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# Eleventh Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh: An Empirical Study

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**Abstract:** The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of the government. This will be expressed in a periodic and transparent election which shall be by equal suffrage and held by secret vote. Through this, the pace of socio-economic and human development of a country is accelerated alongside the strengthening of the democratic process and Bangladesh is not so far from this process of democracy. To sustain the democratic process of Bangladesh it was a challenge for the ruling Awami League to conduct the 11<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election under constitutional law because of the non-cooperation of the opposition. But Awami League overcame that challenges and it was a landslide win which was largely attributed to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's dynamic leadership, her humility and the people's rejection of anti-liberation forces. Majority of the people of Bangladesh, with the spirit of liberation war, wanted to see "Sonar Bangla" a long-cherished dream of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and it was reflected in the results of election.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Formation of Government, Election Commission, Election System, EMF, Father of the Nation

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## 1. Introduction

Electing people's representatives through free, fair and neutral elections is one of the prime prerequisites for establishing good governance and democracy. Elections are a key way for citizens in a democracy to communicate with representatives. The people of Bangladesh reflect their opinions through casting ballots directly in the national and local government elections since its independence under the charismatic leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of the nation. From the very beginning of Bangladesh in 1973 the first parliamentary election was held and the presidential form of governments was also seen in the past. With the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment of the constitution of Bangladesh, caretaker government was taken to hold a free fair election; but in parliamentary system caretaker government has no legal status that's why it was abolished by the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment of the constitution. The election system of Bangladesh has great diversity. Appropriate roles of the participating candidates along with the Election Commission, the administration assigned with election-related tasks and the ruling party is very important in holding these elections. Under the ruling party, the present government of

Bangladesh is successful to hold a free fair and participatory 11<sup>th</sup> parliamentary national election.

## 2. Political History of Bangladesh

The emergence of Bangladesh as an independent and sovereign nation-state is a fact of recent history. This country had great historical development. Bangladesh has had a crucial past under approximately 200 years' British domination and 25 years of Pakistani rule. In 1947 the subcontinent became independent from British colonial rule and on the basis of two nations theory India and Pakistan were emerged. The extreme torture, humiliation, exploitation, misrule by the West Pakistani rulers finally pushed East Pakistani people to get united and come out from the grips of West Pakistan and declare independence in 1971. A great political party Awami Muslim League was established on 23 June 1949, played a vital role in language movement as well as participated in fourth alliance party in the national pole in 1954 and succeeded. In 1956 'Awami Muslim League changed its name and named after Awami League. The great victory of Awami League in 1970's the first general election on the basis of universal adult franchise tends the way of

independence. Awami League made a major role in the movement of Bangladesh liberation war in 1971 under the excellent presidency of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared the independence of Bangladesh on 26 March 1971. A provisional government (Mujibnagar Sarkar) was formed on April 10, 1971, and took oath on April 17, 1971. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was declared as president but his absence Nazrul Islam was an acting president and Tajuddin Ahmed was the Prime Minister of the new government of independent Bangladesh. In 1972 Bangladesh got the constitution and became a republic country [1, 2].

### 3. Formation of Govt. of Bangladesh

Bangladesh got a victory on December 16, 1971, after a nine-month tragic genocide. In 1972 Bangladesh got its own constitution and became the people's republic of Bangladesh with a parliamentary system of government. Then switched over to the presidential form of government, in 1991 it reverted back to a parliamentary system of government.

### 4. Election Commission of Bangladesh

The Election Commission of Bangladesh is an independent constitutional body of the nation that operates the legal functions of Election Law in Bangladesh. EC was formed in 1972, 7 July and its headquarter is situated at Agargaon,

Dhaka. Article 118-126 described the formation of the election commission in the 7<sup>th</sup> part of the constitution of Bangladesh. It consists of a Chief Election Commissioner and a number of other Election Commissioners (Article 118) of the Bangladeshi Constitution. The Chief Election Commissioner is to act as its Chairman when the Election Commission consists of more than one person. The term of office of any Election Commissioner is five years from the date on which he enters upon office for regulating and conducting the election.

## 5. The Election System of Bangladesh

To govern a country with full of democracy, peace and safety, the election system is most important. The Electoral process of Bangladesh is attractive. The electoral system of Bangladesh is sovereign, independent, neutral, and unicameral. The general election is held after the dissolution of one parliament within the 90 days. The citizens of the country are eligible for attaining in the election at the age of 25 years or above as per the constitutional law of the country. The parliament of Bangladesh consists of 350 members of whom 300 are elected from single-member constituencies on popular votes, while 50 seats are reserved for women to be distributed among different parties on the basis of a proportional system [4]. The reserved 50 seats for Women in the parliament have been fixed for the next 25 years by the 17<sup>th</sup> amendments of the constitution of Bangladesh.

## 6. Previous National Election of Bangladesh at a Glance

*Table 1. Results of Previous all National Elections of Bangladesh.*

JS Polls	In Power	Winner	Runner-up
First, 1973	AL	AL	
Second, 1979	Martial Law Regime	BNP	AL
Third, 1986	Martial Law Regime	JP	AL
Fourth, 1988	JP	JP	Combined Opposition Party
Fifth, 1991	Caretaker Government	BNP	AL
Sixth, Feb 1996	BNP	BNP	
Seventh, June 1996	Caretaker Government	AL	BNP
Eighth, 2001	Caretaker Government	BNP	AL
Ninth, 2008	Caretaker Government	AL	BNP
Tenth, 2014	AL	AL	JP

AL- Awami League, BNP- Bangladesh Nationalist Party, JP-Jatiyo Party  
Source- [5]

## 7. 11<sup>th</sup> Parliamentary Election

### 7.1. Election Commission and Declaration

Honourable President Md. Abdul Hamid picked five individuals for conducting eleventh parliamentary election from a list of 10 recommended by the EC search committee. KM Nurul Huda, a former secretary had been named the country's new chief election commissioner, under whose leadership the constitutional body would oversee the 11<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election of Bangladesh. Mr Huda has also

served as chief executive of Dhaka City Corporation. He was also joint secretary and additional secretary to the Ministry of Environment and Forests and the Parliament Secretariat, respectively. Huda had on his team former additional secretary Mahbub Talukder, former secretary Rafiqul Islam, former district judge Kabita Khanam, and former brigadier general Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury as election commissioners [6]. On November 08, 2018 the EC announced the date of an 11<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election that could be held on December 23, 2018. But the Jatiya Oikyafront and the BNP-led alliance decided to participate in

the election and demanded that polling is deferred by a month. Finally, the date of the election was fixed to December 30, 2018 [7].

## 7.2. Manifestos of Major Parties

Ruling Awami League picked 'Bangladesh at the forefront of prosperity' as the slogan in their manifesto which talks about successes of the government in the last two terms along with future plans laid out in phases. The Delta Plan, Blue-economy, youth empowerment and zero-tolerance against corruption are the key issues that the Awami League has given importance in their manifesto [8]. On the other hand, BNP pledges to protect freedom of speech and expression by scrapping what it says are black laws including Digital Security Act, Special Powers Act and Official Secrets Act.

Also promises to form a commission to restructure the administration and decentralise power by making local government bodies stronger. Most of the promises of Oikyafront are similar to that of BNP. Though Oikyafront promised to continue the war crimes trial, BNP manifesto remains silent on this issue [9]. The Jatiya Party wants to achieve its goal to 'establish good governance and develop democracy' by changing the central governing system to the provincial form of government and establishing a double-layered government structure. The manifesto pledges to introduce complete Upazila system of local governance, ensure the independence of the judiciary, reform the education system, enhance medical facilities and take stringent measures against terrorism [10].

**Table 2.** Manifestos of Awami League (Key Points).

01	My Village, My Town (Expansion of modern city facilities to every village of the country)
02	The strength of youth, Prosperity of Bangladesh (Transforming the youth into skilled manpower and ensuring employment)
03	Zero tolerance policy for corruption
04	Women empowerment, parity between sexes and children welfare.
05	Nutritious and safe food security
06	Abolishing terrorism, communalism, terrorism and drugs
07	Speedy implementation of mega projects ensuring optimum standard
08	Strengthening democracy and rule of law
09	Poverty eradication
10	Increasing the quality of education at all levels
11	Quality Health Care coverage for all
12	Broader use of digital technology for overall development.
13	Ensuring electricity and energy security
14	Modern agricultural system- incorporating automation
15	Efficient and service-focused public administration
16	People-friendly law enforcement agencies
17	Blue Economy-Development of sea resources
18	Ensuring safer roads
19	Welfare for elderly, disabled and autism
20	Prosperous Bangladesh with sustainable and inclusive development
21	Increasing public and private investment

Source- [8]

**Table 3.** Manifesto of BNP (Key Points).

01	The balance of power between the President and the prime minister
02	No holding of the office of PM for more than two consecutive terms
03	Deputy speaker from the opposition
04	Amendment to article 70
05	Reintroduction of referendum
06	Appointment of ombudsman
07	Introduction of the upper chamber of JS
08	Disclosure of Wealth statement of PM, ministers, MPs and high officials
09	Judicial commission to reform the judicial system
10	The scrapping of the Special power Act
11	The scrapping of Official Secretary Act
12	Introduction of City Government
13	The pension fund for private jobholders
14	New ministry to protect minority interests

Source: [9]

**Table 4. Manifesto of Jatiya Party (Key Points).**

01	Introduction of the provincial form of government by elevating the eight divisions into provinces.
02	Double-layered structure of government including the central government and the provincial governments and a parliament of 300 seats.
03	Decentralization by shifting at least half of the government offices from Dhaka to the provincial capitals.
04	Introducing the percentage of votes to determine winners in elections. The Election Commission will be given 'full independence'.
05	Local government will be strengthened by introducing courts at Upazila level and other courts to look into family issues. Upazila chairmen will be the supreme authority in Upazilas.
06	Jatiya Party promises an 'independent judiciary' within a year
07	Reformation of the education system will include scrapping primary and junior secondary certificate exams at grade 5 and grade 8 respectively. Education will be free for women until graduation.
08	Promise to prioritise religious sentiment above all while 30 seats in parliament will be reserved for religious minority groups.

Source: [10]

### 7.3. At a Glance of 11<sup>th</sup> Parliamentary Election of Bangladesh

**Table 5. At a Glance of 11<sup>th</sup> Parliamentary Election of Bangladesh.**

Date	December 30, 2018
Voting Time	8 am to 4 pm
Seats	299
Voters	103,826,823 (Male-52,371,620, Female-51,455,203)
Voting Centres	40,051
Polling Stations	205,691
Voting Method	EVM-06 seats (5,045 polling stations in 845 centres. Around 2.1 million voters. Traditional (Ballot Papers)- 293 seats
Political Party	Grand Alliance [Awami League-259, Jatiya Party (Ershad)-26, Workers party of Bangladesh-05, Jatio Samajtantrik Dal-03, Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh-03, Jatiya Party (Manju)- Bangladesh Tarikat Federation- Bangladesh Nationalist Front-04] Jatiya Oikya Front [Bangladesh Nationalist Party-240, Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami-22, Gano Forum-7, JSD-04, Nagorik Oikya-04, Krishak Sramik Janata League-04, Bangladesh Jatiya Party- Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish,-Bangladesh Muslim League- Jatiya Ganatantrik Party- Jatiya Oikya Prokriya- Kalyan Party- Liberal Democratic Party-19] Left Democratic Alliance-83
Candidates	1861 (1733 was nominated by 39 registered political parties, 128 were independent candidates)
Restrictions	No meeting, rally or procession (from 8 am Dec 28 till 4 pm Jan 01) In the day of the vote, no motorised vehicle was allowed Only the presiding officers and the police-in-charge of the security are allowed to use mobile phones inside the voting centres. Voters will not be allowed to use mobile phones inside the voting centres. NID card was not required for voting
Staff	As many as 66 Returning Officers in districts and 582 Assistant Returning Officers in Upazilas took on the overall responsibility for the election. A total of 40,183 presiding officers were in charge of the voting centres. Under them, 207,312 assistant presiding officers and 414,624 polling officers were directly handling the votes
Security	608,000 members of different law-enforcing agencies (police- 121,000, Ansars-446,000, village police-41,000), 600 Platoon (30 people per platoon) RAB and 983 platoon (30 people per platoon) BGB members were present in voting areas. On top of this, the 389 Upazilas will have 414 platoons (30 people per platoon) Army members, 18 Upazilas 48 platoon (30 people per platoon) Navy, and 12 Upazilas 42 platoon (30 people per platoon) Coastguards. Around the country, 1,328 executive magistrates and 640 judicial magistrates As many as 244 members of 122 election investigation committees
Election Observer	A total of 25,900 representatives from 81 local observer bodies, 38 (Invited from FEM BoSA, AAEA, OIC and Commonwealth) foreign observers, 64 officials and diplomats from foreign missions, and 61 Bangladeshi nationals working in overseas organizations will be watching the election.
Budget	Tk. 7 billion (Two-thirds of the money will be spent on security)

Source: [11, 12]

### 7.4. The Scenario of Election Day at a Glance

Bangladesh voted for 299 seats in the 11th national parliamentary election. Voting began at 8 am and ended at 4 pm, The Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina flashed the victory symbol after casting her vote. 15 people have been killed in 11 districts in violence tied to the election. CEC KM Nurul Huda says polls are largely 'peaceful' aside from 'one or two isolated incidents' [13].

### 7.5. Post-Election Scenario

#### 7.5.1. Result and Analysis

The ruling Awami League-led grand alliance won a landslide victory against the anti-liberation force (BNP-led opposition alliance) in the 11th parliamentary elections on December 30; 2018. The results show that the Awami League-led alliance got 288 seats, the BNP-led alliance got 07, and others three. The Awami League, headed by Sheikh

Hasina, has made a hat-trick in an election victory. She took oath as prime minister for the third consecutive term, setting a new record in the history of the country [14-16]. The result of Brahmanbaria-2 was suspended pending a re-vote at three polling centres. Ballots were cast in 299 of 300 parliamentary seats on Sunday. The results for 298 seats have been announced [17]. The parliamentary election of Gaibandha-3

slated for December 30 was postponed due to the sudden death of Oikyo front candidate Dr. TIM Fazle Rabbi Chowdhury on December 19 due to illness and rescheduled to January 27, 2019 [18]. Re-balloting in three election centres in Brahmanbaria-2 constituency, where the voting was suspended during the December-30 general election, began at 8 am January 9, 2019 [19].

**Table 6.** Result of 11th National Election of Bangladesh (At a glance).

Alliance	Total Seats	Name of the Political Party	Number of Seats Won
AL-led Grand Alliance	288	Awami League	259
		Jatiya Party	20
		Workers Party	3
		JASAD	2
		Bikalpa Dhara	2
		Tarikat Federation	1
		Jatiya Party-JP (Manju)	1
BNP- led Alliance	07	Bangladesh Nationalist Party	5
		Gano Forum	2
Others	03	Independent Candidates	3

### 7.5.2. View of the Major Parties

Overjoyed by the landslide victory in the parliamentary polls, Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister and ruling Awami League president, said the countrymen voted her party to power again reaping the benefit of the development works during the two consecutive terms of the party. At the same time, she pointed out debacle of BNP-Jamaat alliance in the December 30's elections caused by their indulgence in terrorism, corruption and leadership crisis. Speaking to foreign poll observers and journalists, Sheikh Hasina termed the Sunday's elections credible and transparent. Bangladesh's opposition condemned what it has called a "farcical" election and demanded a new vote [20]. BNP on December 31 rejected results of the 11th parliamentary election and demanded a fresh election under a non-party caretaker government immediately [21]. The BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami adopted lies and violence as voters have rejected them in the election, says the Awami League. "The BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami alliance realized their defeat is confirmed and are therefore choosing terror and violence, said by the Awami League. Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) KM Nurul Huda proclaimed on 31 December that the voter turnout in the 11th parliamentary election was 80 percent when rejection claimed by BNP and Jatiya Oikyafront's and a new demand of election raised, CEC was strong enough in his proclamation about a peaceful environment and festive mood of the election.

### 7.5.3. View of the Observer

Election Monitoring Forum (EMF) has labelled the December 30 general election as peaceful and fair, saying that it was held in a festive manner. The observers also praised the Election Commission's neutral role in conducting the 11th national polls. The EMF is an association of 31 organizations and 26 NGOs registered with the Election Commission. It deployed 5,811 observers in 239

constituencies, out of 299, and they visited 17,165 centres. Regarding the violence that took place in different areas on polling day, they said the violence was reported from 22 centres across the country where voting was suspended later. The platform has recommended that the Election Commission, law enforcement agencies, and other relevant authorities be stronger and more cordial in discharging their duties to hold free, fair and acceptable elections under a partisan government. The forum also demanded speedy punishment for people involved in election violence and compensation for the families of those who lost their lives during the election. It also requested the Election Commission to make sure that no candidate will be harassed during election time in future. Furthermore, EMF opined that the newly formed 11th parliament lacks a strong opposition, which is a pre-requisite for good democratic practices. He blamed opposition parties for their failure in initiating a movement involving citizens to press their demands for the sorry state of opposition in parliament [22]. BNP's elected members also took oath after a long time of new cabinet begun.

### 7.5.4. Oath Taking & Formation of Cabinet

The Jatio Sangsad, the house of the nation is the supreme legislative body of Bangladesh. The persons who won the election are the honourable member of Parliament. The oath-taking ceremony of newly elected 289 lawmakers from eleventh general election took place at the oath-taking room of the parliament on 03 January 2019 with speaker Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury. Speaker Chowdhury began by administering the oath of the office and then proceeded to read out the oath to other MPs. Awami League took their oaths first with 256 members, later 21 Jatio Party members took an oath while Jatiya Oikyo Front denied taking oath as they rejected the election. After taking oath, Awami League Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been named the leader of the eleventh parliament. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

formed a new cabinet of 47 members where twenty-four of the ministers are new. [23, 24].

## 8. Conclusion

The chief of Awami League has always dreamt of building a well-developed country for the younger generation and this dedication was reflected in her massive undertakings like Padma Bridge, Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, Metro Rail, and so on impressed the young generation to vote for her. Sheikh Hasina has set a rare example by sheltering over a million Rohingya people who were forcibly driven out of their homeland, Myanmar. With the burden of huge population, Awami League Government has strongly handled the situation and become successful to hold the support of mass people. People have rejected BNP because of its ties with the anti-liberation force like Jamat-e- Islam. Bangladesh is continuing its democratic process by holding free and fair elections and sustaining its development very soon. Bangladesh will be the developed country as it has attained all the criteria under the dynamic leadership of Sheikh Hasina.

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