

Electoral Politics in Bangladesh: A critical analysis of Political Strategies

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Abstract

This paper provides a critical analysis of the electoral politics in Bangladesh, focusing on the strategies of the various political parties. The political landscape of Bangladesh is characterized by a dynamic power, ideology, and institutional challenges. This analysis reaches into how parties like the Awami League, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the Bangladesh Jamat-e-Islami and the Jatiyo Party formulate their electoral strategies, engage with voters, and manipulate political narratives to attain and maintain the power of government. The research highlights the role of electoral systems and the impact of political history, including previous conflicts and regime changes, on current political practices. Additionally, it examines the significance of grassroots mobilization, coalition-building, and the use of different tools in electoral campaigns. The paper also addresses the implications of political party strategies on the democratic process, including issues of voter turnout, election transparency, and the influence of external actors. Through a comprehensive review of recent elections and party strategies, this analysis aims to illustrate the complexities of electoral politics in Bangladesh, contributing to a deeper understanding of its implications for democratic governance and stability in the region. The research also illuminates how Bangladeshi political parties engage in electoral politics and what is the political parties' strategies to change the government systems. A transparent and democratic electoral process is fundamental to the legitimacy of any government. In Bangladesh, electoral challenges such as voter suppression, electoral fraud, and lack of transparency hinder democratic consolidation. This chapter introduces the significance of democratic elections and the current state of electoral integrity in Bangladesh. It discusses the challenges faced by the country and the need for reforms to enhance democracy. Bangladeshi political parties engage in electoral politics through a combination of strategies, tactics, and practices that reflect the country's unique political culture, historical context, and socio-economic realities. Electoral politics in Bangladesh is highly competitive, often polarized, and deeply influenced by the legacy of its liberation struggle, the role of dynastic leadership, and the interplay

between democracy and authoritarianism. Below is a critical analysis of how the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL), the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the Jatio Party and the Bangladesh Jamat-e-Islami engages in electoral politics, with a specific focus on its strategies during the 2018 general elections.

Keywords: *Electoral Politics, Bangladesh, Political Strategies*

I. INTRODUCTION

Elections are a fundamental component of democracy, determining the governance and political stability of a nation. Since its independence in 1971, Bangladesh has witnessed a dynamic and often awful electoral history. The country's political landscape is dominated by four major parties: the Awami League (AL), the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the Jatio Party and the Bangladesh Jamat- e- Islami along with several smaller parties that play crucial roles in shaping electoral outcomes. In some elections smaller party made alliance with these two major parties for attending the government. This monograph aims to critically analyze the strategies employed how the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL), the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the Jatio Party and the Bangladesh Jamat-e-Islami engage in electoral politics, with a specific focus on its strategies during the 2018 general elections.

Background of the Study

The political framework of Bangladesh has been shaped by historical events, socio-economic factors, and dynamics of political parties. Since gaining independence in 1971, the country has experienced significant political upheaval, including military coups, civil unrest, and a deep-seated rivalry between its two major political parties: the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). These factors set the stage for a complex electoral landscape marked by intense competition, partisanship, and fluctuating levels of voter engagement.

In recent years, the electoral politics of Bangladesh have undergone notable transformations, influenced by globalization and technological advancements. Political parties now leverage social media and digital platforms to reach constituents, reshape political messages, and mobilize support, changing the texture of traditional campaigning. These shifts highlight the necessity of understanding how political strategies adapt to contemporary challenges and societal expectations.

Moreover, issues such as voter repression, electoral violence, and allegations of electoral fraud have raised serious concerns regarding the integrity of the electoral process. These developments necessitate a critical examination of political party strategies within the context of political culture and institutional frameworks.

This research aims to fill the existing gap in literature by exploring the strategic behaviors of political parties during elections, assessing their effectiveness, and understanding their broader implications for democratic practice in Bangladesh. The findings will contribute to the discourse on political accountability, governance, and the evolving nature of democracy in a developing nation.

Problem Statement

The electoral politics of Bangladesh is characterized by intense rivalry between major political parties, shifting alliances, and strategies that often prioritize short-term electoral gains over long-term democratic stability. While elections are the cornerstone of democracy, the country's political landscape has been marred by allegations of vote rigging, violence, and the strategic use of state institutions to influence electoral outcomes. Political parties in Bangladesh adopt various strategies, including populist appeals, patronage networks, and electoral engineering, which can have profound implications for governance, democratic consolidation, and political stability.

This study critically examines the strategies employed by political parties in Bangladesh during elections, assessing their impact on democratic processes, voter behavior, and institutional integrity. The research aims to identify the key tactics used by parties to secure electoral victories, analyze their effectiveness, and evaluate their consequences for the broader political system. By doing so, it seeks to contribute to the discourse on electoral reforms and democratic strengthening in Bangladesh.

Historical Background of Electoral Politics in Bangladesh

Historical background of electoral politics in Bangladesh's can be divided into several phases:

Post-Independence Elections (1973-1990): This period was marked by the dominance of the Awami League, followed by political instability and military interventions. The first parliamentary elections in 1973 witnessed an overwhelming victory for the Awami League. However, subsequent years saw political unrest, leading to the military coups of 1975 and the eventual establishment of military-led governments under Ziaur Rahman and later Hossain Mohammad Ershad. The period ended with the mass movement of 1990 that led to the fall of Ershad's regime and the restoration of democracy.

Democratic Transition (1991-2006): The 1991 elections marked the beginning of a parliamentary democracy with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) assuming power. This phase saw an intense rivalry between the BNP and the Awami League, with power alternating between the two parties in subsequent elections. The period was also characterized by frequent hartals (strikes), political boycotts, and concerns over electoral transparency. Despite these challenges, democratic institutions began to take shape, albeit with persistent political polarization.

Caretaker Government and Political Turmoil (2007-2008): Amid growing political tension and accusations of electoral fraud, the military-backed caretaker government took charge in 2007. The administration sought to implement political and electoral reforms, but its tenure was marred by controversies, including the arrest of major political leaders. The 2008 general elections, conducted under this caretaker government, resulted in a landslide victory for the Awami League, marking the beginning of a new political era.

Recent Elections (2008-Present): The post-2008 period has been characterized by increasing political centralization, allegations of election rigging, and the weakening of opposition parties. The Awami League secured consecutive victories in the 2014 and 2018 elections, both of which were marred by opposition boycotts and accusations of voter suppression. The Election Commission has faced criticism over its role in ensuring electoral fairness, while the use of digital campaigns and social media has significantly influenced

election strategies. The ongoing challenges to electoral integrity and democratic governance remain critical issues in contemporary Bangladeshi politics.

Overall, this research is crucial for understanding the evolving nature of electoral politics in Bangladesh and its broader implications for democracy, political stability, and governance.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Definition of Electoral Politics:

Electoral politics refers to the processes, activities, and institutions involved in the conduct of elections, which are a fundamental mechanism for choosing representatives and leaders in democratic systems. It encompasses the strategies, behaviors, and dynamics that shape how elections are contested, won, and lost, as well as their broader implications for governance and society. Electoral politics is a central aspect of democratic governance, as it provides citizens with the opportunity to influence political decision-making by voting for candidates or parties that align with their interests and values.

Electoral politics encompasses various elements that collectively shape the process of elections and their outcomes. These elements are interconnected and play a crucial role in determining how democratic systems function. Below is a brief discussion of the key elements of electoral politics:

Key Components of Electoral Politics:

Elections: The formal process through which voters choose their representatives or leaders like general elections, local elections, by-elections, and referendums.

Political Parties: Organizations that represent specific ideologies, interests, or policy agendas. Political Parties play a crucial role in mobilizing voters, nominating candidates, and shaping electoral campaigns.

Voter Behavior: The study of how and why voters make choices, influenced by factors such as party loyalty, candidate appeal, issues, and identity.

Campaign Strategies: The methods used by candidates and parties to persuade voters, including rallies, advertising, social media, and grassroots mobilization.

Electoral Systems: The rules and procedures that govern how votes are cast, counted, and translated into seats or offices. Examples include first-past-the-post, proportional representation, and mixed systems.

Electoral Institutions: Bodies responsible for administering elections, such as election commissions, and ensuring their fairness and transparency.

Political Representation: The relationship between elected officials and the voters they represent, including issues of accountability and responsiveness.

Electoral Violence and Fraud: Challenges to the integrity of elections, including voter suppression, intimidation, and manipulation of results.

Role of Media and Technology: The influence of traditional and social media in shaping public opinion and electoral outcomes.

Importance of Electoral Politics:

Legitimacy of Governance: Elections provide a mandate for leaders to govern and ensure that power is derived from the consent of the governed.

Accountability: Elections hold leaders accountable to the electorate, as poor performance can result in electoral defeat.

Representation: Elections ensure that diverse voices and interests are represented in decision-making processes.

Political Participation: Elections encourage civic engagement and provide citizens with a direct role in shaping their government.

Conflict Resolution: Elections offer a peaceful mechanism for resolving political disputes and transferring power.

Challenges in Electoral Politics:

Electoral Malpractices: Issues such as vote-buying, gerrymandering, and rigging undermine the fairness of elections.

Polarization: Increasing political polarization can lead to divisive campaigns and undermine social cohesion.

Voter Apathy: Low voter turnout can weaken the legitimacy of electoral outcomes.

Inequality: Disparities in resources and access to media can advantage some candidates or parties over others.

External Influence: Interference by foreign actors or the influence of money in politics can distort electoral processes.

Electoral Politics and Political Parties' Strategies in Different Countries:

Electoral politics and political party strategies vary significantly across countries due to differences in political systems, cultural contexts, historical backgrounds, and electoral rules. Below is an overview of electoral politics and party strategies in different countries, highlighting key examples and trends:

United States: The U.S. uses a two-party system dominated by the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. Elections are held at federal, state, and local levels, with the presidential election being the most prominent. The Electoral College system determines the outcome of presidential elections, rather than a direct popular vote. Heavy reliance on fundraising and donations from individuals, corporations, and PACs (Political Action Committees). Extensive use of TV ads, social media, and data analytics to target specific voter demographics. Door-to-door canvassing, rallies, and volunteer networks to energize the base.

India: India is the world's largest democracy, with a multi-party system. Elections are conducted using a first-past-the-post system for the Lok Sabha (lower house of Parliament) and state assemblies. Identity politics, including caste, religion, and regionalism, play a significant role in elections. Parties often form alliances to secure a majority in a fragmented political landscape. Extensive use of rallies, door-to-door campaigns, and local leaders to connect with voters. Emphasis on populist policies, such as subsidies, healthcare, and

education, to attract voters. Increasing use of platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter to reach younger voters.

United Kingdom: The UK uses a parliamentary system with a first-past-the-post electoral system. Elections are held for the House of Commons, with the party winning the majority forming the government. Parties release detailed policy platforms to attract voters. Use of TV debates, newspapers, and social media to communicate with the electorate. Focus on swing constituencies to maximize electoral gains. Recent elections have been heavily influenced by issues like Brexit and national identity.

Germany: Germany uses a mixed member proportional representation system, combining direct elections with party lists. The system encourages coalition governments, as no single party usually wins an outright majority. Parties focus on forming alliances and negotiating coalition agreements. Emphasis on detailed policy proposals, particularly on issues like the economy, climate change, and EU integration. Strong local party structures and community engagement.

Russia operates under a semi-authoritarian system, with elections that are often criticized for lacking fairness and transparency. The United Russia party, aligned with President Vladimir Putin, dominates the political landscape. Use of state resources and media to support pro-government candidates. Intimidation, legal challenges, and exclusion of opposition candidates. Emphasis on nationalism and stability to garner support.

Key Trends in Electoral Politics and Party Strategies Globally:

1. **Rise of Populism:** Many countries have seen the rise of populist leaders and parties that appeal to anti-establishment sentiments.
2. **Digital Campaigning:** Social media and data analytics are increasingly central to electoral strategies.
3. **Polarization:** Growing political polarization in many democracies, leading to divisive campaigns.
4. **Coalition Politics:** In multi-party systems, coalition-building is often essential for forming governments.
5. **Electoral Integrity:** Concerns about fairness, transparency, and the influence of money in politics are widespread.

In summary, electoral politics and party strategies are shaped by a country's unique political, cultural, and institutional context. While there are common trends, such as the rise of digital campaigning and populism, the specific strategies employed by parties vary widely across different political systems. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for analyzing electoral outcomes and democratic governance worldwide.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of electoral politics in Bangladesh has garnered academic attention over the years, focusing on various dimensions such as party strategies, voter behavior, and democracy's challenges. This literature review synthesizes key themes and findings in the existing body of research related to electoral strategies employed by political parties in Bangladesh.

Historical Context and Political Party Evolution: Several scholars have examined the historical evolution of political parties in Bangladesh, highlighting the ideological divides that shape current electoral strategies. According to M. Shamsul Huq (2002), the legacy of

colonialism and the aftermath of the Liberation War have significantly influenced party politics.

Electoral Systems and Strategies: The electoral system in Bangladesh, characterized by the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) model, governs party strategies during elections. Researchers like A. M. M. Shafiqul Islam (2010) argue that this system incentivizes strategic voting and coalition-building, as parties navigate the challenges of a polarized electorate. The literature shows how major parties adopt various approaches, including targeting specific demographic groups and leveraging local issues to consolidate support (Khan, 2013).

Mobilization and Campaign Tactics: The role of grassroots mobilization in electoral success has been extensively discussed. Rahman (2015) emphasizes the importance of local party networks and grassroots activists in mobilizing voters, particularly in rural areas. Furthermore, with the advent of social media, studies by Nazrul Islam (2018) indicate that political parties are increasingly using platforms like Facebook and Twitter to engage, inform, and mobilize younger voters, transforming traditional campaigning.

Voter Behavior and Electoral Engagement: Understanding voter behavior in Bangladesh is critical for analyzing electoral strategies. Research by M. M. Rahman and A. Rehman (2016) underscores the impact of socio-economic factors on voter turnout and decision-making, suggesting that issues of identity, class, and access to information significantly influence electoral outcomes.

Challenges to Democracy and Electoral Integrity: A significant area of concern in the literature pertains to the integrity of the electoral process and the erosion of democratic norms. Scholars such as Ahsan Iqbal (2020) have documented instances of political violence, voter intimidation, and electoral fraud, asserting that these practices undermine public confidence in the electoral system.

The literature on electoral politics in Bangladesh presents a multifaceted view of party strategies shaped by historical legacies, electoral systems, and sociopolitical dynamics. While significant strides have been made in understanding these issues, gaps remain in comprehensively analyzing the interplay between party strategies and evolving voter expectations. This research aims to build on existing scholarship by examining contemporary electoral strategies and their implications for democracy in Bangladesh, thereby enriching the discourse on political accountability and governance in the nation.

IV. OBJECTIVE OF THIS STUDY

The aim of this study was to review Byron in a context of exile as a literary response to the concept of nationalism displaying a form of anti-nationalism within the global Romanticism environment early in history. The primary aim of this research is to critically analyze the electoral strategies employed by political parties in Bangladesh and their impact on the country's democratic process, governance, and political stability. The study seeks to understand the motivations behind these strategies, their effectiveness in securing electoral victories, and their broader consequences for democratic consolidation and institutional integrity.

Specific Objectives:

1. To identify how the Bangladeshi political parties engage in electoral politics and what was their political strategies to attain the electoral processes.
2. To examine the key strategies used by political parties in Bangladesh during elections, including campaign tactics, alliance formations, and vote mobilization techniques.
3. To assess the impact of these strategies on democratic governance, political stability, and the overall electoral process.

By achieving these objectives, the research aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on electoral democracy and governance in Bangladesh, offering insights that can inform policymakers, political parties, and civil society organizations.

V. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How have Bangladeshi political parties engage in electoral politics?
2. How do these strategies impact voter behavior and electoral outcomes?
3. What are the implications of these strategies for democracy and governance in Bangladesh?

VI. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study of "Electoral Politics in Bangladesh: A Critical Analysis of Political Party Strategies" holds significant importance in understanding the dynamics of democracy, governance, and political stability in Bangladesh. The findings of this research contribute to multiple domains, including political science, public policy, electoral reforms, and democratic consolidation. The key significance of the study is as follows:

Understanding Electoral Strategies: The study provides insights into the strategies political parties use to mobilize voters, form alliances, and influence election outcomes. It examines how parties engage in campaign tactics, populist rhetoric, and patronage-based politics.

Assessing the Impact on Democratic Governance: By analyzing electoral strategies, the study highlights their effects on democratic norms, political accountability, and governance. It examines whether such strategies strengthen or weaken democratic institutions in Bangladesh.

Identifying Challenges to Free and Fair Elections: The study sheds light on issues such as electoral violence, vote rigging, misuse of state resources, and media influence in election campaigns. It helps identify structural weaknesses in the electoral system that hinder free and fair elections.

Policy Implications and Electoral Reforms: Findings from the study can inform policymakers, election commissions, and civil society organizations about the need for electoral reforms. It provides recommendations for improving electoral transparency, reducing political polarization, and strengthening democratic practices.

Contribution to Political Science and Comparative Studies: The study adds to the academic literature on electoral politics in developing democracies, particularly in South Asia. It provides comparative insights for scholars studying electoral strategies in other countries with similar political environments.

Enhancing Public Awareness and Political Engagement: By analyzing how political parties operate, the study can help citizens make informed choices during elections. It encourages public discourse on democratic participation and the role of political parties in governance.

VII. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study on "Electoral Politics in Bangladesh: A Critical Analysis of Political Party Strategies" employs a quantitative research approach to analyze political party strategies, electoral trends, and their impact on democracy. The methodology consists of the following key components:

Research Design: The study adopts qualitative research to provide a comprehensive analysis of electoral politics in Bangladesh. It follows a descriptive and analytical design, examining past election data, political party strategies, and voter behavior.

Data Collection Methods- Secondary Data Collection:

Election Reports & Official Documents: Review reports from the Bangladesh Election Commission, international election monitoring bodies and local NGOs.

Political Party Manifestos & Campaign Materials: Analyze party manifestos, speeches, social media campaigns, and advertisements to identify key strategies.

Media Analysis: Examine newspaper articles, television debates, and online discussions to understand media influence on elections.

Academic Literature & Policy Papers: Review existing research on electoral politics, democracy, and political party behavior in Bangladesh.

Data Analysis Techniques:

Quantitative Analysis: Statistical analysis of election results, voter turnout, and survey data using SPSS, Excel, or other statistical tools. Trend analysis to track changes in electoral strategies over different election cycles

Ethical Considerations: Ensure confidentiality and anonymity for survey respondents and interviewees. Obtain informed consent from participants before conducting interviews or surveys. Maintain objectivity and neutrality in analyzing political parties and their strategies.

Scope and Limitations: The study primarily focuses on national and parliamentary elections in Bangladesh, with some references to local elections. While the research includes both qualitative and quantitative data, access to certain confidential political strategies may be limited. The findings are based on available election reports, expert opinions, and voter perceptions, which may have inherent biases. This research methodology ensures a comprehensive and balanced analysis of electoral politics in Bangladesh, offering valuable insights into political party strategies and their implications for democracy.

VIII. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Bangladesh Awami League's (BAL) Strategies to Engage in the Electoral Politics:

The Awami League (AL), one of the two major political parties in Bangladesh was effective in engaging in electoral politics. Its strategies are deeply rooted in its historical legacy, organizational strength, and ability to leverage state resources. The party's approach to electoral politics is characterized by a combination of grassroots mobilization, development-focused campaigns, alliance-building, and the use of state machinery. Below is an analysis of how the Awami League engages in electoral politics, with a specific focus on its strategies during the 2018 general elections.

General Strategies of the Awami League in Electoral Politics:

Historical Legacy and Nationalism: The Awami League positions itself as the party that led Bangladesh's liberation war in 1971. It emphasizes its role in the creation of Bangladesh and its commitment to secularism, nationalism, and the spirit of the liberation war. The party capitalizes on the legacy of its founder, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Bangabandhu), who is revered as the "Father of the Nation." This legacy is a central part of its electoral appeal.

Development and Governance: The Awami League highlights its achievements in infrastructure development, economic growth, and poverty reduction. Projects like the Padma Bridge, metro rail, and power plants are frequently showcased as evidence of its governance success.

Alliance Building: The Awami League leads the Grand Alliance (Mohajot), a coalition of smaller parties, including leftist and centrist groups. This alliance helps consolidate votes and broaden its support base.

Use of State Machinery: As the ruling party, the Awami League has access to state resources, which it uses to its advantage during elections. This includes leveraging local administration, law enforcement, and development projects to influence voters.

Media and Communication: The Awami League enjoys significant support from pro-government media outlets, which amplify its campaign messages and achievements while marginalizing opposition voices. materials.

Awami League's Strategies in the 2018 General Elections:

The 2018 general elections were a significant victory for the Awami League, which won 258 out of 300 parliamentary seats. Below are the key strategies the party employed during the election:

Development-Centric Campaign: The Awami League focused heavily on its development achievements, particularly in infrastructure, energy, and social welfare. Projects like the Padma Bridge, Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, and metro rail were central to its campaign narrative. The party argued that its leadership had transformed Bangladesh into a developing nation and promised to continue this progress.

Grand Alliance Coalition: The Awami League led the Grand Alliance, which included smaller parties like the Jatiya Party (Ershad), Workers Party, and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD). This coalition helped consolidate votes and present a united front against the opposition.

Media Dominance: Pro-government media outlets heavily promoted the Awami League's achievements and campaign messages, while opposition voices were often marginalized or

ignored. Social media campaigns were also used to reach younger voters and counter opposition narratives.

Key Outcomes of the 2018 Elections:

The Awami League won a landslide victory, securing 258 seats in parliament. The opposition alliance, led by the BNP, won only 7 seats and rejected the results, alleging widespread rigging and voter suppression. The opposition and international observers criticized the election for lacking a level playing field, citing restrictions on opposition campaigning, media bias, and the use of state machinery. There were reports of violence and intimidation against opposition candidates and supporters, raising concerns about the fairness of the electoral process.

The Awami League's engagement in electoral politics is characterized by its strong organizational structure, development-focused campaigns, and effective use of state resources. In the 2018 elections, the party's strategies centered on highlighting its governance achievements, mobilizing grassroots support, and countering opposition challenges. While the election resulted in a decisive victory for the Awami League, it also sparked controversy and allegations of unfair practices, underscoring the polarized nature of Bangladesh's political landscape.

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Strategies to Engage in Electoral politics:

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is one of the two major political parties in Bangladesh, alongside the Awami League. Since its founding in 1978 by former President Ziaur Rahman, the BNP has played a significant role in the country's electoral politics. However, its strategies and engagement in elections have evolved over time, shaped by changing political dynamics, alliances, and challenges. Below is an analysis of how the BNP has engaged in electoral politics in Bangladesh:

Historical Context: The BNP was established as a center-right political party advocating for nationalism, free-market policies, and Islamic values. It has alternated in power with the Awami League, forming governments in 1979–1982, 1991–1996, and 2001–2006. The party has faced significant challenges since 2008, including allegations of corruption, legal battles, and a lack of electoral success.

Electoral Strategies:

a. Coalition Building: The BNP has often formed alliances with smaller parties to strengthen its electoral prospects. Notable alliances include the Four-Party Alliance (2001–2006), which included the Jamaat-e-Islami, a conservative Islamic party. This alliance helped the BNP secure a landslide victory in the 2001 elections. In recent years, the BNP has tried to form broader coalitions, such as the Jatiya Oikya Front (National Unity Front) in 2018, to challenge the Awami League's dominance.

b. Populist Policies: The BNP has historically relied on populist rhetoric and promises to attract voters. It has emphasized issues such as economic development, anti-corruption, and social welfare during campaigns.

c. Mobilization of Grassroots Support: The BNP has a strong grassroots network, particularly in rural areas, which it uses to mobilize voters. Local leaders and activists play a key role in organizing rallies, distributing campaign materials, and engaging with voters.

Recent Strategies:

The BNP has often resorted to boycotting elections and organizing protests to challenge the legitimacy of the government. For example, it boycotted the 2014 elections and organized mass protests in 2018, which were met with a heavy-handed government response.

The BNP has sought to draw international attention to what it perceives as unfair electoral practices in Bangladesh. It has lobbied foreign governments and international organizations to pressure the Awami League government to ensure free and fair elections.

Strategies of 2018 Election:

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), one of the major political parties in Bangladesh, faced significant challenges in the 2018 general elections. The party's strategies and approach to the election were shaped by the political environment at the time, which was marked by tensions with the ruling Awami League (AL) government and concerns over the fairness of the electoral process. Below are some key aspects of the BNP's strategies during the 2018 elections:

Demand for a Neutral Election Environment: The BNP repeatedly called for a neutral and inclusive election environment, demanding the deployment of a non-partisan caretaker government to oversee the elections. This was a longstanding demand of the party, rooted in its belief that free and fair elections were not possible under the ruling party's administration.

Alliance Building: The BNP sought to build a broader opposition coalition to challenge the Awami League. It formed the Jatiya Oikya Front (National Unity Front), an alliance with other opposition parties, including the Gono Forum, Jamaat-e-Islami (though Jamaat's participation was controversial and limited due to legal restrictions), and smaller parties.

Election Boycott Threat: Initially, the BNP threatened to boycott the election if its demands for a neutral election environment were not met. However, the party eventually decided to participate, likely due to pressure from its supporters and the fear of losing political relevance.

Legal and Political Challenges: The BNP's leadership, including its chairperson Khaleda Zia, was largely absent from the campaign due to her imprisonment on corruption charges, which the party claimed were politically motivated. This weakened the party's ability to rally its base. The party also faced difficulties in holding rallies and public meetings, as it alleged that its activists were harassed and detained by law enforcement agencies.

The BNP has been a major player in Bangladesh's electoral politics, but its influence has waned in recent years due to internal and external challenges. The BNP's strategies in the 2018 elections were shaped by its limited options in a highly polarized political environment. While the party attempted to rally opposition forces and highlight issues of governance and democracy, its efforts were undermined by legal and political challenges, as well as the overwhelming dominance of the Awami League. The election results and the subsequent political landscape further marginalized the BNP, leaving it in a difficult position in Bangladesh's political arena.

Jatiya Party's (JP) Strategies to Engage in the Electoral Politics in Bangladesh:

The Jatiya Party (JP), led by Hussain Muhammad Ershad, is the third-largest political party in Bangladesh and has played a significant role in the country's electoral politics. Although it has never achieved the dominance of the Awami League (AL) or the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the Jatiya Party has often acted as a "kingmaker" in Bangladeshi politics, particularly in elections where no single party secures an absolute majority. Below is an analysis of how the Jatiya Party engaging in electoral politics, with a specific focus on its strategies during the 2018 general elections.

General Strategies of the Jatiya Party in Electoral Politics:

The Jatiya Party has often aligned itself with larger parties, particularly the Awami League, to secure a share of power. It has been part of the grand alliance led by the Awami League since 2008. The party positions itself as a moderate alternative to the two major parties (AL and BNP), appealing to voters who are disillusioned with the polarization between the AL and BNP.

The Jatiya Party has a strong base in rural areas, particularly in northern Bangladesh, where it emphasizes local development and welfare issues. The party often targets marginalized communities, including ethnic minorities and lower-income groups, by promising inclusive development and representation.

The party is closely associated with its founder, Hussain Muhammad Ershad, who served as the military ruler of Bangladesh from 1982 to 1990. Even after his death in 2019, the party continues to rely on his legacy and family leadership. Ershad's wife, Raushan Ershad, and brother, GM Quader, have played key roles in leading the party, raising questions about internal democracy.

Jatiya Party's Strategies in the 2018 General Elections:

In the 2018 general elections, the Jatiya Party participated as part of the Grand Alliance led by the Awami League. Below are the key strategies it employed:

The Jatiya Party joined the Awami League-led Grand Alliance, which helped it secure a share of seats in parliament. This alliance was strategic, as it allowed the party to remain relevant in a political environment dominated by the AL and BNP. By aligning with the Awami League, the Jatiya Party avoided direct confrontation with the ruling party and ensured its participation in the government.

The party emphasized its commitment to local development and welfare, particularly in rural areas where it has a strong base. It promised to address issues like poverty, unemployment, and infrastructure development. Candidates highlighted their personal contributions to local development projects to appeal to voters.

Key Outcomes of the 2018 Elections:

The Jatiya Party won 22 seats in parliament, making it the third-largest party after the Awami League and BNP. Despite its alliance with the Awami League, the party faced criticism for its perceived subservience to the ruling party and its inability to effectively challenge the AL's dominance. Critics argue that the Jatiya Party has become too dependent on the Awami League, compromising its ability to act as an effective opposition or alternative.

The Jatiya Party's engagement in electoral politics is characterized by its role as a coalition partner, its focus on rural and marginalized voters, and its moderate and centrist image. In the 2018 elections, the party's strategies centered on aligning with the Awami League, emphasizing local development, and targeting specific voter groups. While the Jatiya Party remains a significant player in Bangladeshi politics, its reliance on alliances and limited national appeal pose challenges to its long-term growth and independence.

Bangladesh Jamat-e-Islami's (BJI) Strategies to Engage in Electoral Politics:

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, a conservative Islamist political party in Bangladesh, has had a complex and controversial role in the country's electoral politics. Historically, the Jamat-e-Islami has been a key ally of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), but its participation in elections has been severely restricted in recent years due to legal and political challenges. Below is an analysis of how Jamaat-e-Islami has engaged in electoral politics in Bangladesh, with a specific focus on its strategies during the 2018 general elections.

General Strategies of Jamaat-e-Islami in Electoral Politics:

Alliance with the BNP: Jamaat-e-Islami has historically been a major ally of the BNP, forming a coalition to contest elections. This alliance is based on shared opposition to the Awami League and a common goal of promoting conservative and Islamic values in governance. As part of the alliance, Jamaat-e-Islami typically secures a share of seats in parliament and influences the BNP's policies and campaigns.

Religious and Ideological Appeal: Jamaat-e-Islami campaigns on an Islamist platform, advocating for the implementation of Sharia law, the protection of Islamic values, and the promotion of religious education.

Controversial Legacy: Jamaat-e-Islami's role during the 1971 Liberation War, where it opposed Bangladesh's independence and collaborated with the Pakistani military, remains a highly contentious issue. The party has faced widespread criticism and legal challenges.

Jamaat-e-Islami's Strategies in the 2018 General Elections:

In the 2018 general elections, Jamaat-e-Islami faced significant challenges due to legal restrictions and its controversial legacy. Below are the key strategies it employed:

Indirect Participation Through the BNP: Jamaat-e-Islami was unable to contest the election directly due to the cancellation of its registration as a political party by the Election Commission in 2013. As a result, it participated indirectly through its alliance with the BNP.

Focus on Religious and Conservative Voters: The party emphasized its Islamist agenda, appealing to conservative and religious voters by highlighting its commitment to Islamic values and governance.

Criticism of the Government: Jamaat-e-Islami criticized the Awami League government for its handling of the economy, human rights, and governance, presenting itself as a defender of Islamic values and social justice. The party also highlighted the legal and political challenges it faced, framing them as part of a broader attack on Islam and democracy.

Key Outcomes of the 2018 Elections:

The BNP-led alliance, including Jamaat-e-Islami, won only 7 seats in parliament, a significant decline from previous elections. Jamaat-e-Islami's indirect participation through the BNP did not translate into electoral success, as the alliance faced widespread allegations

of irregularities and voter suppression. The cancellation of Jamaat-e-Islami's registration as a political party severely limited its ability to contest elections directly. The party's controversial role during the 1971 Liberation War and the subsequent war crimes trials have damaged its reputation and political standing.

Jamaat-e-Islami's engagement in electoral politics is characterized by its alliance with the BNP, its focus on religious and conservative voters, and its grassroots mobilization efforts. In the 2018 elections, the party's strategies centered on indirect participation through the BNP, emphasizing its Islamist agenda, and mobilizing its grassroots network. However, legal restrictions, its controversial legacy, and the broader political environment have severely limited] the party's ability to compete effectively. Jamaat-e-Islami's future in Bangladeshi politics remains uncertain, as it continues to face significant challenges and opposition.

Bangladeshi Political Parties' Strategies to Engage in Electoral Politics:

Bangladeshi political parties engage in electoral politics through a combination of strategies, tactics, and practices that reflect the country's unique political culture, historical context, and socio-economic realities. Electoral politics in Bangladesh is highly competitive, often polarized, and deeply influenced by the legacy of its liberation struggle, the role of dynastic leadership, and the interplay between democracy and authoritarianism. Below is an overview of how Bangladeshi parties engaging in electoral politics.

Formation of Alliances and Coalitions: Parties often form alliances to consolidate votes and increase their chances of winning. For example, the Awami League leads the Grand Alliance (Mohajot), which includes smaller leftist and centrist parties, while the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has historically allied with Islamist parties like Jamaat-e-Islami and other opposition groups under the Jatiya Oikya Front (National Unity Front).

Grassroots Mobilization: Parties rely heavily on their grassroots networks, including local leaders, activists, and supporters, to mobilize voters. The Awami League and BNP, in particular, have extensive organizational structures that reach down to the village level.

Election Campaigns: Parties organize large rallies and public meetings to energize their base and attract undecided voters. These events often feature speeches by top leaders, cultural programs, and symbolic gestures. In Bangladesh, each party is assigned a unique electoral symbol (e.g., the Awami League's "boat" and the BNP's "sheaf of paddy"). These symbols are crucial for reaching illiterate voters and are heavily promoted during campaigns.

Narrative Building and Issue-Based Campaigning: The Awami League often emphasizes its role in Bangladesh's liberation war and positions itself as the guardian of secularism and development. The BNP, on the other hand, focuses on issues like democracy, rule of law, and opposition to authoritarianism. Some parties, particularly Islamist groups, use religious narratives to appeal to conservative voters, while others emphasize nationalism and patriotism.

Electoral Violence and Intimidation: Electoral politics in Bangladesh is often marred by violence, including clashes between rival party activists, attacks on candidates, and intimidation of voters. This is particularly prevalent in highly contested constituencies. Opposition parties frequently accuse the ruling party of using state institutions to suppress dissent and manipulate elections.

Boycotts and Participation Dilemmas: Opposition parties sometimes boycott elections to delegitimize the process, especially when they believe the playing field is not level. For example, the BNP boycotted the 2014 general elections, citing concerns over fairness. Even

when participating, opposition parties often criticize the electoral process and highlight irregularities to maintain their credibility with supporters.

Post-Election Strategies: Winning parties typically celebrate their victories, while losing parties often reject the results, alleging fraud and demanding fresh elections. Opposition parties frequently organize protests, strikes (hartals), and demonstrations to challenge election outcomes and pressure the government.

Key Challenges in Electoral Politics:

Lack of Level Playing Field: Opposition parties often face significant obstacles, including restrictions on campaigning, media bias, and harassment of activists.

Polarization: The deep divide between the Awami League and BNP makes it difficult to achieve consensus on electoral reforms or governance issues.

Violence and Instability: Electoral violence and political instability undermine public confidence in the democratic process.

Bangladeshi parties engage in electoral politics through a mix of mobilization, alliance-building, campaigning, and confrontation. While the Awami League and BNP dominate the political landscape, smaller parties and alliances also play a role in shaping electoral outcomes. However, the persistence of violence, polarization, and allegations of unfair practices continue to challenge the credibility and inclusivity of Bangladesh's electoral system.

IX. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Bangladesh's electoral politics continues to evolve, influenced by historical legacies, party strategies, and systemic challenges. To ensure a more democratic and transparent electoral process, several measures are recommended:

- I. For Ensuring the EC's independence from political influences. Enhancing the financial and operational autonomy of the EC. Appointing election commissioners through an independent bipartisan selection process. Establishing a fast-track electoral tribunal for dispute resolution. Enforcing strict penalties for electoral malpractices.
- II. Ensuring security forces remain neutral during elections. Monitoring law enforcement activities to prevent voter intimidation. Updating voter databases through regular audits and transparent processes. Implementing online voter verification systems to curb fake registrations. Enforcing strict limits on campaign financing to prevent undue influence. Mandating transparent financial disclosures from political parties. Ensuring unbiased media coverage for all political parties. Penalizing misinformation and hate speech in election campaigns.
- III. Establishing independent monitoring bodies to prevent violence. Implementing community-driven conflict resolution strategies. Conducting nationwide voter education programs to encourage participation. Educating citizens on their voting rights and responsibilities. Allowing domestic and international organizations to monitor elections. Encouraging civic groups to participate in electoral reform advocacy.
- IV. Bangladesh's electoral politics faces significant challenges that threaten democratic integrity. Addressing these issues requires a commitment from political leaders, civil society, and international organizations to strengthen

electoral laws, promote transparency, and uphold democratic values. Without meaningful reforms, elections will continue to be marred by controversy, reducing public trust and political stability in the country.

V. The future of Bangladesh's democracy depends on the effectiveness of electoral reforms and the commitment of political parties to uphold democratic principles. A balanced and fair electoral process will be instrumental in sustaining political stability and national development.

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