

Bangladesh Elections Assessment

Major General JS Nanda (Retd)

With the backdrop of 05 Aug 2024 uprising and regime change the elections scheduled for 12 Feb 2026 are expected to be a landmark politically for Bangladesh.

Despite reports of Jamaat cadres infiltrating several government departments, the election process is likely to remain largely free and fair, supported by the Armed Forces and other security agencies. Public sentiment currently favours stability, with strong resistance to election violence and political interference. Consequently, the probability of widespread violence or malpractice appears lower than in previous cycles. The following is an assessment of the principal political actors and likely outcomes.

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Advantageous position, but reputational risks remain.

- BNP emerges as a very strong contender. Having remained out of power for nearly 17 years, while it is hungry for power, however, its leadership has demonstrated maturity, restraint, and strategic patience. Tarique Zia's return, coupled with sympathy following the loss of Khaleda Zia, is expected to consolidate voter support.
- The party has released a well-articulated manifesto with a credible implementation framework, strengthening its electoral positioning.
- The student wing, Jatiobadi Chattra Dal, has yet to fully regain street influence, that can adversely impact the youth vote. In addition, there are rebel candidates who could fragment the BNP vote base.
- The Awami League cadres, which have a very significant vote share, is likely to support BNP, with the larger intent to keep Jamaat out.
- Reports of grassroots cadres engaging in extortion and aggressive street politics following the Aug 2024 regime change have negatively could possibly have influenced voter perception. This has resulted in a narrative that BNP is not very different than the Awami League in governance behaviour.

Jamaat e Islami. Capable of significantly reshaping the electoral landscape.

- Having been permitted to contest in elections, Jamaat has rapidly positioned itself as a very credible electoral force. The party benefits from a relatively clean public image, unburdened by any baggage of corruption or governance failures. Its sustained social outreach during the Awami League era—when BNP's opposition role was constrained—is likely to translate into electoral dividends.
- Their messaging has aligned well with public aspirations and is supported by a balanced manifesto. The party has a very strong appeal among lower and middle-income voters. They have also a focused and

targeted outreach toward women voters, though notably without fielding any female candidates.

- The party has a focused contest strategy across roughly 200 seats, with allies covering the remainder. The National Citizens Party alliance has joined hands with BNP, but its outcomes are likely to be limited.
- While its student wing, Islami Chhatra Shibir, retains full and effective street control, however they have exercised full restraint. Their deep penetration into universities and colleges is expected to positively influence the youth vote.
- Notwithstanding above, their ideological reservations regarding democratic principles may create long-term governance concerns despite current electoral appeal.

Awami League. Indirect but consequential influence. It has not been permitted to participate; however, its voter base is likely to support the BNP, potentially providing the party with a decisive electoral advantage.

In summation, BNP currently holds the strongest probability of forming the government. However, Jamaat retains the capacity to disrupt conventional projections and could emerge as a decisive power broker. Regardless of the final outcome, Jamaat will play a critical role in post-election political dynamics, potentially influencing coalition structures, legislative priorities, and national political direction.

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