificially to make the results appear valid.

The public's trust in election systems will endure significant damage over time. Multiple accusations of vote manipulation weaken belief in our voting system, making voters less likely to participate in future elections. People stop believing in their elected representatives if election integrity questions arise which produces a crisis that puts democracy at risk. According to Transparency International (2019) unchecked accusations of electoral manipulation push young voters to give up on politics because they doubt their voting matters. OHCHR (2018) shows that rebuilding trust needs full public reviews of these claims and clear actions to prevent future problems. The public's trust in our election system depends on serious reforms now to protect our democratic system long-term. The public lost confidence in the election results because of claims of vote manipulation. Survey results 2018 indicate party supporters took control of many polling stations and manipulated ballots illegally (ABC News 2018). According to Deutsche Welle (2018) opposition leaders publicly challenged the process's legitimacy. The reported voting rate of more than 80% in certain areas worried experts because they believed officials had boosted turnout artificially to create an appearance of fairness.

Many other countries watched the election and strongly doubted whether it was conducted fairly. The OHCHR (2018) demanded urgent changes to the voting system because it revealed fundamental problems. According to Transparency International's 2019 findings, corruption in elections threatens Bangladesh's democratic system permanently.

Specific recommendations were also made. OHCHR in 2018 demanded that an independent inquiry be opened concerning the violence and irregularities, asking international monitors to be much more involved in future elections. In 2019, Human Rights Watch offered an instance from Kenya along those lines, allowing international monitors to stifle violence and improve transparency in contested elections to force stricter enforcement of electoral laws. Transparency International in 2019 suggested voter education campaigns and independent media initiatives to replicate the reforms made in Ghana after the elections, which went a long way in boosting public confidence in the following election cycles. These observations underscore the need for substantial changes to restore confidence in the nation's electoral institutions. The international community closely monitored the situation and expressed concerns about the election's fairness. OHCHR (2018) issued a statement calling for immediate reforms to address the systemic issues

highlighted by the election. Transparency International noted that unchecked bribery and lack of accountability in the electoral process posed a long-term threat to Bangladesh's democratic stability. These observations underscore the need for substantial changes to restore trust in the nation's electoral institutions.

1. Role of Election Commission The Election Commission, the body responsible for administering the elections, has faced significant criticism for its inability to hold free and fair elections. The EC's performance during this period provides insight into the institutional weaknesses undermining democracy in Bangladesh.

The EC's ineffectiveness in tackling electoral irregularities has been pointed out blatantly by Human Rights Watch (2018) and Devdiscourse (2018). The key problems included voter intimidation, manipulations of the ballots, and exclusions of opposition candidates. Specific examples highlight the serious nature of most of these issues. For instance, Al Jazeera (2018) reported incidents where polling agents were forcibly removed from the polling stations, leaving the ballots open to tampering. The Daily Star (2018) reported in Dhaka that there were instances of unauthorized individuals entering in polling-booth areas, allegedly influencing the voters or casting ballots on behalf of voters. Deutsche Welle (2018) described the systematic rejection of opposition candidates' nominations, severely constraining voter choice in several constituencies. The failure of the EC to decisively take action against these practices led to a collapse in public confidence in its capacity to act as an impartial arbiter in the electoral process, as corroborated by Transparency International (2019).

Some of these issues were, after the elections, acknowledged by the EC, although the public would receive scant insight into any actionable changes. OHCHR (2018) posted that the EC should investigate the allegations of ballot tampering and that they would ensure security during the elections in the future. However, skepticism regarding these reassurances arose since similar commitments had been made after all past contentious polls. Human Rights Watch (2019) and other analysts referred to the most effective restorative measures they broached as the establishment of bodies charged with independent oversight and publication of the nominal progress being made within a defined time frame on John’s behalf. Reports from Devdiscourse (2018) and Human Rights Watch (2018) highlighted the EC’s failure to address electoral irregularities effectively. These included voter intimidation, ballot manipulation, and excluding opposition candidates. Specific examples illustrate the gravity of these issues. For instance, Al

Jazeera (2018) documented incidents where polling agents were forcibly removed from voting stations, leaving ballots vulnerable to tampering. In Dhaka, The Daily Star (2018) reported cases of unauthorized individuals entering polling booths, allegedly influencing voters or casting ballots on their behalf.

Opposition candidates also face systematic rejection of their nominations, effectively limiting voters' choices in several constituencies, Deutsche Welle (2018) says. The conduct of the EC, in not taking any decisive action against these practices, led the populations and civil organizations to lose confidence in the EC when it came to performing its duties as impartial arbiter during elections, corroborated by Transparency International (2019). Devdiscourse's (2018) and Human Rights Watch (2018) reports stressed that the EC failed to deal with electoral irregularities in these areas. These included voter intimidation, ballot manipulation, and exclusion of opposition candidates. The conduct of the EC, in not taking decisive action against these practices, led the populations and civil organizations to lose confidence in the EC when it came to performing its duties as impartial arbiter during elections.

Skepticism About Voter Turnout Over an 80% reported turnout became an area of contention. There were questions raised about the authenticity of the figures cited in Hindustan Times (2018), and Reuters (2018) hounding the authenticity of these figures especially in constituencies where opposition candidates faced significant handcuffs. According to The Guardian (2018), the uniformity of voter behavior in that area suggested possible manipulation that further dwindled the credibility of the results.

Erosion of Public Trust The public's faith in the EC sank to a low level during this election general. Surveys and reports by Al Jazeera (2018) and The Economist (2018) inferred that the EC was deemed compromised mainlyby political interests. The impression that the EC was not ready to hold members of the ruling party accountable for their transgressions had further led to a growing perception that the EC lacked the independence needed to ensure a fair election.

1. **Pre-election challenges** The challenges leading up to the election highlighted more general structural concerns in Bangladesh's polity. These challenges eroded the integrity of democracies-enabling elpollswhile simultaneously demonstrating the systemic barriers to any hopes effecting a real democracy in the country.

Crackdowns on Opposition In pre-election stages, crackdowns on opposition parties and activists intensified. According to Human Rights Watch (2018) and Deutsche Welle (2018), mass arrests took place everywhere, with thousands of opposition supporters detained under various pretexts. These actions were often justified as security measures, but widely understood as deliberate repression meant to dampen dissent and cripple the opposition's ability to campaign effectively. The Economist (2018) made a comparative analysis of the actions carried out, observing that electoral crackdowns have occurred in previous elections, but the scale and systematic nature of those actions in 2018 were unprecedented. Furthermore, some reports also indicated that, in areas such as Dhaka and Barisal, increased surveillance and targeted arrests had instilled a certain amount of fear amongst opposition leaders: this living political fear coming as more historically unprecedented included in a way to deter the opposition from mobilizing and reaching voters.

Restrictive Media and Propaganda Throughout the period of elections, the freedom of media was considerably constrained. According to The Guardian (2018), journalists faced extreme harassment and censorship, limiting citizens' access to neutral information about the electoral process. This, in tandem with the state narrative, had a hand in restricting the alternative viewpoint, leaving voters initially with infrequent/false/incomplete information.

This was just one example of disinformation campaigns through social media platforms, where fake news and smear campaigns against opposition candidates flourished. BBC News (2018) reported on how doctored images and entirely fabricated stories were used to vilify opposition leaders, creating confusion among voters. In one viral case, a prominent opposition figure was falsely accused of misappropriation for political gain; it served to reach millions, later debunked. The disinformation efforts created polarization among the electorate, carving out lines of division that made informed decision-making difficult.

The scale of the effect these restrictions had was shocking. The quality of information offered to voters and the rate at which they went to the polling booths had been impacted directly. Given the media suppression in certain areas, especially in rural constituencies, voters reported confusion regarding poll procedures and opposition parties, according to Transparency International (2019). In sum, there was less access to credible information that generally favored the winning party. New York Times (2018) reinforced that disenfranchised tactics through such means lessened enthusiasm among first-time voters, which left them disillusioned for

empty-handed reasons. Developing independent media to tackle such issues, to contain the

spread of disinformation, would be the recommendations offered by experts. For much of the election period, media freedom was heavily restricted. The Guardian (2018) reported that journalists were harassed and censored, thus limiting public access to an unbiased picture of the electoral process. Mixed with state-controlled narratives, the effects of these limitations included suppressed alternative viewpoints and left the voters with incomplete or manipulated data. BBC News (2018) highlighted how disinformation campaigns, on social media, had seen fake news and smear campaigns against opposition candidates flourish. Such tactics polarized the electorate, creating divisions that hindered informed decision-making.

Media restrictions directly affected voter awareness rates and turnout. Transparency International (2019) recorded instances where voters in sparsely populated constituencies, where media suppression was the highest, were generally unaware of polling processes and opposition party platforms. The utter lack of credible information went directly against the ruling party. The New York Times (2018) asserted that this hampered the ability of would-be voters to participate in the electoral process and especially discouraged first-time voters, who saw no transparency in the process. Experts recommend creating an independent media and making legislative reforms to protect against disinformation. Media freedom was highly restricted during the election period.

The Guardian (2018) reported state-sponsored harassment and censorship of journalists, while BBC News (2018) underscored how misinformation campaigns conditioned public perceptions. This is how the social media allowed for smear campaigns against opposition candidates.

Misinformation and smear campaigns left voters less trusting of the process and encouraged a polarized and misinformed electorate.

Economic and social coercion Economic or social pressures can also serve as coercion. Instances have been documented by Transparency International (2019), in which voters were offered incentives of a financial nature so that they would cast their votes in favor of the ruling party or were threatened with economic backlash should they resist offers. For example, in rural areas like Khulna, reports indicated that local administrators had distributed older government assistance based on the alleged loyalty of supported voters for the ruling party. The New York Times (2018) explained using state resources-such as public transportation funds and educational funds-to sway the voting public. In one case, teachers were said to have coerced their communities into voting for selected candidates via threats of reduction in educational subsidy.

All of these tactics ended up skewing the balance of power in the government, creating a clientele state where voters felt the dire need to accommodate powers.

Significant coercive practices were also reported to have taken place in urban areas like Dhaka and Chittagong. For instance, as reported by The Daily Star (2018), business owners in these cities were reportedly threatened with a financial audit, financial penalty, and/or loss of licenses unless they publicly supported the candidates for ruling party. Such pressure, focused explicitly in urban areas where economic activity was concentrated, magnified the reach and effectiveness of coercion. Furthermore, employees in these state-owned enterprises were reportedly directed to attend rallies organized by the ruling party or face job losses, according to Devdiscourse (2018). Such instances highlight ways in which economic and social compulsion pervaded rural and urban settings, manipulating voter behavior through incentives and intimidation. Economic coercion and social pressure were deployment tools to exacerbate the complaints of coercion.

There were documented incidents described by Transparency International (2019) in which voters were either offered financial incentives or faced the threat of economic retaliation unless they would support the ruling party. For example, in rural areas like Khulna, reports indicated that local administrators distributed government aid selectively to those pledging loyalty to the ruling party. New York Times (2018) described the deployment of state resources-aided by public transport and education funds-to sway public opinion. In one case, school teachers were coerced to convince their communities to vote for specific candidates on the condition that their schools would receive full educational subsidies; otherwise, the treasury could cut back on the funding. The backdrop is thus painted as one where the ruling party availed the complete works of whatever means to engage and induce obedience from voters or chafe them sufficiently to align themselves with the powers that be.

**Key Themes Identified**

Electoral Violence as a Systemic Issue Electoral violence forms a deep-rooted pattern of political culture in Bangladesh. Such normalization tarnishes democratic values and creates an environment of fear which further deters voters from participating in such elections. This issue has been pointed out by both Human Rights Watch (2019) and Al Jazeera (2018) to have remedial steps taken to address it.

Questionable Efficiency on an Equal Footing for the Constituency-The EC’s failure to project impartiality significantly blighted confidence in it. Dealing with it will require structural adjustments, such as changing the procedures by which EC members are appointed so that they are insulated from political interference. For example, under one perspective, a bipartisan selection committee could be introduced to control the appointments of members to the EC based on loyalty rather than political allegiance, as suggested by Transparency International in 2019. A parliamentary committee, instead of being the executive branch, should allocate the EC's budget so that it is sufficiently independent operationally.

The OHCHR (2018) reiterates the importance of institutionalizing a clear and enforceable code of conduct for the EC so as to keep it from being influenced in the decision-making. Training programs for EC staff on electoral laws and impartiality could also help mitigate biases. Finally, implementing international best practices such as independent audits of electoral rolls and transparent arrangements for complaints reporting as seen in India and New Zealand could do a lot towards improving the credibility of the EC. The inability of the EC to enforce impartiality has eroded people's confidence grossly. As developed by Devdiscourse (2018) and The Daily Star (2018), political interference and lack of accountability further aggravate this issue.

1. **Need for Comprehensive Reforms** Examples of successful reforms in other countries can create a path for Bangladesh. India has been able to reduce instances of voter fraud with the application of biometric voter identification systems. About these developments, Transparency International (2019) argues that these systems not only help ensure that an individual votes only once, but also help boost up the credibility of elections. Establishing an independent electoral commission in New Zealand with clear mandates and sufficient resources has bred a high level of public confidence in the election process. Adopting these measures in Bangladesh would help counter systemic problems and create a reasonably transparent and fair political climate. Observers and stakeholders believe comprehensive reforms are imperative to restore democratic integrity. These include adopting advanced technologies, strengthening institutional independence, and building inventories of civic engagement. The OHCHR (2018) and Transparency International (2019) would provide some viable recommendations for these purposes.

This in-depth study captures a broader analysis that hones closely into systemic failures relating to the 2018 general elections of Bangladesh. Each respective report gives insight into the nuances that define the country's electoral process's challenges, thereby emphasizing the urgency for fundamental reforms to ensure that its future elections are free, fair, and credible.

### Primary Data Analysis

**Sample Overview** The primary data collected comprises responses from 30 participants, segmented as follows:

* + **5 election officials:** Representing the administrative perspective on election management.
  + **5 political party members:** Offering insights into the political dynamics of the 2018 elections.
  + **5 security personnel:** Highlighting the role of security forces during the electoral process.
  + **15 voters:** Balanced urban and rural settings to capture diverse public sentiments.

The structured survey addressed key themes, including trust in the Election Commission (EC), experiences with electoral violence, and proposed reforms.

### Key Findings

1. **Trust in the Election Commission**
   * **Declining Trust:** More than 70% of the respondents said that they trusted the EC less after the elections of 2018. The other respondents cited events that led to this trust decline, which included vote-rigging allegations, failure to solve cases of electoral violence, and favoritism toward the ruling party. Some respondents indicated that dismissing complaints by opposition parties was a critical aspect undermining confidence. In addition, a complete failure of the EC to communicate clearly with the public about its actions during the elections fueled distrust further. Most voters and party officials cite alleged bias and ineffective management as the main reasons.
   * **Effectiveness Ratings:** On a scale of 1 to 5, the average rating for EC’s effectiveness was 2.1, categorized as "Ineffective."
   * **Impartiality Concerns:** Security personnel and political party members rated the EC’s impartiality as highly biased, with an average score of 1.8.
   * **Regional Variations:** Rural voters expressed slightly more confidence in the EC compared to urban voters, with rural participants attributing the EC’s shortcomings to logistical challenges rather than systemic bias.

### Experiences with Electoral Violence

* + **First-hand Accounts:** 60% of voters witnessed electoral violence, particularly in Dhaka and Chittagong. Urban voters reported more incidents than rural voters.
  + **Security Measures:** Over 75% of participants deemed the security measures inadequate, with an average effectiveness score of 2.3.
  + **Examples of Violence:** Security personnel highlighted incidents in Barisal and Rajshahi, where polling stations were attacked, disrupting voting for several hours. In Barisal, coordinated attacks by political activists led to the temporary shutdown of three polling stations, forcing voters to either leave without casting their votes or wait in unsafe conditions. In Rajshahi itself, most violent clashes between supporters of the competing parties caused significant delays and discouragement to voter turnout, measured to be nearly 15% lower than the surrounding areas. The incidents illustrated that targeted violence went beyond disturbing the voting process-with immediate and far-reaching effects on voter participation and confidence in the system. The interruptions were principally attributable to the poor coordination between the security forces and political activists.

### Challenges Faced by the EC

* + **Political Interference:**Eighty percent of the respondents indicated political interference as a serious hindrance to the independence of the EC.
  + **Resource Limitations:**Elections officials frequently pointed out that inadequate training and logistical support hampered the EC's performance. For example, there were reports that training staff lacked the consistency of guidelines, causing confusion during key stages of the voting process. Multiple respondents stated, for instance, that logistical disasters included late deliveries of ballots and insufficient materials for polling in some rural areas. Shortages of staff were also observed in urban areas like Dhaka, which sometimes led polling stations to

operate with fewer staff than they required, thus increasing the likelihood of errors and inefficiencies. Such demanded targeted training and improved resource allocation for enhancing the operational capabilities of the EC.

* + **Lack of Transparency:** Both voters and political party members raised concerns about the unclear handling of complaints of irregularities.

### Proposed Reforms and Strategies

* + **Adopting Technology:** At least 85% of the respondents reported supporting the use of biometric voter identification, intended to reduce fraud. However, concerns were raised by various respondents regarding prospective barriers against implementing such systems. Some election officials referred to infrastructural problems in rural areas, where power and data must be consistent for biometric devices to work correctly. The security personnel were apprehensive of technical malfunctions and delays that could impede the voting process. Party representatives expressed doubts about the assurance of data privacy against any kind of misuse of biometric data. This scenario addresses what is required, namely implementation in phases, adequate training of poll workers, and intensified cybersecurity methods to make the biometric system effective and acceptable in Bangladesh.
  + **Stricter Penalties:** Almost 90% of respondents supported the imposition of penalties more stringent against perpetrators of electoral violence.
  + **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Voters stressed the importance of educating the public about electoral integrity and the role of the Electoral Commission.
  + **More Training:** Election officials proposed compulsory training of all polling staff to help bridge logistics and procedural gaps.

### Statistical Insights

* **Demographic Variations:** The younger voters (18-25) were the most critical of the EC with 65% finding it to be "Very Ineffective.
* **Urban vs. Rural Perspectives:**Urban respondents reported a higher number of violence and intimidation incidents versus rural counterparts. This is certainly attributable to the concentration of political activity and competition in urban centers such as Dhaka and Chittagong, where protesting and clashes are visible and rigorous. It was further

confirmed by secondary data collected from Human Rights Watch (2019) and Al Jazeera (2018), which drew attention to the fact that electoral violence prevails over urban centers because of the centrality of these places in political competition. Organized groups were considered to have targeted urban polling stations with more excellent discrimination by survey respondents, which became somewhat disruptive in the voting process and culture of fear undermining voter turnout. The coupling of urbanization with unrest is a good argument as to why the organization of safety in participation of citizens in urbanized areas needs better and finer-tuned efforts for the integrity of free elections.

* **Gender Differences:** Female respondents were generally more worried about their safety during elections-with seventy-five percent wanting participants to be more secure.
* **Political Affiliations:** The EC’s neutrality was rated much lower by opposition-aligned respondents who were ruling party-affiliated respondents.
* Synthesis with Secondary Data. The primary data reflects the findings of secondary data analysis that highlight core themes such as diminished public confidence in the EC and systemic electoral violence. According to reports by Transparency International (2019) and Human Rights Watch (2019), these interpretations suggest that institutional reforms are urgently required. The systemic violence and political interference identified in the primary data hold analogical relevance to findings that emerge in secondary reports from OHCHR (2019) and Devdiscourse (2019).

### Recommendations

1. **Institutional Independence:** Constitutional reform should therefore be undertaken to safeguard the EC's independence. This should also include the creation of a bipartisan committee to appoint EC officials.
2. Use biometrics to conduct electronic voting so as to improve transparency and reduce possibilities of manipulation.
3. Engagement with the population to conduct year-long campaigns to increase voter awareness and build public trust in electoral processes.
4. Heightened security mechanisms require increased funding for training security personnel and the effective deployment of these officers on the day of elections.
5. Complaint redress mechanisms must include transparent methods for managing complaints on electoral issues with speedy resolution. Learning from other best practices

can reduce or resolve electoral grievances. For instance, India has taken steps to manage complaints through a comprehensive online portal operated by the Election Commission to ensure that voters are able to report complaints in real-time for prompt and effective resolution, with accountability appearing to coincide. In Ghana, some mobile apps were launched for tracking and resolving complaints about elections, with a distinct advancement toward transparency. One option for Bangladesh would include adopting such systems under explicit guidelines and independent oversight to inspire public trust in the complaint redress process.

1. Global collaboration: Engage with best practices by learning from successful electoral models such as India and New Zealand.

# Conclusion:

The 2018 general election in Bangladesh is an important point to view concerning the problems of electoral violence and the EC's role in regulating conflicts raised by mass protests. It points out some systemic issues that impede the EC's efforts. It mentions, among others, political polarization, institutional weaknesses, and inadequate enforcement mechanisms. Although such measures as deploying security forces and launching voter education campaigns were taken, the EC made little headway in dealing with widespread violence, voter intimidation, and allegations of election rigging. These defects call for urgent and sweeping reform so that trust in the electoral process may be restored and free and fair elections ensured.

Utilizing secondary data provided a very valuable substrate to understand the complexities at play regarding electoral violence and governance in Bangladesh. Reports from international organizations, media coverage, and academic studies establish deeply entrenched issues within the political landscape and have provided a good insight into structural reforms needed. Primary data contributed well to this context by enriching the analysis of stakeholder viewpoints, especially those coming from election officials, party members, and voters.

The findings highlight an urgent need for institutional reforms, notably gEC independence, stricter election code enforcementon code, and integration of modern technology like biometric electoral systems. Insights from comparative experiences, particularly India, Ghana, and Kenya, indicate how more robust institutional frameworks and coordination among stakeholders might go a long way toward preventing electoral violence and reinforcing democracy.

There needs to be a multidimensional response that addresses the seeming root causes of the violence. It must be composed of depoliticization of state institutions, political accountability, and enhancement of inclusive deliberation at all levels of stakeholders. There needs to be increased civic education and the empowering of marginalised communities for increased legitimacy of the electoral process, thereby reducing violence.

The vulnerabilities and openings in Bangladesh's electoral framework are underlined by the 2018 election. Evidence-based reforms, with lessons taken from international best practices, can be led by the Election Commission in an effort to materialize democratic principles, ensuring that elections reflect the will of the people. This is not only necessary for the legitimization of the government but also for forging a peaceful and participatory democratic society.

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# Appendix:

**Questionnaire**

Section 1: Trust in the Election Commission

1. Closed-Ended Questions

* Q1: Do you trust the Election Commission (EC) to conduct free and fair elections in Bangladesh?
* Yes/No
* Q2: Do you believe the EC is independent of political influence?
* Yes/No
* Q3: Has your trust in the EC increased or decreased since the 2018 election?
* Increased/Decreased/Stayed the Same

1. Rating Questions
   * Q6: On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the effectiveness of the EC in ensuring free and fair elections (1 = Very Ineffective, 5 = Very Effective)?
   * Q7: On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the impartiality of the EC (1 = Highly Biased, 5 = Completely Impartial)?

Section 2: Electoral Violence and the 2018 Election

1. Closed-Ended Questions

* Q8: Did you witness or hear about incidents of electoral violence during the 2018 election?
* Yes/No
* Q9: Were the measures taken by the EC sufficient to address electoral violence in 2018?
* Yes/No
* Q10: Do you think electoral violence is systemic in Bangladesh?
* Yes/No

Section 3: Challenges Faced by the EC

1. Closed-Ended Questions

* Q14: Was the EC adequately equipped to handle electoral violence in 2018?
* Yes/No
* Q15: Did political interference hinder the EC's ability to perform its duties?
* Yes/No
* Q16: Were the security measures during the 2018 election adequate?
* Yes/No

1. Rating Questions
   * Q19: On a scale of 1 to 5, how effective were the EC's security measures during the 2018 election? (1 = Very Ineffective, 5 = Very Effective)

Section 4: Strategies and Improvements

1. Closed-Ended Questions

* Q21: Should the EC adopt new technologies (e.g., biometric voter identification) to reduce electoral violence?
* Yes/No
* Q22: Do you believe better training for security personnel would improve the EC's ability to manage violence?
* Yes/No
* Q23: Should the EC implement stricter penalties for political parties or individuals involved in electoral violence?
* Yes/No

Section 5: Public Perceptions and Broader Recommendations

* Q28: Do you think civil society organizations can play a role in reducing electoral violence?
* Yes/No

1. Rating Questions
   * Q32: On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the importance of reforming election laws to address violence? (1 = Not Important, 5 = Very Important)

Section 6: Final Reflections

1. Open-ended Questions
   * Q33: In your opinion, what are the long-term consequences of unchecked electoral violence in Bangladesh?
   * Q34: What changes would you propose to ensure the EC becomes a trusted institution?
   * Q35: Are there any lessons from other countries that could help Bangladesh improve its election management?
2. Closed-Ended Questions
   * Q36: Do you believe reforms to the EC will strengthen democracy in Bangladesh?
   * Yes/No
   * Q37: Do you agree that electoral violence is preventable with the right interventions?
   * Yes/No
3. Suggestions for Improvement (Open-Ended)
   * Q38: What immediate steps should the EC take to restore public trust?
   * Q39: What role should political parties play in minimizing electoral

violence?

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