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Election, Democratic Legitimacy and Regime Stability: Evidence from Bangladesh[1]

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Abstract

Bangladesh witnessed her 10th General Election with some remarkable incidents such as major political opposition parties did not take part in the polls hence more than 50% candidates of which mostly from the ruling party were elected MPs uncontested; voters turnout was very low - about 22%-26% (www.amadershomoy.com); due to a lack of contesting candidates in some constituencies there was no vote at all!); election ends with chaos; local media, international communities and donor agencies expressed their dissatisfaction about the credibility of the election outcomes and the way election was conducted; and others. However, the ruling Awami League called the election a free and fair one and expressed its satisfaction about the election outcomes. This paper deals with the following research questions: (a) What is the political culture in Bangladesh and how does political culture influence election in the country? (b) Why Bangladeshi regimes feel encouraged to allow 'electoral engineering' or fail to meet international standards while conducting elections? (c) What are the consequences when elections fail to meet the necessary level of credibility and how to overcome these problems? The paper is based on empirical data collected mainly from personal observation of the 10th national election in Bangladesh as well as information from the Election Commission's website and print and electronic media reports about the 10th General Election and democracy in Bangladesh. Data from published secondary sources have also been consulted. This paper argues that Bangladesh democracy is again at the crossroads as the provision of Non-party Caretaker Government (NCG) has been scrapped by the current regime from the Constitution despite resistance from the main opposition block. In fact, the 10th general parliamentary election under party government raised critical questions about the credibility of election, legitimacy of the regime, and stability of the government. The paper further argues that democracy has been provided with little room for expected development by uncouth party politics or political culture in Bangladesh. Although an interim arrangement, called the Caretaker Government system, was introduced for transition from dictatorship into democracy in 1991 and was relatively successful in holding three free and fair elections; it suffered setback in conducting the 4th General Election owing to composition imbroglio and was replaced by a military-backed Caretaker Government. Therefore, this paper draws the conclusion that though electoral system in Bangladesh has been changed from the Caretaker Government system to election under party government system, little qualitative change has taken place in the country's political system and electoral arena and culture to have credible election, followed by democratic legitimacy and regime stability.

Key words: Free and fair election; political culture; electoral politics; democratic legitimacy; regime stability

1. Introduction

The stability and smooth functioning of a political regime depends on democratic values i.e. representative attributes which also facilitates the development of political legitimacy (Dalton, 2004; Easton, 1975). Political legitimacy is also subjected to citizens' approval and consent to rule and policies of entire political system and the decisions of the regime. There is a well-built relationship between democracy and the political legitimacy. It is because democratic polity is characterized by(Warren, 2008): (a) the recognition of all citizens as political equals (b) the right of the citizens to self-rule mainly through the election of their rulers. For Aragon, there are five fundamental dimensions of political legitimacy, which ultimately facilitates the regime stability and success of a democratic polity; These are (a) support for the political community; (b) support for the core regime principles, norms and procedures; (c) assessment of the regime performance; (d) support for the regime institutions; and (e) support for the authorities. He further adds that regime stability also requires the ability to demonstrate performance and capacity to find solutions to the problem of society such as ensuring economic progress with equitable distribution, public order and security, unbiased and effective rule of law, quality improvement in health, education, free and fair elections, etc. It is also mentioned that the democratic commitment of political elites in a particular society is of utmost importance for democratic legitimacy hence regime stability (Pharr & Putnam, 2000; Warren, 2006). Democratic project through election has to be mostly state-centered failing which democratic legitimacy and regime stability will have unfortunate interference of 'external actors' outside the realm of the state (Aragon, 2008 and quoted in Warren, 2008). Seligson (2000), on the other hand, pointed out that political culture of a particular society has tremendous influence on election and democratic legitimacy. He further argues that "if citizens do not believe their political system is legitimate, its stability will be very much in question" (Seligson, 2000, p.7). However, political tolerance and regular election paves the way for legitimate system of governance, which increase citizens' trust in government hence facilitates regime stability (Seligson, 2000). By political tolerance Seligson refers to respect for the political rights of opponents such as their right to choose, raise their voices, go for demonstrate if requires, etc (Seligson, 2000, p. 9), which ultimately warrant accountable, democratic and transparent governance.

2. How Does Political Culture Influence Election?

In order to understand the nature of the 10th general election and its subsequent effects on the democratic legitimacy and stability of the current regime, I think we need to clarify the term "political culture". The term "political culture" is also a much debated concept although it is one of the "most popular and seductive concept in political science…" (Elkins & Simeon, 1979, p. 127). The modern study of political culture dates back to the middle of the 1950s when Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba's pioneering work *The Civic Culture* (1963) fleshed out the properties and types of political culture i.e. political behaviour and attitude based on the survey data of five countries. Having compared political attitude in five countries Almond and Verba concluded that there are cognitive, emotional, and evaluative components in the pattern of political behaviour, action and orientations that are embedded in the behaviour and political socialisation of a particular group. For them, an imitation of the Western democratic institutions in emerging countries would not be effective to embrace democracy in these countries. What in this respect is crucial to understand "the inner working and the cultural dimensions of democracy". What must be learned about democracy, they advocated, "is a matter of attitude and feeling, and this is harder to learn" (Almond and Verba, 1963:5). Newly emerging countries (such as Bangladesh), according to Almond and Verba, have a parochial political culture. A characteristic of their political systems is that they are "…always threatened by parochial fragmentation, teeter like acrobats on tight ropes, leaning precariously at one time toward authoritarianism, at another toward democracy" (Almond and Verba, 1963, P.26). Dahl (1956) looks at it as peoples' orientation to problem solving, collective action, political system and inter-subjectivity. For Lucian Pye (1995, P.965, quoted in Hague and Harrop, 2004, P.89), it is "the sum of the fundamental values, sentiments and knowledge that give form and substance to political process". In its simple meaning, it refers to "[A] community's attitudes toward the quality, style and vigour of its political processes and government operations (Shafritz, 1988:412).

The above-mentioned discussion has shown that there is no agreement among scholars with regard to the definition of the concept political culture. However, what I understand by the concept political culture is somewhat similar to that of Brown's suggestion:

> It [political culture] will be understood as the subjective perception of history and politics, the fundamental beliefs and values, the foci of identification and loyalty, and the

political knowledge and expectations which are the product of the specific historical experience of nations and groups. (1979, p. 1)

 I think the above-mentioned definition of political culture provided us a broader context of the concept and it would help in identifying the crucial elements of the historically emergent political culture of Bangladesh.

2.1 The Essential Characteristics of Political Culture in Bangladesh

According to Kochanek, the political culture in a given society can be understood in relation to the configuration of individual and collective attitudes toward politics and the organisation of society underlying the functioning of the political system. For him, "these attitude and values help shape the forms, style, and behaviours of the organisations that groups create" (1993, p. 34). In fact, there are 'cognitive, emotional, and evaluative' components in the pattern of political behaviour, action and orientations that are embedded in peoples' behaviour and political socialisation in a given society (Almond & Verba, 1963). Scholars (for example, Wood, 2000; Khan et al, 1996; Hossain et al, 2002; Lewis & Hossain, 2007, etc) have identified historically derived "deep structures" or critical dynamics of the emergent political culture of Bangladesh. Some of which are:

- Religion and ethnicity have been as sources of political identity (Kochanek, 1993; Khan et al., 1996) and highly fragmented political culture (Maloney, 1991);
- Intense network of interpersonal patron-client relations (Khan et al, 1996) and clientelist-based forms of welfare and safety nets (Wood, 2000; 2001);
- A "strong reliance for all upon networks linkages" and interlocked transactions between elites e.g. political, business and high profile professional groups (Wood, 2000; Khan, 1998);
- Highly personalised pattern of authority or patrimonial /neo-patrimonial political and bureaucratic behaviour (Maloney, 1991; Khan et al, 1996; Wood, 2000);
- Authority derives from individuals' ascribed social status (e.g. a high-up position, superior lineage status, etc) rather than rule of law or official roles (Wood, 2000).

Let us explain briefly the above-mentioned deep-rooted dynamics of political culture in Bangladesh:

Firstly, **the unresolved national identity and social fragmentation:** "The two most important influences responsible for shaping national identity in Bangladesh have been religion and ethnicity (Kochanek, 1993:34). The cultural bedrock of Bangladesh has been formed by several religious traditions. Following Hinduism and Buddhism, Jainism had also spread to Bengal by the second century B.C. (Majumder, 1974). Later followers of the *Sufi* (saints) doctrine from different parts of the Muslim Western and Central Asia came to settle in Bengal and preach Islam (Karim, 1959; Haq, 1975). These *Sufis* were able to attract large followers and spread Islam particularly among the peasantry and eventually led to the establishment of Islam as the dominant religion of Bengal. Moreover, the *Sufism* not only resembled in many ways the mystic religious cults of Hinduism and Buddhism but also contributed to the growth of a pervasive cultural syncretism in Bengal. Saints provided a psychological relief against threats of nature in the deltaic ecology of Bengal thus enjoyed the extraordinary power or charisma and *pir-murid* (holy master-subordinate) relationships (Roy, 1980; Islam, 1988). Kochanek (1993, p. 34) argued that religion played a crucial role in shaping 'Bengali Muslim' identity from the late nineteenth century until the creation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in 1947. However, with the partition of Pakistan and creation of independent state Bangladesh in 1971, disputes have come to centre on the role of religion in shaping national identity, the nature of the state and the character of the political order.

While Khan et al (1996) argued that the war of independence celebrated Bengali nationalism with linguistic identity, secularism and liberalism, Kochanek (1993:42) felt that there were many in Bangladesh who felt uncomfortable with the secular approach of the Awami League and raised fundamental questions about 'Bengali nationalism' or heavy emphasis on "Bengaliness" based simply on linguistic identity. Moreover, this 'Bengali nationalism' failed to differentiate between Bangladesh and its neighbour (the Indian province of West Bengal) and embrace non-Bengali minority community such as tribes in the Hilly districts of the country. Considering the necessity to find somehow different identity from the Bengali subculture of the Indian province of West Bengal and potential threat from India, efforts were made to develop an identity with roots in both Bengali culture and Islam. For example, General Ziaur Rahman (here after Zia) developed "Bangladeshi nationalism" that was distinct from "Bengali nationalism". Zia also

"reinforced …Islam to its rightful place in the society" by the replacement of variety of references to the Islamic basis of the state for "secularism"—one of the main constitutional principles adopted by the Awami League (AL) in 1972 (Kochanek, 1993, p.43). The Islamic basis of the state reinforced by Zia has been replaced again by the principle of "secularism" by the current regime recently. Although religion and ethnicity have been used to create a national identity but the intellectuals and political elites of Bangladesh has become divided on the issue. It is because the two main political camps in the country i.e. Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) have taken two distinct stands in relation to national identity. For example, the AL and its intellectual circles continue to stress a secular Bengali nationalism, whereas the BNP and its political allies and intellectual circles emphasize Islam and Bangladeshi nationalism.

Secondly, **intense network of interpersonal patron-client relations.** In order to explain "who gets what" in Bangladesh society many scholars identified the intense network of interpersonal patron-client relations and clientelist-based forms of welfare and safety nets. As stated previously, Maloney characterises interpersonal relationships in Bangladesh as a "complex network of obligations, dependencies, and expectations, in which people conduct their dealings with each other" (1991, p. 66). She characterises the notions of social role and obligation in Bangladeshi society as follows:

> Entitlement operates both above and below the self. A man is entitled to subsistence from the big people [patron] he is dependent upon, but similarly there are people entitled to dependence on him, including family members (Maloney, 1991, p. 41)".

For Wood (2000; 2001), 'clientelist-based forms of welfare and safety nets' and patron-client mode of politics are key features of social and contemporary political system in Bangladesh. In fact, there are clearly defined personal bonds/ networks between political leaders and their followers in Bangladesh based on mutual gains such as— clients provide personal services, attendance at rallies, votes, taking personal risks and in return patrons guarantee jobs, official positions, monetary benefits, etc. Considering the existing 'client-based forms of safety nets' in Bangladesh, Bode and Howes also observed:

> ….moral values, rooted in religion and kin-based social institutions, have served to partially constrain the rich; obliging them to engage in redistributive activities and to

provide minimal safety nets if they wish to command respect and secure sustained political support (2002, p. VI; also quoted in Lewis & Hossain, 2007).

Baxter and others (1993, p. 278) identified another feature of the network of patron-client relations in Bangladesh. For them, there are links between civil, military and business elites. These also maintain transactions with the high profile "professionals" (for example: medical doctors, university professors) as they need their services. A study of the World Bank also reveals that "....the functioning of the public service reflects a pervasive *clientalism* operating within clearly defined hierarchies…" The same report pointed out a number of well organised interest groups in Bangladesh that according to its finding largely determined political decisions in the country. These influential groups are: political leaders, the military, the public bureaucracy; private business; professional organizations; NGOs; and the donors (World Bank, 2002,p. VI). Lewis and Hossain (2007, p. 6) observed that "the rise of a post-1971 elite that has built strong political connections with the aid industry", which has created another type and network of patron-client relationship in the political arena.

Thirdly, **patrimonial/neo-patrimonial political and bureaucratic behaviour.** Weber treated pre-colonial India as predominantly patrimonial. Although colonialism established a rational-legal bureaucracy, yet the colonial rule can also be viewed as partly patrimonial (Khan, Islam and Haque, 1996). Bangladesh has set up a "superstructure" of classical bureaucratic machinery for carrying out its policies and providing services to the citizens. It is to mention that political culture in Bangladesh has a deep foundation of patrimonial/neo-patrimonial rule inherited from the colonial administration. Khan et al., for example, pointed out that "Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's (the 1st Prime Minister of the country) became routinised in the direction of patrimonialism and it led to a neo-patrimonial regime… Zia had an essentially gloried 'yes-man's club'… The Ershad regime can be compared to what Weber (1978) called *sultanism*—an extremely arbitrary use of the ruler's discretion in the administration of this domain" (Khan et al., 1996, p. 20). I think the 'yes-madam' policy continues during the reigns of Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina. Maloney argues that common attributes of social behaviour and attitudes of peoples, political and bureaucratic system in Bangladesh are: the principle of hierarchy, personal force, the personalisation of authority, the reliance on patronage and indulgence, the authoritarian

administration, the opportunistic individualism and the lack of commitment to abstract objectives and ideologies (1991, p. 66). For Wood (2000), the public and private realms of the state officials in Bangladesh are blurred when performing as officials and they exercise personalised power via relationships of patronage and subjective reasoning, drawing on social norms, values and cultural principles such as seniority and loyalty. Because of such characteristics of political elites in Bangladesh there are always rooms for "exceptions and exemptions" in relation to public policies and their implementation. These are also paved the ways for *tadbir*[2] or personal persuasion for individual favours (Kochanek, 1993) as well as personal interests of the power elites about a particular service sector or group.

Fourthly,**the principle of hierarchy and the exercise of inherited authority and personal force** in interpersonal relations are accepted as morally right and necessary and even ritualized in many ways in South Asian countries, including Bangladesh (Nicholas, 1967; also quoted in Maloney, 1991). According to Maloney, "when two people meet in daily intercourse [in Bangladesh] they commonly establish relative rank one way or another; it may depend on wealth, lineage, education, rank of employment, or even a small difference in age" (1991, p. 40). In daily interaction, therefore, one person may be accorded higher rank than another, which gives him the right to extract service and demand respect; in return he assumes obligations of patronage and/or *dayã* (indulgence) vis-à-vis those of lower rank. This pattern is extended from family relations to those of workplace and even to society in general (Maloney, 1991, p. 43).

2.2. The Outcomes of the 10th General Election and the Influence of Political Culture

It has been recognised by experts that election and democracy are intertwined and main pillars of modern democratic polity. According to experts like MacIver (quoted in Hakim, 1993) elections confer legitimacy and means for routinised succession for ruling elites. It is not only considered as the main mechanism that ensures governing elites remain accountable to their electorate but also accentuates legitimacy crisis for many regimes. Bangladesh may be portrayed as a typical

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[2]"*Tadbir* is a kind of lobbying to manage a decision taken or to be taken by an authority overruling, breaking, or bending existing norms and practice…..a process that leads to corruption because it breaks away the standard bureaucratic norms, values, and impersonal rules… *Tadbir* is a pathology of Bangladeshi culture. … The degree of tadbir has reached to such an extent that one has to resort to *tadbir* even for routine matters, which are considered due. *Tadbir* interferes in normal functioning of the bureaucracy and decision making through undue influencing" (Jamil and Haque, 2004, p. 51).

case where regimes suffered credibility and legitimacy due to rigged elections, used violence and force to win election, lack of elections at periodic intervals, etc, which have become part of political culture in Bangladesh. As stated in the earlier section that the political culture in Bangladesh represents the characteristics such as clear division among political elites especially among two major rival camps, the 'yes-madam/ yes-sir' tradition of political loyalty, the exercise of 'inherited authority' of political elites in interpersonal and official relations are accepted as morally right and the public and private realms of the political influential are blurred when performing as officials, etc.

2.2.1. Pre-elections Political Scenario in Bangladesh

It should be mentioned here that elections especially during the rule of the military regime of General Ershad (1982-90) revealed all dysfunctional consequences (Ahmed, 2004). However, Bangladesh stepped back onto the road to free and fair election and democracy resulted from an election in 1991 under a unique system, namely Non-party Caretaker Government (NCG). This caretaker system of government took a better shape through constitutional modifications in 1996 and, that, too, following mass movement. This very innovative system of government ensured three general elections, which were accorded overwhelming appreciation home and abroad. But as usual, the main opposition party complained of anomalies, which symbolizes the politics of rivalry and division. It is also to mention that the ruling party Awami League (AL) was one of the main proponent and supporters of the NCG during 1990s. Quite dramatically, before the 10th General Election, the caretaker system had become an anathema for the ruling party AL. They scrapped the system from the Constitution despite opposed by main opposition parties i.e. BNP and its allies for which they once paralysed the country with mass movements. The opposition political camp has been blaming ruling party for using the country's highest Court which declared (the judgment was also dissented by two out of five judges) the 'Caretaker' provision for conducting election unconstitutional though in the verdict there was an option of holding two more elections under Non-party Caretaker Government. It was not only the Supreme Court but also international communities were also in opinion to hold the 10th General Election under the NCG to facilitate all political parties to participate in the election. The main opposition parties demanded with mass protests and movements to reinstate NCG system in the constitution before conducting the election otherwise they threatened to boycott the election. Despite international

persuasions and appeal to have a amicable settlement among rival political groups to conduct the 10th General Election, AL went on to conduct the 10th General Election under the party system i.e. the control of its own regime bypassing the directive (i.e. two more elections should be conducted under NCG) of the Supreme Court. The reason is obvious: healthy competition is not the political culture and way of life of political elites in Bangladesh. Moreover, there were widespread allegations that in many occasions both ruling and opposition alliances were so desperate to go to power and retain it without showing little interest about some sort of comprise, which considered to be the cornerstone of effective democracy. Interesting indeed, a sort of crusade ensued between the two alliances, one alliance committing to hold the 10th General Election under party control at any cost 'for the sake of safeguarding the Constitution' (The Daily Star, "JS polls Bangladesh's constitutional requirement: India", January 06, 2014. Dhaka)while the other being determined to resist the same tooth and nail for safeguarding the voting rights of the people.

There have also been alarming reports of pre-election political intimidation, and human rights abuse, which according to government an effort to stop the violence. For example, Ex-Prime Minister and ex-opposition leader, Khaleda Zia, an identical rival to the prime minister Sheikh Hasina, put under house arrest. *The New York Times*, (Barry, "Opposition Party Boycotting Bangladesh Election", January 4, 2014) reported that police officers surrounded Mrs. Zia's home on January 3, 2014 when she tried to leave for a rally, and would not allow her to leave. Since then, she remained blockaded inside the compound, at one point behind five trucks loaded with sand until 10th general election was finished on January 5, 2014! Ershad, a former dictator who leads the Jatiya Party (3rd biggest party), had been locked up in the combined military hospital since he belatedly joined the poll boycott. Another major political party, Jamaat-e-Islami, which is considered to be 4th largest party in the country was "banned from the polls for being too religious". Police arrested and detained large numbers of opposition activists, including a close adviser to Mrs Zia as he left a meeting with journalists. Thousands of opposition activists had been detained before 05 January 2014, the scheduled date for the 10th general election. One daily reports,

"On polling day alone, over 20 people were shot by police, or beaten or burned to death as rival goons from the BNP and the League clashed and as opposition thugs petrol-bombed buses, apparently to discourage voting. In some cases violent attacks appeared staged especially for television and other

cameras" (The Daily Star, "Hasina plans to hang on to office after an electoral farce: Economist", January 10, 2014).

Painfully enough, despite there have had long struggles and repeated rhetorical commitment by leaders of political parties to uphold democracy but their real activities have measurably failed to create a democratic society in the country based on the principles of consensus and compromise and find the ground rules for how to conduct an election, democratic competition and dissent (Jahan, 2000).

2.2.2. The Outcomes of the 10th General Election and the Legitimacy of the Regime

Though Bangladeshi leaders tend to pile up arguments as and when situation demands, they are quite adept in changing positions once they find themselves cramped in the game; and the only rule of game is win, even through a walkover. In fact, the 10th General Election paved the way for AL to have a walkover win in the election as major opposition parties did not take part in the polls hence total 153 out of 300 candidates in the parliament (more than 50%) of which mostly from the ruling AL were elected MPs uncontested (Table 1) and in the capital voting took place in just nine of 20 parliamentary seats! (The Daily Star,"Hasina plans to hang on to office after an electoral farce: Economist", January 10, 2014, Dhaka). Voters' turnout was also very low "about 22-26%" (The Daily Amadershomoy, "The New Government in Bangladesh Illegal: Anadabazar Potrika", January 10, 2014, Dhaka) – and due to a lack of contesting candidates in some constituencies there was no vote at all! The 10th General Election also ended with chaos. And local media as well as international communities such as the UN, Commonwealth, and other donor countries such as US, UK, Japan, etc expressed their dissatisfaction about the credibility of the election's outcomes and the way the election was conducted (The New Age, "US, Australia, C'wealth, and Japan want immediate talks", January 8, 2014, Dhaka). However, the ruling Awami League called the election as free and fair and expressed its satisfaction about the election outcomes.

Table 1: Position of Parties in the 10th General Election

Category	Party						
	AL	JP	JSD	WP	JP-M	Ind.	Others
Win	105	13	2	4	0	13	2
Uncontested	127	20	3	2	1	0	0
Total	232	33	5	6	1	13	2

Source: The Daily Star, January 06, 2014, Dhaka

If we look at the figures in the table 1, one might notice that political legitimacy of the current regime is perhaps very much in questions. As stated earlier, the legitimacy of a regime is subjected to citizens' recognition and acceptance of the entire political system as valid one through popular franchise. But the current regime's legitimacy to rule is undermined when citizens' right to choice and self-rule mainly through the election of their rulers was denied (over 50% candidates became MP uncontested). Moreover, the Jatiya Party (JP) that is being considered as the main opposition party with 33 lawmakers has been playing a double role by joining the cabinet- which is unprecedented in the country and has raised questions from different quarters. Some media and experts claimed thatthe AL won a one-sided election and created a chaotic and to some extent unconstitutional and questionable cabinet. "There is no provision in the constitution allowing the opposition to join the cabinet" says barrister Rafique-Ul Huq- an eminent lawyer (The Daily Star, *New Cabinet Tomorrow:* All-party; team of around 50", January 14, 2014, Dhaka). The conduct of the 10th general election and subsequent formation of the cabinet appears to analysts as something along the lines of "who cares about the constitution?"

It is important to also mention that parliamentary elections under political governmentshave always been controversial and not free, fair, and impartial in Bangladesh. The partisan governments tried to bring the elections results in their favor. However, the non-party caretaker governments had no stake whatsoever in the outcomes of elections. Therefore, the elections under them were free from centrally-designed electoral frauds (Mizi, 2004). It should also be mentioned here that overall NCG system helped to reduce electoral violence and increase voter turnout as well as peoples' trust and confidence in the usefulness of elections while election

under party system such as the 10th General Election increases violence and reduce voter turnout in Bangladesh (Table 2).

Table 2: Violence and Elections in Bangladesh

General Elections	% of Voter turnout	Election postponed		Nature of violence	
		Constituency	Centre[3]	No. of clashes (pre-election) (death[4])	No. of deaths (election day)
Tenth [a]	22-26[d] (below 40[e])	----	400	500	20
Ninth [b]	87[f]	-----	-----	-----	-----
Eighth [c]	74.8	16	90	144	3
Seventh [c]	74.9	27	123	na	4
Fifth [c]	55.4	12	30	na	1
Fourth [c]	52.5	na	23	19	7
Third [c]	61.1	na	284	221	32
Second [c]	51.3	na	63	122	18
First [c]	54.9	na	56	85	13

Sources:
[a] Election held under party government after the abolition of the NCG system
[b] '----' means data not available; [c]Ahmed, 2004:92; [d]independent source figure (The daily Amadershomoy, January 10, 2014, Dhaka); [e]official (government) source figure (The Daily Star, January 10, 2014, Dhaka); [f]The Daily Star, January 17, 2014, Dhaka.

A low turnout (Table 2) could pressure the government to begin preparing for fresh elections, something that happened after a similar opposition boycott in 1996. The Article 65(2) of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh stipulates that the members of parliament shall be elected in accordance with the law from single territorial constituencies by direct election not selection. But considering the very low turnout in the 10th general election, some eminent citizens such as the eminent lawyers Dr Kamal and BarristerRafique-Ul Huq opined "An election can't be called an election where 80 percent voters don't participate" and "it was

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[3]Burning down of more than 150 polling stations by opposition activists before polling began at 8:00am Sunday, 05 January, 2014, killing of an assistant presiding officer and snatching of election materials forced the Election Commission to suspend voting in around 400 centres around the country (Source: The Daily New Age, Monday, January 06, 2014; http://www.newagebd.com/detail.php?date=2014-01-06&nid=79438)
[4] According to media reports, in the pre-election year 2013 approximately 500 people were killed in political clashes, which is considered as the most violent year since independence (source: The Daily Star, January 10, 2014)

rather selection than election as per the country's constitution" while placing arguments as *amicus curiae* before the High Court during the hearing on a writ petitionon a public interest litigation writ petition (PIL) challenging the validity of the Section 19 of the Representation of the People Order empowering MP candidates to be elected unopposed (The Real-Time News Network,"Jan 5 election rather a selection than election: Barrister Rofiqul Huq", June 6, 2014. Dhaka). In an editorial note one prominent journalist expressed his frustration about the 10th General Election under the title *State Power vs People's Power:Engineered election, a bulldozed victory and emergence of one-person State?* as follows:

> The party [Awami League] that has always been known to depend solely on people's power for all its activities since birth in 1949 has brutally, ruthlessly and according to plan used state power to 'hijack' the just concluded election and deny people their right to vote just to ensure its stay in power.What was dubbed as an election was engineered, its results bulldozed and the so-called victory that emanated from it was predetermined as evidenced by the fact that a majority of seats -- 153 out of 300 -- were already 'won' before a single vote was cast…. (Mahfuz Anam,"editorial", January 17, 2014. Dhaka:The Daily Star*)*.

3. Why 'Electoral Engineering' While Conducting Elections?

As stated in Section 1, credible election through political inclusion and tolerance pave the ways for stable system of governance and warrant accountable, democratic and legitimate administration. According to scholars, politics must show ways to integrate people with varied political beliefs and ideologies. If it promotes only the selfish interest of a leader, party or a regime, then it creates bloodletting divisions in a given society. Bangladesh is at a crossroad in relation to its smooth transition of power despite a democratic framework of political system and election has been in place and practiced since 1990s. It is because in the post-liberation Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, the Awami League have been the two main political camps that have had ruled the country but they are considered arch rivals of each other in the political scenario in Bangladesh. These two major political camps never recognise each other to even hold dialogue with one another when there is desperate need for the nation to have dialogue between these two parties in order to settle national issues such as system of election or government. As stated earlier the main objectives of these two major political alliances are only to win and stay in power and healthy competition is not their political norms.

Jahan has also argued that there are intermediate classes which dominate the electoral politics of Bangladesh, irrespective of differences in their ideological positions and social backgrounds. It must be borne in mind that the leadership of all political parties in Bangladesh belongs to these intermediate classes and most of them come from wealthy farmer family backgrounds and are themselves by occupation lawyers, businessmen or civil/ military bureaucrats (Jahan, 2000). Under the existing "Winner-Takes-All (WTA)" political system in Bangladesh, party candidature can be purchased at any time before the election and that's why businessmen with black money rush to grab the party brand by exploiting the greed of leadership and winning is the only motto of these 'new politicians' cum businessmen who has no previous political experience! Under the WTA system of politics, party in power also exercises all the dos and don'ts and they have a mindset of "who cares?" The elected parliament member of the opposition even sometimes cannot visit his/ her own constituency due to the unwritten embargo set by the ruling party. Major pillars of the state such as administration, police and judiciary has been purposively politicised and tamed to feed the greed of the leaders of party in power. So, a 'win' even by adopting 'electoral engineering' is the ultimate desire of political elites, which is the source of all power particularly for members of the ruling party. Khan on the other hand, characterises the Bangladeshi political system as follows:

> Successive regimes in Bangladesh have changed the political system [including electoral system] to suit their narrow, individual, sectarian and partisan interests. Mujib, Zia and Ershad have all manipulated the political system in a bid to hold on to power… Individuals became much more important than institutions, resulting the lack of faith in such political institutions as political parties, the legislature, and the judiciary. The political system becomes the shadow of one man [such as Prime Minister or President] as long as he is in power. The executive organ of the government keeps on playing the most dominant role compared with other organs, i.e. the legislative and the judiciary. (1991, p. 27)

In fact, even after restoration of democracy in 1991, democracy has been provided with little room for expected development by uncouth electoral politics. Though an interim arrangement, called Non-government Caretaker System, was introduced for transition from dictatorship into democracy in 1991, the system had to be continued due to distrust of elections under party governments. Islam (2011) also argues that there is a firm institutional framework of the electoral process in Bangladesh characterized by electoral fraud and violence, which routinely

claims lives. Moreover, doubtful results, harassment of political opponents and no engagement of meaningful political dialogues between two major political rival parties are some common features of electoral culture in Bangladesh. As a result, 'electoral engineering' has been an inseparable part of electoral politics in Bangladesh. The general election on January 5, 2014 was not exception in this respect.

4. 10th General Elections and Aftermath for Political Development in Future

Democratic process was impeded at the very beginning just after 3 years of the Independence in Bangladesh. An elected parliamentary system of government started working with its brutal majority in the legislature. The so called "majority" misinterpreted the sense "democracy" and the most "popular government" couldn't understand the sense of demand of the people and failed to translate people's expectations into realities. Subsequently, military intervention in politics was brought up and the people of the country were disfranchised for long time. As mentioned a long battle did occur between the democratic forces and the undemocratic elements on the vast canvas of the political history of Bangladesh. After a huge sacrifice presented by her brave people, Bangladesh has rediscovered the track of democracy at the beginning of the 1990s. However, the resurrection of democracy could not find its elevator rather its ways are blocked from time to time due to the fact that major political parties here do not foster the purpose of democracy through credible elections. One observer, Badiul Alam Majumdar, secretary of the nonprofit group Citizens for Good Governance, remarked about the election of January 5, 2014, "The fact that we are having this sort of sham election, it's not going to solve our problems. It will push us to an uncertain future. We will be in unchartered waters." (Barry, "Opposition Party Boycotting Bangladesh Election", New York Times, January 4, 2014)

There are a few major consequences of elections of January 5, 2014. The first and foremost is perhaps the 10th general election testified to voters' frustration at being denied a choice. It shows destruction of public confidence about their democratic rights to choose and that citizens' vote matters and in a regular interval citizens will have a chance to elect their leaders without any fear and intimidation. Secondly, given the nature of the country's long standing political rivalry among two major political camps, a credible election is impossible under a party government, be it AL or BNP. Thirdly, it has given passage to move towards a "one party state" and absolute power in the hands of ruling party leaders in particular the Prime Minister. One editorial quotes,

"The Prime Minister has now accumulated the enormous power in her hands and the consequent danger she runs of falling into the trap that Lord Acton had justly warned us of: "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely" (Mahfuz Anam, "Editorial", the Daily Star, January 17, 2014). Fourthly, it has yielded real threat to the check and balance of power among three branches of the state: executive, legislative and judiciary. Today, the country's Prime Minister unquestionably and effectively controls the executive and legislative branches of the government. As is the practice in the country, the PM traditionally and totally controls the executive branch. As for the legislative branch, the PM as the leader of the House normally has a lot of influence. However, the new development after the 10th general election is that even the opposition is now a handmaiden of the PM, with part of it being in the cabinet and other part in the opposition (first time in the country's history). We all know how the leader of the opposition came into being and how the so-called opposition is bargaining with the ruling party for more ministerial berths. Under these circumstances the Leader of the House i.e. the Prime Minister is likely to have full control of the legislative branch. That leaves only the judiciary, which the executive branch has always had enormous influence through the appointment process of the judges. With the highest respect for the higher judiciary, one still cannot escape the reality of the executive branch's enormous influence. Moreover, Bangladeshi media recently reported that the current regime with its brutal majority in the legislature considering amendment of the Article 96 of the Constitution, which ensures judiciary independence. Under its new proposal, the regime wants to transfer power in the hand of legislature to confiscate judges of high court. In addition, the cabinet has recently approved the new "National Broadcast Policy-2014" despite widespread reservation from different stakeholders such as media, rights groups and opposition political parties fearing that it would be used as weapon by the regime to control media in the country. For example, Madam Sultana Kamal, the chairperson of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) and former advisor of the NCG claimed that the policy aimed at controlling the press in the country. Sultana expressed her frustration while speaking at a press conference on August 14, 2014 as follows: "The policy is conflicting with the country's constitution, democratic norms and values, human rights and Right to Information Act,". The anti-graft watchdog (TIB) also termed the policy as "repressive" and "is unfit for the 21st century" (bdnews24.com, "Broadcast policy is a control mechanism, says TIB", August 14, 2014, Dhaka). There is a fear that the government

will misuse this new broadcast policy in the name of maintaining quality in the electronic and print media.

Thus it can be mentioned that there is a state structure in Bangladesh, which has no check upon the government and especially the powers of the ruling elites. "As experience has shown from governments the world over, the key to good governance lies in effective distribution of power between the various branches and 'pillars' of a modern state along with free media and independence of judiciary. Governments are kept under effective monitoring and oversight by the legislative branch and on occasions by the judiciary and media. Where there has been too much concentration of power of one branch of the state over the other disastrous consequences occurred in the whole process of governance. Without a 'check and balance' of power, governance process in Bangladesh is likely to degenerate even further. In normal circumstances a party getting a two-thirds majority in the House has always led to disastrous consequences. South Asia is rich in such history which is popularly known as the "Curse of Two-Third Majority"(The Daily Star, 28 Oct, 2014, "State-power Vs Peoples-power"). As an outcome of the 10th general election current regime "with three-fourths majority in the House, a handpicked and henpecked opposition and the emergence of a leader with unchecked power and no institution that can hold her accountable, the risk of Lord Acton's warnings coming true looms large" (The Daily Star, 28 Oct, 2014, "State-power Vs Peoples-power"). But history reveals that the people of Bangladesh have shown little inclination towards autocratic regimes and attempts to install repressive government. They have shown with overwhelming popular movements for democracy and rights of citizens (Sengupta, 2007, p. 84). What would then be the ultimate consequences of the 10th general election for democratic legitimacy and regime stability in Bangladesh? Gowher Rizvi, former adviser to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, remarked by acknowledging low voter turnout in the 10th GE, "it was 'almost without doubt' that Mrs Hasina would call new elections ahead of schedule, noting that an election 'loses its luster' when a major party does not take part" (Barry, "Opposition Party Boycotting Bangladesh Election", New York Times, Jan. 4, 2014).

5. Conclusion

Bangladesh runs a fragile system of government and it inherited the Winner-Takes-All (WTA) voting system since it was a British colony before 1947. Notably, WTA system paves the way for fortune-making politics in Bangladesh. Especially party in power leaves its pro-people political programmes and deviate its activities to grab money by any means such as manipulating election and electoral process. Here party man especially belong to ruling party becomes the part of the administration from grassroot level to apex level--Winner Takes All! On the other hand, opposition parties do not go to parliament and are confined or sometimes compelled to confine (sometimes due to aggressive attitude of ruling party) itself in its party office releasing some political programmes using media or street agitations, etc. Both the regime and opposition aggravate their political programmes (politics for power) just before the scheduled election. They declare their manifestos, circulate it and try to explain it through the media. After election both of them forget the manifesto and pledges that they had promised. Thus, in Bangladesh, politics simply means election – a means to grave power even by a work over win. And, therefore, for ensuring a sound environment of healthy politics and a true democracy, the reform in voting system is a crying need indeed. It should also be mentioned here that proportional representation (PR) has been widely adopted across the globe because it avoids an outcome in which some people win representation and the rest is left out. Under PR, a legislature will accurately reflect the voting strength of various parties and difference between the treasury and the opposition eventually is reduced. Thus the malpractice of boycotting the parliament and power mongering may be stopped. This may provide an opportunity to renovate and strengthen the mechanisms of governance, offering the citizens of Bangladesh a democracy that does not offer the so-called 'tyranny of the majority' but a responsive and accountable government that ensures the citizens right to chose.

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