



European Union
Election Observation Mission
BANGLADESH 2026
Final Report



Parliamentary Elections
12 February 2026



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	7
II.	INTRODUCTION	10
III.	POLITICAL CONTEXT	10
IV.	LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM	11
	a. International principles and commitments	11
	b. Electoral legislation	11
	c. Electoral system	13
	d. Boundary delimitation	13
V.	ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION	14
	a. Structure and composition of the election administration	14
	b. Administration of the election	14
	c. Postal voting.....	15
	d. Voter education.....	16
VI.	VOTER REGISTRATION	16
	a. The right to vote.....	17
	b. Voter registration	17
VII.	REGISTRATION OF PARTIES AND CANDIDATES	17
	a. Registration of political parties	17
	b. The right to stand	18
	c. Selection of candidates	19
	d. Registration of candidates.....	19
VIII.	CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENT	19
	a. Campaign activities.....	20
	b. Campaign regulations and enforcement.....	20
	c. Electoral security	21
IX.	PARTY AND CAMPAIGN FINANCE	22
X.	MEDIA	23
	a. Media environment	23
	b. Legal framework for the media.....	24
	c. Media monitoring findings	25
XI.	SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL RIGHTS	27
	a. Social media environment.....	27
	b. Legal framework for social media and digital rights	28
	c. Social media monitoring findings	29
XII.	PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN	31

XIII. PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH	32
XIV. PARTICIPATION OF MINORITY GROUPS.....	33
XV. PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES.....	35
XVI. CIVIL SOCIETY AND CITIZEN OBSERVATION	36
XVII. ELECTORAL JUSTICE.....	36
a. Complaints and appeals	36
b. Electoral offences.....	38
XVIII.VOTING, COUNTING AND TABULATION OF RESULTS	38
a. Opening, voting and closing	39
a. Counting and tabulation.....	40
b. Publication of results.....	41
XIX. RESULTS AND POST-ELECTION ENVIRONMENT	41
a. Election and referendum results.....	42
b. Petitions against the results	42
c. Post-election developments	43
XX. RECOMMENDATIONS.....	45
ANNEX 1 – ELECTION RESULTS.....	58
ANNEX 2 – MEDIA MONITORING RESULTS.....	61
ANNEX 3 – SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING RESULTS	69

LIST OF ACRONYMS

Abbreviation Full name

AD	Appellate Division of the Supreme Court
AFED	Alliance for Fair Election and Democracy
AI	artificial intelligence
AL	<i>Awami League</i> party
ARO	Assistant Returning Officer
BASAD	Socialist Party of Bangladesh
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BDT	Bangladeshi Taka
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BTRC	Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission
BTV	Bangladesh Television
CCTV	Closed-Circuit Television
CCPR	Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CERD	Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CoC	Code of Conduct of Political Parties and Candidates, 2025
CrPC	Code of Criminal Procedure
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil-society organisation
EC	Bangladesh Election Commission
EEACs	Electoral Enquiry and Adjudication Committees
EOM	Election Observation Mission
EP	European Parliament
ERC	Electoral Reform Commission
EU	European Union
GC	General Comment
GOP	<i>Gono Odhikar Parishad</i> party
GSA	<i>Ganosanhati Andolan</i> party
HCD	High Court Division of the Supreme Court
IAB	<i>Islami Andolan Bangladesh</i> party
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICPPED	International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
ICPV	In-Country Postal Voting
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IG	Interim Government
ILO	International Labour Organisation
JeI	<i>Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh</i> party
JP	<i>Jatiya Party</i>
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoIB	Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
MMU	Media Monitoring Unit

NCP	National Citizen Party
NID	National Identity Document
PC	polling centre
PVC	polyvinyl-chloride
RO	returning officer
RPO	The Representation of the People Order
SPBM	Socialist Party of Bangladesh – Marxist
TI-B	Transparency International Bangladesh
UN	United Nations
UNCAC	United Nations Convention against Corruption

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2026 parliamentary elections were credible and competently managed, marking a pivotal step towards restoring democratic governance and the rule of law. For the first time since 2008, elections were genuinely competitive, with fundamental freedoms broadly respected. However, sporadic, localised political violence and persistent fear of mob attacks, often triggered by manipulated online narratives, harmed the democratic process. The limited political space afforded to women undermined their equal participation. The Bangladesh Election Commission (EC) worked independently and transparently, maintaining the confidence of stakeholders, and upholding the integrity of the polls. The orderly and peaceful election day, followed by a transparently conducted tabulation of results, and wide acceptance of the outcome, clearly illustrated how a credible process can propel the renewal of democracy.

The elections were conducted under a renewed legal framework that largely accords with international standards for democratic elections. The 2025 amendments to the Representation of the People Order, 1972 (RPO) strengthened inclusion and credibility. Further reform, aimed at rebuilding trust in state institutions and strengthening the separation of powers, was also initiated. Notwithstanding these efforts, the legal electoral framework remains fragmented, requiring revision to enhance legal certainty and close loopholes which diminish institutional accountability and risk eroding integrity and transparency, as well as to revise or repeal laws that unduly restrict freedom of expression.

The EC adopted a proactive approach to rebuilding public trust in elections, enabled and supported by the Interim Government (IG) and other stakeholders. The EC demonstrated transparency and openness, responding promptly to media queries, sharing information of public interest, and maintaining dialogue with political parties. However, its new and stringent campaign rules were not consistently enforced, at times feeding perceptions of bias and grievances about an uneven playing field, voiced by many parties, including the two main electoral alliances. Notable efforts were made by the EC to ensure electoral security.

Election day preparations were undertaken professionally and on time, raising confidence in the polls. Some 770,000 voters living abroad were enfranchised through a postal ballot; the training of more than 850,000 polling staff was well-delivered; and the distribution of materials went smoothly. On election day, poll workers managed the voting efficiently, while the consistent presence of party agents from both major parties enhanced transparency and accountability.

Vote counting and tabulation of results were competently handled, yet integrity safeguards during these two critical phases of the elections could be strengthened. Whilst efficient, the requisite checks were not always performed during ballot counts. The tabulation of results was transparent, party agents could follow the process and returning officers were regularly releasing updates on constituency results, building public confidence in the accuracy. Nevertheless, the slow and analogue nature of the EC's nationwide results' publication limited the public's access to credible election data.

Overall, the parliamentary elections were competitive, and voters were offered a broad range of political alternatives, building on a solid foundation for a credible process established during candidate registration. The EC handled 645 appeals related to candidate nominations efficiently and transparently, reinstating two-thirds of initially rejected appellants, and upholding their right to stand. Some 2,000 candidates contested, including 275 independents. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP-) and Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI-) led alliances were the primary contenders in the field of 51 parties. Student leaders, who spearheaded the 2024 uprising, for the most part, either stood as independents or within the National Citizens Party (NCP) that entered into a seat-sharing agreement with JeI.

The campaign itself was dynamic, and candidates enjoyed freedom of assembly and expression. Key contenders held mass rallies, drawing hundreds of thousands of supporters in person and tens of millions more online. At the local level, campaign banners draped the streets, and marches and door-to-door canvassing dominated, while, in the digital space, partisan influencers sought to sway the youth vote in favour either of the BNP or the JeI. Closer to the polls, the rhetoric heightened, with the focus shifting from policies to personal insults and mutual allegations of misconduct. Intra-party conflicts, local patronage networks and varying financial means shaped the playing field.

Many Electoral Enquiry and Adjudication Committees were proactive and played a generally positive role in upholding campaign rules, yet financial and logistical constraints limited their effectiveness in investigating alleged violations. The EU EOM received many reports about EEACs promptly responding to complaints, conducting summary trials and even raising awareness among stakeholders.

Although campaign spending was capped and post-election reporting is mandated, limited oversight and accountability mechanisms impair efforts to verify compliance with the existing finance regulations. Moreover, the prescribed spending ceilings were widely regarded as unrealistically low. In the absence of a uniformed and digital reporting system of campaign expenses and mandatory audit, transparency was compromised, granting an advantage to wealthier candidates.

Women candidates were, regrettably, almost absent from these elections, which underscored an urgent need for new affirmative measures to advance equality in national politics. Only 4 per cent of the contestants were women, and only 7 women were elected (2.4 per cent of 297). The BNP fielded 10 (6 elected), while JeI and 30 other parties did not have any, evidencing a lack of political will to support women candidacies, despite apparent commitments in the July National Charter. The marginalisation of women in political leadership was further reflected in the composition of the new government, where a mere 3 out of 49 appointments were granted to women. Further deterrents to women's participation included discrimination, digital and physical harassment and character assassination.

Sporadic political violence peaked right before the polls; however, incidents remained localised, exhibited no systematic pattern, and failed to derail the election process. During the campaign, the EU EOM received and corroborated reports of some 56 campaign-related incidents across 27 districts involving physical violence, resulting in at least 200 people injured. Episodes of intimidation and harassment of campaigners, particularly women, and attacks on property, were also reported. Most incidents pitted BNP and JeI supporters against one another, with former BNP affiliates, contesting as independents, also frequently embroiled in confrontations.

The digital quest for the 55.6-million strong youth vote was also fierce, leaving little space for respectful political debate. The EU EOM identified at least 23 viral disinformation incidents, with manipulative content reaching at least one million views each within 24 hours. There were concerted efforts to delegitimise the elections and targeted attacks on minorities and women activists. Overall, partisan influencers and deceptive media accounts, including some from outside Bangladesh, were the prime vectors of disinformation on Facebook and TikTok.

National fact-checking initiatives, jointly with digital rights activists, took important steps to counter disinformation. Civil society organisations developed innovative platforms to track malign and false content, fact-checkers collaborated with trusted traditional media houses to expand the reach of debunked stories. Even the EC and the Press Wing of the IG regularly posted credible debunks. However, social media platforms were slow to respond to national reports and appeared ill-prepared to safeguard digital information integrity at scale throughout the election period.

Several private media outlets strived to offer balanced coverage of the elections, yet, overall, self-censorship remains deeply entrenched. Sustained pressure from state and non-state actors, economic

vulnerability, incidents of digital-led violence and harassment, alongside inadequate police protection, curbed media freedom and evidenced the need for further legal and operational reforms. Encouragingly, private broadcasters hosted talk shows with candidates presenting divergent political views, thereby helping voters to make informed choices.

A revitalised civic space has emerged in the wake of the July uprising, with numerous grassroots organisations launching election-related initiatives and making an important contribution to restoring public trust in the electoral process. Often supported by the EU and bilateral development partners, CSOs carried out voter information campaigns, monitored political violence and disinformation, worked to close digital literacy gaps, and observed elections, adding to transparency and advocating respect for human rights. Election observation was a new activity for many of these organisations, and their enthusiasm can be built upon in future elections.

However, more efforts to foster electoral inclusion are needed. Indigenous communities and religious minorities had their hopes for greater representation and respect for their political rights dashed by the absence of any affirmative action either in present law or in the July National Charter. Despite sustained advocacy efforts, persons with disabilities often did not have the opportunity of dignified and independent voting, as nearly half of the polling booths were not accessible to persons with reduced mobility, while postal ballot or other means were not available to them.

Overall, the 2026 parliamentary elections underscored a steadfast commitment by electoral stakeholders from across the political and social spectrum to the democratic process, while also highlighting the need for further reforms, focusing on strengthening legal certainty, enhancing electoral integrity safeguards, ensuring transparency in political finance and in the advancement of women in national politics. The EU EOM is offering **19 recommendations** for improving future electoral processes and upholding the international commitments which Bangladesh has adopted. There are **six priority recommendations**:

- 1. Revise the legal framework governing parliamentary elections to address inconsistencies and loopholes, reduce fragmentation, strengthen legal certainty, and ensure closer alignment with international standards for democratic elections.*
- 2. Ensure consistent arrangements for maintaining transparency during the tabulation of votes at the sub-district and district levels, such as projection of data entry on screens, as well as prompt publication of complete preliminary and final election results, including online.*
- 3. Amend the RPO to include strict monitoring and enforcement measures for implementation of Article 90B(1)(b)(ii), ensuring that all political parties achieve the goal of 33 per cent women as members of all internal party committees by 2030; and consider requiring that all political parties nominate at least one-third women candidates for national and local elections.*
- 4. Promote a safer and more transparent digital space by amending the Cyber Security Ordinance to establish binding legal obligations for social media platforms, aimed at safeguarding informational and electoral integrity. Those obligations may encompass defined collaboration protocols, special measures around elections, algorithmic transparency, and regular reporting on content moderation activities.*
- 5. Review and strengthen campaign finance provisions to ensure that spending limits and reporting obligations are realistic, enforceable and subject to effective verification and oversight. The RPO could require candidates and political parties to submit audited election expenditure accounts in a standardised format, provide for systematic controls by the Election Commission during and after the campaign, and set clear deadlines for the publication of financial reports.*

6. Consider extending eligibility for postal voting to other categories of voters in Bangladesh who are unable to cast their ballot in person on election day, such as homebound voters and persons with disabilities, internally displaced persons, migrant labourers and students, while retaining existing integrity safeguards and exploring additional ones. Additional voting arrangements, such as early voting, suitable for enfranchising other categories of voters, could also be introduced.

II. INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) deployed an Election Observation Mission (EOM) to observe the 12 February parliamentary elections in Bangladesh following an invitation from the Bangladesh Election Commission (EC) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The EU EOM was present in the country from 28 December 2025 to 4 March 2026.

The EU EOM was led by Chief Observer Ivars Ijabs, Member of the European Parliament from Latvia. The EU EOM comprised a core team of 11 experts based in Dhaka and 56 long-term observers, who were deployed to all 64 administrative districts of Bangladesh on 17 January; 90 short-term observers scaled up the mission for election-day observation and were present in Bangladesh from 6 to 16 February; 35 locally recruited short-term observers from the diplomatic missions of the EU Member States, as well as Canada, Norway and Switzerland, also joined the mission. A delegation of the Members of European Parliament (EP) was integrated into the Mission. At full strength, the EU EOM comprised 223 international observers from all EU Member States, Canada, Norway and Switzerland.

The mission's mandate was to observe all aspects of the electoral process and assess the extent to which the elections complied with regional and international commitments for elections, as well as with the national law. The EU EOM is independent in its findings and conclusions. The Mission followed an established, long-term, nationwide election observation methodology and adhered to the "Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation", endorsed under United Nations (UN) auspices in October 2005, and now espoused by over 50 organisations.

III. POLITICAL CONTEXT

The 12 February 2026 parliamentary elections were a key step in the restoration of democratic governance following the mass uprising in July and August 2024, which ended 15 years of increasingly repressive Awami League (AL)-rule, characterised by the centralisation of power, restrictions on fundamental freedoms, and the suppression of dissent by law enforcement agencies. The uprising began as a student-led demonstration against public sector job quotas and was met with a violent response from the police, culminating in the ousting of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. In August, parliament was dissolved and an interim government (IG) was established, headed by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Dr. Muhammad Yunus, composed of technocrats, civil society representatives and student leaders.

The transition period reshaped the political landscape, and reopened electoral competition to previously excluded parties, such as the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which had boycotted the 2014 and 2024 parliamentary elections, and Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), whose registration had been suspended between 2013 and 2025. New political forces also emerged, including the student-led National Citizens Party (NCP). On 12 May 2025, the IG banned all activities of the AL, under the Anti-terrorism Act. On 17 November 2025, Sheikh Hasina was sentenced to death *in absentia* by the International Crimes Tribunal for crimes against humanity.¹

¹ The UN Human Rights Office's [Fact-Finding Report](#) on the July–August 2024 Protests established that "that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the former Government and its security and intelligence apparatus [...]"

The elections took place amid wide-ranging legislative and institutional reforms initiated by the IG, aimed at rebuilding trust in state institutions, strengthening respect for human rights, reducing corruption and reinforcing the separation of powers, with particular emphasis on judicial independence. Central to this reform agenda was the July National Charter, a political agreement adopted in October 2025, which consolidated proposals on constitutional and governance reform. All major political parties that contested these elections endorsed the Charter, with some submitting reservations in the form of dissenting notes, while certain civil society representatives criticised the consultation process as insufficiently inclusive. On 11 December 2025, the Bangladesh Election Commission (EC) announced that parliamentary elections would be held on 12 February 2026, concurrently with a referendum on the July National Charter.

The AL and its affiliates continuously sought to undermine the IG and the legitimacy of the elections. In the pre-election period, social media accounts associated with the AL called for a boycott. This messaging intensified in January and, by election day, posts on TikTok using AL related hashtags had generated approximately 183 million views in total, indicating a significant online mobilisation despite the party's absence from the electoral race.

While the political transition and the elections enjoyed broad public support, the pre-election period was also marked by security concerns, limited public confidence in law enforcement agencies, and views among some interlocutors that more far-reaching and timely reforms could have been pursued by the IG.

IV. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Recent electoral reforms strengthened inclusivity, amid concerns over legal coherence.

a. International principles and commitments

Bangladesh is State Party to the main international treaties relevant to democratic elections, through accession or ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 2000), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and its Optional Protocol (CEDAW, 1984), the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD, 1979), the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2007) and its Optional Protocol as well as the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC, 2007). Of relevance to elections, Bangladesh has not signed the Optional Protocol to the ICCPR that would allow the Human Rights Committee to receive Individual Communications from Bangladeshi citizens, although they may petition the CRPD and CEDAW Committees. The Interim Government (IG) has acceded to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED, 2006); the new Parliament still needs to pass implementing legislation to fully give effect to the Convention domestically.

b. Electoral legislation

Fundamental civil and political rights necessary for democratic elections are set out in the Constitution of Bangladesh, 1972. These include the right to vote and to be elected by direct universal suffrage, freedoms of assembly, association, movement and expression, as well as freedom of the media, subject to qualified restrictions imposed by law on certain grounds.

systematically engaged in serious human rights violations, including hundreds of extrajudicial killings, other use of force violations involving serious injuries to thousands of protesters.” International Crimes Tribunal is a national court created under the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act 1973 to investigate and prosecute atrocities from the 1971 Independence war.

The electoral legal framework is grounded in a range of statutory instruments, primarily the Representation of the People Order, 1972 (RPO), as well as the Election Commission Act, the Electoral Rolls Act and the Political Parties Ordinance.² While relatively comprehensive and broadly aligned with international standards, the legal framework remains fragmented across multiple laws and regulations that have been amended incrementally over time. Recent reform efforts, encompassing constitutional proposals under the July National Charter, amendment Ordinances to the RPO and other electoral laws³ and recommendations of the Electoral Reform Commission (ERC),⁴ were pursued in parallel without a unified legal roadmap or sequencing framework, and largely omitted to address shortcomings and ambiguities that permitted divergent interpretations during the 2026 elections, such as the absence of detailed rules on recounts ordered by ROs, uncertainty as to when the renunciation of dual citizenship takes legal effect; inadequate provisions on campaign finance transparency; and candidate disqualification grounds that are not fully consistent with international standards. This fragmentation is compounded by weaknesses in implementation and enforcement, which undermine legal certainty, weaken institutional accountability and diminish the overall effectiveness of electoral governance.

The inclusivity and credibility of the 2026 parliamentary elections were strengthened through the RPO First and Second Amendment Ordinances, approved by the IG on 25 November and 8 December 2025, respectively. Key improvements include extending postal voting to registered out-of-country residents and to eligible prisoners; and granting the EC judicial officers, namely the Electoral Enquiry and Adjudication Committees (EEACs), magisterial powers to conduct summary trials for violations of the Code of Conduct and the offences of corrupt practice, bribery, and undue influence. It also empowered the EC to declare the election of a returned candidate void at any time during their tenure, if false or inconsistent information is found in the candidate's affidavits or financial returns. Other amendments include disqualifying court-declared fugitives from standing as candidates, introducing the "None of the Above" option on the ballot for constituencies with only one candidate, and sanctioning any violation of the EC Code of Conduct for Political Parties and Candidates triable by the EEACs for up to six months' imprisonment, a fine or both.

Priority recommendation: *Revise the legal framework governing parliamentary elections to address inconsistencies and loopholes, reduce fragmentation, strengthen legal certainty, and ensure closer alignment with international standards for democratic elections.*

The promulgation of the Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Ordinance on 11 May 2025, enabling the banning of a political entity's activities,⁵ and the same-day decision by the Interim Government to prohibit all activities of the Bangladesh Awami League (AL) and its affiliated organisations pending completion of trials before the International Crimes Tribunal, followed by the Election Commission's suspension of the AL's party registration on 12 May 2025, raised concerns among some EOM

² Supplementary legislation includes the Code of Conduct for Political Parties and Candidates 2025, the Registration of Political Parties Rules 2008, the Constituency Delimitation Act, 2021 and its 2025 Amendment Ordinance, the Conduct of Election Rules 2008, as amended in 2013, the Guidelines for Election Observation of 2017, the Guidelines for the Election Agents and Polling Agents, Polling Centre Establishment and Management Guidelines 2025, the Penal Code of 1860 and the Code of Criminal Procedure of 1898, as amended through the Amendment Ordinance of 2025.

³ Pursuant to Article 93 of the Constitution, Ordinances must be laid before Parliament at its first meeting following their promulgation and shall cease to have effect if not ratified at the expiration of 30 days or if a resolution disapproving the Ordinance is passed by Parliament before the expiration of 30 days.

⁴ The ERC submitted a comprehensive report with 200 recommendations; however, several have been partially accepted or diluted in the 2025 RPO Amendment Ordinances, such as those related to broader campaign finance oversight.

⁵ Section 18(1) of the Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Ordinance authorises the government to "ban all activities of any entity" and the amended section 20 authorises a "ban publishing [...] by or on behalf of that entity, or organising any sort of publicity on mass media, online, social media or other media, procession, rally, gathering or press conference, or giving a public speech." The Anti-Terrorism Act, 2009 allowed the banning of an entity, but not its activities.

stakeholders regarding the inclusivity of the electoral process, as well as the proper implementation of the legal framework and the proportionality of these measures. While the suspension could be temporarily justified, on the ground of protection of public order, in light of the AL's stance during and after the July 2024 uprising, procedural shortcomings are noted in the application of the legal framework. In particular, Article 90G of the RPO provides for cancellation of party registration but does not expressly stipulate the measure of temporary suspension, raising questions as to whether suspension can be implied as ancillary to cancellation or whether the measure could be *ultra vires* and susceptible to judicial review. Further concerns relate to due process guarantees, including whether the party received adequate notice and a meaningful opportunity to respond. Notably, the AL has not sought judicial review of either the IG's ban or the EC's suspension.

c. Electoral system

The Parliament is unicameral and composed of 350 members elected for a five-year term: 300 are directly elected in single-member constituencies under the First-Past-The-Post system; 50 seats are reserved for women, nominated by parties in Parliament proportional to their share of the 300 seats.

The prime minister and ministers that form a cabinet government are appointed by the President from the political party with the highest number of seats in parliament, pursuant to article 56 of the Constitution, 1972. The prime minister is head of the executive branch with extensive powers; government as a whole is accountable to parliament. The President who is head of state, is also elected by the Parliament

The Implementation Order of the July National Charter (Constitutional Reform), 2025, approved in the 12 February 2026 referendum, provides for the creation of a Constitutional Reform Council, comprising all elected Members of Parliament and vested with full authority to complete constitutional reform within 180 working days from the commencement of its first session. Within 30 days of the completion of the constitutional reforms, the Implementation Order provides for the establishment of an upper chamber of the Parliament via a proportional representation based on the votes received in the election to the lower chamber.

d. Boundary delimitation

The EC is responsible for the delimitation of 300 constituencies for the purpose of parliamentary elections. The Constituencies Delimitation Act, 2021 outlines that the delimitation should follow the principles of administrative convenience and geographical integrity of constituencies, and at the same time, as far as possible, it should reflect the population distribution as per the last census. It further expanded the criteria for redrawing constituencies, strengthened protection against splitting administrative units and provided a legal path for the EC to proceed with boundary delimitation ahead of the elections. The EC's decisions on the delimitation of constituencies are final and cannot be challenged. The Constituency Delimitation (Amendment) Ordinance 2025 only provided a technical clarification ensuring that the operative provision correctly refers to the applicable criteria.

On 30 July 2025 the EC published draft boundaries for the 300 constituencies; a total of 1,185 objections and 708 recommendations were submitted. The EC held four-day hearings, from 24 to 28 August on the redrawing of boundaries for 84 constituencies across 33 districts. On 4 September the EC finalised the delimitation, redrawing 46 constituencies.⁶

⁶ These are: Panchagarh-1 and 2; Rangpur-1 and 3; Sirajganj-1 and 2; Pabna-1 and 2; Bagerhat-1, 2 and 3; Satkhira-2, 3 and 4; Manikganj-2 and 3; Dhaka-2, 4, 5, 7, 10, 14; Gazipur-1, 2, 3, 5, 6; Narayanganj-3, 4, 5; Faridpur-2 and 4; Shariatpur-2 and 3; Brahmanbaria-2 and 3; Cumilla-1, 2, 6, 10; Noakhali-1, 2, 4, 5; and Chattogram-7 and 8. For further details see also section *Voter registration*.

V. ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION

Timely preparations by the Election Commission and successful roll-out of postal voting.

a. Structure and composition of the election administration

Elections are managed by the Election Commission (EC), which has constitutional status as an independent body. All five EC members, including the Chief Election Commissioner, were appointed by the President in November 2024, following a legally prescribed selection process by a search committee. By law, the search committee is composed of two judges, the Auditor-General, chair of the Public Service Commission, and two distinguished citizens nominated by the President (one of whom must be a woman). While allowing for nominations by political parties and professional organisations, the time given to the search committee to propose candidates is too short (15 days) and no public call or hearing is foreseen, to the detriment of meritocratic selection and transparency. A public hearing on nominees, or at least a media debate on their merits could also strengthen the perception of the EC's independence.

The EC has considerable powers to implement its mandate, yet its legal status could be further strengthened, and its accountability mechanisms better defined. The Constitution provides for the duty of all executive authorities to assist the Commission in the discharge of its functions. However, the RPO leaves any directions that may be necessary to enforce this provision to the discretion of the President. Furthermore, the law authorises the Commission to require any person or authority to render assistance, but the enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with such orders are not clearly spelled out. The Commission's financial reports to the parliament are not published. There is no legal obligation for a public report on the Commission's activities, which would increase its accountability.

Reliance on executive officials has diminished perceptions of the independence of the election administration. The conduct of polls in constituencies is overseen by returning officers (RO), supported by assistant ROs and EC offices. As per established practice, the Commission appointed ROs primarily from the ranks of deputy commissioners, who are district executive chiefs, while assistant ROs were senior *upazila* (sub-district) officials, all government appointees. During the pre-electoral period, ROs came under frequent criticism, particularly for allegedly ignoring transgressions by the leading political alliances. Even considering the non-partisan nature of the interim government, many EU EOM interlocutors expressed doubts that executive officials in general possess the requisite degree of neutrality and impartiality to perform RO functions. The EC has discretion over the choice of ROs, which allows selection of officials who are generally perceived to be impartial, such as EC officers or judges. This course of action was also advised by the Electoral Reform Commission and the National Elections (2014, 2018, 2024) Inquiry Commission. Independence and impartiality of election administration are crucial elements of international standards for democratic elections.⁷

Recommendation: *Include criteria of impartiality and political neutrality for returning officers and assistant ROs in the EC rules; appoint ROs who enjoy the requisite guarantees and perception of impartiality and political neutrality, such as officers of the Election Commission and judges.*

b. Administration of the election

The EC steered election preparations professionally, demonstrating the capacity and willingness to deliver a credible and peaceful process. In the run up to the polls, the Commission showed transparency

⁷ In General Comment No. 25 (1996) to ICCPR, the UN Human Rights Committee advises that an independent electoral authority should be established to supervise the electoral process. See also Inter-Parliamentary Union, Declaration on Criteria for Free and Fair Elections (1994), art. 4(1): “States should take the necessary policy and institutional steps to ensure the progressive achievement and consolidation of democratic goals, including through the establishment of a neutral, impartial or balanced mechanism for the management of elections.”

and openness by engaging with stakeholders, maintaining dialogue with political parties, observers, and civil society, as well as by responding to media enquiries and promptly publishing information of public interest. Co-ordination cells with law enforcement agencies were established to monitor the pre-election environment, including online, aimed at ensuring security at the polls, as well as at facilitating timely interventions. In line with calls from civil society and political parties, nearly all polling centres were equipped with CCTV cameras, in order to discourage miscreants.

Logistical arrangements in advance of election day were handled efficiently. Distribution of electoral materials for the 42,779 polling centres was organised on 11 February, with security escorts and use of boats and army helicopters to reach remote areas. More than 850,000 polling staff were drawn primarily from the ranks of public sector employees. Training sessions attended by the EU EOM at the EC's district and sub-district offices were assessed positively, but observers noted that trainers often relied only on lectures and written manuals, without use of video tutorials or practical exercises that could have enhanced the transfer and retention of knowledge.

In the run-up to the elections, there was increased general stakeholder confidence in the EC's operational competence and impartiality. This was strengthened by the EC's consistent public messaging of a commitment to a "free, fair and credible" electoral process. At the same time, the Commission weakened its own standing by initially imposing stringent campaign and election day rules which it was unable to enforce and subsequently backtracking on some of them after vocal opposition from political parties.⁸ Notably, the EC changed its stance and allowed electoral symbols to be printed on paper slips handed by political parties to voters on election day. The Commission also relaxed the rules on the use of loudspeakers during the campaign and allowed mobile phones inside polling centres.

c. Postal voting

For the first time in Bangladesh's electoral history, the EC successfully undertook the challenge of large-scale postal voting, enfranchising voters abroad and in-country electors who were unable to vote in person. Postal voting was supported by a newly developed mobile application used for registering and verifying voters, confirming ballot delivery, as well as for tracking ballots in transit. The registration was open from 18 November 2025 until 5 January 2026. Over 770,000 overseas voters residing in 123 countries registered; the highest numbers from Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Qatar, and Oman. Given the relatively short statutory time between the allocation of electoral symbols to registered candidates (21 January) and election day, "generic" ballot papers with all 119 possible symbols were mailed to voters abroad well in advance, which they could mark and dispatch after symbol allocation. Postal voters also received referendum ballots.

In-country postal voting (ICPV) was available to government officials engaged in any duty outside their constituency, polling personnel on duty outside their precinct, and prisoners. More than 760,000 registered for ICPV. Following a public complaint from the BNP, which argued that it was disadvantaged by the position of its electoral symbol on the "generic" postal ballot, the Commission revised its initial plan to send "generic" postal ballots to in-country postal voters, instead dispatching constituency-specific ballots as demanded by the party. This compressed the already tight schedule and reduced the time for ballot return. In order to be included in the count, all returned ballots had to reach ROs before the end of polling hours (16:30) on 12 February.

Postal voting was conducted transparently, with regular updates on the progress and the challenges encountered. Nearly 1.17 million ballots, some 95 per cent of the votes sent by voters, reached ROs in time to be counted. This included almost 500,000 votes from abroad. However, 92,000 postal votes

⁸ See also section *Campaign environment*.

had to be excluded from the count because the required steps for confirming receipt of the ballot by the voter, including in-app verification, were not followed. Over 65,000 of these rejected votes came from ICPV, indicating the need for better instructions and more voter education, particularly for in-country voters. The handling of this unprecedented mail load put a strain on the resources of the Bangladesh Post Office, but it rose to the challenge.

The overall success of the postal voting operation strengthened the case for potential extension of this option to other categories of voters who are unable to reach their assigned polling centres on election day. This includes, among others, homebound voters and persons with disabilities, persons internally displaced due to natural disasters, voters employed in essential services and others unable to take leave from work, migrant labourers and students. At the same time, postal voting retains the risks associated with casting ballots in an uncontrolled environment, including possible vote-buying and other forms of undue influence. These risks warrant retention of the current integrity safeguards, namely the voter's declaration, as well as searching for additional safeguards. Special voting arrangements may also be explored for polling staff, polling agents, and citizen observers.⁹

Priority recommendation: *Consider extending eligibility for postal voting to other categories of voters in Bangladesh who are unable to cast their ballot in person on election day, such as homebound voters and persons with disabilities, internally displaced persons, migrant labourers and students, while retaining existing integrity safeguards and exploring additional ones. Additional voting arrangements, such as early voting, suitable for enfranchising other categories of voters could also be introduced.*

d. Voter education

The EC conducted a broad and visible voter education campaign, supported by the EU and other development partners, with dozens of video clips aired across traditional and social media, as well as print and outdoor materials, explaining campaign rules, duties of polling officials, and key electoral procedures. The EC also encouraged participation in the referendum, without advocating any vote preference. The Interim Government's initially vocal "yes" campaign for the referendum became more muted after the EC's warning against the involvement of public officials.

Discussion on institutional reforms advanced by the July National Charter during the referendum campaign highlighted the importance of cultivating better understanding of political and electoral processes among the electorate, including young voters and marginalised communities. Such programmes should be carried out also between electoral cycles and utilise opportunities for co-operation with educational and training institutions. Civil society organisations engaged in civic and voter education have expressed interest in partnerships with the EC, while the Commission's Electoral Training Institute lacks resources for ongoing voter education activities.

Recommendation: *Support voter and civic education programmes between electoral cycles, covering the electoral system, the role of political parties and elected representatives, and particularly the need for women's participation in political and public life; encourage Election Commission partnerships with educational institutions and civil society organisations.*

VI. VOTER REGISTRATION

An inclusive voter registration system, but more effort needed for equal suffrage and effective opportunity to vote.

⁹ See, for example, International IDEA handbook on special voting arrangements, available at <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/special-voting-arrangements-international-idea-handbook>.

a. The right to vote

Overall, the legal framework is broadly inclusive of citizens' voting rights. Pursuant to Article 122 of the Constitution, persons are eligible to be registered as voters if they are citizens of Bangladesh, at least 18 years old, are, or are deemed by law to be, residents of a constituency and have not been declared by a competent court to be of unsound mind, the last requirement not being in accordance with CRPD jurisprudence.¹⁰ In addition, the Constitution stipulates that persons convicted of an offence under the Bangladesh Collaborators (Special Tribunals) Order, 1972, are disqualified from registering as voters. All other prisoners and pre-trial detainees are entitled to register as voters.

b. Voter registration

The EC undertook an extensive update of the voter register in early 2025, with an awareness campaign and door-to-door enumeration. Following this drive, more than 127.7 million voters registered for these elections, an increase of 8 million compared with the January 2024 poll.

Analysis of the number of voters per constituency, based on the data obtained by the EU EOM from the official gazette, shows considerable differences in constituency sizes for these elections.¹¹ The average number of voters per constituency was nearly 426,000. Deviation from this average was less than 10 per cent in 101 constituencies. The size of another one-third of constituencies deviated by more than 10 but less than 20 per cent. In 59 constituencies the number of voters per seat was higher or lower than the national average by 20 to 30 per cent. In 40 constituencies the ratio deviated from the national average by more than 30 per cent. At the extremes, the largest constituency, Gazipur-2 (Dhaka Division), had 804,333 voters, while the smallest, Jhalakathi-1 (Barisal Division) had 228,430. These disparities warrant attention in light of international standards on equal suffrage.¹²

Under the active registration system, eligible citizens must apply to be included on the lists and may do so continuously throughout the year at the designated EC offices. The voter lists closed on 31 October 2025, with voters who turned 18 before that date being eligible for inclusion.

The completeness and accuracy of voter lists was assessed positively by most EU EOM interlocutors, while a few pointed out that the system does not accommodate population mobility, and that change of address is slow and cumbersome. As a result, those who migrate internally due to employment, education or are displaced by natural disasters, often find it difficult to register in their new places of residence and need to travel back to their home constituency to vote. Cheaper and more feasible solutions, such as postal voting, are not available to all such categories of voters. Further efforts are also needed to assist with the registration of voters abroad who hold passports but never registered in the National ID Database (NID).¹³

VII. REGISTRATION OF PARTIES AND CANDIDATES

The nomination process attracted broad participation, although numerous disqualification criteria are unduly restrictive.

a. Registration of political parties

Strict political party registration requirements make it difficult for new political movements to enter national politics. Political party registration is administered by the EC under the RPO, the Political

¹⁰ See also section *Participation of Persons with Disabilities*.

¹¹ See also section *Legal Framework and Electoral System*, sub-section *Boundary Delimitation*.

¹² See ICCPR, Art. 25(b) and UN HRC GC No. 25, para. 21: “*The principle of one person, one vote, must apply, and within the framework of each State’s electoral system, the vote of one elector should be equal to the vote of another.*”

¹³ See also *Election Administration* section.

Party Registration Rules 2008, the Political Parties Ordinance 1978, and the Political Party Registration Act 2020, which establish extensive organisational requirements. To qualify, a party must, *inter alia*, form a central committee and demonstrate nationwide presence, including to have committees in at least one third of the 64 districts and in 100 of the 492 *upazilas*, as well as have 200 members in each district and *upazila* where it maintains a committee. While preventing frivolous party registrations is a legitimate aim, these requirements are overly restrictive and are not fully aligned with international standards on freedom of association.¹⁴ The law also prescribes that party statutes provide for internal democracy and women's representation within party structures.¹⁵

Ahead of these elections, the party registration process resulted in a high rejection rate. From 10 March to 22 June 2025, the EC received 143 applications but registered only eight parties in time to contest the elections, rejecting the remainder for failure to meet membership and organisational requirements. Conversely, some EU EOM interlocutors noted that the EC did not consistently enforce provisions relating to internal party democracy and women's representation. Representatives of indigenous communities alluded to difficulties forming their own parties.¹⁶ In total, 57 political entities were in the political party register at the time of the elections, including those registered prior to 2025; of these, 51 nominated candidates.

Recommendation: *Revise the political party registration requirements to lower the threshold of territorial presence and membership requirements, while maintaining reasonable safeguards to prevent frivolous registrations.*

b. The right to stand

In line with constitutional provisions, eligibility to contest elections requires Bangladeshi citizenship and a minimum age of 25. Disqualification grounds include being declared of unsound mind by a competent court, being an undischarged insolvent, having acquired the citizenship of, or pledging allegiance to a foreign state, conviction for a criminal offence involving moral turpitude with a sentence of two years or more (unless five years have elapsed since release), conviction under the Bangladesh Collaborators (Special Tribunals) Order, 1972, and holding any public office of profit, unless exempted by law.

The RPO introduces additional disqualifications, including legal incapacity, being a utility bill or loan defaulter until the day before submission of nomination papers, being a director or partner in a defaulting company, holding an executive position in a civil society organisation that received foreign grants within the three years prior to elections, being a court-declared fugitive, and holding a public office. Nomination requirements also include a deposit of BDT 50,000 (approximately EUR 350), refundable if the candidate secures more than one-eighth of the votes cast, and, for independent candidates, collection of supporting signatures from at least one percent of registered voters in the constituency. A candidate is permitted to contest up to three constituency seats.

While eligibility criteria are largely aligned with international standards, some of these provisions appear disproportionate and unduly restrict the right to stand for election, including disqualification of individuals who have held executive posts in foreign-funded civil society organisations and those who resigned or retired from public service within three years of elections, and those who defaulted in

¹⁴ Art. 22 (2) of the 1996 [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR) states that no restrictions may be placed on the exercise of the right to freedom of association other than “[...] which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order [...], the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.”

¹⁵ Under the RPO, party statutes must provide for the election of committees at all levels, and to set a goal of reserving at least 33 per cent of all committee positions for women and achieve this goal by the year 2030.

¹⁶ For further details see *Participation of Women* and *Participation of Minority Groups* sections.

paying utility bills. In addition, the requirement to collect supporters' signatures amounting to one per cent of voters proved excessively burdensome, notably due to the requirement to record voters' identification numbers (often unknown to the voters themselves) rather than national ID numbers, as well as reported intimidation and harassment of voters who signed nomination lists.

c. Selection of candidates

The selection of candidates by political parties was not fully transparent, reducing advancement of women and youth and, at times, leading to internal frictions. The RPO requires political parties to ensure internal democracy, with nominations originating from grassroots structures and approved by a central body. In practice, this provision was not effectively implemented, and candidate selection was often reportedly determined by senior party leadership, with decisions influenced by candidate's financial capacity and access to influential party networks. This also generated internal tensions within some parties and prompted numerous unsuccessful nominees to contest as independents. In several cases, this contributed to conflicts during the campaign period.¹⁷

Recommendation: *Strengthen internal party democracy through transparent and inclusive candidate nomination process with meaningful participation of lower-level party structures, women and youth, and in line with existing legal provisions.*

d. Registration of candidates

An efficiently conducted and inclusive candidate registration process by the EC laid the foundation for genuinely competitive elections. In total, 2,569 prospective candidates submitted nominations, among whom only four per cent were women. Nineteen per cent of nominees were independents. The ROs initially rejected 723 candidates, with a much higher proportion among independents (48 per cent) than among party nominees (19 per cent). Upon the conclusion of the adjudication of 645 appeals, 421 candidacies (two-thirds of the applicants) were reinstated by the EC. More than half of these (185) were independents.¹⁸ The appeal proceedings were conducted in a transparent and balanced manner, with adequate opportunity for the appellants to be heard.

A total of 2,026 candidates contested the elections, including 275 independents, among whom some 80 were formerly BNP affiliated, but did not receive the party nomination. Only BNP, Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB), JeI, and the Jatiya Party (JP) had candidates in at least half of the races. BNP and JeI formed electoral alliances, comprising 5 and 11 parties respectively, covering all constituencies. However, in 102 and 78 constituencies, respectively, BNP and JeI's coalition partners fielded more than one candidate, and at times engaged in direct competition against one another, in particular within the BNP-led alliance.¹⁹

VIII. CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENT

A competitive campaign offered voters a genuine choice but was marked by divisive rhetoric, regulatory shortcomings and isolated, yet sometimes serious, security incidents.

¹⁷ For further details see also *Campaign environment* section.

¹⁸ Two independent candidates were disqualified for being official members of Krishak League, affiliated with the AL, which was subsequently outlawed.

¹⁹ Following the RPO 2025 amendments, and departing from previous practice, it is prohibited to use joint coalition names or symbols in the campaign and on the ballot; parties may not use the name or symbol of a coalition partner.

a. Campaign activities

The campaign was pluralistic, dynamic and competitive, and voters were presented with a wide choice of distinct political agendas. Fundamental freedoms of assembly and expression were generally respected. While political parties were overall able to compete on a level playing field, in some constituencies some candidates benefited from close links with district or local authorities, as well as unequal access to financial resources.²⁰ Of the 50 contesting parties, only four conducted nationwide campaigns, with the BNP and JeI being most visible, and the IAB and NCP present to a lesser extent.

Candidates relied on a wide range of campaign methods, including outdoor advertising, in-person events, street campaigning, and digital outreach. Senior party figures, such as BNP's Tarique Rahman and JeI's Shafiqur Rahman, led high-profile rallies attended by tens of thousands and followed live on Facebook by over 40 million viewers each.²¹ The EU EOM observed 190 in-person campaign events, most of which were peaceful, and had adequate police protection, although confrontational rhetoric emerged at times.²² In the digital space, official party and candidate pages were primarily used for self-promotion, while unofficial supporting accounts were often used for attacking opponents. The tone of the campaign hardened closer to elections, with parties frequently accusing each other of creating an uneven playing field, and of threats and violence.

Campaign messages focused on socio-economic issues, such as employment, health, education, security, and relations with India. Both the BNP and JeI-led alliances invoked the legacy of the July uprising, offering different approaches to implementation of wide-ranging reform agendas. Religious themes were prominent in the messaging of JeI and IAB. At constituency level, candidates often relied on personal reputation and local patronage networks, as well as promised local development projects. All contestants, except the JP, supported a "yes" vote in the referendum, but only the JeI and NCP emphasised this message.

Most political parties published campaign manifestos outlining key priorities and policies. In some cases, ROs and CSOs organised meetings at the constituency level to facilitate the joint presentation of manifestos, contributing to voters' ability to make an informed choice. However, several manifestos contained vague policy promises with limited detail on implementation, while others were issued only a few days before election day, thereby reducing public scrutiny and policy debate.²³

b. Campaign regulations and enforcement

Despite a legal prohibition on early campaigning, all major contestants started voter outreach before 22 January, including through meetings with voters, the display of posters, and online mobilisation. The election administration issued warnings, show-cause notices and minor fines in some instances. The official campaign period lasted only three weeks, from 22 January until the beginning of the 48-hour silence period on 10 February.

Campaign rules were overly prescriptive and, at times, ambiguous, and their inconsistent enforcement raised concerns about impunity and bias.²⁴ The RPO, complemented by the 2025 Code of Conduct of Political Parties and Candidates (CoC), a binding regulation adopted by the EC, regulated in excessive

²⁰ The EU EOM assessed that in approximately five per cent of constituencies disparities in access to financial resources disproportionately tilted the playing field in favour of wealthier candidates.

²¹ Those were the BNP's campaign launch in Sylhet (22 January) and rallies in Chattogram (25 January) and Gazipur (10 February); JeI campaign launch in Dhaka (22 January) and major rallies in Chattogram (2 February).

²² During the campaign, the EU EOM observed 190 campaign events, of which 43 per cent were organised by the BNP, 22 per cent by JeI, and 8 per cent by IAB, and 4 per cent by NCP.

²³ The NCP published its manifesto on 30 January, the JeI on 4 February, and the BNP on 6 February.

²⁴ Among others, the CoC set no criteria for granting or rejecting rally permits, vaguely defined "exploitation of religious sentiments"; and included an undefined exception for "general campaigning" regarding use of sound systems.

detail the content, format and timing of campaign activities and materials.²⁵ The EU EOM observed numerous, mostly minor, violations of these rules by many contestants.²⁶ The EOM was also made aware of some credible reports of illicit practices, including promises of spiritual rewards in exchange for votes and the provision of inducements such as money, food or prizes, which were not consistently investigated or sanctioned by the competent authorities.²⁷

Responding to these allegations, the Electoral Appeals Committees (EEACs) were generally proactive and, despite limited resources, played a positive role in the effective adjudication of campaign-related complaints. EEACs conducted more than 50 summary trials, while also initiating inquiries and undertaking outreach to local communities to raise awareness of the CoC and encourage reporting of violations. The EEACs adjudicated more than 510 violations and disputes between party supporters. Committees predominantly issued warnings; fines were imposed on at least 55 persons, and 15 cases were referred to the police. Nevertheless, limited human and financial resources constrained their ability to ensure uniform enforcement.

Recommendation: *Establish a campaign regulation framework that is unambiguous, avoids unnecessary restrictions and is consistently enforced by adequately resourced oversight bodies.*

The EU EOM did not observe systemic misuse of administrative resources. The RPO contains broad prohibitions on government officials campaigning and on the abuse of official position. The CoC provided additional safeguards by forbidding the use of government vehicles, premises, personnel, public funds and official events for campaign purposes, and by providing for sanctions, including cancellation of candidature in serious cases.

c. Electoral security

The overall security environment enabled smooth nationwide campaigning and the orderly conduct of election day. At the same time, the pre-electoral period was volatile and marked by security incidents, alongside widespread concerns about weakened law enforcement capacity and alleged attempts by AL-affiliated structures to interfere with the political transition. Tensions escalated in December 2025 after the killing of youth activist Sharif Osman Hadi.²⁸ Between the calling of the elections on 11 December and election day, the IG reported five deaths related to political activities.

Politically motivated violence affected the campaign in some highly contested constituencies. These incidents were localised and did not indicate a systematic pattern. The EU EOM received and corroborated reports of at least 56 distinct incidents involving physical hostilities between supporters of rival candidates or party factions, resulting in at least 200 injuries across 27 districts. Additional incidents included threats and intimidation, harassment of supporters, targeted attacks on campaign offices, and arson. Most cases involved BNP and JeI candidates and campaigners, BNP factional disputes and, in some instances, the NCP and independent candidates. While the police publicly emphasised a preventive approach and provided protection to some candidates, many contestants saw

²⁵ For example, the CoC required campaign materials to be printed only in black and white, set precise size limits for banners, prohibited specific materials such as polythene and PVC, and restricted the use of loudspeakers to between 2 and 8 p.m. with a maximum sound level of 60 decibels.

²⁶ In 16 per cent of campaign events observed by the EU EOM, at least one regulation was violated, mainly campaigning outside permitted hours, exceeding noise limits, or non-compliant campaign materials.

²⁷ The EU EOM directly observed or received credible reports of promises of spiritual rewards, such as “going to heaven” in exchange for votes in more than 20 per cent of the districts and of inducements such as distribution of money or food in above 5 per cent of the districts.

²⁸ Osman Hadi was shot on 12 December 2025 in Dhaka following a pre-campaign event. His death triggered protests that turned violent and led to arson attacks on two media houses. At the time of writing, investigations into both Hadi’s killing and the attacks on media houses remained ongoing.

these measures as insufficient and expressed limited confidence in the police's capacity to ensure safety.

Violent incidents peaked one day before the elections, when more than 20 disturbances were reported from 12 districts. These primarily involved attempts to unlawfully enter polling centres, interference with election officials, and clashes between rival supporters. In connection with these events, more than 30 individuals were detained or sentenced to imprisonment, and, in several cases, custodial penalties were imposed following summary proceedings.

IX. PARTY AND CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Insufficient campaign finance transparency and accountability measures distort electoral competitions.

The RPO regulates political party and campaign finance, establishing rules on financial transparency, spending limits, and restrictions on anonymous donations. Political parties must disclose their sources of funding and provide bank account details at the time of registration with the EC. In addition, registered parties must submit annual financial reports, audited by a chartered accountant, to the EC; however, the legal framework does not expressly require the public disclosure of these reports.²⁹

Prospective candidates must, when filing nomination papers, submit statements of income and election expenses, indicating likely funding sources, together with declarations of assets and liabilities, annual income and expenditure, and their latest tax return. While the Anti-Corruption Commission announced that it would verify the candidates' affidavits, it did not take meaningful follow-up action, citing the limited timeframe before election day.

The prescribed spending ceiling is seen as unrealistically low in relation to actual campaign costs, limiting its effectiveness. The RPO Ordinance 2025 introduced a broad definition of election expenses³⁰, capped individual donations at BDT 5 million (approximately EUR 35,000), and raised spending limit to BDT 10 per registered voter or BDT 2.5 million per constituency (approximately EUR 33,000). Political party representatives generally assessed those ceilings as insufficient. The EU EOM received credible reports that the actual campaign costs of some contestants might have been much higher, considering costly rallies and voter mobilisation efforts. These observations were corroborated by analysis conducted by Transparency International Bangladesh (TI-B), which found that average spending may have exceeded the maximum permitted limit by approximately 170 per cent, with nearly 69 per cent of candidates surpassing the legal ceiling.³¹

All candidates must submit election expense statements to the EC within 30 days of the publication of results,³² while political parties must submit campaign expenditure statements within 90 days of the completion of elections in all constituencies. However, the RPO does not require these statements to be audited before submission or verified by the EC, neither does it require any publication by the EC of compliance findings and audit summaries, including identified breaches and follow-up actions. Sanctions for non-compliance by political parties include warnings, fines, and possible cancellation of registration by the EC. While the RPO provides for publication of financial reports on the EC website, it sets no deadline and does not require the EC to publish any assessment of the reports. The absence

²⁹ Rules 6 and 9 of the Registration of Political Parties Rules, 2008.

³⁰ According to Article 21 of the RPO, "a candidate may appoint any voter of the concerned constituency qualified to be elected as a member to be his election agent".

³¹ See TI-B's report on [13th National Election Process Tracking and Affidavits](#), the average exceedance rate was 327.5 per cent for BNP candidates, 315.2 per cent for independent candidates, 159.1 per cent for JeI candidates, and 128.6 per cent for JP candidates.

³² This includes expenditure on content creation, advertising, boosting, and sponsorship on social media related to the election, together with total election expenses. Foreign-funded online advertisements are expressly prohibited.

of effective verification, oversight, and enforcement undermines the transparency and credibility of the campaign finance framework.

Priority recommendation: *Review and strengthen campaign finance provisions to ensure that spending limits and reporting obligations are realistic, enforceable and subject to effective verification and oversight. The RPO could require candidates and political parties to submit audited election expenditure accounts in a standardised format, provide for systematic controls by the Election Commission during and after the campaign, and set clear deadlines for the publication of financial reports.*

Party and candidate spending on social media is difficult to verify beyond a reasonable doubt, as there are no reporting requirements for social media platforms on income generated from political advertising. The EU EOM social media monitoring indicated a costly online campaign by leading electoral alliances, their candidates and third-party support accounts.³³ However, it is not possible to establish the actual costs of digital campaigns, as only Meta has introduced its ad transparency tool for Bangladesh. Google and TikTok do not offer such services and there was also direct advertising by third parties on Facebook pages, which appeared as organic content.

X. MEDIA

Legal framework requires urgent reform to protect media freedom and reduce self-censorship.

a. Media environment

The media environment is diverse and dynamic but suffers from long-standing structural issues. Significant changes in the management and leadership of media outlets and regulatory authorities have taken place, and the legal framework governing media has improved since 2024, but ownership concentration, political interference, and economic vulnerability continue to pose threats to investigative journalism, editorial independence and political pluralism in media. Pervasive self-censorship has heavily impacted on electoral reporting and there was little analytical scrutiny of candidates' manifestos, thus reducing the possibility for voters to make a fully informed choice.

Psychological, physical and digital harassment, as well as inadequate police protection from mob attacks further reduced freedom of reporting during the period leading up to election day.³⁴ Arson attacks on two prominent media houses, the *Daily Star* and *Prothom Alo*, orchestrated by online disinformation and hate speech, led to a life-threatening situation for at least 29 journalists on 18 December 2025, evidencing failed efforts to contain disinformation and also exposing the media's vulnerability.³⁵ This attack had a chilling effect on campaign coverage.

The police mistreatment of journalists, including during recent demonstrations, also negatively affected the media environment.³⁶ The EU EOM received credible reports on harassment of journalists in Dhaka and Chittagong, while intimidation was reported to the EU EOM observers in at least 15 districts in all divisions. At present, four journalists are imprisoned for alleged alignment with the previous regime during the 2024 uprising.³⁷

³³ For further details on paid political advertising and spending patterns, see Annex III, Chart 12.

³⁴ According to the Bangladesh Media Monitor, more than 243 journalists were affected in 119 incidents between 8 August 2024 – 16 February 2026. At least 32 journalists were detained or arrested; four journalists were found dead. On 7 February, after a critical publication about the Chief of Army Staff, the military interrogated 21 journalists from the online media *Bangladesh Times*. In another incident, one journalist was charged for allegedly spreading propaganda in talk shows and conspiring to rehabilitate the AL. Source: [International Federation of Journalists](#)

³⁵ *"A dark day for independent journalism"* The Daily Star, 19 December 2025.

³⁶ *Inqilab Moncho protest: Police allegedly beat up Journos Dhaka Stream*, 6 February 2026.

³⁷ [CPJ writes Yunus to release 4 imprisoned journalists in Bangladesh](#), Views Bangladesh, 9 December 2025.

Overall, many media stakeholders expressed satisfaction with a reduced level of interference by authorities and noted an improved working environment for the media compared with the situation under the previous AL government. However, inadequate police protection for media practitioners still negatively affected media freedom.

Recommendation: *Establish legal and operational framework to effectively protect journalists and media houses from physical and digital harassment and attacks, including clear procedures for police and other law enforcement agencies to promptly investigate and prosecute such acts of violence against media professionals in a timely manner.*

Large segments of society still consider the television as the main source of news, including on elections. Currently, there are 36 private television channels, 19 FM radio stations and 15 community radio stations broadcasting in operation. Although the circulations of print outlets are declining, their online platforms are highly popular allowing these outlets to retain a relatively large readership. There are approximately 3,000 print outlets, and more than 250 registered online news portals. Most outlets publish primarily in Bengali and occasionally in English, while minority languages are rarely used.

There are no legal requirements to uphold transparency in media ownership, leaving room for allegations of political bias in the distribution of licences.³⁸ Independent reporting was also constrained by the financial vulnerability of journalists, and by media owners reportedly using outlets to advance their political interests. The Mission was also informed that in Rajshahi district the owner, who also was a candidate, put pressure on the newsroom to withdraw reports painting him in a negative light.

The National Press Club, district and sub-district level press clubs are vital hubs for professional interaction and development. However, several district-level press clubs were either split along political lines, or journalists from those clubs were openly supporting certain political parties. The EU EOM received such reports from Chattogram, Dhaka, Khulna, Mymensingh, Rangpur and Rajshahi.

b. Legal framework for the media

The Constitution of Bangladesh enshrines freedom of expression, subject to reasonable limits. However, section 499 of the Penal Code criminalises defamation in a manner inconsistent with international standards.³⁹ Although the Cyber Security Ordinance 2025 replaced the repressive Digital Security Act 2018 and the Cyber Security Act 2023, concerns regarding the legal framework persist as definitions of prohibited speech in the Cyber Security Ordinance remain vague, enabling arbitrary application and misuse.

The IG pledged to carry out wide-ranging media reforms; however, the results have been limited. Outdated and repressive laws that curb freedom of expression remain in force, which, considering the vague definitions, severe penalties, and broad enforcement powers, continue to create a climate of fear among journalists and online content creators. For example, the Code of Criminal Procedures Act grants the government power to confiscate newspaper copies and to ban or close newspapers and other publications on grounds of defamation, sedition, and indecency.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the Official Secrets Act 1923 prohibits the disclosure of vaguely defined “sensitive government information”.

³⁸ The MoIB approved the registration of several online news portals during the IG, granted licences to Next TV (owned by NCP politician), and for Live TV (owned by a former member of National Citizen’s Committee).

³⁹ On 1 December 2025, the Dhaka University Students’ Union Vice President filed a case against 18 individuals – including a satirical platform – accusing them of defamation via Facebook posts. [Shadik Kayem files case-against 18 individuals](#).

⁴⁰ Further laws pertaining to the operation of media are the Press and Publications Act (1973), the Telegraph Act, 1885, the Wireless Telegraph Act, 1933, the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1973, the Indecent Advertisements

The media oversight is fragmented, with several institutions having regulatory powers. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MoIB) is the main regulatory body responsible for media policy and for issuing licences for private televisions and radio channels. The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) oversees the technical aspects of broadcasting, regulates internet and telecommunications services, and allocates radio frequencies. Meanwhile, the Press Council of Bangladesh handles complaints against print media outlets and issued a Code of Conduct to guide journalistic practices.

Political advertising is poorly regulated, leaving loopholes for misuse. The rules for state advertising are described in the Broadcasting Act (2003), the Press Council Act (1974), and the Broadcasting Policy Document, while the RPO only grants political parties access to state-funded television and radio stations' broadcasts, without specifying rules for paid-for content. The EC took steps to ensure equitable media access for all candidates during the campaign, but actual regulations and oversight of actual implementation were lacking.⁴¹

In early 2025, the Media Reform Commission submitted its recommendations to the IG, yet none of these were implemented prior to the elections.⁴² The IG published the draft National Media Commission Ordinance 2026 and the Broadcasting Commission Ordinance 2026 for public consultation in January 2026, but did not gazette them, and, overall, media stakeholders starkly criticised both ordinances as overly restrictive and lacking effective protection mechanisms for journalists and media houses alike.⁴³

Recommendation: *Establish an independent media regulator, a National Media Commission, tasked with overseeing all types of media (broadcast, print and online media), and select its commissioners through a competitive, transparent and merit-based process.*

c. Media monitoring findings⁴⁴

With gradually improving media freedoms, news outlets were active in covering the election, however, they focused only on the main political parties. Although access to media was generally open to all contestants, smaller parties and independent candidates, especially women, received substantially less coverage.⁴⁵ The EU EOM media monitoring revealed significant disparities in the total airtime, news and editorial coverage of candidates across TV channels.⁴⁶

Private TV channels *Jamuna TV*, *Somoy TV*, Channel 24, and Independent TV did not provide equitable airtime to contestants in monitored prime-time broadcast.⁴⁷ The EU EOM quantitative monitoring data shows, that the two major parties, BNP and JeI, dominated the media coverage, while smaller parties and independent candidates were marginalised.

On a positive note, several private TV channels (*Jamuna TV*, Channel 24, *Somoy TV*, News 24, Channel I and RTV) organised talk shows with candidates, helping voters to directly compare contestants in several constituencies. In *Jamuna TV's* prominent talk show "*Rajniti*" (Politics), BNP representatives participated 17 times, compared to JeI's seven-time and NCP's three-time appearance,

Prohibition Act 1963, the Newspaper Employees Act 1974, Policy Guidelines for Advertisements and Supplements 2008, the Community Radio Policy 2008, and the Censorship of Films Act, 1963.

⁴¹ In the letter to the MoIB the EC emphasised the importance of a "*free, fair and widely acceptable election*", noting that "*equal opportunity*" should be given to all parties and candidates. [BSS News article](#), 17 December 2025.

⁴² The Media Reform Commission report was submitted to the IG on 22 March 2025.

⁴³ See: [Rushed media ordinances threaten press freedom: Article 19 | The Daily Star](#) and [TIB slams draft media ordinances as 'mockery' of free press | The Business Standard](#)

⁴⁴ Media monitoring findings and methodology employed by the EU EOM is included in Annex II.

⁴⁵ For further details see Annex II, Charts 3, 10, 11 and 12.

⁴⁶ For further details see Annex II, Chart 3, 4, 6 and 7.

⁴⁷ For further details see Annex II, Chart 6.

while independent candidates featured only in six broadcasts.⁴⁸ *Somoy TV*'s talk show "Shompadokiyo" featured BNP and NCP equitably, while Channel 24 TV "Muktobak" (Free Speech) invited an equitable number of candidates from the leading parties, with no independent candidate featured. Other private TV channels, NTV, RTV, Channel I and News 24 most frequently featured BNP representatives, while the JeI affiliated invitees did not participate. While overall the media offered extensive coverage of the elections, no debates among the party leaders were organised on any of the TV channels monitored, due to candidates' reluctance to discuss their party programmes publicly.

Although radio's popularity has declined amid the rise of social media and television, it remained an informative platform during the campaign period. The State broadcaster *Bangladesh Betar Radio* covered the campaign in its evening newscasts, overwhelmingly focusing on the BNP and JeI. The BNP was featured 92 times, JeI 82 times, while there were only 32 news stories related to the NCP, and only a few mentions of independents and smaller party candidates. Similarly, private broadcaster Radio Today devoted greater coverage to BNP (107 news stories) and JeI (79 news stories), while NCP was featured in 33 stories and independents and smaller parties again appeared only one or two times.

The EC and IG voter information videos featured overwhelmingly on BTV between prime-time newscasts, while private TV channels aired voter information segments to a substantially lesser extent.⁴⁹ *Bangladesh Betar Radio* aired voter education messages 36 times during the monitored period, while Radio Today broadcast 45 times over the same time.⁵⁰

During the monitoring period, the broadcast media coverage of political parties and candidates was predominantly neutral or positive.⁵¹ The AL was the only political actor that was negatively portrayed across all monitored outlets.

Leading national newspapers – *Prothom Alo*, *Jugantor*, *Bangladesh Pratidin*, *Kaler Kantho*, and *Amar Desh* – provided extensive coverage of the electoral process. Reporting included overviews of the main political parties and candidates, including independents, outlining their visions and manifestos, as well as the tracking of developments regarding political alliances. Among the parties, the BNP received the highest level of coverage, with JeI accounting for approximately two-thirds of that share. In contrast, the NCP and smaller parties received very limited attention.

Minority groups lacked meaningful media exposure during the campaign period, with approximately 20 Hindu candidates occasionally being mentioned on private TV channels. Among them, two female candidates – one from the Socialist Party of Bangladesh (BASAD) and another from the Socialist Party of Bangladesh – Marxist (SPBM) party – were featured, with the BASAD candidate appearing several times on the talk show *Rajniti* and in evening news segments. While several voter information clips encouraged minority participation in the electoral process, concerns related to the safety and security of minority groups during the election period did not receive substantive broadcast coverage.

Overall, media outlets made notable efforts to present electoral contestants and inform the public. However, exchanges of accusations between the major political parties overshadowed substantive

⁴⁸ The EU EOM Media monitoring Unit (MMU) quantitatively monitored five national TV channels: the state-funded BTV, *Jamuna TV*, *Somoy TV*, Channel 24 and Independent TV, as well as qualitatively monitored five private TV channels: News 24, Channel I, NTV, RTV, and *Ekkator TV*, for the period of 20 January to 10 February 2026.

⁴⁹ For further details see Annex II, Chart 8.

⁵⁰ State *Bangladesh Betar Radio* and the private Radio Today were qualitatively monitored between 22 January to 10 February 2026, from 20:00 to 02:00 hours.

⁵¹ For further details see Annex II, Chart 4 and 5.

debate and policy discussions, limiting voters' opportunities to compare candidates' programmes and party manifestos.

XI. SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL RIGHTS

The online campaign was dominated by information pollution from partisan accounts, with inadequate reaction from social media platforms.

a. Social media environment

Social media was the decisive communication channel swaying the 55.6-million strong youth vote, yet the quality of political debate was diminished by high volumes of disinformation. In the positive, a small number of fact-checking initiatives and digital media made real-time content verification, helping tech-savvy voters to navigate the dense information environment. Nationwide impact of these efforts was limited, due to the volume of disinformation that outpaced the debunking capacity and by overall low digital literacy levels, outside urban areas in particular.⁵²

By the end of 2025, almost half of Bangladeshis had access to internet, yet the urban-rural digital divide remained high.⁵³ While connectivity rates in urban centres are above 70 per cent, in rural areas its only 36.5 per cent.⁵⁴ This deep digital divide not only exemplifies unequal access to diverse sources of information among voters, but it also limits the reach of digital voter information efforts. Encouragingly, internet connectivity sees a steady growth at five per cent annually, and investment in infrastructure and digital inclusion is expected to continue, gradually reaching millions.

Overall, Facebook, YouTube and TikTok were the most important social media platforms to access news, while digital channels that prioritise user anonymity were more frequently leveraged for mobilisation efforts. Digital communication infrastructure, carefully crafted during the July uprising, remained active.⁵⁵ The 2024 ecosystem was built by anonymous profiles, deceptive media accounts, and influencer networks to circumvent censorship, while for those elections, it was repurposed largely for partisan interests – to mobilise voters, to spread disinformation, and to confuse. Many of these anonymous account networks commanded millions of followers, and during the electoral campaign, their influence over public opinion rivalled with that of established digital media outlets.

The most engaging content was created by pseudo-media accounts which posted digital cards styled as breaking news alerts, mimicking content created by credible news media. Manipulative engagement polls were the second most popular type of content, consistently gathering tens of thousands of reactions, including artificially generated. Those “polls” featured side-by-side images of two or more rival candidates or parties asking users to react with a like or heart to show support to the candidate. Most of this deceptive content was made in specific slang used on social media, blending words in Bengali and in English and carried context-dependent meaning and slang that automated moderation systems struggled to detect. In several instances, such content clearly violated social media community standards, but was not de-platformed, exposing a critical gap in social media platforms' content moderation, including during the elections.

⁵² Research notes that 82 per cent of the rural population have low or no digital skills, [BRAC Institute of Governance and Development “Digital Literacy of Rural Households in Bangladesh”](#), December 2020.

⁵³ [Data Reportal – Digital Bangladesh 2026](#)

⁵⁴ For further details on internet penetration and social media usage, see Annex III, Section 1.2, Chart 1.

⁵⁵ “Online communication infrastructure” refers to networks of public groups, channels, and accounts created on a wide range of social media platforms and messaging apps used to disseminate information, evade censorship under the AL government, and to facilitate coordination and mobilisation during the uprising. Most prominent platforms were Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, Telegram, Discord.

National, multi-pronged efforts to counter disinformation were constructive, marking an encouraging step towards a systemic approach in countering digital malice and hate. The EC's Law and Order cell monitored harmful content in the capital, while sub-structures did the same at the district level. The page of the IG's Press Wing and other government channels regularly published debunked and fact-checked materials. The EC also contributed to an informed pre-election environment with some 200 posts on its Facebook page, reaching approximately 15 million views. Several fact-checking initiatives and media outlets exposed a wave of AI-generated political clickbait sites and developed a platform to monitor harmful content.⁵⁶ Those collaborative efforts not only pointed out fabricated or manipulated content but also helped raising public awareness about the disinformation.

The responsiveness of social media platforms was insufficient, as global firms appeared ill-equipped or not committed to safeguard information integrity at scale throughout the election period. Only TikTok had a formal agreement with the EC and offered country-specific support, including a virtual Election Information Centre on the TikTok application. Google did not provide any country-specific support and did not have a partnership with national fact-checkers. Meta's approach led to the most consequential gap, as the platform - with more than 73 million Bangladeshi users - entered the campaign without a dedicated election centre and was only responding to regular takedown orders from and collaborating with only three fact-checking organisations. The digital-led December 2025 mob violence against the media houses exemplified lack of adequate safety mechanisms.

b. Legal framework for social media and digital rights

Despite constitutional safeguards for freedom of expression, including online, the current regulatory framework lacks operational clarity, hindering the uniform protection of digital rights. In line with the Cybersecurity Ordinance 2025, the newly established National Cybersecurity Agency is mandated to standardise content takedown requests that either the BTRC or the relevant ICT division can send to social media platforms. In the positive, it requires post-factum permission from the relevant Tribunal within three days of any content removal, transfer or blocking, and stipulates that the content must be restored if such permission is not granted. It also requires the government to publish information on content that is blocked or removed, which, if implemented properly, could enhance transparency. However, these safeguards are currently not put into practice. Further, the Ordinance does not include a requirement for notification of the content creator if the content is removed due to an institutional takedown request or a procedure to appeal the decision to block or remove content. During the election campaign, the government did not publish any information regarding content takedown requests. The Ordinance specifies threats to national integrity, security, or public order as criteria for takedown orders. However, without a published methodology for how these requests are evaluated, the process lacks transparency and safeguards against arbitrary application.

Prioritising reactive takedown orders as the key mechanism for a collaboration with social media platforms offers limited strategic efficiency in managing platform content and addressing digital threats. To achieve sustainable impact, the legal framework must evolve toward a more structural, proactive governance framework that incorporates algorithmic transparency, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and transparency reports regarding their content moderation activities. Establishment of national focal points by social media platforms at least during the electoral period would strengthen the integrity of the information environment and protect voters from undue digital influence.

Priority recommendation: *Promote a safer and more transparent digital space by amending the Cyber Security Ordinance to establish binding legal obligations for social media platforms, aimed at safeguarding informational and electoral integrity. Those obligations may encompass defined*

⁵⁶ [Unlabelled AI-generated media floods election campaigns as platforms fail to enforce rules](#), Dismislab, 31 January 2026.

collaboration protocols, special measures around elections, algorithmic transparency, and regular reporting on content moderation activities.

While the Ordinance mandates protections against sexual harassment and obscene content, it is not enforced in practice due to the lack of formalised operating procedures and insufficient specialised training for law enforcement. There is also very limited public awareness that digital harassment is a punishable offence. Owing to the low trust in the ability of the police to investigate digital harassment cases, only one activist filed a complaint; most female candidates who were targeted by online gender-based abuse apparently spoke about it only to media.⁵⁷

The EC's Code of Conduct requires candidates to register their social media accounts with the EC and report all online campaign expenditure. The RPO First Amendment Ordinance introduced Article 73A, which prohibits the creation, sharing, or promotion of false or misleading content, including AI-generated material, intended to harm candidates, influence results, or impair electoral integrity, as well as the use of automated bots and fake accounts to spread disinformation. Violations are classified as corrupt practice. Both provisions display a promising direction towards building transparency and accountability, yet no obligations are placed on social media platforms, while enforcement is assigned to the EEACs, that currently lack the technical means and capacity to act on them.

Data protection legislation is yet to take full effect. In late 2025, a new Personal Data Protection Ordinance and a National Data Governance Ordinance were adopted, creating an encouraging start for data ownership rights for citizens and mandating explicit consent before storage and collection of online data. However, the implementation mechanisms are not in place yet and data privacy breaches remain unaddressed. For example, on 1 February, an error on the EC website exposed the personal data of 14,000 journalists, illustrating an urgent need to establish clear safety protocols.⁵⁸

c. Social media monitoring findings

The 2026 elections witnessed an online campaign during which political parties and candidates relied heavily on the support of public groups and partisan accounts that amplified the reach of party messages and were accelerating political mudslinging. Despite a comparable official online presence, the two leading electoral alliances operated at very different scales. The JeI and NCP jointly reached ten times more views than BNP (129 million versus 13 million), benefiting from a well-organised ecosystem of influencers and pseudo-media, while the BNP's online infrastructure was rather fragmented, with each candidate largely creating their own digital footprint. Although not an electoral contender, AL-leaning networks on TikTok consistently called for a boycott of elections, using dedicated hashtags and accumulated some 183 million views during the campaign period.⁵⁹

Applying quantitative and qualitative monitoring methods, the EU EOM tracked communication on some 900 Facebook pages and close to 300 TikTok accounts; more than 500,000 posts were recorded and assessed based on virality and the authors' political leaning. The sample of pages and accounts was designed to capture a balanced snapshot of Bangladesh's digital communication landscape.⁶⁰

Established news outlets pages and pseudo-media reached the most users, followed by influencers. However, engagement with traditional news stories remained significantly lower than that of manipulated or sensationalist content, consistently outpacing the capacity of fact-checkers. On election

⁵⁷ [Dhaka Tribune, "Female candidates face rising cyber harassment ahead of Bangladesh polls"](#), 08 February 2026.

⁵⁸ [Prothom Alo, "EC "lapses" lead to massive leak of journalist's personal data"](#), 01 February 2026.

⁵⁹ For further details on reactions to posts and accounts with the highest reactions per post, see Annex III, Chart 4.

⁶⁰ For further details on the social media sample, monitored sources, and total number of analysed posts, see Annex III, Table 2 and Charts 3A and 3B.

day alone, DisinfoLab, RumourScanner, and FactWatch collectively published some 70 fact-checked stories and the analysis of viral incidents, reaching some four million users on Facebook.

The official campaigns of both leading parties were primarily self-promotional, with only occasional attacks on rival parties and candidates. The BNP led the most positive campaign on its official pages, while on NCP pages, every third post was targeting the BNP. Parties' approach to messaging also differed. The BNP changed topics weekly, while JeI built its entire campaign around the message of justice. The NCP was rather reactive in its communication, at first explaining its alliance with JeI, and then focusing on promotion of its leader Nahid Islam.⁶¹

Political mudslinging was primarily observed on public groups and partisan accounts, with large audiences. The EU EOM analysed over 40,000 posts, with an equal share of BNP, NCP, and JeI-leaning content. From 22 January, at least a fifth of the posts on NCP and JeI-leaning accounts aimed to discredit BNP, alleging corruption, branding candidates as loan defaulters and extortionists, framing BNP as a pro-India party, and attacking their stance on women. BNP-leaning accounts, in turn, portrayed JeI either as an "internet bubble party" or as a party that exploits religious sentiments.⁶²

Disinformation was diffused on a viral scale, including from outside Bangladesh. The EU EOM monitoring identified 23 viral incidents of wide-spread dissemination of divisive content in a 24-hour window, with an average of one million views. The main narratives exploited BNP –JeI tensions. There were also several viral, manipulated videos alleging that BNP candidates assaulted women; this claim was recycled in at least 1,000 posts, labelling the party as "women abusers" and, notably, at the end of the campaign, JeI support accounts spun this narrative to portray JeI as "women protectors".

Women's safety emerged as a shared campaign theme for both BNP and JeI; however, JeI-aligned accounts led the conversation, producing roughly three posts for every two from BNP-aligned sources. While both parties used this topic against each other, 48 per cent of JeI-aligned posts discussing BNP's stance on women were negative, compared to only one in five on BNP-aligned accounts debating JeI.⁶³

Although prohibited by law, AI was used to mimic organic support at scale. The EU EOM identified 173 AI-generated videos accumulating 23 million views and 478,000 shares, showing potential artificial amplification, with more than half promoting JeI, and one fifth promoting BNP.⁶⁴

Online hate speech targeting minorities was also observed in the run-up to the elections.⁶⁵ The EU EOM detected over 100 region-specific Facebook groups called "Protect Our Sisters" that adopted a coordinated structure sharing identical content. Such groups were active across nearly all districts and 96 per cent of their posts were spreading fabricated stories portraying Hindu and Christian men as sexual predators, labelling them as "thugs" and "rapists", and calling for "retaliation" to protect "Muslim women". Ninety-four per cent of this content could have been classified as hate speech, with disinformation and doxxing as the leading tactics, yet those groups were not removed from Facebook.

The scale and capacity of disinformation networks, and the coordination among hate speech actors, as identified during this electoral campaign, exposed significant gaps in Bangladesh's institutional capacity to safeguard the integrity of the information environment. Neither state institutions, civil

⁶¹ For further details on election-related content and tone across categories and party pages, see Annex III, Chart 7.

⁶² For further details on the distribution of content across official and unofficial pages of the BNP and the JeI, see Annex III, Charts 6A, 6B, 6C and 6D.

⁶³ For further details on cross-party narratives related to women, including tone, content, and posting frequency, see Annex III, Charts 9A, 9B, 9C and 9D.

⁶⁴ For further details on AI-generated content and engagement patterns, see Annex III, Chart 10.

⁶⁵ For further details on hate speech and harmful content, including types and targeted groups, see Annex III, Charts 11A, 11B and 11C.

society organisations (CSOs), nor academia have the mandate, resources, or technical capacity to safeguard the integrity of the information environment alone.

Recommendation: *Protect freedom of expression online by establishing an independent, civilian-led strategic communications unit comprising digital safety specialists, fact-checkers, and civil society representatives to elaborate a comprehensive strategy to strengthen institutional resilience against information pollution and coordinated disinformation. Consider beneficial synergies between government institutions, universities and dedicated CSOs.*

XII. PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

Powerful patriarchy and gender-based discrimination, together with inaction by political parties, effectively exclude women from political life.

Despite the central role women played during the 2024 uprising, the participation of women in political leadership is minimal at present, with sexual harassment, gender-based violence and an absence of political will on the part of political parties having excluded them. Deep-seated misogyny, exacerbated by traditionally embedded patriarchy, has relegated women to the private sphere, undermining their participation in electoral politics. Violence against women, both physical and facilitated by technology, was reported to and observed by the EU EOM, with the online harassment of women posing a significant problem for women in the election.

The election campaign was far from feminist, as women were observed by the EU EOM to have been active in campaigning in much lower numbers than men, and as campaign narratives predominantly addressed women as wives and mothers, not as independent agents. No women were present as speakers at 154 of the 192 campaign events observed by EU EOM, that is, at 80 per cent of the events attended. There were also no women observed to be present as supporters at 45 per cent of events observed, and women comprised fewer than 50 per cent of participants in 88 per cent of events overall. The EU EOM also received credible reports of harassment or intimidation of women campaigning across the country.

Women accounted for just under four per cent of total candidates for the 299 seats in the direct elections. Major parties nominated very few women, with ten from BNP, two from NCP, and none from JeI or from another 30 of the 51 contesting parties. Seven women were elected, six BNP members and the seventh an independent, formerly BNP, amounting overall to just 2.3 per cent of the 300 seats. Only three among 49 ministerial appointees were women, just one at full ministerial level.

An additional 50 seats are reserved for women, distributed to political parties according to their proportion of the other 300 seats, a mechanism not favoured by the women's movement, as, not being directly elected, the women lack constituencies and meaningful connections with voters. Their accountability is to the party which nominated them instead of to citizens. One reserved seat is allocated for every six seats won in the general direct election. The BNP won 209 seats and will get 35 of the reserved seats; JeI will get 11, NCP will get one. The remaining three seats will be distributed among smaller parties and independents. There will be a total of 57 women in the 13th Parliament, comprising just over 16 per cent of total membership.

The role of political parties is critical in the advancement of women in politics, in mentoring women within internal structures, from local to national levels, and in selecting women as candidates. Parties are dominated by men and by political dynasties, while an ability to bring financial resources for campaigning is also important. Women's share of the labour force is below half that of men, indicating a significant gender gap in economic participation, and less access to the financial resources needed to contest elections. The RPO requires that, in order to be registered with the EC, a political party must

adopt the goal of reserving at least 33 per cent of all committee positions for women, including within the central committee, and must progressively achieve this goal by 2030.⁶⁶ This measure has excellent potential to empower women within political parties, but the EC has not undertaken monitoring and enforcement action in relation to implementation.

Bangladesh ratified CEDAW in 1984. The CEDAW Committee has expressed concern regarding the persistent patriarchal attitudes and discriminatory stereotypes about the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society noting that they constitute serious barriers to women's equal participation in all spheres of life.⁶⁷ Article seven of CEDAW requires that measures be taken to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life and, in particular, to ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the rights to vote and to stand for election. The CEDAW Committee has interpreted this obligation on states as achievement of gender parity.⁶⁸

The women's movement has long been advocating the achievement of gender equality and, despite a constriction of civic space for such endeavours, continues to do so. A Charter of Demands was developed by civil society in 2023 to articulate both the obstacles to progress and the opportunities for change. The Women's Affairs Reform Commission, established as part of the July reform process, addressed the systemic barriers to women's participation, including proposing enactment of an anti-discrimination law. The Commission also proposed that half of the membership of parliament, increased to 600 members, would be allocated to women, to be directly elected within constituencies. The July National Charter did not incorporate these proposals. The Women's Political Rights Forum was subsequently created within civil society and advocacy for affirmative action, including direct elections for reserved seats, financial support for female candidates, and measures to prevent gender-based violence, continues.

Priority recommendation: *Amend the RPO to include strict monitoring and enforcement measures for implementation of Article 90B(1)(b)(ii), ensuring that all political parties achieve the goal of 33 per cent women as members of all internal party committees by 2030; and consider requiring that all political parties nominate at least one-third women candidates for national and local elections.*

XIII. PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH

High youth political mobilisation did not translate into proportional representation in elected office and political leadership.

For the generation that spearheaded the July 2024 uprising, these elections were both the first experience of competitive electoral politics and an attempt to decrease the enduring dominance of veteran politicians. Youth constituted a decisive segment of the voting-age population, with citizens aged 18 to 37 representing 44 per cent of registered voters; among them some 4.5 million were first-time voters, constituting three per cent of the electorate.⁶⁹

Since 2024, parts of the youth leadership sought to transition their mobilisation into formal party politics. These efforts led to the formation of new political parties but did not produce a unified youth-oriented platform. Two movements transformed into political parties: *Gono Odhikar Parishad* (GOP),

⁶⁶ The year 2030 had formerly been 2020 but was amended by section 11 of Act No. XVII of 2023. The July Charter contains a requirement for parties to nominate five per cent female candidates, growing in increments of five per cent in successive elections, until 33 per cent is reached, or by 2043.

⁶⁷ [CEDAW/C/BGD/CO/8](#) Concluding Observations on the Eighth Periodic Report of Bangladesh, CEDAW, 2016.

⁶⁸ [CEDAW General Recommendation number 40 \(2024\)](#) on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems.

⁶⁹ See also the 2022 [population and housing census](#), according to which the share of those aged 15 to 24 increased from 18.16 per cent in 2011 to 19.11 in 2022; the total of people aged 15 to 29 rose from 40 million to 46 million.

originating from the 2018 quota reform protests, and the NCP, formed by part of the uprising's leadership. The former fielded 92 candidates, partly in co-ordination with the BNP, while the latter contested 32 constituencies in alliance with the JeI. The NCP's alliance with JeI triggered internal splits, with some members arguing that the party was departing from its original secular stance and, subsequently, contested the elections as independents.

Despite their demographic weight, young people remained underrepresented in decision-making and party leadership positions. Two young advisers were appointed to the IG; however, this did not alter broader patterns of limited youth access to leadership. Most parties lacked internal mechanisms for youth advancement, and candidate selection was largely controlled by senior party leadership. Although the average age of candidates decreased if compared to previous elections, it was 52 years.⁷⁰ Youth participating in public life continued to face structural barriers, including limited employment opportunities corresponding to qualifications.⁷¹

In the pre-electoral period, youth mobilisation was particularly visible on university campuses and through issue-based activism. Following decade-long hiatuses, five student union elections were held from mid-2025 onwards, all won by the JeI-affiliated *Chhatra Shibir*. Student wings of both the BNP and JeI organised campaign events nationwide. Youth pressure groups, including *Inqilab Moncho* and Students Against Discrimination, demonstrated over the December 2025 killing of Sharif Osman Hadi and campaigned in favour of the July National Charter referendum.

Online discourse reflected sustained youth engagement. Of 16,084 posts analysed by the EU EOM between 1 January and 12 February on prominent student pages and groups, 79 per cent featured issues related to national politics. Religion in politics accounted for 1,103 posts, police brutality and campus violence for 833, and 690 posts were related to the death of a JeI representative after a clash with the BNP supporters in Sherpur. Women's rights and safety in politics accounted for 268 posts on student-led discussion groups.

All electoral contestants actively sought youth support, primarily through targeted outreach on Facebook, YouTube and TikTok. Manifestos included proposals on job creation for young professionals, income support for unemployed youth, training and educational programmes, entrepreneurship and special measures to enhance their participation in public life.

Two youth-led parties secured parliamentary representation, with the NCP winning six seats and the GOP one. The average age of elected MPs was 59 years, underscoring the limited translation of youth mobilisation into parliamentary representation.⁷² Youth representation in the new government is limited: the average age of cabinet members is 60 years, and only two members are aged below 40. The GOP got one cabinet post;⁷³ the government includes a dedicated Ministry of Youth and Sports.

XIV. PARTICIPATION OF MINORITY GROUPS

Absence of affirmative action measures, in light of election results, marginalises minorities.

⁷⁰ The EC does not provide age-disaggregated data on candidates. According to a TI-B [analysis](#), candidates aged 25 to 34 accounted for 9.41 per cent of all aspirants in 2026, an increase from 3.96 per cent in 2024.

⁷¹ According to [data](#) from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, around 41 per cent of those aged 15 to 24 were not engaged in employment or education in 2022, with the figure reaching 61 per cent among young women.

⁷² Based on TI-B [analysis](#), among the elected MPs, 3.03 per cent are aged 25–34, 6.73 per cent are 35–44, 18.86 per cent are 45–54, 33.67 per cent are 55–64, and 36.03 per cent are aged 65 and above.

⁷³ The leader of the GOP was appointed with a dual portfolio as the Minister of State for Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment and as Minister of State for Labour and Employment.

Religious and ethnic minorities comprise about nine per cent of the population, representing a rich diversity of faith and linguistic groups spread across the country. While the majority of Bangladeshis are Muslim, Hindus form 7.95 per cent of the population, Buddhists are less than one per cent, as are Christians, with other groups even fewer, according to the Population and Housing Census of 2022.⁷⁴ The Constitution provides that the state religion is Islam, but also protects religious rights to practice Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and other religions. Secularism is provided for in the Constitution, but there is a growing influence of religion in political life.

The electoral process was an occasion of great anxiety for ethnic and religious minorities, raising fears of violence and of political marginalisation. Many feared that attacks on them and on their places of religious worship, as perpetrated in the wake of the July uprising, would be repeated. This did not transpire. There was, however, a diminution in the number of persons from religious and ethnic minorities contesting the elections and being elected to parliament. They are significantly under-represented, having secured only four seats (just over one per cent) of the total 300 directly elected seats, down from around six per cent in the last parliament. Two seats were won by Hindus and two by Buddhists, all four from BNP. There are no reserved seats for minorities in parliament.

Indigenous peoples, about one per cent of the population, have long been marginalised in political life, without any affirmative action measures to ensure their effective political participation. Concentrated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), and in some plains districts, there are more than 50 indigenous ethnic groups in Bangladesh.⁷⁵ The two Buddhists elected to parliament are indigenous, from CHT, but there is nobody from among the plains groups. They lack the protection of International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 169, the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, which has yet to be ratified by Bangladesh.⁷⁶ The Constitution, in Article 23A, provides for protection and support to the unique local cultures and traditions but this provision does not confer any political rights. Indigenous peoples in the CHT are seeking the conduct of elections to the regional and district councils of the CHT, as agreed in the CHT Peace Accord, to vindicate their right to effective representation. The legal framework inhibiting registration of a regional party has been criticised as another important barrier to representation.⁷⁷

The July National Charter aspires to the co-existence and dignity of all communities, proposing a constitutional provision to the effect that “*Bangladesh is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual, and multicultural country, where the co-existences of all communities shall be guaranteed*”. Special measures to ensure the political representation of religious and ethnic minorities are, however, absent from the Charter.

Recommendation: *In light of the potential establishment of an upper house of parliament, consider introduction of a requirement for political parties (passing a reasonable threshold of seats) to nominate people from religious and ethnic minorities among their proportional representation in the upper house.*

The gender-diverse community was largely invisible in the electoral process, with the exception of 1,234 voters registered as being of third gender, and a single independent candidate from that community. The guarantees of equality in the Constitution do not apply to gender identity or sexual orientation, nor is there any anti-discrimination law in place, despite the UN Human Rights Committee

⁷⁴ [Population and Housing Census 2022](#), National Report Volume 01, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

⁷⁵ The Small Ethnic Groups Cultural Institutions Act, 2010, as amended by an Amendment Act in 2019, includes a list of fifty ethnic groups recognised by the State.

⁷⁶ Bangladesh is a party to the earlier ILO Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 (No. 107); while the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007 is also relevant.

⁷⁷ See the recommendation on the registration of political parties in the *Registration of political parties and candidates*.

having called upon Bangladesh to introduce law to give effect to its obligations under the ICCPR, including in protecting the rights of gender diverse persons.⁷⁸

The existence of the Hijra, a transgender identity, has been recognised by government since 2013, included in the census and in official documents as a third gender. The 2022 Census recorded 8,124 persons identifying themselves as third gender. Amendments to the Electoral Rolls Act, 2009, made in 2018, enable registration as third gender in the voter register. Gender-diverse people are marginalised and report increasing rejection of advocacy of their rights in recent years.

XV. PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Rights of persons with disabilities to access polling stations and vote independently unfulfilled.

Persons with disabilities could exercise their right to vote but were denied the dignity and autonomy due to them under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Nobody from the disability community has been elected to parliament. Bangladesh has been a party to the CRPD since 2007, and the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act was adopted in 2013. While this law is important, there is an absence, in both the Constitution and in legislation, of measures that explicitly prohibit discrimination on the grounds of disability.

The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities reviewed the record of Bangladesh in compliance with the CRPD and has found several failures to protect the rights of participation in political life.⁷⁹ The Committee recommended that Bangladesh would repeal or amend all laws that restrict the rights of persons with disabilities, particularly those with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities, to vote and to stand for election. This was specifically in relation to Articles 66 and 122 of the Constitution, and to the Electoral Rolls Act of 2009.

On election day, transportation to polling stations, and their accessibility, created obstacles to voting for persons with reduced mobility. The EC imposed restrictions on vehicular movement on election day, without a waiver to accommodate special needs. The EU EOM observers noted that just over 52 per cent of the polling centres visited were accessible to people with reduced mobility. Observers often noted that voting rooms were located on higher floors of buildings, although rooms on the ground floors were also available. The situation was somewhat better on voting centre premises, with the Mission observing that the layout of the actual voting rooms was adequate for persons with reduced mobility in almost 70 per cent of observations. Assisted voting was possible by a person of the voter's choosing. Extension of optional postal voting to persons with disabilities is advocated by civil society organisations, representing persons with disabilities, as it would ameliorate matters for some.⁸⁰ However, reasonable accommodation for independent voting, in secret, and accessible polling stations, would be preferable to achieve compliance with the CRPD.

The level of representation of persons with disabilities in political and public decision-making is low, despite the existence of a large community, estimated at 16 per cent of the global population by the World Health Organisation. In advance of the election, organisations of persons with disabilities engaged in advocacy efforts to demand their inclusion. Their endeavours included offering advice to the EC on best practice in accessible polling stations and use of adaptative tools, as well as demanding reserved seats in parliament. The Bangladesh Society for Change and Advocacy Nexus (B-SCAN), the only organisation of disabled persons to be accredited as election observers, deployed 100 observers on election day. Nobody identifying as having a disability was elected to Parliament.

⁷⁸ [CCPR/C/BGD/CO/1](#) Concluding Observations on the Initial Report of Bangladesh, 27 April 2017

⁷⁹ [CRPD/C/BGD/CO/1: Concluding observations on the initial report of Bangladesh.](#)

⁸⁰ See also the recommendation related to postal voting in the section *Election Administration*.

Recommendation: *In light of the potential establishment of an upper house of parliament, consider introduction of a requirement for political parties (passing a reasonable threshold of seats) to nominate persons with disabilities among their proportional representation in the upper house.*

XVI. CIVIL SOCIETY AND CITIZEN OBSERVATION

Active interest in citizen observation, despite most groups lacking experience and resources.

Democratic transition has opened greater space for civil society organisations, and many developed election-related initiatives aiming to strengthen public trust in the electoral process, with significant support from the EU and other donors. Civic and voter education, capacity building for journalists, campaign monitoring in the digital space and in the field, tracking campaign spending, monitoring political violence, and election observation, are only some of the projects successfully implemented by CSOs for these elections. While partnerships and alliances within the non-governmental sector were frequent, links between state institutions and CSOs are yet to be developed, and trust rebuilt, to facilitate fruitful co-operation. In particular, the EC could engage more with advocacy groups and capacity building projects to achieve better inclusion and participation in future elections.

The EC's 2025 guidelines on election observation are not fully conducive to independent election monitoring due to overly prescriptive requirements with regard to the deployment of observers and duration of observation. These guidelines did not present a problem since most of the 81 organisations, newly accredited by the EC to conduct citizen observation, were grassroots CSOs with little funding and no prior election observation experience. Observer groups met by the EU EOM expressed interest in more guidance from the EC. A less restrictive policy, particularly with respect to the deployment of observers and duration of observation, would facilitate a more enabling environment for election observation, contributing to transparency and integrity of the process.

The EU-supported Alliance for Fair Election and Democracy (AFED) developed a sound methodology incorporating a long-term component as well as a statistically representative sample on polling day, with some 2,500 short-term observers. AFED was also the only citizen observer group to publish reports of their findings after election day. Other organisations and alliances fielded observers but lacked resources for in-depth training and robust reporting.

XVII. ELECTORAL JUSTICE

Flexible and transparent appeals process expanded candidacy but sparked legal and political debate.

a. Complaints and appeals

The EC conducted appeal hearings against ROs' decisions on candidate nominations in a generally transparent and efficient manner, over a nine-day period. The EC Commissioners adopted a pragmatic and flexible approach that supported inclusiveness, distinguishing between curable technical deficiencies and constitutional or statutory grounds for disqualification. Appeals were accepted where candidates demonstrated substantial compliance in remedying deficiencies.

The EC's interpretation of disqualification grounds related to dual citizenship and loan default generated substantial legal and political controversy. Out of 25 appeals concerning dual citizenship, the EC concluded, in 23 of them, that submission of renunciation application to the foreign state and completion by the applicant of all administrative procedures, pending acceptance by the foreign state, is considered as the legal point of time of renunciation; and thus allowed these candidates to run. Although Article 66(2A) of the Constitution does not expressly imply a positive obligation upon the

aspiring candidates to prove that the renunciation application has been accepted,⁸¹ the EC's departure from two prior High Court Division orders,⁸² which ruled that mere filing of a renunciation application is not sufficient but acceptance by the foreign state is required for the second citizenship to be considered as cancelled, fuelled allegations of preferential treatment of BNP candidates.⁸³

The EC's approach to the disqualification of guarantors, when examining the issue of loan defaulters, departed from the Bank Companies Act, which attributes equal liability to guarantors and principal debtors⁸⁴ and the RPO that provides for disqualification of guarantors and principal borrowers alike. By narrowing the scope of statutory disqualification to principal loanees, excluding guarantors (either natural or legal persons) unless they held more than 20 per cent of shares in the defaulting company or they were managing directors of the company, the EC sought to safeguard the right to stand for election. This approach, however, stretched the EC's mandate, given the limits on executive bodies in interpreting statutory law.⁸⁵

Around 95 writ petitions were filed before the High Court Division (HCD) of the Supreme Court, based on constitutional provisions on the protection of fundamental rights, namely the right to stand. The HCD adjudicated cases promptly and in accordance with applicable procedures. Although the absence of statutory deadlines for filing and adjudicating petitions and appeals created uncertainty for electoral contestants, the EC and voters alike, both the HCD and the Appellate Division (AD) largely upheld the EC's decisions, including on dual citizenship, loan default, and signature collection by independent candidates, emphasising that post-election tribunals constitute the appropriate forum for disputes concerning candidate disqualification. Three appeals on candidate nominations were pending at the AD of the Supreme Court on election day, with the AD having issued an order on 3 February allowing the candidates to contest and ordering the EC to suspend the announcement of results of these constituencies until the hearing of the appeals against their nomination, set for 28 April 2026.⁸⁶

Recommendation: *To safeguard the right to an effective remedy, the RPO to be amended to introduce expeditious and realistic deadlines for the adjudication of nomination-related petitions to ensure resolution before the start of the campaign and, in any event, before election day; expeditious and mandatory time limits should also be established for decisions on post-election petitions.*

⁸¹ The constitutional text explicitly states “in the case of dual citizenship, gives up the dual citizenship” without implying any positive obligation upon the candidate to prove that the clarifying what “gives up” actually entails.

⁸² *Shammi Ahmed v. Bangladesh Election Commission and Others*, Writ Petition No. 16463 of 2023, and *Shamin Hoque v. Bangladesh Election Commission and Others*, Writ Petition No.16496 of 2023.

⁸³ The EC upheld the nominations of 10 BNP, 4 JeI, 3 Islami Andolan, 2 Jatiya Party, 2 independent candidates, as well as one from NCP and one from *Khelafat Majilis*.

⁸⁴ Section 5(cc) of the Bank Companies Act 1991; this provision was inserted by the Bank Companies (Amendment) Act 2013. The EC based its approach regarding guarantors on a court decision taken before the incorporation of the Bank Companies Act, 1991 (*Warish Miah vs. The People Republic of Bangladesh*, 41 DLR (1989), page 51). In that case, the court held that a person who stood as a guarantor on behalf of a borrower is not disqualified as a candidate under s.7(2)(g) of the Local Government (Union Parishads) Ordinance (LI of 1983). On the contrary, the Appellate Division (AD) ruled in 2012 (*Md Abdul Kashem v. Mahmudul Hasan and others*, 17 MLR (AD) 2012) that a natural or legal person may be declared a defaulter where a loan is taken in his/its own name (whether as a director or guarantor of a defaulting company) and the loan, or any part of it (including interest), remains unpaid for more than six months after it becomes due. The AD further upheld the High Court Division's decision, holding that the exclusion of a legal person from the CIB record did not absolve the company of loan liability, and that a candidate's disqualification for parliamentary elections is a personal matter, independent of his company's liability.

⁸⁵ Out of the 113 loan defaulters, 77 were rejected by both ROs and EC, while 36 were allowed to run following appeal. Out of these, 14 (including 6 guarantors) were BNP candidates, two (including one guarantor) were JeI, 11 (including 9 guarantors) were independent candidates and nine (including 8 guarantors) represented other parties.

⁸⁶ The constituencies are Sherpur-2, Chattogram-2, and Chattogram -4.

b. Electoral offences

A highly positive 2025 amendment to the RPO granted EEACs first-class Magistrate powers,⁸⁷ allowing them to hold summary trials for Code of Conduct violations and impose penalties of up to six months' imprisonment and/or a fine. Several EU EOM observer teams reported that this significantly strengthened EEACs' effectiveness and responsiveness to campaign violations. Pursuant to Article 91A of the RPO, on 14 December the EC established 300 EEACs, each composed of a single judge in every constituency. Their mandate lasted for 60 days, expiring upon the official declaration of results. EEACs may inquire into alleged breaches of the EC Code of Conduct and offences under the RPO, mainly corrupt practices, bribery, and undue influence. EEACs may act on their own initiative or on complaint, and can summon persons, take evidence on oath, and require the production of relevant documents or objects. Within three days of concluding an enquiry, an EEAC must report to the EC and propose measures for the EC to order the responsible person to cease an act, remedy an omission, and, where necessary, correct false information. The EC in turn could issue instructions, and impose a fine and, where applicable, cancel the candidature. For other RPO offences, EEACs may take cognisance and refer cases to the competent court.

According to official EC data, a total of 595 cases were investigated by the EEACs, either following a complaint or on their own motion; for 228 of these, the EEACs conducted summary trials; they imposed fines on 294 perpetrators and sentenced five to imprisonment. The majority of cases concerned Code of Conduct violations, including early canvassing. The EEACs issued verbal warnings and imposed fines, while also referred 11 more serious offences to the police. Between 10 to 14 February, the EC additionally deployed 656 Judicial Magistrates to monitor election irregularities; they held 108 summary trials, prison sentence was imposed on 60 perpetrators for several violations.

The EEACs were proactive and played an overall positive role, as observed by the EU EOM. They responded swiftly to complaints, conducted summary trials, and also initiated investigations. In several areas, they engaged local communities by explaining the Code of Conduct and encouraging the reporting of violations. However, despite their broad mandate, the EEACs faced significant financial and logistical constraints. Their reliance on ROs and the police for transport limited their ability to conduct independent field visits, as required, and at times undermined their effectiveness. More generally, dependence on government allocations for funding and operational support reduced their capacity to carry out prompt and robust enquiries into alleged violations. In addition, because EEAC offices were located within district court premises, their visibility remained limited; many stakeholders therefore preferred to file complaints with ROs, Assistant Returning Officers (AROs), or Executive Magistrates rather than approach the EEACs directly.

Recommendation: *Allocate adequate resources for effective functioning of the Election Enquiry and Adjudication Committees (EEACs), raising public awareness of the complaint mechanisms, and making all complaint decisions available in a timely manner to enhance transparency, consistency, and confidence in the process.*

XVIII. VOTING, COUNTING AND TABULATION OF RESULTS

Peaceful and generally orderly election day saw well-run polling, while more robust procedures for counting and prompt publication of results would have been beneficial.

Election day was overall peaceful, orderly and calm, with polling staff efficiently facilitating voting in polling centres observed by the EU EOM. The counting of the ballots and the tabulation of results

⁸⁷ According to the Section 6(3)(b) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, Magistrate of the first class is a Judicial Magistrate, who shall, in Metropolitan areas, be known as a Metropolitan Magistrate.

were generally well organised, in the presence of candidates' agents, but at times lacked procedural safeguards and transparency. The EC gave little information during the election day but released the preliminary results for most constituencies by the following morning.

a. Opening, voting and closing

The opening of polling centres (PC) was without incident and in most observed cases voting started on time or with a short delay, most frequently caused by unpreparedness of the polling staff. Less than a third of the observed PCs had long queues of voters at the time of opening. No major issues were observed in the vicinity of PCs, yet political parties' stands at the entrances of polling centres were often much closer than the distance prescribed by law (400 yards). It was observed that frequently party activists in these stands not only distributed paper slips to voters with their polling location and number on the list, but also canvassed for votes, in breach of the law.

Voting was orderly and professionally managed. In 97 per cent of the 707 PCs observed, the conduct of polling was rated as "good" or "very good", as polling staff were routinely implementing the procedures, including identifying voters, applying indelible ink, and issuing ballot papers. The negative assessments related mostly to voters not always being properly identified by matching their face with the photo on the list and checked for traces of indelible ink. Observers noted that some polling staff in female voting rooms were male, which appeared to make the identification process less comfortable for women who wore face covers. No identification document is required for voting, leaving undue room for potential malpractices.

Secrecy of the ballot was not protected in some five per cent of observations, mostly due to the voting compartment ("secret booth") being inadequate or not used by voters.⁸⁸ This is of concern, particularly since ballot secrecy plays a key role in countering vote-buying and other undue interference with the free expression of voters' will. Use of see-through materials for secret booths and overly small voting rooms jeopardised ballot secrecy, and, in several instances, EU EOM observers saw that CCTV cameras were pointed into voting compartments, potentially violating the secrecy of the vote. Safeguarding vote secrecy also appeared to be more challenging as each voting room is staffed by only three polling personnel (one assistant presiding officer and two polling officers), which leaves no spare capacity to monitor secrecy of voting and the ballot box.

Closing of the polls was orderly, but the procedures were not implemented uniformly. Queues of voters at the end of polling hours were observed in only a few cases and nearly all observed PCs closed on time or with a short delay. The ballot box was promptly sealed in all but three cases. In two thirds of the observations, assistant presiding officers proceeded to prepare a ballot paper account, including counting the counterfoils to establish the number of ballots issued. This was not done, however, in one third of the observations, which indicates insufficient training of polling personnel on the key procedural safeguards of an accountable polling process.

Around one third of all polling personnel were women, yet there were only three per cent female presiding officers in EU EOM observations. About one third of the assistant presiding officers and 22 per cent of ROs encountered were women, as were one fourth of candidates' agents.

The overall transparency and integrity of voting was enhanced by the consistent presence of polling agents of both leading electoral alliances, as well as the unimpeded access of media, as observed by the EU EOM. In almost all observations, polling agents of at least two candidates were present, keeping

⁸⁸ A polling station, commonly referred to as a "polling centre" in Bangladesh, is divided into several voting rooms (also called "polling booths"), each with its own voter list, polling staff and ballot box. The space within the voting room where voters mark their ballots is here referred to as the "voting compartment" (also called "the secret booth").

track of the voters who turned up. Citizen observers were less visible as EU EOM observers came across them in eight per cent of observations. In a few instances, EU EOM observers were asked to reduce their observation time by presiding officers, and one team was not allowed to observe vote count. The Mission was informed that polling agents of several candidates were denied access to or expelled from PCs by presiding officers on election day, which detracted from transparency. Also, citizen observers from the AFED reported that one fifth of their observers were denied access to the vote count.⁸⁹ Considering the pivotal role candidates' agents and observers play in ensuring the credibility and integrity of the polls, the EC should develop rapid reaction mechanisms to prevent such violations on election day, for example hotlines to EC officials and AROs.

Security arrangements on election day were overall adequate to maintaining public order. Approximately 900,000 security personnel were deployed nationwide, including police and auxiliary forces, with additional support from the army. Polling stations were categorised according to risk assessments and reinforced accordingly. On election day, the EU EOM either observed or was informed of more than 60 incidents across half of the districts, including clashes, intimidation of voters and party agents. In most cases, law enforcement responded promptly through arrests, detentions, and summary court proceedings.

a. Counting and tabulation

Counting of ballots was conducted efficiently overall, but it often lacked the necessary sequencing and procedural order. The number of votes cast was not established before the ballot boxes were opened in 29 of the 78 EU EOM observations, resulting in the lack of verification of the number of ballots, which is an important and advisable first step in the counting process. After all ballot boxes from all voting rooms of the polling centre were mixed together, polling staff proceeded with the count, at times without a clear assignment of tasks and effective supervision.

When counting large numbers of ballot papers, accuracy and transparency could be better served if the votes are first sorted by candidate (or referendum option), and then each candidate pile is counted by one or more officer and then re-checked. Such procedures were not prescribed by the EC, thus sorting and counting were carried out simultaneously, which detracted from transparency and made the process more difficult to follow for the polling agents and observers. In one fifth of the EU EOM observations, votes counted and bundled by one counter were not re-checked by another. These factors led to EU EOM observers' doubt in the accuracy of the ballot count in some of the observations. Overall conduct of the count was assessed as "bad" in 10 cases out of 78, indicating that counting procedures would benefit from a review to strengthen transparency and integrity safeguards, in line with international standards.⁹⁰

Result statements of PCs were prepared without difficulty, but their content does not provide for cross-checking all relevant information. After completion of the count, presiding officers are required to fill in a statement (Form 16), which includes the total numbers of valid and invalid votes, but not the numbers of ballot papers received by the PC and issued to voters. The latter information is only provided separately through ballot paper accounts, which makes a subsequent audit of the ballot paper trail rather complicated. In the positive, polling agents and observers had a clear view of the process

⁸⁹ AFED, Election Day Observation Preliminary Statement, 13 February 2026, p. 3.

⁹⁰ In its GC No. 25 (1996) to the IICPR, the UN HRC has emphasised the importance of independent scrutiny of the voting and counting process and the electors' confidence in the security of the ballot and the counting of the votes (see para. 20). See also art. 4(2) of the IPU Declaration on Criteria for Free and Fair Elections (1994), urging states to ensure the integrity of the process for counting votes.

in nearly all EU EOM observations and signed the statement of PC results in all but three cases, signalling acceptance of the outcome.

Recommendation: *Review the ballot counting procedures and strengthen integrity safeguards, ensuring transparency and accuracy, including by verification of the number of votes cast, sorting of votes before counting, doublechecking during the counting process, and reconciliation of the ballot paper totals.*

Results' tabulation was transparent in all but three of the Mission's 120 observations. Polling agents and observers were able to follow PC results entry. The EU EOM observed tabulation of results at the sub-district level by assistant returning officers, as well as at the district level by ROs. The process included entry of PC voting results delivered in hard copy into the EC's results management system by ARO operators, as well as the scanning of Form 16. Observers noted that some tabulation centres made arrangements for more transparent data entry, projecting progress on screens. There were also instances when results tabulation centres were overcrowded, which negatively affected organisation.

b. Publication of results

Regular updates on constituency results were released by ROs, which helped build public confidence in the accuracy of the results, but publication of nation-wide results data by the EC is not required by law. Preliminary election results were announced by most ROs on election night, after information from all PCs in the constituency and postal vote counts were entered in the EC's results management system. The announced results were quickly reported in the media. The EC Secretariat began releasing preliminary results by constituency in the early hours of 13 February, when the winners were already declared by ROs. The release was carried out by way of verbal announcements, followed by posting of a hard copy on the specially mounted large notice board.

Preliminary results were not published online, reducing access to information of public interest. On 13 February, the EC issued an official gazette with the names of winners in each constituency, without the results data. This expeditious publication was criticised by JeI and several other candidates, who argued that the official consolidation of voting results in some closely contested constituencies was formalistic and no requests for re-counting of ballots were granted by ROs. The lack of legal requirements to publish consolidated results data from all constituencies undermines transparency, leaving room for rumours to spread, including online. The EC published final results on its website only on 1 March, disaggregated by polling centre.

Priority recommendation: *Ensure consistent arrangements for maintaining transparency during the tabulation of votes at the sub-district and district levels, such as projection of data entry on screens, as well as prompt publication of complete preliminary and final election results, including online.*

The turnout was announced by the EC at 59.44 per cent on 13 February. During election day, the Commission made few public statements, and neither of its turnout announcements covered all polling centres, indicating difficulties with timely collection of data from the entire country. Turnout for the referendum was announced at 60.26 percent on 13 February; this figure was revised to 60.19 per cent on 25 February.

XIX. RESULTS AND POST-ELECTION ENVIRONMENT

Broad acceptance of the results enabled an orderly transition, with a limited number of legal challenges.

a. Election and referendum results

The elections resulted in a nine-party parliament, while the referendum mandated the newly elected legislature to proceed with the implementation of the July National Charter. The Charter was approved with 68.59 per cent of valid votes cast in favour.

The BNP-led alliance won 211 seats, a comfortable two-thirds majority sufficient for undertaking constitutional reform. The JeI-led alliance secured 77 seats. Within the BNP-led alliance, the BNP won 208 seats, while *GOP*, *Ganosanhati Andolan (GSA)* and *Bangladesh Jatiya Party* won one seat each. In the JeI-led alliance, JeI secured 68 seats, the NCP six, *Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis* two, and *Khelafat Majlis* one.⁹¹ Outside the two coalitions, only one party, IAB, received one mandate. Seven independently nominated candidates, all previously affiliated with the BNP, were also elected. The average margin of victory between winners and runners-up was some 20 percentage points; however, in approximately one-fifth of the constituencies, the margin was less than five percentage points, including nine constituencies where it was less than one percentage point (a difference of a few thousand votes), highlighting that a notable number of races were closely contested. At the other end of the spectrum, in eight constituencies, the margin of victory exceeded 60 percentage points.

All contesting political parties publicly accepted the overall outcome of the elections; however, representatives of JeI and NCP raised concerns about irregularities during vote counting and tabulation, alleging alterations to results sheets and pressure on party agents to sign result protocols, and indicated their intention to challenge some constituency results.

In the immediate aftermath of the elections, social media was used to cast doubts on the fairness of the electoral process. The EU EOM social media monitoring identified two online networks that amplified allegations of fraud. One, centred around a certain influencer, comprising approximately 30 pages with more than three million combined followers, shifted from voter mobilisation in favour of JeI to allegations of fraud and calls for protests in Dhaka once counting began; however, these did not result in significant protests. A second network of approximately 90 AL-affiliated pages disseminated messages of rejection of the results, including claims of empty polling stations, ballots cast before polls opened, violence at voting centres and assertions that the election lacked legitimacy.

In two constituencies, repeat elections will be held following the publication of a new schedule by the EC: in Sherpur-3, polling was postponed following the death of a candidate, while in Bogura-6, the elected candidate, Tarique Rahman, vacated the seat after being elected in another constituency. On 24 February, the EC set 9 April as the date for elections in both constituencies.

b. Petitions against the results

Only candidates who contested the specific election can file petitions challenging the results. Any such petition must name as respondents all other contesting candidates in that constituency, as well as any candidate accused of corrupt or illegal practices. The High Court Division has original jurisdiction over these disputes and may grant several forms of relief: declaring the returned candidate's election void; declaring the election in that constituency void while confirming the petitioner (or another candidate) was duly elected; or declaring the entire election void.

Petitions must be filed within 45 days of the results' publication in the Gazette. The RPO requires that election petitions be disposed of expeditiously, directing the High Court to strive to conclude the trial within six months of the day of filing. Appeals from the High Court may be lodged with the Appellate Division (AD) of the Supreme Court within 30 days of judgment, but there is no legal deadline for the

⁹¹ See also Annex I *Election results*.

AD to issue its decision. Parliamentary elections can be annulled if non-compliance with the RPO or its associated rules materially affected the result or if corrupt or illegal practices were widespread. An individual candidate's election can be voided for reasons such as invalid nomination, disqualification, securing victory through corrupt or illegal practices, exceeding campaign spending limits, or corrupt or illegal acts committed by the candidate or any other person acting with their knowledge or connivance. Notably, the last ground is very broad as it does not require proof that the irregularities materially affected the result of the election. While the legal framework provides a clear avenue for judicial redress, the non-binding six-month timeline for concluding trials at the High Court Division and the absence of any deadline for Appellate Division decisions, risk undermining the timely resolution of inherently time-sensitive election disputes.

On 13 February, JeI filed 32 requests for recounts, but as results had already been declared at constituency level, the requests were denied.⁹² JeI then submitted an application to the Chief Election Commissioner, seeking the cancellation of results in 32 constituencies, alleging counting irregularities in favour of the BNP, such as uncounted valid ballots, unlawful rejection of valid votes, and widespread inconsistencies and arithmetic errors. JeI argued that many races were decided by narrow margins, so the issues may have affected the outcomes. The absence in the RPO of a requirement to publish in the Gazette the results following completion of any recounts at constituency level, leaves judicial recourse as the only avenue for redress, despite its particularly lengthy timelines.

Until the departure of the EU EOM on 3 March, four JeI candidates filed petitions to the High Court Division, challenging the results in their constituencies and seeking to void the returned candidates' elections and have the petitioners declared duly elected. Separately, a BNP candidate filed a petition against a JeI winner, alleging multiple irregularities during the campaign as well as during voting and counting. In addition, until the court's vacation that started on 13 March, 20 petitions requesting recounts were filed before the High Court Division.

c. Post-election developments

The transfer of power from the IG to the newly elected political leadership proceeded swiftly and in an orderly manner. On 17 February, 296 elected members of parliament took the parliamentary oath.⁹³ On the same day, Prime Minister Tarique Rahman (BNP) and members of the new cabinet, consisting of 25 ministers and 24 state ministers, were sworn in. Most ministerial positions were assigned to the BNP; one post went each to the GOP and the GSA, and three to non-party technocrats. In its initial public messaging, the government identified restoring law and order and curbing corruption as its main priorities, while also emphasising economic stability.

Shortly after the announcement of the parliamentary results, the EC stated that the election to the 50 reserved women's seats would be held in the coming weeks, and indicated that, on the basis of the results, BNP would receive 35 seats, JeI 11 and the NCP 1, with the remaining three to be distributed among independent MPs and smaller parties if they formed alliances. By mid-March, however, the process had not been completed, while the parliament had held sittings without the women members for the reserved seats. In March, the Women's Political Rights Forum renewed calls for direct elections to the reserved seats in future, arguing that the party-controlled nomination process limits the independence of the women selected for those seats.

The July National Charter referendum envisaged the establishment of a Constitution Reform Council composed of all members of parliament to oversee its implementation. On 18 February, the EC

⁹² A recount can be ordered by the RO if a challenge in writing has been submitted by a contesting candidate/ or their agent and the RO is satisfied about the reasonableness of the challenge, or is directed to do a recount by the EC.

⁹³ In Chattogram-2 and 4, publication of the results was withheld pending court decision on candidate registration.

administered a separate oath for membership of the Council. While JeI and NCP MPs took the additional oath, BNP MPs declined to do so, arguing that the Council should first be incorporated into the Constitution. By mid-March the Council had not been convened.

The post-election security environment remained stable, with few localised incidents of political violence. In the week after election day, the EU EOM received and corroborated reports of some 56 individual post-election incidents involving clashes and attacks, primarily affecting opposition supporters and members of minority communities. The new government publicly condemned these incidents and pledged action in response.

XX. RECOMMENDATIONS

NO.	FR page #	CONTEXT	RECOMMENDATION	SUGGESTED CHANGE IN LEGAL FRAMEWORK	RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTION	RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL PRINCIPLE / COMMITMENT
LEGAL FRAMEWORK						
1	12	While relatively comprehensive and broadly aligned with international standards, the legal framework remains fragmented across multiple laws and regulations that have been amended incrementally over time. Recent reform efforts (...) were pursued in parallel without a unified legal roadmap or sequencing framework and largely omitted to address shortcomings and ambiguities that permitted divergent interpretations during the 2026 elections, such as the absence of detailed rules on recounts ordered by ROs, uncertainty as to when the renunciation of dual citizenship takes legal effect; inadequate provisions on campaign finance transparency; and candidate disqualification grounds that are not fully consistent with international standards.	PRIORITY Revise the legal framework governing parliamentary elections to address inconsistencies and loopholes, reduce fragmentation, strengthen legal certainty, and ensure closer alignment with international standards for democratic elections.	Representation of the People Order, 1972	Parliament	Right and opportunity to participate in public affairs and hold office Right to stand ICCPR article 25: "Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity... without unreasonable restriction... to be elected". GC 20 to CCPR, para. 4: "Any conditions which apply to the exercise of the rights protected by article 25 should be based on objective and reasonable criteria" and "The exercise of these rights by citizens may not be suspended or excluded except on grounds which are established by law and which are objective and reasonable."
ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION						
2	14	The EC appointed ROs primarily from the ranks of deputy commissioners, who are district executive chiefs, while assistant ROs	Include criteria of impartiality and political neutrality for returning officers and assistant ROs in the EC rules; appoint ROs who enjoy	No legal change is required	Election Commission	State must take the necessary steps to give effect to rights GC 25 to CCPR, para. 20: "An independent electoral authority should

NO.	FR page #	CONTEXT	RECOMMENDATION	SUGGESTED CHANGE IN LEGAL FRAMEWORK	RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTION	RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL PRINCIPLE / COMMITMENT
		<p>were senior <i>upazila</i> officials, all government appointees. Even considering the non-partisan nature of the interim government, many EU EOM interlocutors expressed doubts that executive officials possess the requisite degree of neutrality and impartiality to perform RO the functions. The EC has discretion over the choice of ROs, which allows selection of officials who are generally perceived to be impartial, such as EC officers or judges. This course of action was also advised by the Electoral Reform Commission and the National Elections (2014, 2018, 2024) Inquiry Commission.</p>	<p>the requisite guarantees and perception of impartiality and political neutrality, such as officers of the Election Commission and judges.</p>			<p><i>be established to supervise the electoral process and to ensure that it is conducted fairly, impartially and in accordance with established laws which are compatible with the Covenant.</i></p> <p>Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Declaration on Criteria for Free and Fair Elections, art. 4(1): “<i>States should take the necessary policy and institutional steps to ensure the progressive achievement and consolidation of democratic goals, including through the establishment of a neutral, impartial or balanced mechanism for the management of elections.</i>”</p>
3	16	<p>The overall success of the postal voting operation strengthened the case for potential extension of this option to other categories of voters who are unable to reach their assigned polling centres on election day. At the same time, postal voting retains the risks associated with casting ballots in an uncontrolled environment, including possible vote-buying and other forms of undue influence. These risks warrant retention of the current integrity safeguards, namely the voter’s declaration, as well as</p>	<p>PRIORITY Consider extending eligibility for postal voting to other categories of voters in Bangladesh who are unable to cast their ballot in person on election day, such as homebound voters and persons with disabilities, internally displaced persons, migrant labourers and students, while retaining existing integrity safeguards and exploring additional ones. Additional voting arrangements, such as</p>	<p>Amendments to Representation of the People Order, 1972 and/or new legislation</p>	<p>Parliament, Election Commission</p>	<p>State must take the necessary steps to give effect to rights</p> <p>GC 25 to CCPR, para. 11: “<i>States must take effective measures to ensure that all persons entitled to vote are able to exercise that right.</i>”</p>

NO.	FR page #	CONTEXT	RECOMMENDATION	SUGGESTED CHANGE IN LEGAL FRAMEWORK	RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTION	RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL PRINCIPLE / COMMITMENT
		introducing additional safeguards and other voting arrangements, suitable for specific groups of voters, such as early voting or mobile polling stations.	early voting, suitable for enfranchising other categories of voters could also be introduced.			
4	16	The referendum campaign highlighted the importance of cultivating better understanding of political and electoral processes among the electorate, including young voters and marginalised communities. Such programmes should be carried out also between electoral cycles and utilise opportunities for co-operation with educational and training institutions. Civil society organisations engaged in civic and voter education have expressed interest in partnerships with the EC, while the EC's Electoral Training Institute lacks resources for ongoing voter education activities.	Support voter and civic education programmes between electoral cycles, covering the electoral system, the role of political parties and elected representatives, and particularly the need for women's participation in political and public life; encourage Election Commission partnerships with educational institutions and civil society organisations.	No legal change is required	Election Commission	<p>State must take the necessary steps to give effect to rights</p> <p>GC 25 to CCPR, para. 11: “<i>Voter education and registration campaigns are necessary to ensure the effective exercise of article 25 rights by an informed community.</i>”</p> <p>IPU, Declaration on Criteria for Free and Fair Elections, art. 4(1): “<i>States should [...] initiate or facilitate national programmes of civic education, to ensure that the population are familiar with election procedures and issues.</i>”</p>
REGISTRATION OF CANDIDATES AND POLITICAL PARTIES						
5	18	Excessively strict political party registration requirements, including extensive criteria regarding district and subdistrict organisational structures, make it difficult for new political movements to enter national politics. This was reflected in a high rejection rate ahead of these elections, with only eight of 143 applicant parties registered by the EC	Revise the political party registration requirements to lower the threshold of territorial presence and membership requirements, while maintaining reasonable safeguards to prevent frivolous registrations.	Amend the Representation of the People Order, 1972, and the Political Party Registration Act, 2020	Parliament	<p>Freedom of Association</p> <p>ICCPR, art. 22: “<i>No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right [to freedom of association] other than those which [...] are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order [...], the protection of public health or morals or the</i></p>

NO.	FR page #	CONTEXT	RECOMMENDATION	SUGGESTED CHANGE IN LEGAL FRAMEWORK	RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTION	RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL PRINCIPLE / COMMITMENT
		in time to contest.				<i>protection of the rights and freedoms of others.”</i>
6	19	The law requires political parties to ensure democratic candidate selection based on nominations from grassroots structures; however, this was not effectively enforced, and nominations were often decided by senior party leaders, limiting opportunities for marginalised groups, women and youth. It also contributed to internal tensions. Some unsuccessful nominees contested as independents, at times contributing to campaign-related violent incidents.	Strengthen internal party democracy through transparent and inclusive candidate nomination process with meaningful participation of lower-level party structures, women and youth, and in line with existing legal provisions.	No legal change is required	Political parties, Election Commission	<p>State must take the necessary steps to give effect to rights</p> <p>GC 25 to CCPR, para. 20: <i>“An independent electoral authority must [...] supervise the electoral process and ensure that it is conducted fairly [...] in accordance with established laws.”</i></p> <p>GC 31 to CCPR, para. 7: <i>“States Parties adopt legislative, judicial, administrative, educative and other appropriate measures in order to fulfil their legal obligations.”</i></p>
CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENT						
7	21	Campaign rules were overly detailed, at times unclear, and not consistently enforced, which led some stakeholders to question the equal treatment of contestants. Numerous contestants violated campaign rules, but these violations were not consistently addressed by the competent authorities, contributing to perceptions of impunity and bias.	Establish a campaign regulation framework that is unambiguous, avoids unnecessary restrictions and is consistently enforced by adequately resourced oversight bodies.	Amend the Representation of the People Order, 1972, and the Code of Conduct of Political Parties and Candidates 2025	Parliament, Election Commission	<p>Rule of Law</p> <p>ICCPR, art. 22: <i>“All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law.”</i></p> <p>GC 25 to CCPR, para. 25: <i>“a law must be formulated with sufficient precision to enable an individual to regulate his or her conduct accordingly”.</i></p>

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CAMPAIGN FINANCE						
8	23	The RPO does not require financial statements by contestants to be audited before the submission or to be verified by the EC, neither does it require any publication by the EC of compliance findings and audit summaries, including identified breaches and follow-up actions. While the RPO provides for publication of financial reports on the EC website, it sets no deadline and does not require the EC to publish any assessment of the reports.	<p>PRIORITY</p> <p>Review and strengthen campaign finance provisions to ensure that spending limits and reporting obligations are realistic, enforceable and subject to effective verification and oversight. The RPO could require candidates and political parties to submit audited election expenditure accounts in a standardised format, provide for systematic controls by the Election Commission during and after the campaign, and set clear deadlines for the publication of financial reports.</p>	Amend the Representation of the People Order, 1972	Parliament	<p>Genuine elections that reflect the free expression of the will of voters</p> <p>Prevention of corruption/Fairness in the election campaign</p> <p>Transparency</p> <p>GC 25 to CCPR, para.19: <i>“Reasonable limitations on campaign expenditure may be justified where this is necessary to ensure that the free choice of voters is not undermined or the democratic process distorted by the disproportionate expenditure on behalf of any candidate or party.”</i></p> <p>UNCAC article 7.3: <i>“Each State Party shall also consider taking appropriate legislative and administrative measures, consistent with the objectives of this Convention and in accordance with the fundamental principles of its domestic law, to enhance transparency in the funding of candidatures for elected public office and, where applicable, the funding of political parties.”</i></p>
MEDIA						
9	24	During the 2024 uprising and in the run-up to the elections several attacks	Establish legal and operational framework to effectively protect journalists and media houses from	Amend the Penal Code 1860,	Parliament, Government,	Freedom of expression and opinion ICCPR, art. 19: <i>“Everyone has the</i>

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		<p>against journalists were recorded. Attacks against journalists have a chilling effect not only on the individual victim, but on the entire media industry. Impunity for crimes against media professionals exacerbates the problem, fosters self-censorship and discourages professional reporting. Crimes against journalists should be prevented, investigated and adjudicated by establishing clear institutional responsibilities and coordination mechanism among law enforcement agencies, including a rapid response system, while including gender-sensitive approaches.</p>	<p>physical and digital harassment and attacks, including clear procedures for police and other law enforcement agencies to promptly investigate and prosecute such acts of violence against media professionals in a timely manner.</p>	<p>Cybersecurity Ordinance 2025, Official Secrets Act 1923, Press Council Act 1974, Bangladesh Telecommunication Act 2001</p>	<p>Police</p>	<p><i>right to freedom of opinion and expression”</i> GC 34 to CCPR, para 19 (3)“23. <i>States parties should put in place effective measures to protect against attacks aimed at silencing those exercising their right to freedom of expression [...] All such attacks should be vigorously investigated in a timely fashion, and the perpetrators prosecuted, and the victims, or, in the case of killings, their representatives, be in receipt of appropriate forms of redress.”</i></p>
10	25	<p>The current media regulatory and oversight system is fragmented, with the MoIB, BTRC and Bangladesh Press Council each having a limited authority, independence and capacity. Such fragmentation not only leads to regulatory incoherence but also increases media vulnerability and allows for arbitrary application of rules. International standards support establishment of an independent regulatory authority with a clear mandate, enforcement capacity and financial autonomy.</p>	<p>Establish an independent media regulator, a National Media Commission, tasked with overseeing all types of media (broadcast, print and online media), and select its commissioners through a competitive, transparent and merit-based process.</p>	<p>Amend the Press Council Act 1974, and the Bangladesh Telecommunication Act 2001</p>	<p>Parliament, Government</p>	<p>Freedom of expression and opinion ICCPR Article 19: “<i>Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference. 2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers [...].”</i> UN, OSCE, OAS, ACHPR Joint statement on the Media and Elections, 15 May 2009: “<i>States should put in place a range of measures [...] to create an</i></p>

NO.	FR page #	CONTEXT	RECOMMENDATION	SUGGESTED CHANGE IN LEGAL FRAMEWORK	RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTION	RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL PRINCIPLE / COMMITMENT
						<i>environment in which a pluralistic media sector can flourish.</i>
SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL RIGHTS						
11	31	The online environment was polluted with coordinated spread of disinformation, malicious AI-generated content and organised hate speech targeting minorities. Addressing this phenomenon requires enhanced capacity and cross-sector collaboration, including nationwide media literacy and fact-checking initiatives. Currently, institutions lack the mandate, resources, and technical capacity to build public resilience at scale, including during elections.	Protect freedom of expression online by establishing an independent, civilian-led strategic communications unit comprising digital safety specialists, fact-checkers, and civil society representatives to elaborate a comprehensive strategy to strengthen institutional resilience against information pollution and coordinated disinformation. Consider beneficial synergies between government institutions, universities and dedicated CSOs.	No legal change required	Parliament, Government, Academia, CSOs	<p>Freedom of expression and opinion ICCPR, Art. 19: <i>“Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression [...]”</i> GC 25 to CCPR, para 19: <i>“Voters should be able to form opinions independently, free of violence or threat of violence, compulsion, inducement or manipulative interference of any kind.”</i> Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and "Fake News", Disinformation and Propaganda, UN/OSCE/OAS/ACHPR Special Rapporteurs, 2017. <i>“All stakeholders – including intermediaries, media outlets, civil society and academia – should be supported in developing participatory and transparent initiatives for creating a better understanding of the impact of disinformation and propaganda .”</i></p>
12	29	Bangladesh's regulatory collaboration with social media platforms currently relies on takedown orders. This mechanism proved to have a limited impact on combating harmful content	PRIORITY <i>Promote a safer and more transparent digital space by amending the Cyber Security</i>	Amend the Cyber Security Ordinance 2025	Parliament, National Cyber Security Agency	<p>Freedom of expression and opinion GC 34 to CCPR, para 7: <i>“The obligation to respect freedoms of opinion and expression is binding on</i></p>

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		<p>during the elections. Platforms' responses were inconsistent and largely reactive. Takedown orders alone do not create a structural incentive for social media platforms to invest in safety measures, local partnerships, or transparency reports.</p>	<p>Ordinance to establish binding legal obligations for social media platforms, aimed at safeguarding informational and electoral integrity. Those obligations may encompass defined collaboration protocols, special measures around elections, algorithmic transparency, and regular reporting on content moderation activities.</p>			<p><i>every State party as a whole. The obligation also requires States parties to ensure that persons are protected from any acts by private persons or entities that would impair the enjoyment of the freedoms of opinion [...]."</i></p> <p>Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and "Fake News", Disinformation and Propaganda, UN/OSCE/OAS/ACHPR Special Rapporteurs, 2017. <i>"Intermediaries should support the research and development of appropriate technological solutions to disinformation and propaganda which users may apply on a voluntary basis. They should cooperate with initiatives that offer fact-checking services to users and review their advertising models to ensure that they do not adversely impact diversity of opinions and ideas."</i></p>
PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN						
13	32	<p>Women accounted for just under four per cent of total candidates for the 300 seats in the direct elections. Major parties nominated very few women, with ten from BNP, two from NCP, and none from JeI or from another 30 of the 51 contesting parties. Seven women</p>	<p>PRIORITY</p> <p>Amend the RPO to include strict monitoring and enforcement measures for implementation of Article 90B(1)(b)(ii), ensuring that all political parties achieve the</p>	<p>Amendment the Representation of the People Order, 1972</p>	<p>Parliament</p>	<p>Women's participation in public affairs / Equality between men and women.</p> <p>CEDAW Article 4.1: <i>"Adoption by State Parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de</i></p>

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		<p>were elected in the direct election, amounting overall to just 2.3 per cent of the 300 seats. The RPO requires that a political party must adopt the goal of reserving at least 33 per cent of all committee positions for women, including within the central committee, and must progressively achieve this goal by 2030. This measure has excellent potential to empower women within political parties, but the EC has not undertaken monitoring and enforcement action in relation to implementation.</p>	<p>goal of 33 per cent women as members of all internal party committees by 2030; and consider requiring that all political parties nominate at least one-third women candidates for national and local elections.</p>			<p><i>facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discriminatory.</i></p> <p>GC 40 to CEDAW: 45 “The Committee recommends that States parties: 1(a) <i>Adopt or strengthen parity laws, for example, by alternating between women and men candidates in elections, via vertical and horizontal parity lists, and rejecting non-compliant lists;</i> (b) <i>Conduct awareness-raising to reject excuses that not enough women are available or qualified to stand</i>”</p>
PARTICIPATION OF MINORITY GROUPS						
14	35	<p>Hindus form around eight per cent of the population, while Buddhists, Christians and others are less than one per cent. Indigenous peoples are about one per cent of the population. All these groups are significantly under-represented in parliament, having overall secured only four seats (just over one per cent) of the total 300 directly elected seats, down from around six per cent in the last parliament. There are no reserved seats for minorities in parliament.</p>	<p>In light of the potential establishment of an upper house of parliament, consider introduction of a requirement for political parties (passing a reasonable threshold of seats) to nominate people from religious and ethnic minorities among their proportional representation in the upper house.</p>	<p>For insertion in future law on an upper house</p>	<p>Parliament</p>	<p>Right to participate in public affairs and hold office/ freedom from discrimination</p> <p>ICCPR, Art 26: “<i>All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall [...] guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race</i>”</p> <p>CERD, Article 5: “[...]States Parties undertake to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of</p>

NO.	FR page #	CONTEXT	RECOMMENDATION	SUGGESTED CHANGE IN LEGAL FRAMEWORK	RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTION	RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL PRINCIPLE / COMMITMENT
						<i>everyone, [...] to equality before the law, notably (c) Political rights, in particular the right to participate in elections – to vote and to stand for election – on the basis of universal and equal suffrage [...]</i>
PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES						
15	36	Persons with disabilities could exercise their right to vote but were denied the dignity and autonomy due to them under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Nobody from the disability community has been elected to parliament. Bangladesh is a party to the CRPD since 2007, and the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act was adopted in 2013. While this law is important, there is an absence, in both the Constitution and in legislation, of measures that explicitly prohibit discrimination on the grounds of disability.	In light of the potential establishment of an upper house of parliament, consider introduction of a requirement for political parties (passing a reasonable threshold of seats) to nominate persons with disabilities among their proportional representation in the upper house.	For insertion in future law on an upper house	Parliament	<p>Right and opportunity to participate in public affairs and hold office/freedom from discrimination</p> <p>Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Article 29 <i>“States Parties shall guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others, and shall undertake to:</i></p> <p><i>(a) Ensure that persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others, directly or through freely chosen representatives, including the right and opportunity for persons with disabilities to vote and be elected...”</i></p>

NO.	FR page #	CONTEXT	RECOMMENDATION	SUGGESTED CHANGE IN LEGAL FRAMEWORK	RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTION	RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL PRINCIPLE / COMMITMENT
ELECTORAL JUSTICE						
16	38	Although the absence of statutory deadlines for filing and adjudicating petitions and appeals created uncertainty for electoral contestants, the EC and voters alike, both the HCD and the Appellate Division largely upheld the EC’s decisions, emphasising that post-election tribunals constitute the appropriate forum for disputes concerning candidate disqualification. While the legal framework provides a clear avenue for judicial redress, the non-binding six-month timeline for concluding trials at the High Court Division and the absence of any deadline for Appellate Division decisions, risk undermining the timely resolution of inherently time-sensitive election disputes.	To safeguard the right to an effective remedy, the RPO to be amended to introduce expeditious and realistic deadlines for the adjudication of nomination-related petitions to ensure resolution before the start of the campaign and, in any event, before election day; expeditious and mandatory time limits should also be established for decisions on post-election petitions.	Amend the Representation of the People Order, 1972	Parliament	<p>Right to an Effective Remedy</p> <p>ICCPR, art. 2(3)(a): “<i>To ensure that any person whose rights or freedoms as herein recognized are violated shall have an effective remedy, notwithstanding that the violation has been committed by persons acting in an official capacity.</i>”</p>
17	38	Despite their broad mandate, the EEACs faced significant financial and logistical constraints. Their reliance on ROs and the police for transport limited their ability to conduct independent field visits, as required, and at times undermined their effectiveness. More generally, dependence on government allocations	Allocate adequate resources for effective functioning of the Election Enquiry and Adjudication Committees (EEACs), raising public awareness of the complaint mechanisms, and making all complaint decisions available in a timely manner to enhance transparency, consistency, and	No legal change required	Election Commission, Supreme Court	<p>Right to an Effective Remedy</p> <p>Access to Information</p> <p>ICCPR, art. 2(3)(a): “<i>To ensure that any person whose rights or freedoms as herein recognized are violated shall have an effective remedy, notwithstanding that the violation has been committed by persons acting in</i></p>

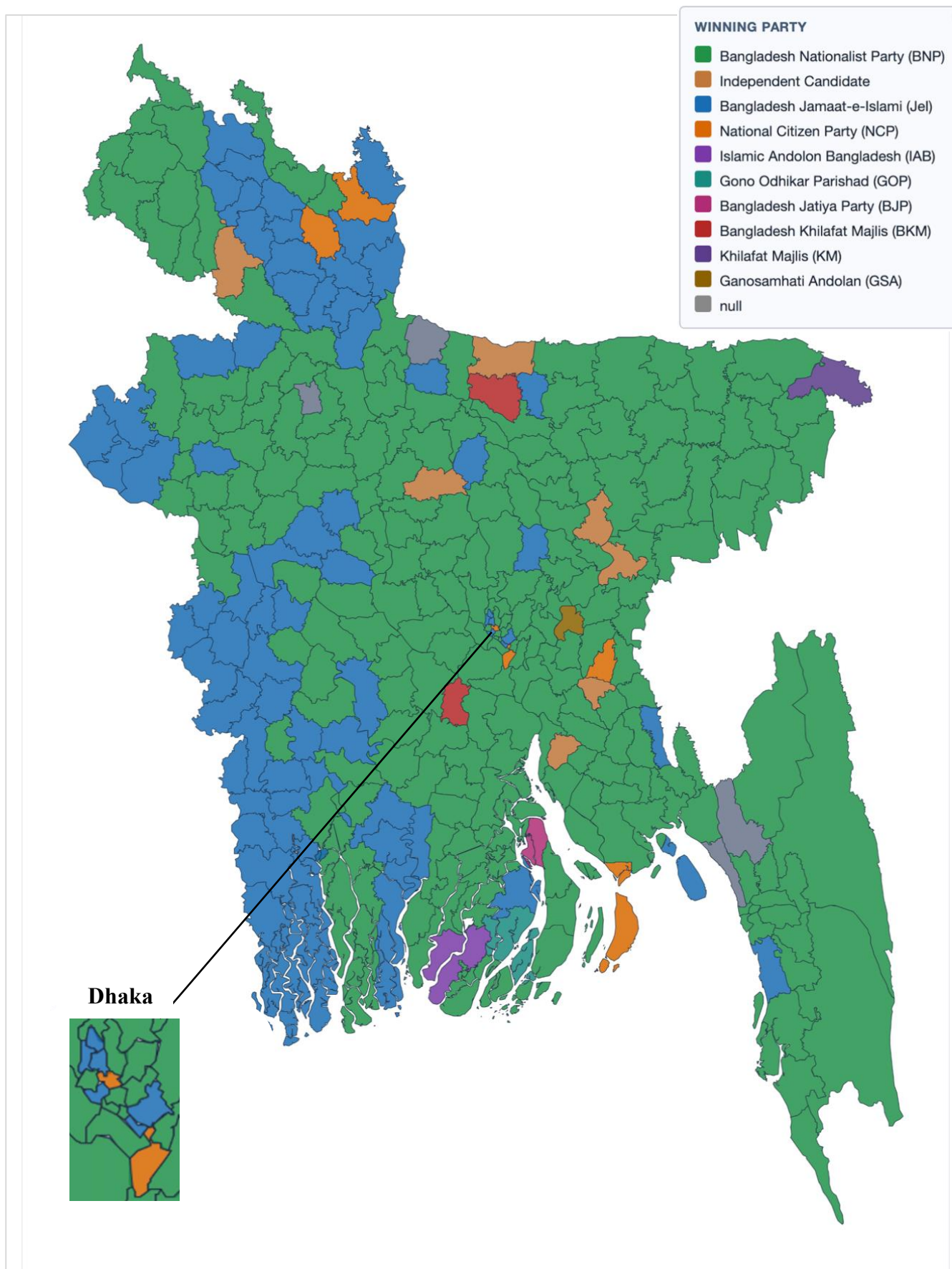
NO.	FR page #	CONTEXT	RECOMMENDATION	SUGGESTED CHANGE IN LEGAL FRAMEWORK	RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTION	RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL PRINCIPLE / COMMITMENT
		for funding and operational support reduced their capacity to carry out prompt and robust enquiries into alleged violations.	confidence in the process.			<p><i>an official capacity.”</i></p> <p>GC 31 to CCPR, para.15: <i>“to ensure that individuals have accessible and effective remedies [...] Administrative mechanisms are particularly required to give effect to the general obligation to investigate allegations of violations promptly, thoroughly and effectively through independent and impartial bodies.”</i></p> <p>GC 34 to CCPR, para.19: <i>“To give effect to the right of access to information, States parties should proactively put in the public domain Government information of public interest.”</i></p>
VOTING COUNTING AND TABULATION OF RESULTS						
18	41	Counting of ballots was conducted efficiently overall, but it often lacked the necessary sequencing and procedural order. The number of votes cast was often not established before the ballot boxes were opened. Sorting and counting were carried out simultaneously, which detracted from transparency and made the process more difficult to follow for the polling agents and observers. In one fifth of EU EOM observations votes counted and bundled by one counter were not re-	Review the ballot counting procedures and strengthen integrity safeguards, ensuring transparency and accuracy, including by verification of the number of votes cast, sorting of votes before counting, doublechecking during the counting process, and reconciliation of the ballot paper totals.	No legal change is required EC instructions to election personnel need to be reviewed	Election Commission	<p>State must take the necessary steps to give effect to rights</p> <p>GC 25 to CCPR, para. 20: <i>“There should be independent scrutiny of the voting and counting process [...] so that electors have confidence in the security of the ballot and the counting of the votes.”</i></p> <p>IPU, Declaration on Criteria for Free and Fair Elections, art. 4(6): <i>“State authorities should ensure that the ballot is conducted so as to avoid</i></p>

NO.	FR page #	CONTEXT	RECOMMENDATION	SUGGESTED CHANGE IN LEGAL FRAMEWORK	RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTION	RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL PRINCIPLE / COMMITMENT
		checked by another. These factors led EU EOM observers to doubt the accuracy of the ballot count in one fifth of observations.				<i>fraud or other illegality, that the security and the integrity of the process is maintained, and that ballot counting is undertaken by trained personnel, subject to monitoring and/or impartial verification.”</i>
19	41	Some tabulation centres made arrangements for more transparent data entry than others, projecting progress on screens. Regular updates on constituency results were released by ROs, but publication of nation-wide results data by the EC is not required by law. Preliminary election results were announced by most ROs on election night and quickly reported in the media. The EC began announcements of results when the winners were already declared by ROs, followed by posting of a hard copy on a notice board. Preliminary results were not published online. On 13 February, the EC issued an official gazette with the names of winners in each constituency, without results data. The lack of published results data from all constituencies by EC undermined transparency.	PRIORITY <i>Ensure consistent arrangements for maintaining transparency during the tabulation of votes at the sub-district and district levels, such as projection of data entry on screens, as well as prompt publication of complete preliminary and final election results, including online.</i>	No legal change is required; RPO can be amended to introduce more specific EC duties	Election Commission	State must take the necessary steps to give effect to rights GC 25 to CCPR, para. 20: <i>“There should be independent scrutiny of the voting and counting process [...] so that electors have confidence in the security of the ballot and the counting of the votes.”</i> IPU, Declaration on Criteria for Free and Fair Elections, art. 4(6): <i>“State authorities should ensure that the ballot is conducted so as to avoid fraud or other illegality, that the security and the integrity of the process is maintained, and that ballot counting is undertaken by trained personnel, subject to monitoring and/or impartial verification.”</i>

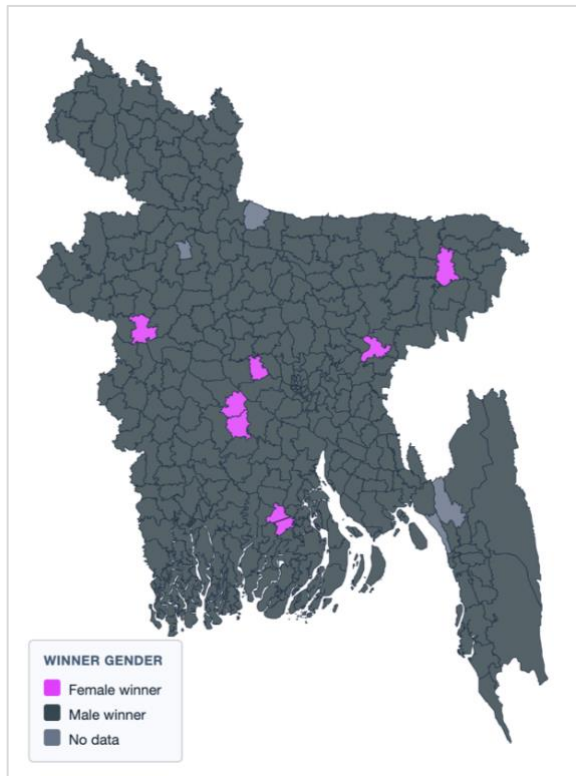
ANNEX 1 – ELECTION RESULTS

ELECTION RESULTS				
POLITICAL PARTY	SEATS WON	PERCENTAGE OF SEATS IN THE PARLIAMENT	TOTAL VOTES CAST ACROSS THE COUNTRY	PERCENTAGE OF ALL VALID VOTES
Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	208	69.33%	37.134.451	50,22%
Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI)	68	22.67%	23.332.119	31,55%
<i>Independent candidates</i>	7	2.33%	4,036,011	5.46%
National Citizen Party (NCP)	6	2.00%	2.232.559	3,02%
Bangladesh Khalefat Majlis (BKM)	2	0.67%	1.528.953	2,07%
Islami Andolon Bangladesh (IAB)	1	0.33%	2.000.798	2,71%
Gono Odhikar Parishad (GOP)	1	0.33%	241.760	0,33%
Khalafat Majlis (KM)	1	0.33%	555.167	0,75%
Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP)	1	0.33%	104.595	0,14%
Ganosamhati Andolan (GSA)	1	0.33%	103.551	0,14%
INVALID VOTES			1,631,200	2.16% (all votes cast)
REFERENDUM RESULTS				
VOTE OPTION	NUMBER OF VOTES		PERCENTAGE OF VALID VOTES	
“Yes” vote	47,225,980		68.26%	
“No” vote	21,960,231		31.74%	
INVALID VOTES	7,435,196		9.70% of all ballots cast	

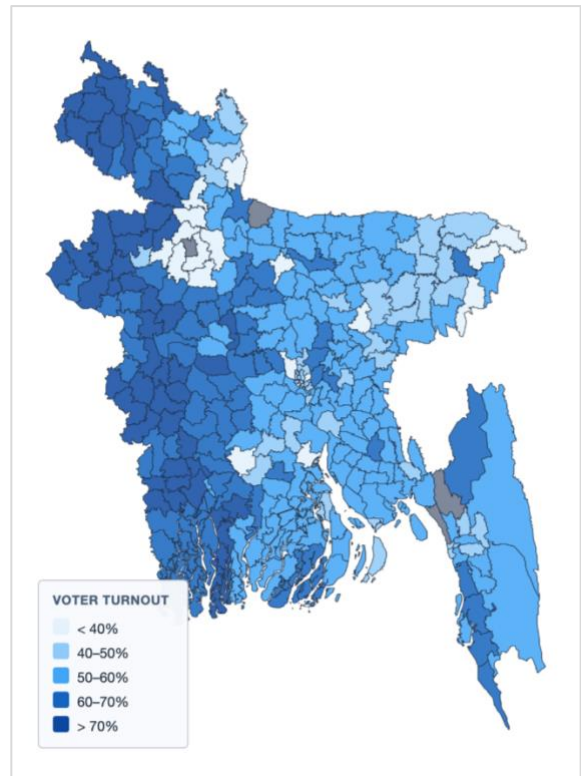
Winning party per constituency



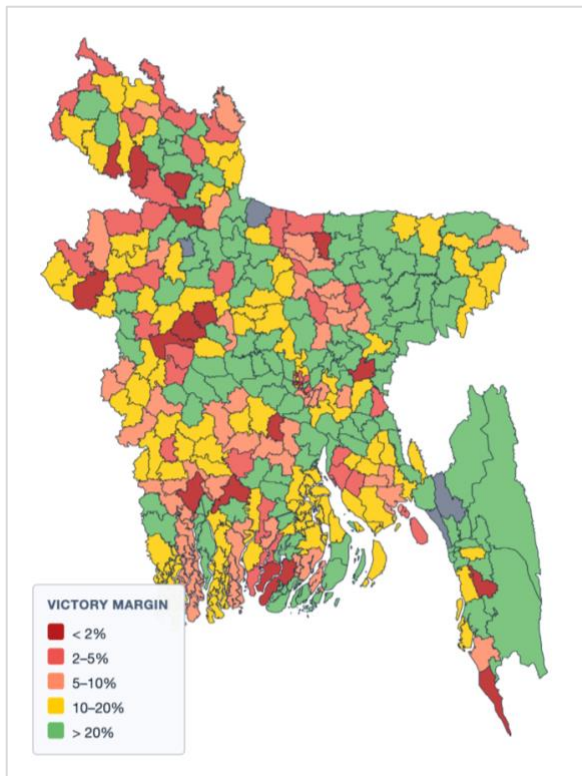
Constituencies with returned women candidates



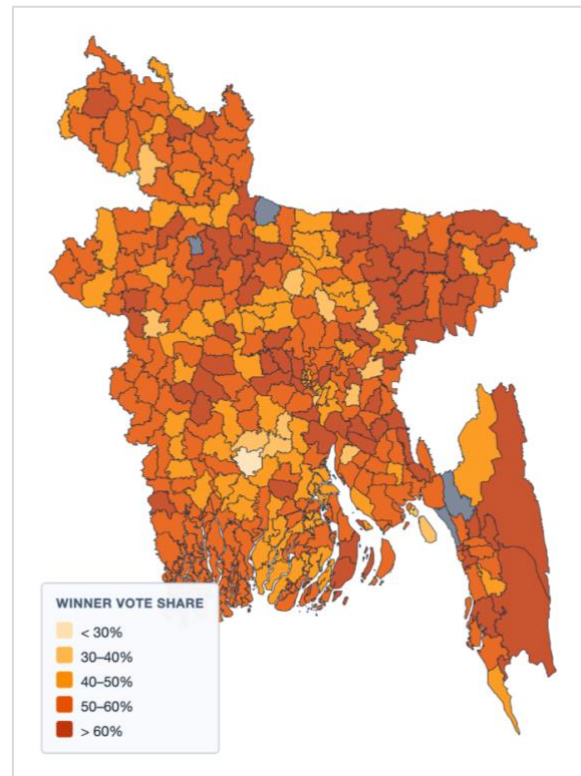
Turnout



Margin of victory per constituency



Vote share of winning candidates



ANNEX 2 – MEDIA MONITORING RESULTS

The EU EOM monitored a sample of national broadcast media during the election campaign. The media monitoring included quantitative and qualitative analysis of five TV stations, and qualitative analysis of selected print and online media outlets to assess the coverage of the campaign, the amount of time and space allocated to the main political parties and candidates, public officials and the Interim Government (IG). The tone of the coverage and the gender balance across monitored media was also evaluated, with the latter contributing to the EU EOM’s assessment of women participation in political life. The EU EOM Media Monitoring Unit also tracked voter education materials produced by the EC and the IG, as well as the evaluation of the tone of the coverage by the media outlet towards the political actor. All monitored coverage were broadcast in Bengali language.

Quantitatively monitored TV channels:

- **BTV – Bangladesh Television** – Main state-owned TV channel (terrestrial TV with national coverage)
- **Jamuna TV** – Private TV channel (satellite TV with national coverage)
- **Somoy TV** - Private TV channel (satellite TV with national coverage)
- **Channel 24** - Private TV channel (satellite TV with national coverage)
- **Independent TV** - Private TV channel, (satellite TV with national coverage)

The quantitative monitoring period: 20 January – 10 February 2026, covering the **official campaign period of 22 January - 10 February**. The broadcast media monitoring focused on programs aired during the **prime-time hours: from 20:00 to 02:00 hours, six hours per day**. During the campaign silence period from 10 to 12 February, as well as on election day, and during the announcement of the results, the media outlets were monitored qualitatively.

How to read the charts: The bar/column/pie charts show the distribution of airtime in percentage from the total airtime, allocated to political parties and other actors in each media outlet, as well as the tone of coverage (negative, neutral, positive) applied by the media to report on the contestants, with base airtime in all the relevant categories. **The amount of time is measured in seconds.**

During the 22-day-long period, the EU EOM Media Monitoring Unit monitored a total of 660 hours of prime-time broadcast, of which it coded and analysed a total of 195 hours 15 minutes or 30 per cent on average across all audio-visual media as election-related coverage.

Table 1

TELEVISION STATIONS			
Media outlet	Language of broadcasts	Percentage of total time coded	Time allocated to political communication
BTV (State-owned TV)	Bengali	45 per cent	59 hours 19 minutes
Channel 24	Bengali	24 per cent	31 hours 57 minutes
Independent TV	Bengali	25 per cent	32 hours 26 minutes
<i>Jamuna TV</i>	Bengali	25 per cent	32 hours 29 minutes
<i>Somoy TV</i>	Bengali	30 per cent	39 hours 4 minutes

Chart 1 – Volumen of political and electoral coverage TV shows the total time allocated to political communication on monitored national TV channels during prime-time programmes.

Chart 1

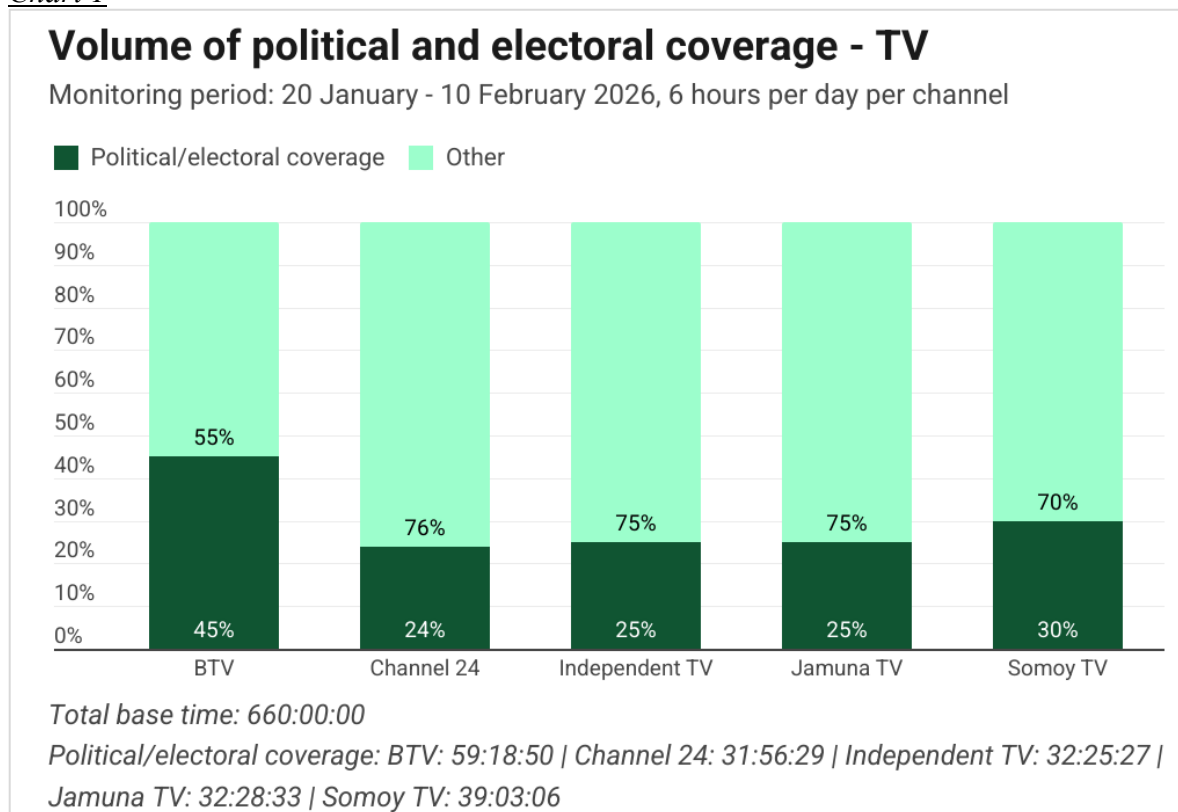
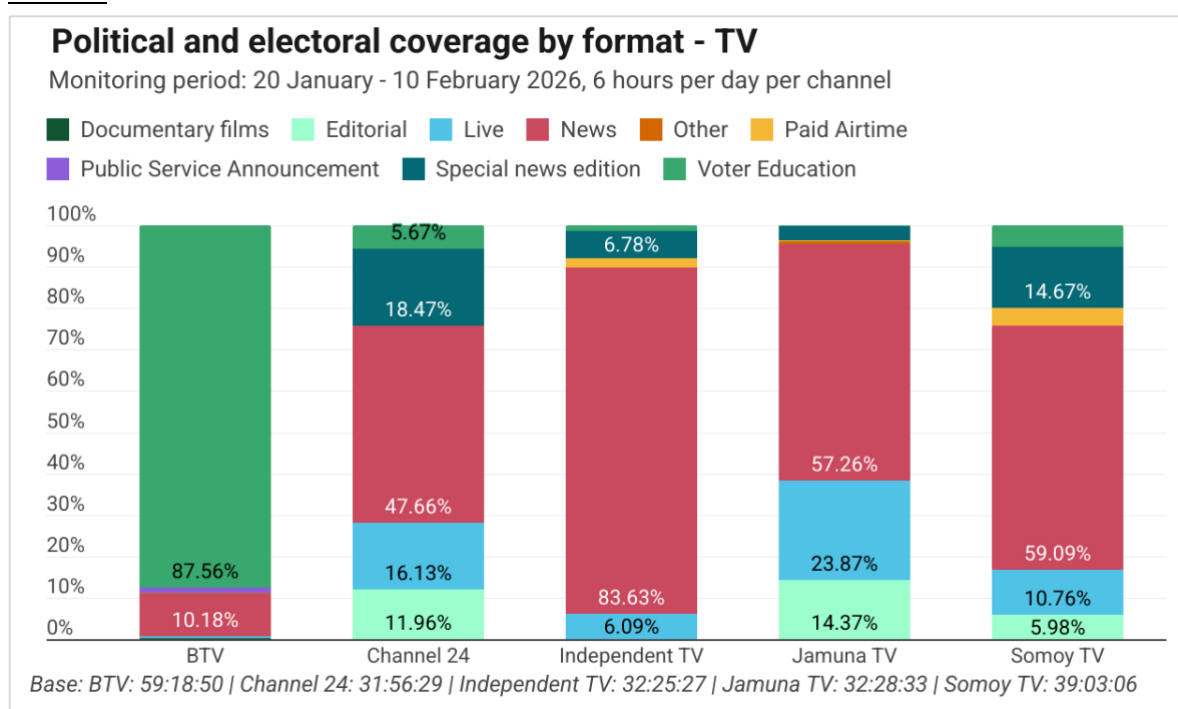


Chart 2 – Political and electoral coverage by format shows the types of programmes used in political communication by TV channels.

Chart 2



Most private TV channels used news bulletins to report on the elections, while the state-funded BTV focused on voter education materials. In the chart Editorial programmes refer to all TV programmes of editorial choice programmes including analysis and commentaries. “Special news edition” includes programmes focusing on the election-related coverage outside the established news bulletins. Those programmes were *Nirbachoner Somoy* on *Somoy TV*, *News Express* on Channel 24, *Voter Mathe BD* on Independent TV, as well as *Kothar Lorai*, *Nirbachoner Chobi*, *Shob Khobor* and *Chobbish Ghonta* on *Jamuna TV*. The BTV aired a few documentaries featuring election-related topics, such as *Duyare Vote* (Vote at the door). In the chart this program is coded as “Documentary films”

Chart 3 – shows the proportional distribution of airtime among various political actors, including political party representatives, candidates and the IG, within the prime-time newscasts.

Chart 3

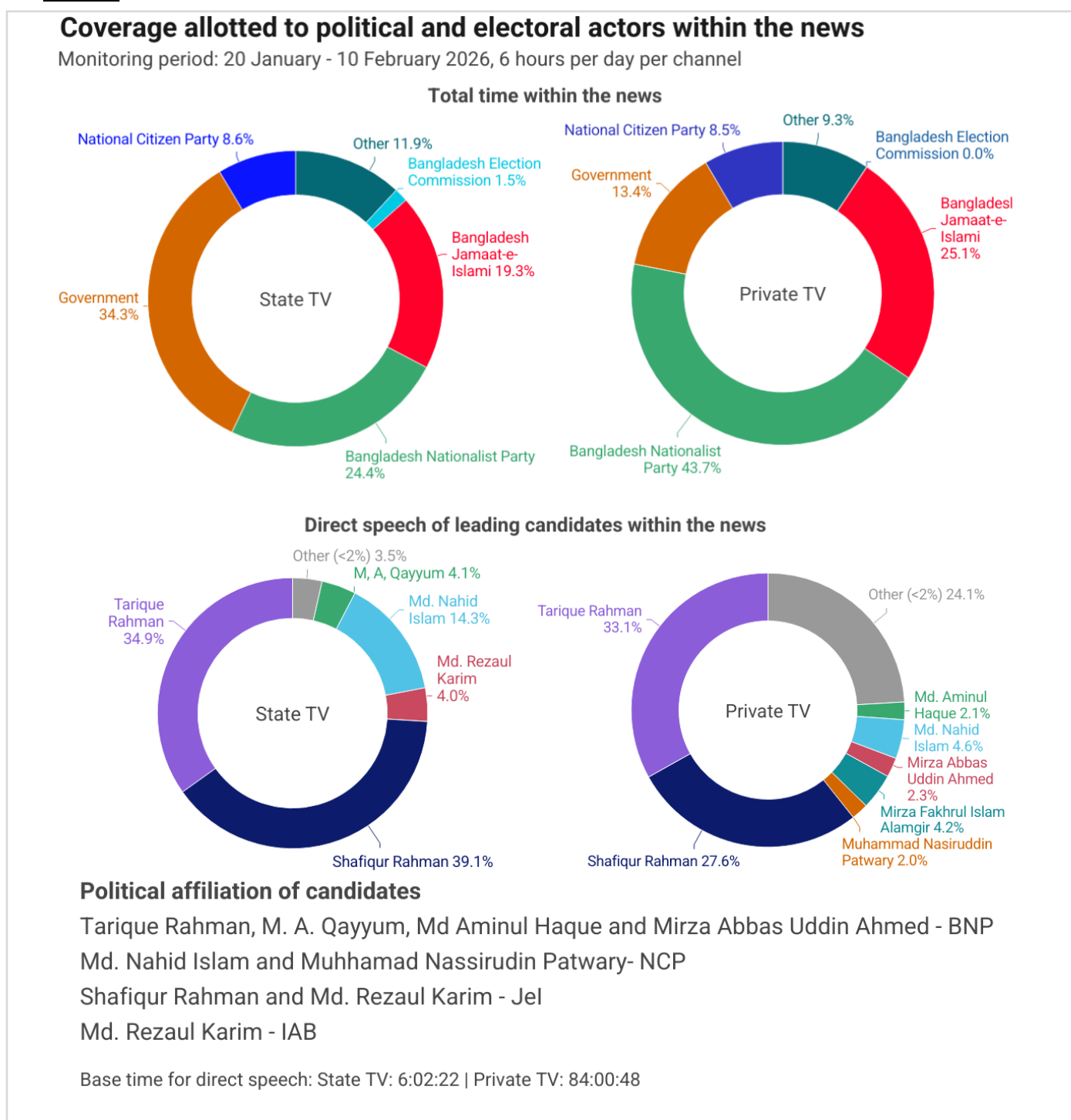


Chart 4 and 5 – Tone of coverage towards the political actor shows the tone of coverage applied by the media towards the most featured political parties and the Interim Government within prime-time broadcast. Chart 4 illustrates the tone in the news bulletins; Chart 5 – within editorial programmes

Chart 4

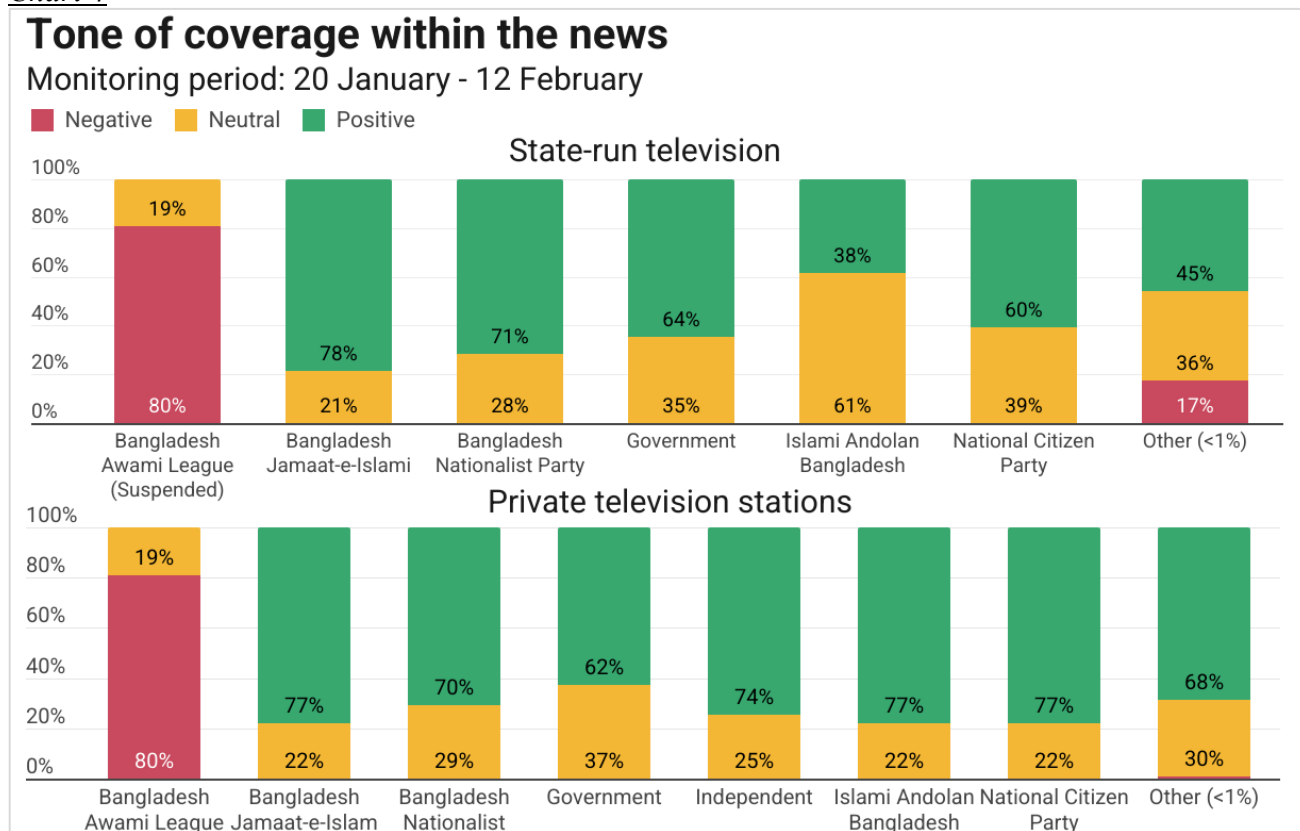


Chart 5

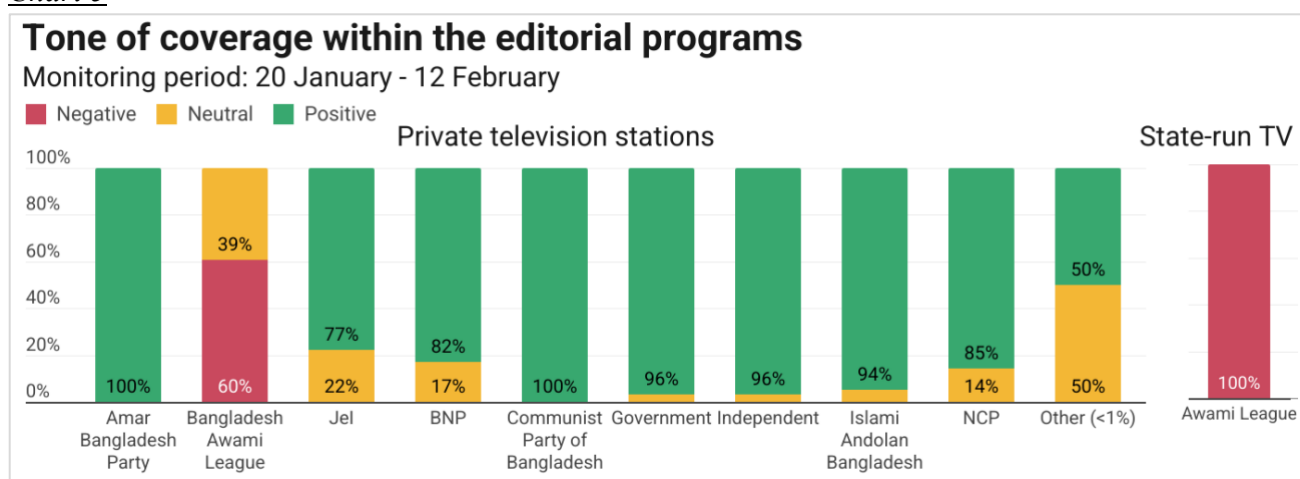


Chart 6 – Time allocated to political actors during prime-time broadcasts - illustrates the total amount of time allotted to all political actors across all prime-time programmes in monitored channels

Chart 6

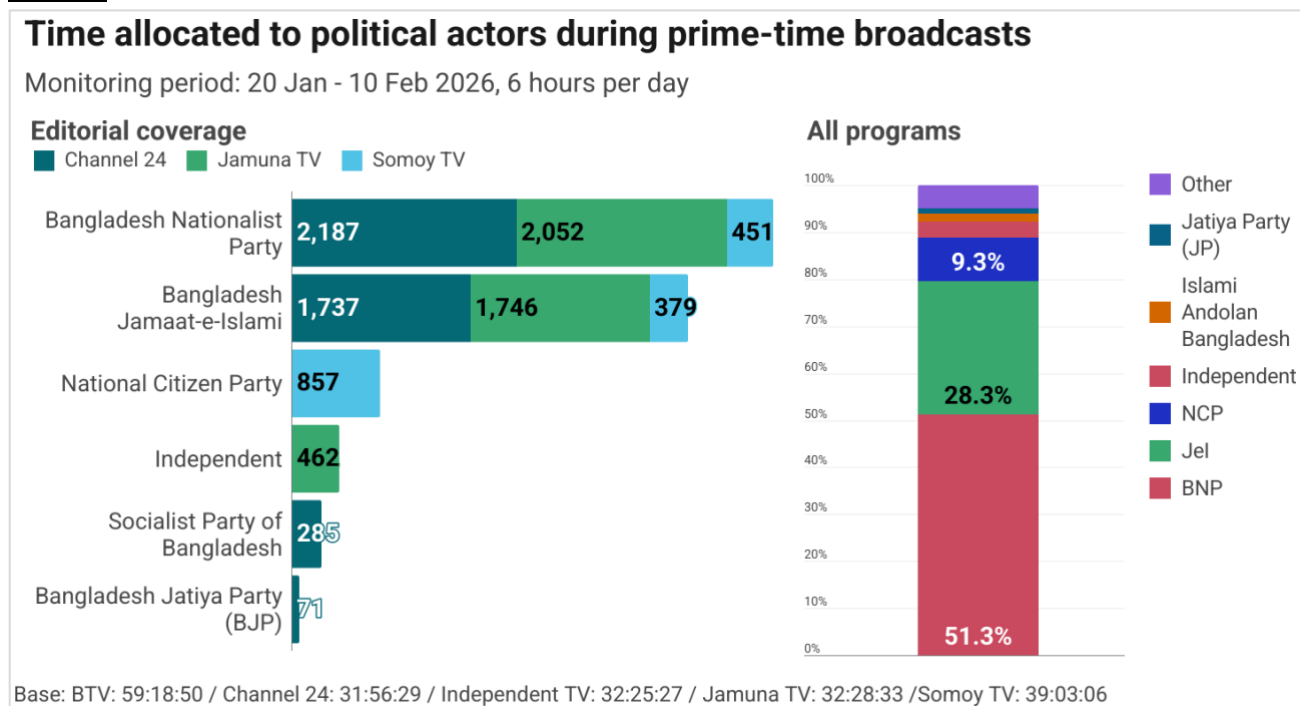


Chart 7 – Distribution of time among political actors during editorial and live programmes - shows most frequently covered political actors in programmes of editorial choice, such as talk shows, discussions and *live* coverage of various campaign rallies and events.

Chart 7

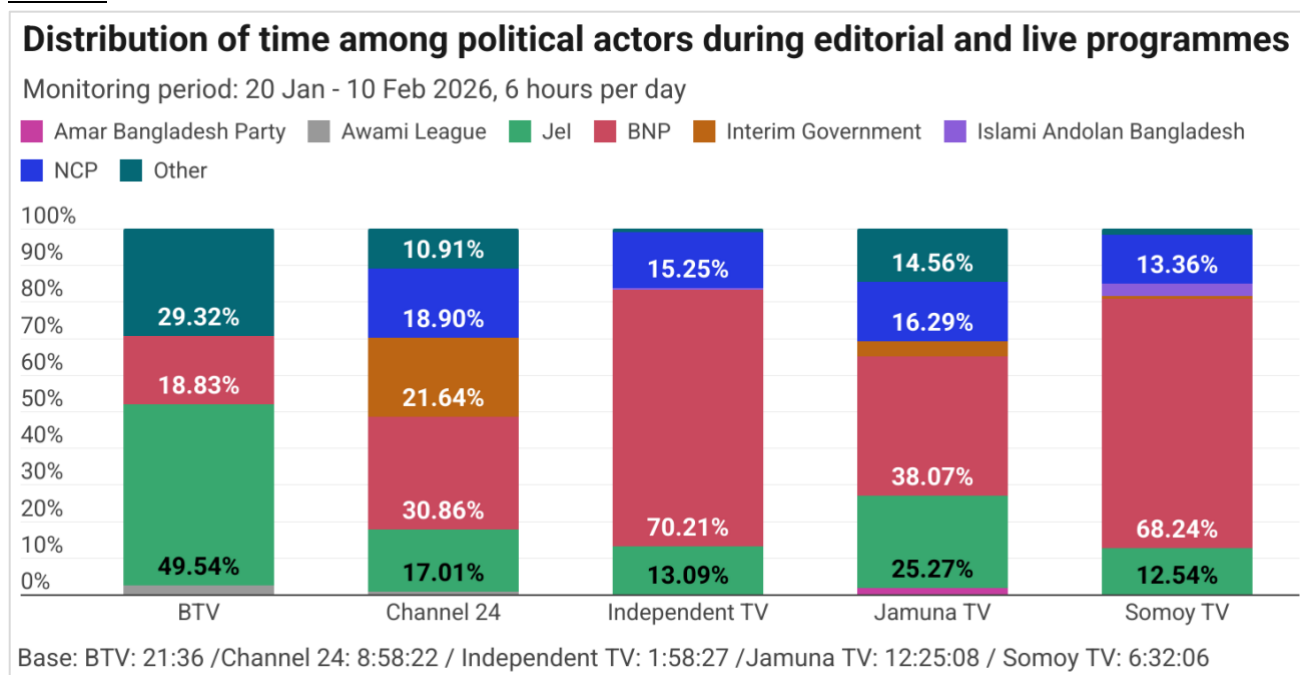


Chart 8 – Voter education across monitored media shows the airtime devoted to voter education clips and programmes made by the Bangladesh Election Commission and by the Interim Government.

Chart 8

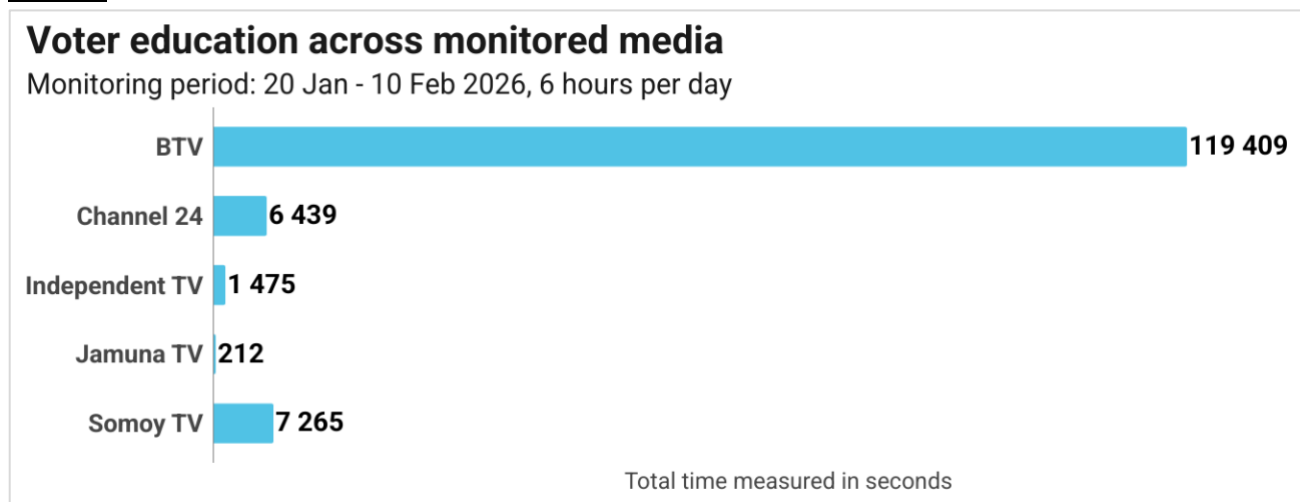


Chart 9 – Use of paid airtime by political parties across monitored media - shows the distribution of paid airtime per political party. Paid airtime included short political ads, as well as an hour-long documentary about the BNP’s Tarique Rahman on private TV channels. Political parties did not place any paid political advertisements on two out of five monitored TV channels during their prime-time programming; Independent TV only featured BNP adverts.

Chart 9

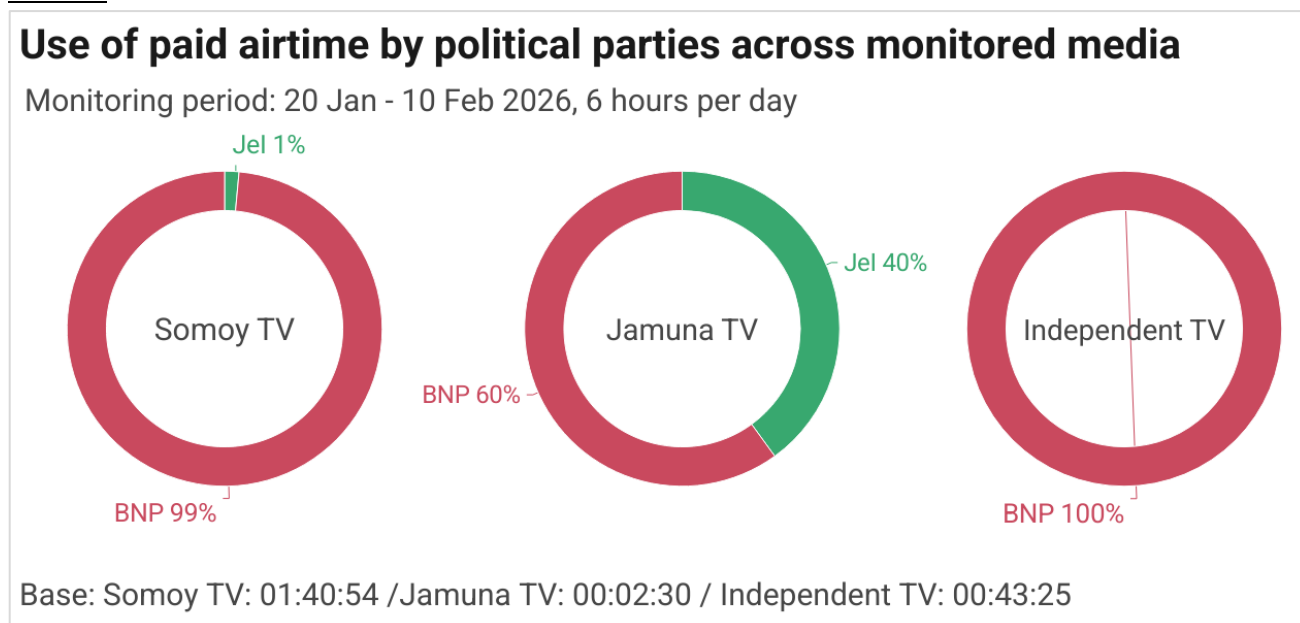


Chart 10 – Gender balance across monitored media – illustrates the gender balance across all prime-time TV programmes, including paid advertisements. Notably, none of the paid advertisements featured a female candidate.

Chart 10

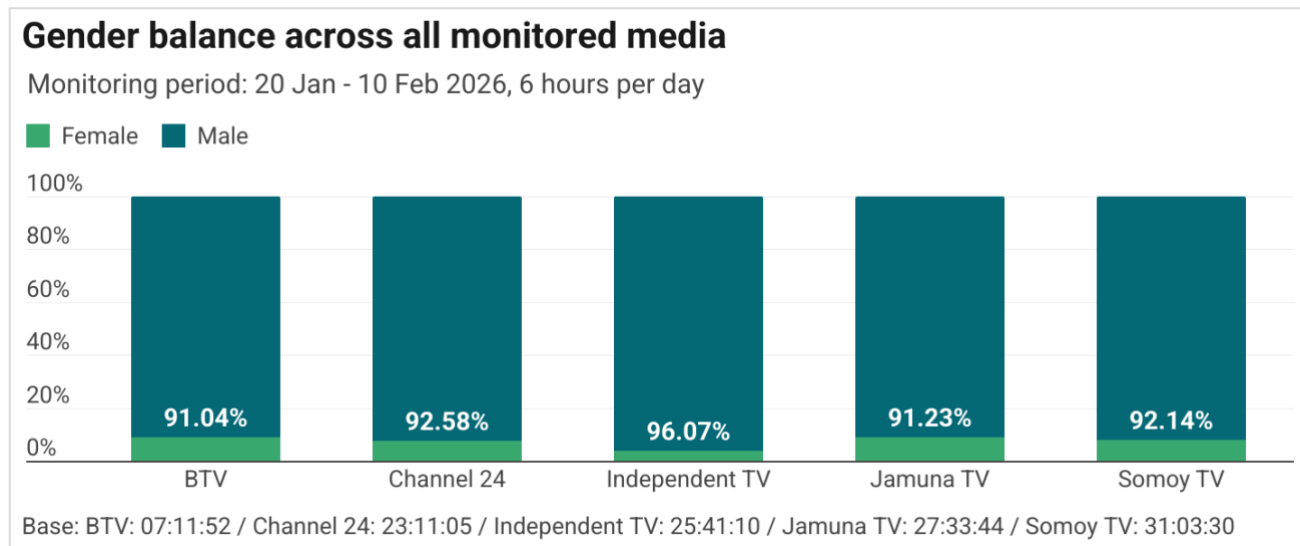


Chart 11 – Gender balance across all news and editorial programmes - shows the proportion of airtime allocated to male and female candidates across the monitored TV stations within news and editorial programmes, as well as illustrates the proportion of direct speech granted to female candidates and shows the most quoted female candidates

Chart 11

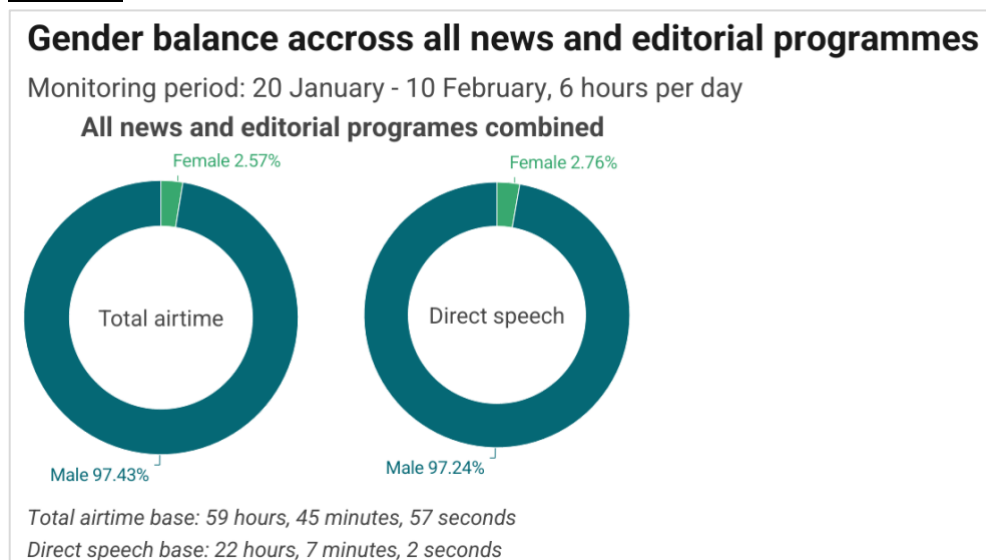
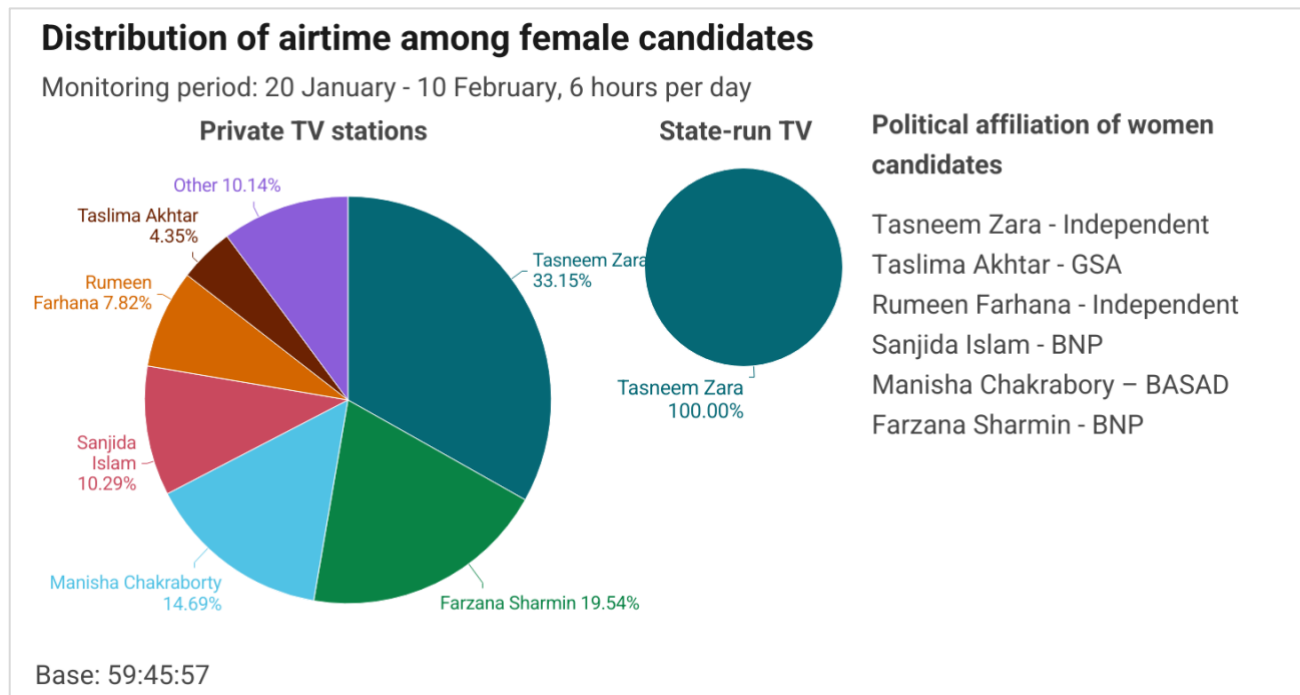


Chart 12 – Distribution of airtime among female candidates – illustrates the proportion of news and editorial coverage allotted to each female candidate on private and stat-run TV.

Chart 12



ANNEX 3 – SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING RESULTS

Almost 70 per cent of voters had access to internet and almost a half of all voters were active social media users at the end of 2025 in Bangladesh. To assess the content and impact of online political communication on the elections, the EU EOM Bangladesh applied different and complementary approaches and techniques to analyse online platforms and to gather information on online election-related content.⁹⁴ These methods include quantitative and qualitative data analysis, legal analysis, meetings with relevant stakeholders, OSINT and collaboration within the EU EOM core team.

1. The EU EOM Social media monitoring methodology.

To capture a balanced snapshot of Bangladesh’s digital communication landscape and considering the prevalence of Facebook as well as the emergence of TikTok, the EU EOM analysed an indicative set of accounts, profiles, groups, pages, considering:

- **The relevance and prospective impact on political agenda and discourse** - number of followers and interaction with posts on the respective page. Those accounts, pages, profiles and groups were administrated by or represented electoral contenders, other political actors (such as the Awami League), social media influencers, as well as online and pseudo-media.⁹⁵
- **The content of the page / account** - participation in the public debate on social, political, and electoral issues.
- **Political affiliation of the account/page** – to ensure a politically balanced snapshot of digital landscape, the EU EOM selected an equitable number of social media accounts⁹⁶ representing and aligned with the largest electoral alliances, with balanced geographical coverage, as well as including a comparable number of national-level focused sources with region-specific public groups.

Considering the size and diversity of social media landscape in Bangladesh, the EU EOM also considered:

- **Diversity of information sources (social media accounts).** Sources such as TikTok micro-influencers were included based on their virality and top 100 videos, based on the number of views per selected hashtags in the last 30 days. Meme pages, student public groups, and harmful influencer accounts were also monitored both qualitatively and quantitatively.
- **Necessity to close so called blind spots, which meant monitoring echo-chambers with a high potential to cause a viral incident.** For the qualitative assessment of viral incidents and harmful content, the mission consistently monitored 100 public groups, at least one in each district, that were identified as a digital actor actively pushing content that can be characterised as hate speech and disinformation. This content was targeting the Hindu community. These groups were assessed as a high-risk information echo-chambers that had the potential to

⁹⁴ Instant messaging platforms, such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Messenger and Discord were not included in the scope of the EU EOMs monitoring due to data protection and privacy matters. However, EOMs may include relevant information shared by credible national and international organisations and interlocutors that specialise in monitoring online platforms.

⁹⁵ “Pseudo-media” refers to unofficial pages, groups or profiles that present themselves as legitimate news outlets, replicating the visual identity, formatting, and reporting style of established media organizations, yet the actual content on those platforms do not constitute news. Overall, these online sources lacked transparency and accountability, with no verifiable information about the administrators or content creators and operating anonymously or with minimal traceability.

⁹⁶ Here and further in the text the term “social media account” is used to offer a summary characterisation of the social media source and includes not only accounts, but also public pages, profiles, groups and channels.

contribute to hostile pre-election environment. Women's perception online was assessed across a combination of official and unofficial pages supporting the two largest parties.

The social media monitoring and data collection was done using following tools:

- **Gerulata** and **SentiOne** – social media monitoring and data extraction (Facebook and TikTok).
- **WhoTargetsMe** – monitoring and data extraction related to political ads on Meta platforms.
- **Apify** – social media data extraction (Facebook and TikTok)
- **Python** using libraries such as pandas, NumPy, scikit-learn, spaCy, NLTK, and datasketch and **Excel** – data processing and analysis.
- **Infogram, Streamlit and Python** – data visualisation

Considering the size of the social media audience and the wide-range of pages and accounts who had the potential to affect the information environment, as well as the recent history of digital-led mobilization and subsequent real-life consequences (mob violence), it was decided that a standard manual social media data coding won't be sufficient to assess the digital pre-election information environment. Hence, the EU EOM also designed an AI-powered and manually verified data quantification system, that enabled topic-modelling, network analysis, as well as provided sufficient data to detect coordinated activities by partisan actors.

2. Digital landscape and EU EOM monitoring sample.

Chart 1 – Digital landscape. The chart provides background information on key statistical data related to elections and use of social media in Bangladesh by December 2025, serving as the first point of reference for selecting the EU EOM monitoring sample

Chart 1

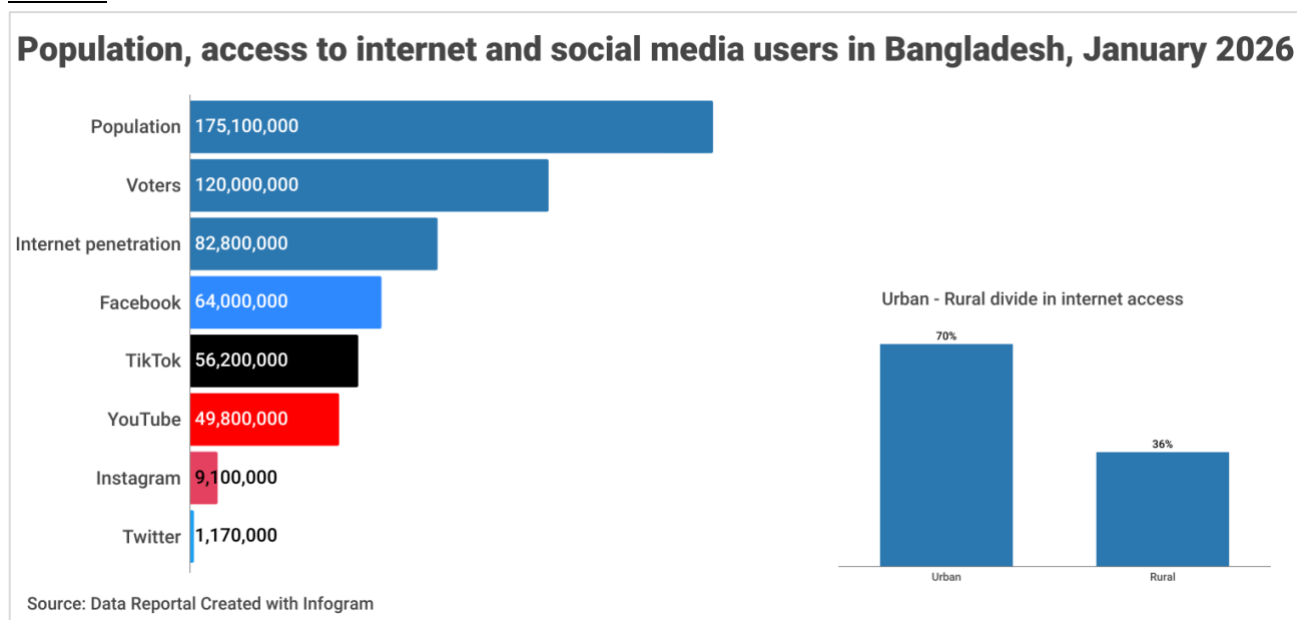


Table 2 – Social media monitoring sample. The table provides information on number of pages and accounts consistently monitored by EU EOM per given category, applying a quantitative method. The selection of pages and profiles was in part affected by technical limitations of the ready-made social media monitoring tools. In cases where data retrieval using tools was not possible, content was

retrieved using manual observation method, with findings incorporated in the overall assessment of the online communication landscape.

Table 2

CATEGORY	Facebook Official	Facebook Unofficial ⁹⁷ Accounts	TikTok Official	TikTok Fan and Unofficial Accounts	Instagram	X
CANDIDATES, POLITICAL PARTIES AND STATE INSTITUTIONS						
BNP	91	60	30	51	13	-
NCP/ JeI	97	60	24	48	27	9
Islami Andolan	11		3		1	2
GOP	8		-		-	-
Student Platforms	70		-		-	-
Institutions, Interim Government	31		2		6	8
SECTION TOTAL	308	120	59	99	47	19
MEDIA AND OTHER POLITICAL ACTORS WHO DID NOT CONTEST THE ELECTIONS						
Online Media	97		30		50	28
Pseudo Media, Meme Pages	143		-		-	-
Influencers	84				-	-
Registered Political Parties	49		8		10	13
Awami League Related Pages	90			55		
SECTION TOTAL	463		38	55	60	41

3. Observation and analysis of organic content on Facebook and TikTok

Analysis of organic content posted on above listed pages was separated from the paid-for or artificially boosted content. **Chart 3.A and Chart 3.B – Number of posts analysed by the EU EOM from all platforms**, provides information on a total number of posts and videos placed by electoral stakeholders per respective category. All those posts were analysed by the EU EOM using quantitative method with manual qualitative verification of a representative sample of posts.

⁹⁷ “An unofficial account” refers to a source that promotes a political party or political agenda without transparent disclosure of its affiliation or formal registration as a politically linked entity.

Chart 3A and 3B

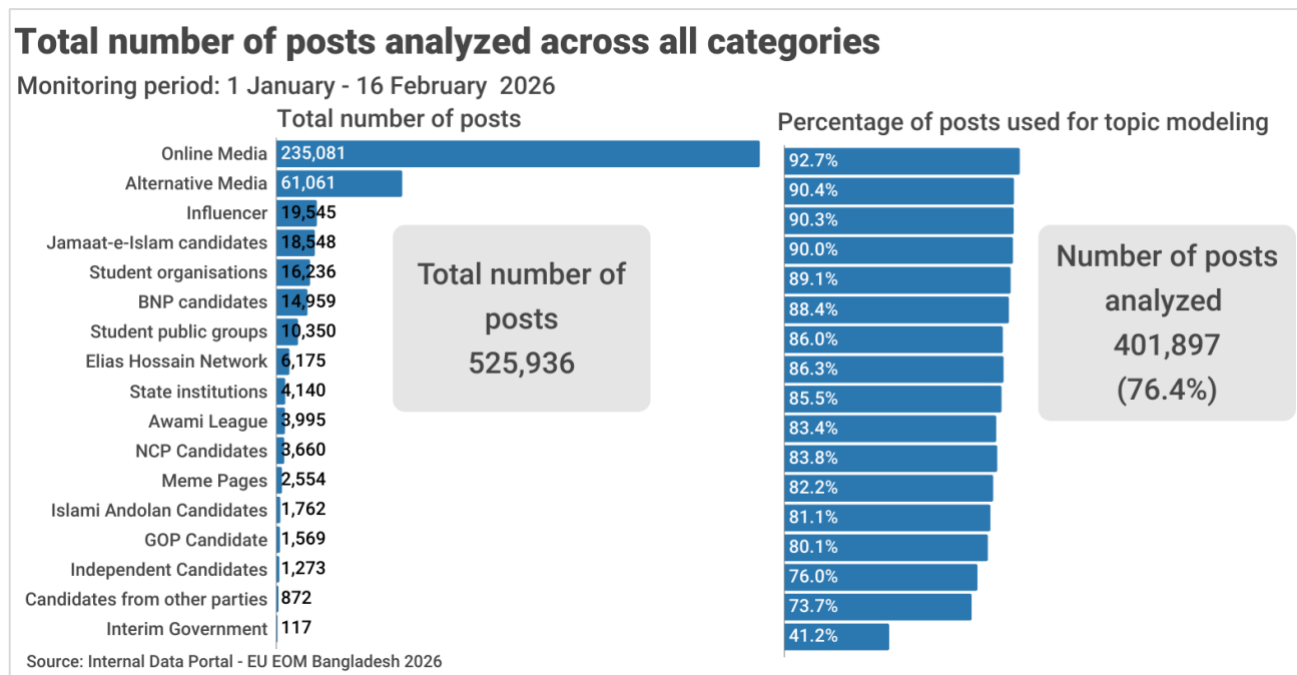
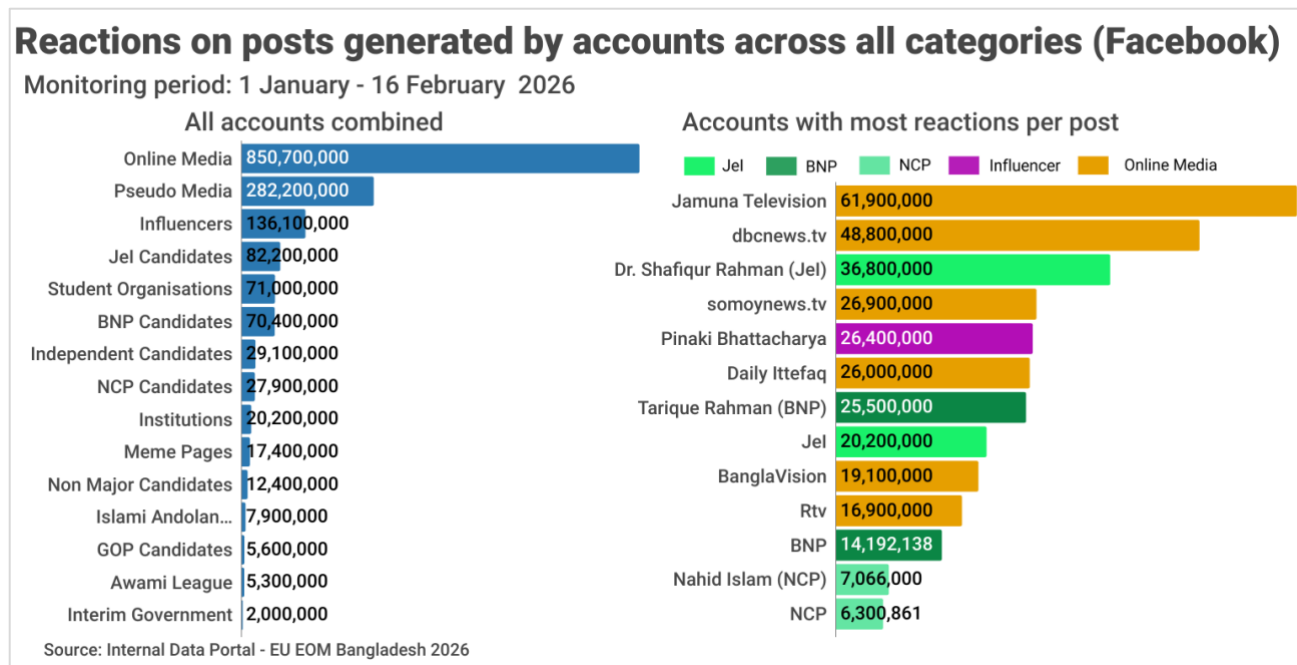


Chart 4 – reactions on posts created by monitored accounts (Facebook). This chart shows the total number of reactions generated by posts placed by all accounts per respective category, as well as the lists the top 10 accounts with the highest number of reactions generated per post, with online media accounts leading,⁹⁸ followed by pseudo media influencers and student led organisations⁹⁹.

Chart 4



⁹⁸ “Online media accounts” refer to the top 100 official media accounts, ranked by number of followers, including both traditional outlets (e.g. TV, radio, newspapers) and digital-only media organizations.

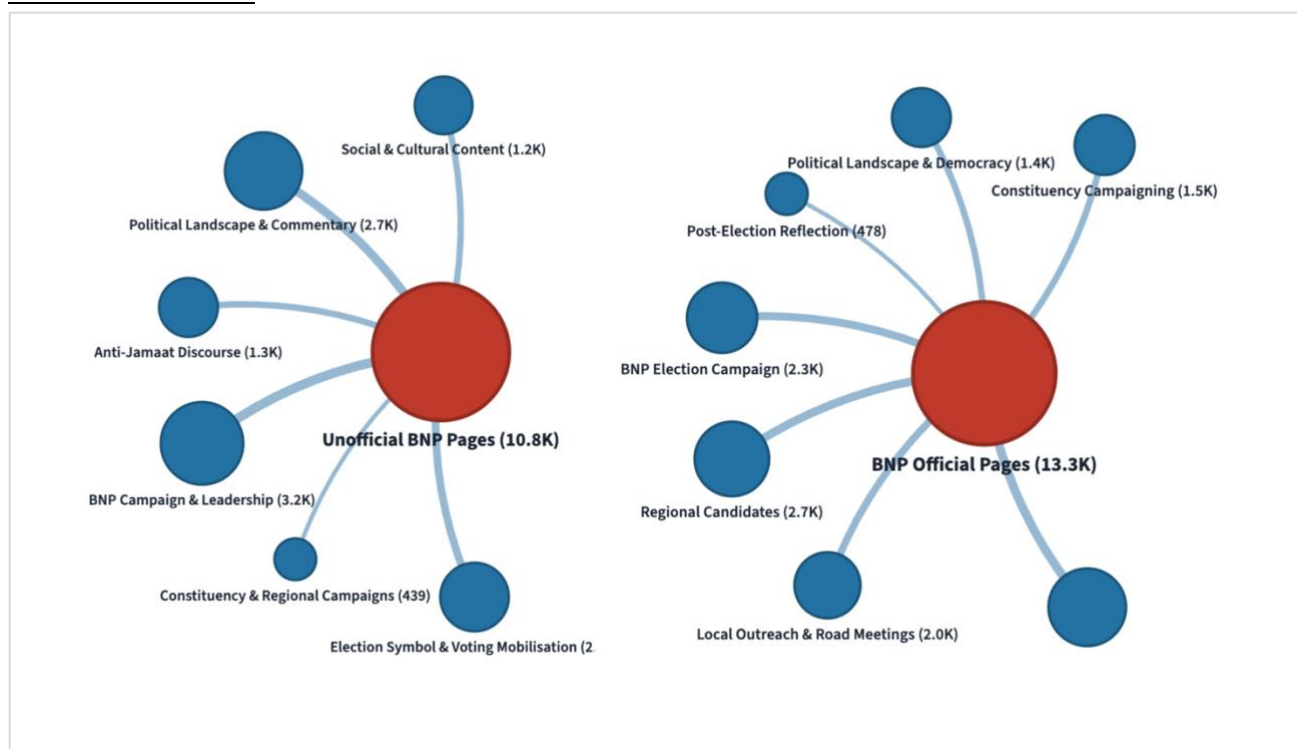
⁹⁹ “Student Organisations” List includes 49 sources comprising official Facebook accounts of student organisation leaders, Facebook news pages affiliated with student organisations, and the official pages of student organisations.

Specific monitored lists such as Awami League and candidates from non-major parties¹⁰⁰ and Student Public Groups¹⁰¹ were primarily active within more targeted social media echo chambers, hence considered influential despite the lower overall volume if compared to other lists.

Chart 6 (A, B, C, D, E) - top narratives across monitored sources. The chart illustrates the most popular narratives and topics discussed across online sources with the same political leaning. In those charts the size of the red bubble corresponds to the total posts published by that group (shown in parentheses). The size of each blue bubble reflects the volume of posts within that specific group. The connecting lines link the topics back to their parent group. The larger the bubble, the more dominant that theme.

Charts 6.A and 6.B present the thematic distribution of posts identified through topic modelling across BNP official pages and unofficial BNP pages. **Charts 6.C and 6.D** presents content published by JeI official and unofficial pages. **6.E** presents content published by accounts affiliated with Bangladesh Awami League.

Charts 6.A and 6.B



¹⁰⁰ “Candidates from non-major parties” list includes 11 politicians from different political parties contesting the elections outside two leading electoral alliances, each of whom had at least 100,000 followers online. Those candidates represented following parties *Ganosanhati Andolan*, *Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis*, *Revolutionary Workers Party of Bangladesh*, *Boruna Madrasah*, *Nagorik Oikko*, *Amar Bangladesh Party*, *Jatiya Gonotrantrik Party*, *Bangladesh Jatiya Party*.

¹⁰¹ “Student Public Groups” list included 40 most prominent student-oriented public groups on Facebook, each affiliated with or named after a prominent student organization, with at least 100,000 members.

Charts 6.C and 6.D

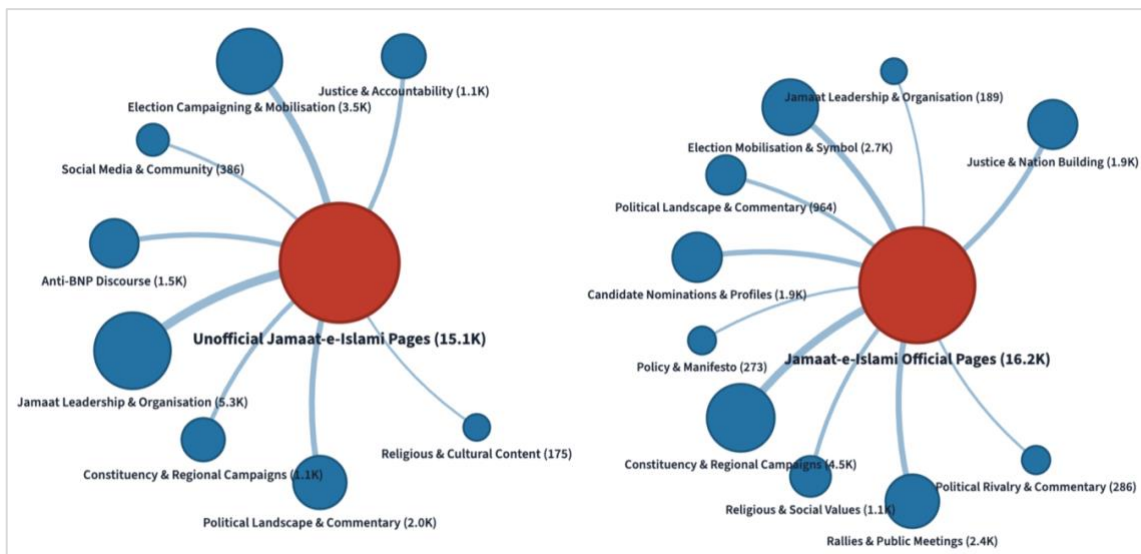


Chart 6.E

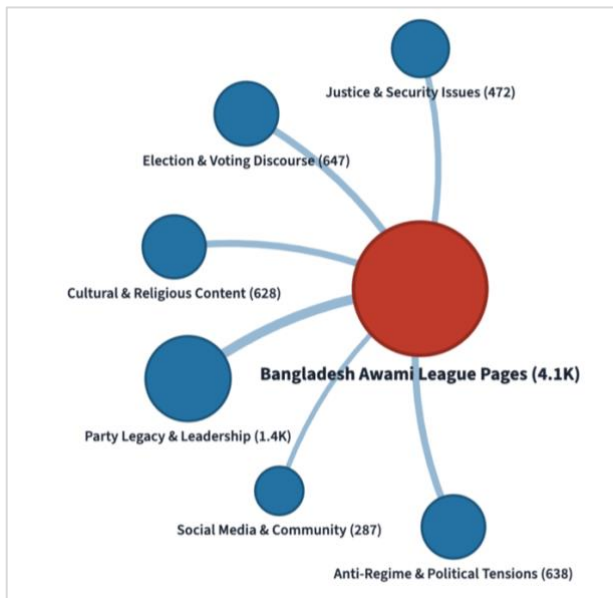


Chart 7 - Content and sentiment analysis of monitored posts illustrates the proportion of election-related content across all monitored online sources, as well as illustrated the tone of the content whether it is positive, negative, or neutral towards the subject. The tone was evaluated only across posts placed by official accounts of candidates standing on a BNP, JeI and NCP tickets. The monitoring covers the entire campaign period and is based on top 150 posts per party ranked by number of reactions to the post.

Chart 7

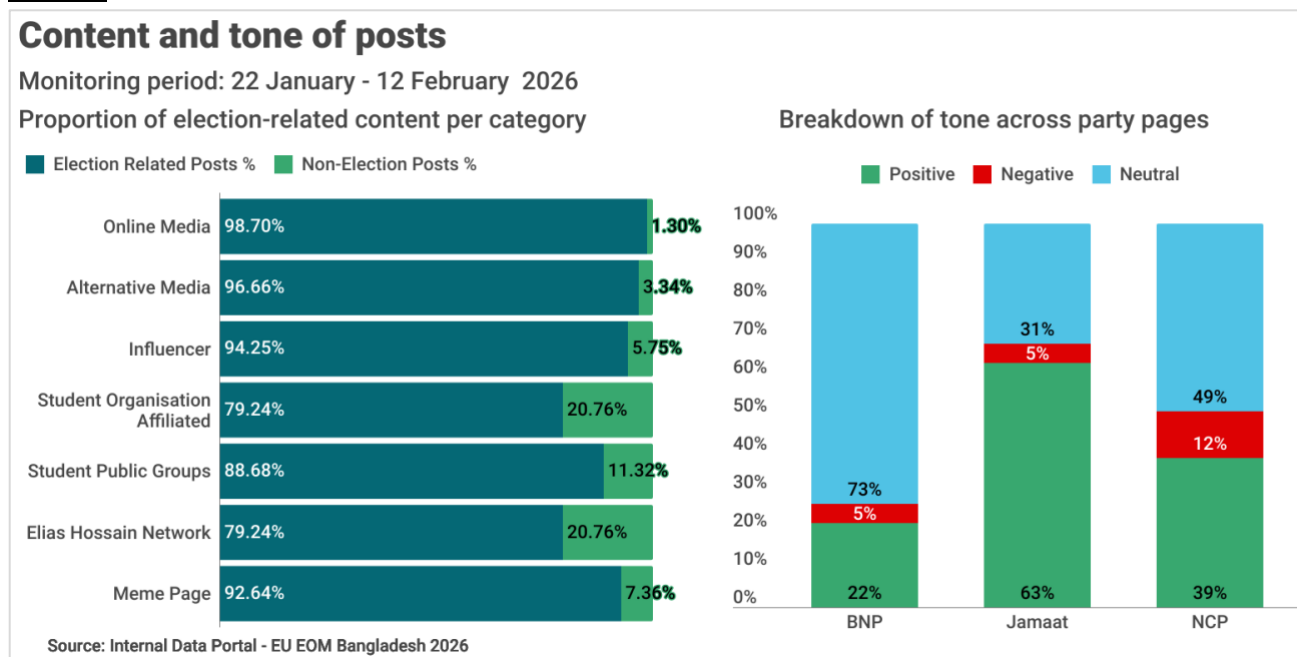
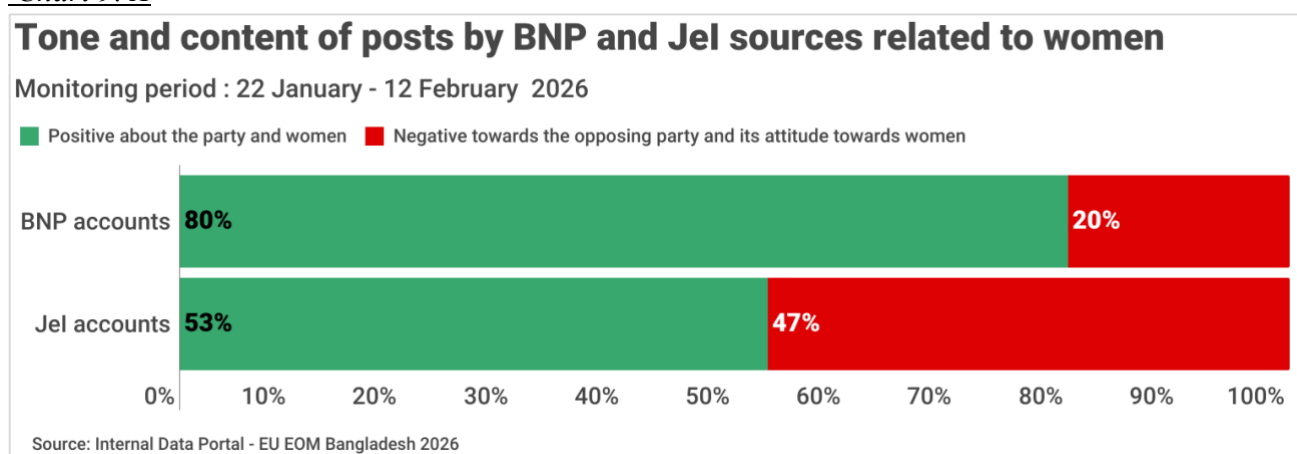


Chart 9 (A, B, C and D) – Cross party framing of women – these charts compare narratives related to women that were featured across BNP and JeI official pages and informal support groups, as well as show the posting frequency over time.

Chart 9. A



Charts 9 B and C

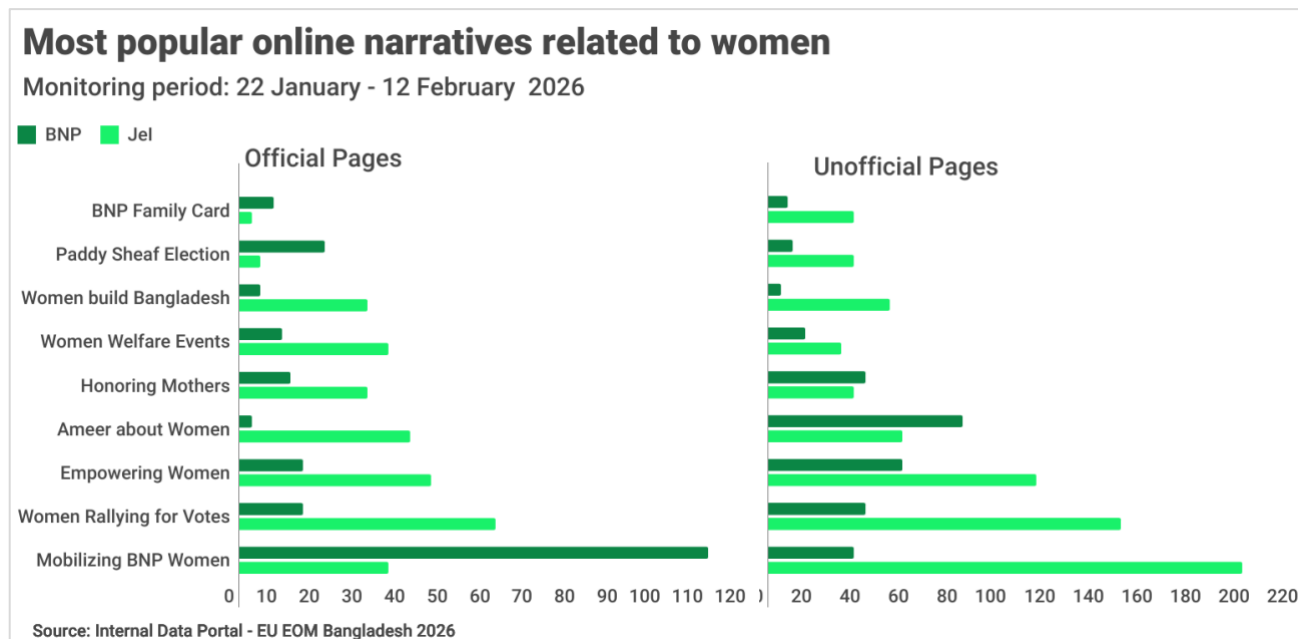


Chart 9 D

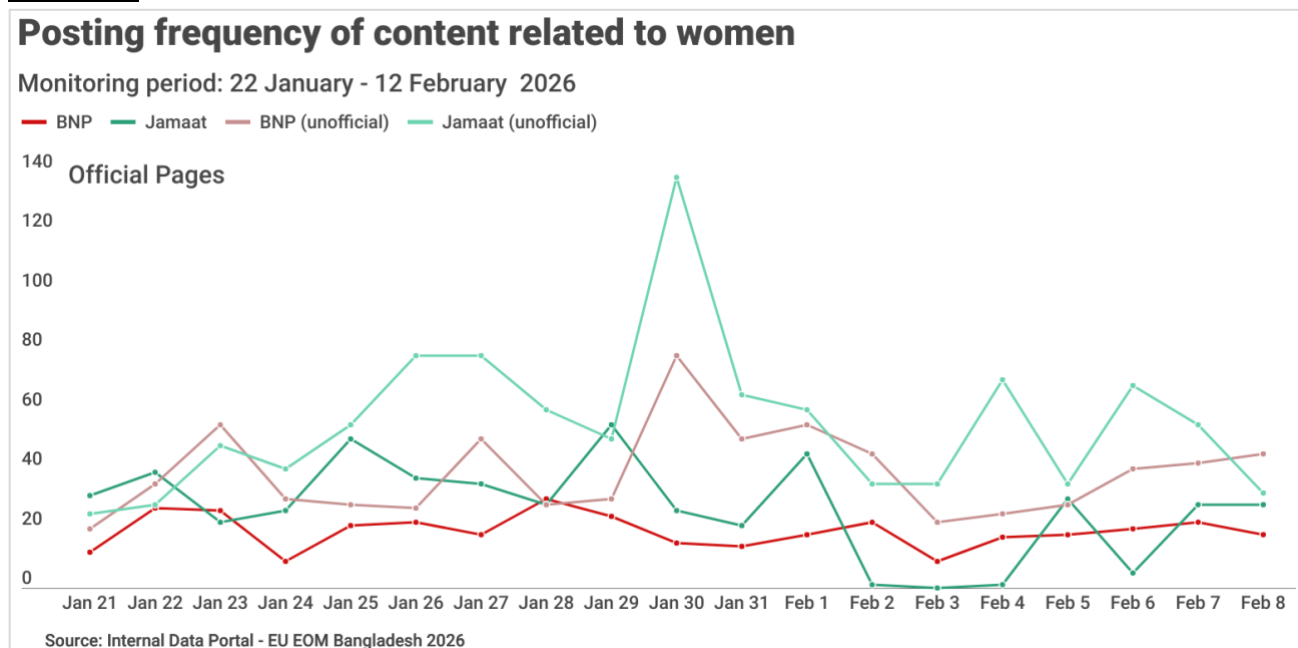


Chart 10. Engagement generated by posts created with Artificial Intelligence (AI) - this chart summarises engagement with AI-generated political videos. A total of 173 videos generated approximately 27.8 million views, alongside 2 million likes, 45,000 comments, and nearly 490,000 shares have been identified by the EU EOM monitoring. Engagement was significantly higher for pro-Jel content if compared with the pro-BNP videos.

Chart 10

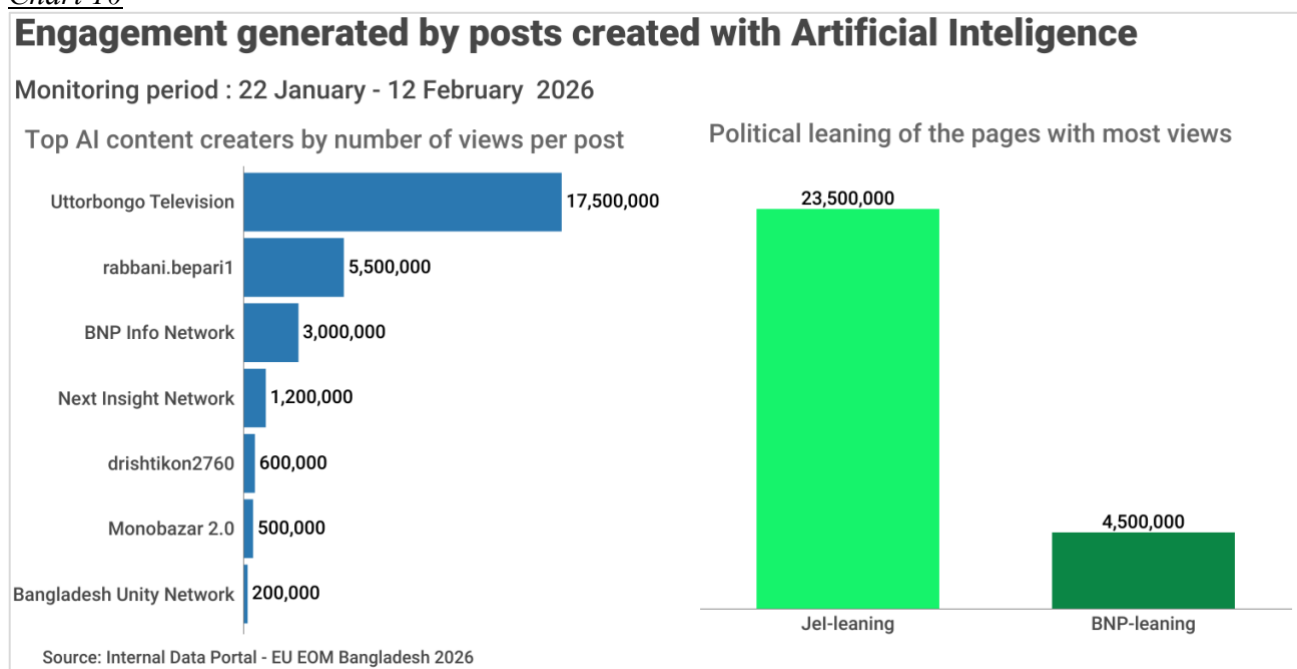
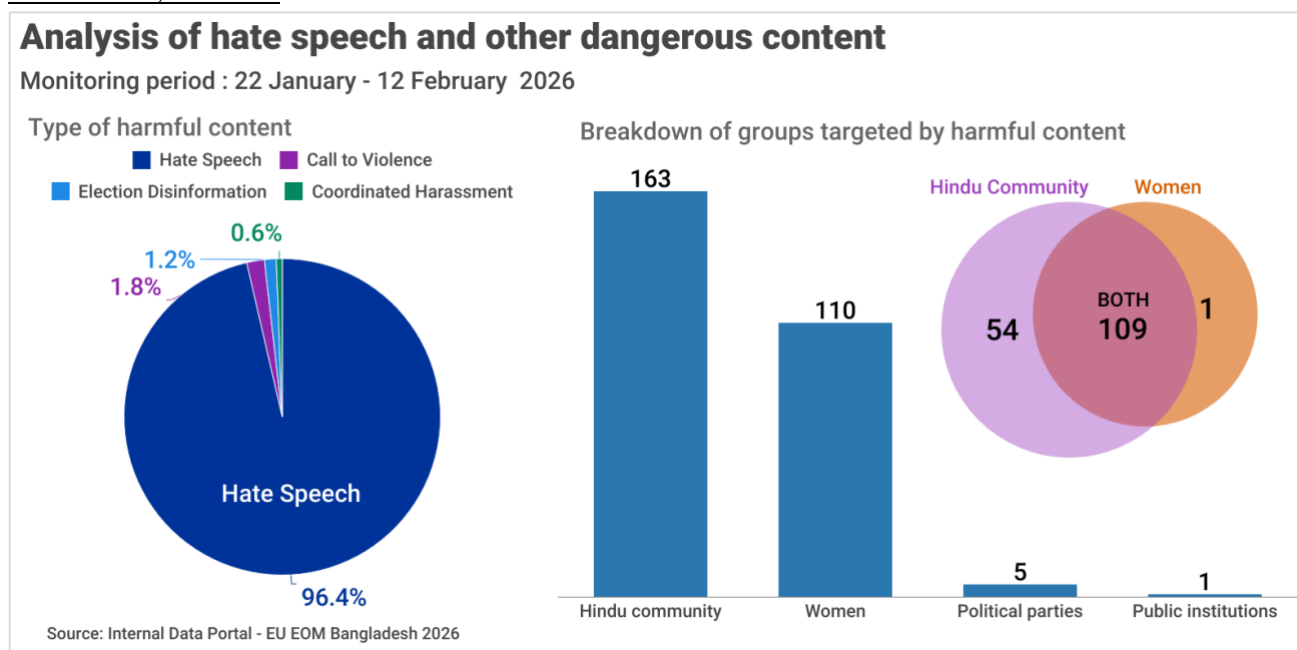


Chart 11. A, B and C - Hate speech analysis.¹⁰² These charts illustrate the breakdown of harmful content identified on the public groups Protect Our Sisters during the electoral campaign. The sample of 170 posts was collected manually, with most of those posts being classified as hate speech (94.7 per cent), with smaller shares identified as a call to violence, election disinformation, and coordinated harassment. In terms of targets, the Hindu community (163 posts) and women (110 posts) were the most frequently targeted groups. Notably, 66 per cent of posts targeted both communities.

Chart 11. A, B and C



¹⁰² The EU EOM applied a definition of hate speech based on Bangladeshi national legislation and international standards ratified by Bangladesh. All relevant content was manually reviewed.

3. Paid content

Chart 12 – Paid political advertisement on Meta platforms - this chart presents an estimated expenditure on political advertising between 1 January and 12 February 2026. The calculated total per party includes both expenditures by official party pages and by third-party pages that have placed advertising promoting the respective party. The advertisement is classified based on the content presented in the advertisement and based on the established affiliation of the Facebook page or account. In total, approximately EUR 332,500 were spent during the campaign, promoting the BNP narratives; approximately EUR 225,200 were spent to promote JeI narratives. All other parties spent significantly less.

Chart 12

