

SIPG POLICY BRIEF 37



THE QUEST FOR A FAIR AND REPRESENTATIVE ELECTORAL SYSTEM FOR BANGLADESH



SIPG

October 2025

Background

The desire to have a discrimination-free and truly democratic Bangladesh was one of the main aspirations behind the historic July Revolution of 2024. The youth-led uprising reflected the citizens' desire for equity, justice, and a political order where their voices count. Fundamental institutional reform, starting with the electoral system, is essential to achieve this goal. As Bangladesh moves towards reconstruction, there are concerns about establishing a fair and representative electoral system that prevents future authoritarian backsliding.

To explore this challenge, the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG) of North South University and the Private University Teachers Association of Bangladesh (PUTAB), jointly organised a dialogue titled “The Quest for a Fair and Representative Electoral System for Bangladesh(একটি গণতান্ত্রিক ও প্রতিনিধিত্বমূলক নির্বাচন পদ্ধতির সন্ধানে) on 02 August 2025. Professor Dr. AKM Waresul Karim, Dean, School of Business & Economics of NSU, delivered the keynote presentation. This dialogue brought together politicians, academics, researchers, policymakers, journalists, students, and other stakeholders to examine the current electoral system, discuss the structural and institutional reforms needed to ensure a fair electoral system, and come up with strategies to enhance the participation of youth and marginalised communities in the electoral process.

Main Challenges in Implementing a Fair and Representative Electoral System in Bangladesh

Like many other countries, the current First Past the Post (FPTP) system in Bangladesh usually produces results that fail to reflect the diversity of the voters' choices. The other major problems of the current electoral system include:

Structural Problems in the Current System

Under the First Past the Post (FPTP) system, a political party can secure the majority of seats without winning most of the popular votes. This “winner-takes-all” phenomenon ignores the representation of the voters. Therefore, opposition parties are not properly represented, which leads to weakening parliamentary debate and the broader system of democratic checks and balances. In countries like Bangladesh, the use of the FPTP electoral method frequently leads to distorted outcomes in the parliament.

Political Resistance

Any kind of change in the current electoral system can challenge political interests. For example, a country's ruling party usually gets the maximum benefits from the current electoral arrangements. If any kind of reform or changes in the current system show the possibility of reduced dominance, the ruling party might resist the changes in the current system.

Lack of Public Confidence

Any major change in the current electoral process requires the approval and acceptance of the public. In the case of Bangladesh, flawed elections and political violence have reduced public trust in the system. Hence, many voters believe that elections are usually predetermined or heavily manipulated. This causes the voters to lose interest in attending any political engagement. Therefore, their lack of support and disinterest can be a serious challenge in implementing initiatives to change the current electoral system.

Institutional and Administrative Challenges

Even though the Election Commission is assigned with the task of ensuring the electoral integrity of a country, it often faces challenges due to the lack of complete autonomy. Moreover, any change in the current FPTP system requires rewriting and redesigning of the entire electoral process. It also requires designing new ballots, introducing new voting procedures, training of election officials and poll workers, along with launching campaigns to educate the voters on the new system. However, this entire process can face significant technical and administrative challenges.

Risk of Manipulation

The previous elections in Bangladesh have a history of vote-buying, manipulations of votes, and the use of voting machines for unethical advantage. These kinds of practices undermine the chances of fair elections in the country and discourage the participation of weaker parties in elections. In some cases, the free campaigning of the weaker political parties is restricted by rallies of the opposition parties, harassment of activists, or illegal application of laws.

Risk of Political Fragmentation

Although the proportional representation systems can represent all the political parties, this system can also result in fragmented parliaments with numerous small parties. Considering Bangladesh's political culture, this situation could create unstable coalition governments and frequent changes in the leadership. Without any stable mechanisms, any shift to a different electoral system could weaken the overall governance.

Solutions for Implementing a Fair and Representative Electoral System

- Adopt a Modified Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP) voting system where voters cast one ballot for a local candidate and another for a party list to correct distortions of the parties caused by the current FPTP system.
- Introduce a reasonable national vote threshold (e.g., 5%) to help balance proportionality and political stability, to limit excessive fragmentation by fringe parties.
- Establish independent constituency boundary commissions to transparently redraw electoral boundaries to prevent gerrymandering.
- Create political consensus for reform while organising inclusive multi-party discussions led by impartial mediators from academics, international organisations, and civil society.
- Generate shared incentives for political support, link election reform to larger efforts to promote democracy (judicial independence, media freedom, anti-corruption).
- Implement reforms in phases to allow political parties and the public to adapt gradually and reduce resistance.
- Conduct nationwide education campaigns using media to educate the people in general and build public trust in the new system.
- Ensure transparency in the electoral process through regular monitoring and reporting of data from registration to vote count.
- Ensure independent election observation by local and international monitors to prevent malpractice in the electoral process.
- Change the recruitment procedure for the Election Commissioners to ensure that the authority is free from any political influence.
- Establish a dedicated team for solving any disputes by increasing the powers of the Election Commission.

- Create a national electoral reform roadmap with precise timelines, institutional responsibilities, and regular public progress reports to ensure transparency and accountability.
- Test the new electoral system in local or municipal elections to test and adjust procedures.
- Improve speed, accuracy, and transparency of the electoral process by introducing training programs for election officials.
- Impose severe fines and mandatory prosecution for electoral malpractices, such as vote-buying, coercion, and fraud.
- Ensure equal access of political parties to campaign venues, media, and public forums for promoting fair competition.
- Protect voters and candidates from all the political parties by deploying trained security forces on election day.

Key Observations of the Resource Persons



Professor Dr. AKM Waresul Karim
Dean, School of Business &
Economics, NSU

"From 1973 to 2018, Bangladesh's elections have often failed to translate votes into fair representation. Our proposed Weighted Mixed Member Proportional system preserves direct voting for all 300 seats but adds a proportional adjustment to align seats with vote share, while rewarding electoral success through a winners' premium."



Dr. Badiul Alam Majumdar
Head, Election System
Reform Commission

"Age and wisdom do not necessarily go hand in hand; history shows that transformative leaders can be very young. It is time to open the doors of parliament to the next generation, ensuring their voices and visions are part of our national decision-making."



Advocate Ruhul Kabir Rizvi
Senior Joint Secretary General,
Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)

"For any electoral reform to succeed, we must also transform our political culture. Without the foundation of genuine democracy, even the best-designed system will fail to produce real representation."



Bobby Hajjaj
Chairman, Nationalist Democratic
Movement (NDM)

"Electoral reforms must be tested and adapted to our own political reality. Borrowing foreign models without understanding the ground realities risks creating solutions that do not work for Bangladesh."



Dr. Abdullah-Al-Mamun
Associate Professor,
Department of Japanese Studies,
University of Dhaka

"International experience shows that stability often comes from acting quickly. Sixteen countries restored order within ten months through targeted reforms. For Bangladesh, a timely, reformed election could provide the stability we urgently need."



Dr. Tasnim Jara
Senior Joint Member Secretary,
National Citizen Party (NCP)

"Bangladesh has one of the world's youngest populations, yet both youth and women remain grossly underrepresented in governance. We must build an electoral system that allows them to shape the nation's future."



Mamunul Haque
President,
Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis

"Today's electoral framework leaves most voters as spectators while two dominant parties control the field. We must replace this with a system that ensures all citizens are fairly represented."



Professor Dr. Dilara Chowdhury
Academic and Political Analyst

"Despite decades of democratic struggle, Bangladesh has never held a serious academic discussion on proportional representation. PR not only reflects diverse voices but is one of the most effective ways to ensure women's representation in parliament."



Professor Dr. Mahbubur Rahman
Chair,
Department of History & Philosophy,
North South University

"The July Revolution brought together 30 political parties in open dialogue. Any system that fails to represent the people undermines the very essence of democracy, and reform is essential to preserve that essence."



Barrister Fuad
Senior Leader,
Amar Bangladesh (AB) Party

"Fair elections have been at the heart of our political aspirations since the six-point demand of 1966. Decades later, we are still fighting for that same principle. However, meaningful reform is long overdue."

Conclusion

The July Revolution of 2024 showed a strong public demand for a new political order in Bangladesh. Observations further reveal that the current First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system has limitations and flaws. This system has historically compromised the democratic process and proved to be ineffective in representing a type of governance that the people of Bangladesh have supported. By adopting a new electoral model, like the Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP) system, the current interim government can establish a representative parliament that reflects the will of the citizens. This reform in the electoral system is not merely a systematic adjustment; it is a vital step toward fulfilling the promises of the revolution and building a sustainable, just, and democratic future for everyone in Bangladesh.

This Policy Brief is prepared by

K. M. Noor-E-Zannat Nadi

Research Associate, SIPG, NSU

Email: noor.nadi@northsouth.edu

Under the supervision of

Professor Salahuddin M. Aminuzzaman

Adviser, SIPG, NSU

Email: saminuzzaman@gmail.com

Designed by

Kaushini Anuradha Dammalage,

Foreign Graduate Assistant, SIPG, NSU

Email: dammalagekaushi@gmail.com

Contact Us

South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG)

North South University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Phone: +88-02-55668200 ext. 2164, 6156

Email: sipg@northsouth.edu

Website: www.sipg.northsouth.edu

