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Accommodating Party Members in Local Government Institutions:

Partisan Elections and Changing Patronage Relations in Bangladesh

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Working Paper **#2**

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Abstract

Accommodating party activists under political party patronage in government offices is nothing new in the politics of developing countries especially Bangladesh. Soon after the independence, this country has experienced the collusion of political party leaders and criminals. Many militia groups were forming, not accepting the government's authority. Therefore, the then regime leaders allowed their party followers to carry arms to defend themselves from the militias. Long after the independence, the government passed a rule to enable partisan election in the local government institutions. With this change in the election policy, rural local party activists become more interested in taking the offices. By doing this, the government allowed urban-based political violence in rural Bangladesh. With the party in power, the party leader or sometimes the rebel or opposition party candidates won the office of the local government institutions. This has allowed the local party leaders to access the state resources and use them at their end. With this access, those local leaders concentrated their power with local grouping or faction politics by polarizing the opposition leaders and other leaders of the same political party. And they have been successful in doing this by accommodating the local party followers and activists in the local government offices and providing them with state resources.

Keywords:

partisan election; local government; violence; patronage; party politics; Bangladesh.

Introduction

In 2016 Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has decided to conduct the Local Government institutions' (LGI) elections (rural & urban) under party lines. With this decision, the political parties' client networks have become proactive to gain nominations from the political parties to participate in the elections for the LGIs' offices. This has increased the competition for gaining support from the political party. Due to the competition, intra-party violence has become an extensive tool to gain party attention (Kuttig, Suykens and Islam, 2020). This increasing competition and violence are important because if the candidate gets a nomination from the incumbent, it will be an automatic win for the LGI office. There were reports of corruption for gaining nomination from the incumbent party, and many incumbent party leaders became rebel candidates in the election of their respective constituencies. However, the situation was not similar for other political parties (Aziz and Razzaque, 2018).

Nevertheless, the election's violence was noteworthy, and especially the intraparty violence was out of control. This policy change has caused intensive election violence before and after the Union Council's five-phased election (Union Parishad-UP, the lowest administrative tier of GoB). Around 132 people have died, more than ten thousand people were injured throughout the process, and most of the violence was caused by intra-party competition. People who died mainly were the followers of the incumbent party (Mollah et al., 2018).

More than 90% of the UP got elected chairpersons who belonged to the incumbent political party (nominated or rebel candidate who won the election) after the election took place. Before the party line election or partisan election in the UPs, the chairmen and members' political affiliations were known in the community they were serving (Noorana, 2015). But making the affiliations obvious has created some new implications. Making the political identity obvious by the partisan election for the elected officials for the LGIs was a crucial turn of events. By this, the offices become very party oriented. Since all the state resources for the country's marginalized population are distributed through these LGIs especially the UPs, political identity becomes one of the essential requirements to access these resources. Besides, the traditional leaders who were ideologically oriented with any political party but not politically active have lost their position in society (Saha, 2017; Sarker and Nawaz, 2019). The newly emerging political party leaders, who are also the clients of the patrons sitting in the center or upper tier of the party, become more significant to the rural population (Fieldwork 2017).

In this current paper, we would like to show the audience how introducing the partisan election in the LGIs has made the LGI offices into a party hub. Previously, it was an office for all the community people. It has become an office for the political party leaders and followers or is ideologically oriented with the party ideology. Furthermore, the intraparty contest and competition have significantly increased, creating many cleavages. Tension among the groups from the same political party is on the rise. This has also contributed to changing the power structure of the rural livelihoods in Bangladesh. In the background, we discussed the information to understand the history and current politics and elections in Bangladesh. Then in the methodology, we have discussed the methods we have followed to collect

and analyze data for the current project. We have conducted a semi-systematic literature review to understand the existing gaps in the party patronage and local election literature. We have brought the structure of the Bangladesh local government and some recent changes in it, and the current causes and types of violence in local elections in rural Bangladesh. Then we have discussed the new trend that is taking place in the local government institutions and how the party members are taking up the spaces of the community members. Then we have analyzed the findings and way forward of our current research along with the final thought.

Background

Bangladesh as a country has been known for its frequent natural disasters and poverty. However, this country has recently stepped into the middle-income country club and become the news headlines of the national and international media houses for its overwhelming economic success. Furthermore, this country has achieved sufficiency in food production, foreign remittance reserve, implementing mega projects in the infrastructure and garments industry. Despite all these economic and development success stories country's political history is a troublesome (Islam, 2015; Kuttig, 2020).

The earliest history of Bangladesh has been written by travelers, conquerors, missionaries, princely rulers, and peasants. The Portuguese colonial campaigns and later in 1757 the British defeated the local rulers and started the British colonial rule in Bangladesh. It continued for 200 years, and in 1947 they left and divided the Indian Sub-continent into two separate nations based on religion. India is for Hindus and Pakistan is for Muslims, and Bangladesh the then East Pakistan became part of the Pakistani colonial rule (Hassan et al., 2019). During the Pakistan period, especially the Ayub Khan's 'Basic Democracy' system was introduced in the local government system. There was no direct election for the representative for the local government institution, only with the indirect election. Representatives from the authoritarian government could hold the offices of the local government institutions (Van Schendel, 2015).

During the Pakistan rule in Bangladesh, there has been discrimination and ignorance from the central government, the citizens, and the leaders from this part of the then United Pakistan revolted. And with a bloody war, Bangladesh became the independent sovereign country under the leadership of the father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. After independence in 1972, the government passed a presidential order, discontinued all the previous local government, and established the present four-tier local government system in Bangladesh, keeping the three hill districts (Chattogram Hill Tracts) out of this system (Huq, 2016; Chowdhury and Panday, 2018; Hassan et al., 2019). Since then, there have been many changes in the rules and regulations relating to the local government institutions in Bangladesh. So far, there have been ten UP elections in Bangladesh. Some of the polls were as deadly as it gets, and some were fair and free from violence.

Literature Review

Literature on local government and relevance has been growing since the 2000s, and it has covered several previously unexplored areas. Most of the literature focuses on the decentralization of power from central government to local government, the process of devolution, the election violence in the local government election, accountability, transparency, and so forth (Rondinelli, McCullough and Johnson, 1989; Farrington, 2011; Sarker and Nawaz, 2019). Local government institutions work as a public service delivery system in countries like Bangladesh. Government institutions are fragile and constantly face challenges in delivering state-provided support and services to the grassroots (Sarker and Nawaz, 2019). These institutions are elected by the local people and serve based on the interest of their voters; however, due to the severe corruption in the third world developing countries like Bangladesh and some countries in South Asia, Latin America, Africa, and East Europe, the local government institutions are failing to deliver their mandated services to the recipient's (Harbers, 2009; Krawczyk and Sweet-Cushman, 2016).

Moreover, the election and selection process of the local government officeholders are not always accessible and fair. In most cases, these elections are marred by electoral fraud, election violence, vote stuffing, etc. (Rashiduzzaman, 2002). Party members also expect benefits in exchange of party support. To secure the support from the individual the party promises several kinds of goods or opportunities including a position in public or semi-public life, jobs in the civil service, public organizations, universities, regulatory bodies or goods like medicine, food, infrastructure in the locality, or even a low interest loan (Kopecký and Scherlis, 2008). There are different types of patronage system are found in the literature such as clientelism, pork barrel politics, and corruption. Nevertheless, they are often intertwined, and the final output of the patronage output is to secure political support of the individual in exchange for benefits (ibid).

Samuel P. Huntington, in his foundational work, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, has claimed that government institutions should be based on free and fair elections. For this creation of institutions to maintain the free and fair election is important (Huntington, 1968). In this, NGOs and election observers from home and abroad play a vital role in maintaining the equilibrium for free and fair elections (Valters and Jahan, 2017). Furthermore, the election outcome depends on the successful implementation of the electoral policies by the election regulatory authorities and the security forces. However, a flawed election system in low-income countries affects the democratization process, and political elites take advantage of the situation (Hassan and Nazneen, 2017). Nevertheless, the election is an institution that helps the peaceful transfer of power within the groups in society; conversely, this process can generate conflict (Hassan, 2016; Sarker and Khalid, 2018).

Democratic election ensures proper participation of the citizens in the local government elections. The modern democratic system provides the decentralization of power at the local level, and the citizens can participate in a competitive environment to become the representative of those institutions (Johnson, 2001; Johnson, Deshingkar and Start, 2007). Local government institutions disburse resources among the local citizens, and the central government has less or no control over their decision. They can also accu-

multate resources for their projects and programs, manage their staffing, manage their budget. The central government plays an external advisory role in the local government institutions' decision-making (Sarker and Nawaz, 2019). A significant portion of the literature discusses the transfer of power, de-concentration, devolution, their responsibilities, actions, politicization, power of the local administrative units, democratic development through local government leadership, etc. (R C Crook and J Manor, 1998; Yilmaz, Beris and Serrano-Berthet, 2010). The decentralization of the local government is one of the essential topics of discussion the contemporary literature, including participation, equity, representation, accountability, and others. However, the literature misses how the local government representatives use the institution to create a power hub in the local government offices in two ways. By manipulating the election, the political party leaders capture the office of the local government institutions. They influence elections by changing election policy violence, using the regime's power and administration (Rahman and Nasrin, 2017).

Similarly, after winning the election and taking control of the local government office, they provide access to the local party leaders and followers. The office was supposed to be for all beyond their religious, gender, and political identity. However, in the current paper, we see how the local government offices, especially the UP became the party centers and how it became the sort of local party office.

Methodology

The study aims to determine how local government institutions become the accommodating ground for the local party members. In addition, the study also intends to find out how the local government institutions' officeholders are using the office for creating their group in the locality. The study focuses on the current situation of the local government institutions, the Union Parishad (UP), and how this has become the party office of the rural level. And by using this UP, the local leaders who became the officeholders are distributing the state resources to their followers. For conducting the study, we have chosen the field in Magura, Bangladesh, with four different Upazila Parishad (UPZ), the second-lowest local government institution tier in Bangladesh, and 36 UPs. We have chosen four other UPs randomly for data collection. The names of the UPs will remain inaccessible for our readers because of the sensitivity of the data collected from the field. We have conducted the fieldwork from September to October 2017. Data was compiled from both primary and secondary sources (Fieldwork 2017).

The reason that we have selected the rural level local government institutions because most of the literature on political violence or election violence across the globe is based on the data from urban setting. The urban settings are more violence and there are many reasons behind but during the last UP election we have seen in Bangladesh that the political violence or election violence used to an urban phenomenon but now it became viral in rural areas of Bangladesh. Similarly, the rural local government institutions play a vital role in producing leaders for democracy and that brings us to the bottom-up approach for leadership making but if this UP election process gets corrupted then it will be difficult for people with dignity to come to politics and election from the rural areas and that will create a vacuum in the leadership pipeline.

Especially the urban city in Bangladesh is hugely densely populated and the people participate in the violence are mostly the low-income people and migrants and working menial jobs. On the other hand, the rural violence is more focused on the local people and fighting between the neighbors. In addition, during our field work we have found that party activists in the urban areas buy supporters on a daily payment system and when they need, they will buy them and show off in front of the party office. However, they will have their big leaders and some strong supports who will manage everything for the big leader. But rural violence more acute and fight among the neighbors and they interact with them on a daily basis. These are the things that make the rural violence is different from the urban violence.

For primary data collection, we have prepared a checklist for an interview. Then we conducted one-on-one in-depth interviews of 20 respondents from four different UPs of Magura District of Bangladesh, covering four different UPZs of this district. The respondents were current chairmen, former chairmen, former members, political leaders from the local areas (including AL-Awami League, BNP-Bangladesh Nationalist Party, and others), female members, general citizens, etc. The snowball sampling method was used for selecting the respondents. We have conducted the interviews and recorded our conversation with their consent. Later, we transcribed the conversation, wrote our field notes and observations, and analyzed them using MS Word software. We have collected documents from UP, Election Commission, articles, books, journals, newspaper clippings, and policy documents for collecting secondary data. We have provided the study's theoretical understanding and validated the findings based on the secondary data.

Like many of the research studies out there, they have some limitations. The sample size is not adequate for representing the location and population of the field sights. In addition, due to the time and resource constraints, we had to limit ourselves from extensive fieldwork and research. Some respondents were skeptical about the study and some of them abstained from answering a few sensitive questions. Furthermore, when we talked in public places, many people spoke from the side, took our concentration, and dictated our conversation. Some respondents answered that I should know the response as I'm native to the land and grew up in this political ecosystem. Few respondents were afraid of us and skeptical about what we will do with the data. And lastly, one of our responses couldn't be recorded because the interviews forgot to press the record button. Nonetheless, above all the shortcomings, we could finally complete the fieldwork and compile the data for completing the project's work. The research was initially conducted to explore the connection between the policy change and the increasing election violence in the local government elections of Bangladesh.

Local Government in Bangladesh

A bit of background on the local government system in Bangladesh has been discussed above; however, here in this section, we will discuss the local government system in Bangladesh in detail. Different legislation provides grounds for local government in Bangladesh. Still, the country's constitution provides provisions for local government institutions in the rural and urban settings, including its election and participation (Chowdhury and Panday, 2018). Nevertheless, local government was always there in this

region of the country. In the medieval period, the historians reckon to mitigate petty disputes, there was Panchayats in every village, and it has existed since then (Banglapedia, 2012; Panday and Rabbani, 2017; Sarker and Nawaz, 2019).

During the colonial periods when the British took control of this part of the world, they introduced the Local Self-Government Act, 1885, and introduced three-tier local government systems. During the Pakistan rule in the region, the autocratic rulers introduced the Basic Democracy in the local government representative's election for its four-tier local government system. But it failed because of the controversies and the authoritarian rule in this region. Later Bangladesh became independent, and in 1972 a presidential order was issued to keep the four-tier local government system. In 1973 for the first time in independent Bangladesh, the election for UP took place (Banglapedia, 2012).

In 1976 in the changing political landscape, the military dictator introduced a three-tier local government in Bangladesh. Subsequently, another military dictator in Bangladesh took significant steps to reorganize the local government system and emphasized the thana as the hub of all administrative activities (Van Schendel, 2015). In 1982 to decentralize the administration election in the Upazila Parishad was introduced, and it was made for planning, promotion, and execution of development programs, primary education, health, and family welfare, various rural infrastructure programs, and many other functions which could be carried out at the local level. In 1991, the democratic government came into power and abolished the provision of Upazila Parishad (Mollah et al., 2018). Since there have been many changes and development in the local government institutions in Bangladesh, we present the present local government system in Bangladesh (Panday and Rabbani, 2011). Now there are several legislations for every local government institution, from local to urban, supporting and promoting the functions of the local government institutions in Bangladesh. Bangladesh has eight divisions, 64 districts, and 495 Upazilas (sub-districts). In addition, there are 4554 Union Parishads in Bangladesh which is the lowest tier of local government in Bangladesh.

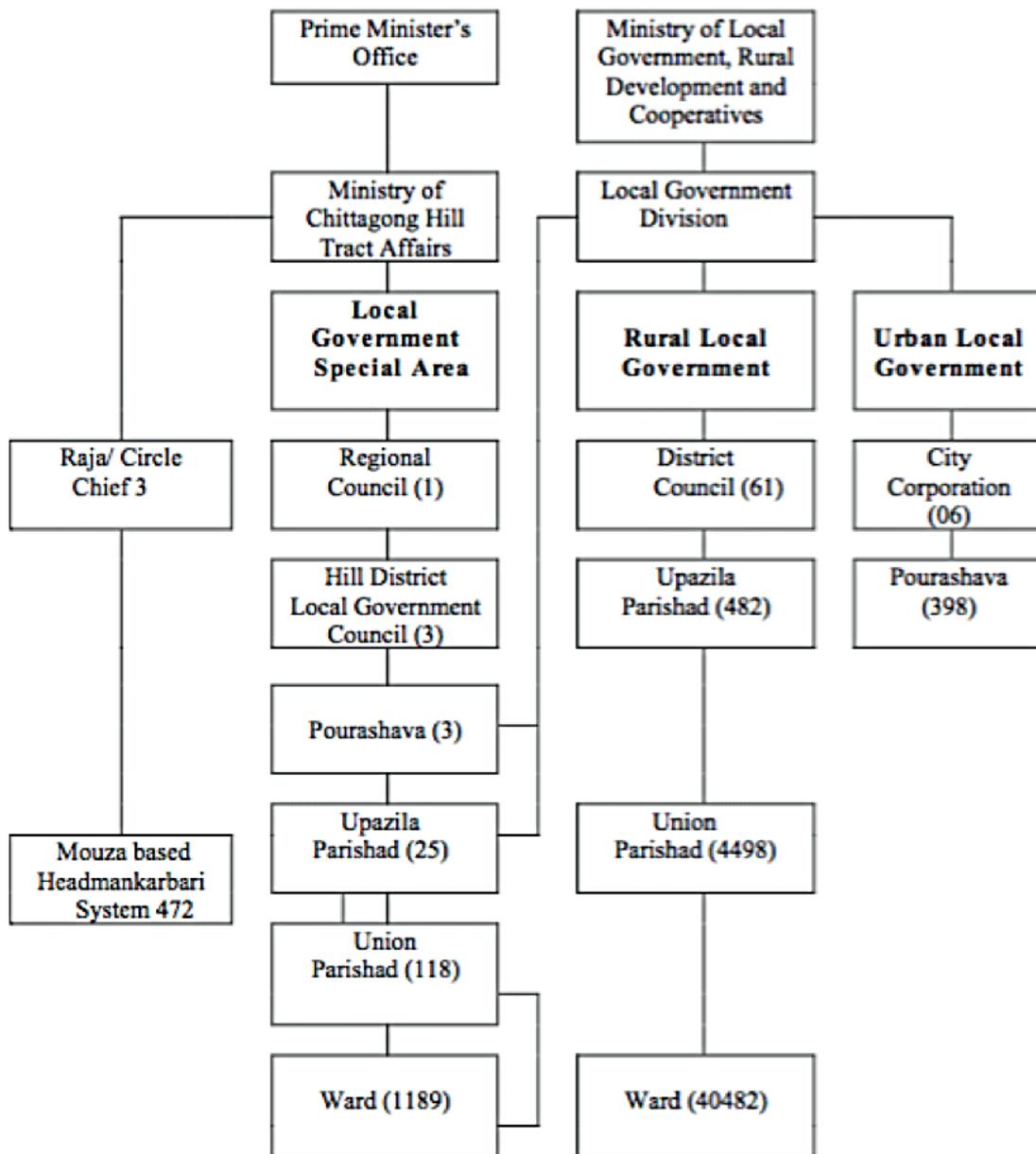


Figure 1: Current Structure of Local Government in Bangladesh (numbers have changed but the structure remained the same)

Some Recent Changes

Several structural and functional reform initiatives took place during different regimes, including electoral, financial, planning, budgeting, and staffing reform. In 1991 after assuming power, the BNP-led Khaleda Zia government took the initiative of the more effective local government system and formed a high-powered Local Government Structure Review Commission (LGSRC). The commission proposed two tiers of the local government system, Zila Parishad (District Council, ZP) and Gram Sabha (Council of villagers, GS), considering the village as the basic unit of the UP (Chowdhury and Panday, 2018). Later in

1996, the Hasina regime appointed another high-powered commission and recommended four-tier local governments: Gram Parishad, UP, UPZ, and Zila Parishad. Similarly, the Local Government (Union Parishad) (Second Amendment) Bill of 1997 made the composition of UP into nine wards for direct election and three women members for reserved seats (Rahman and Nasrin, 2017). In the following graph, you can see the current structure of the UP, the lowest tier of local government institutions in Bangladesh (Sarker and Nawaz, 2019).

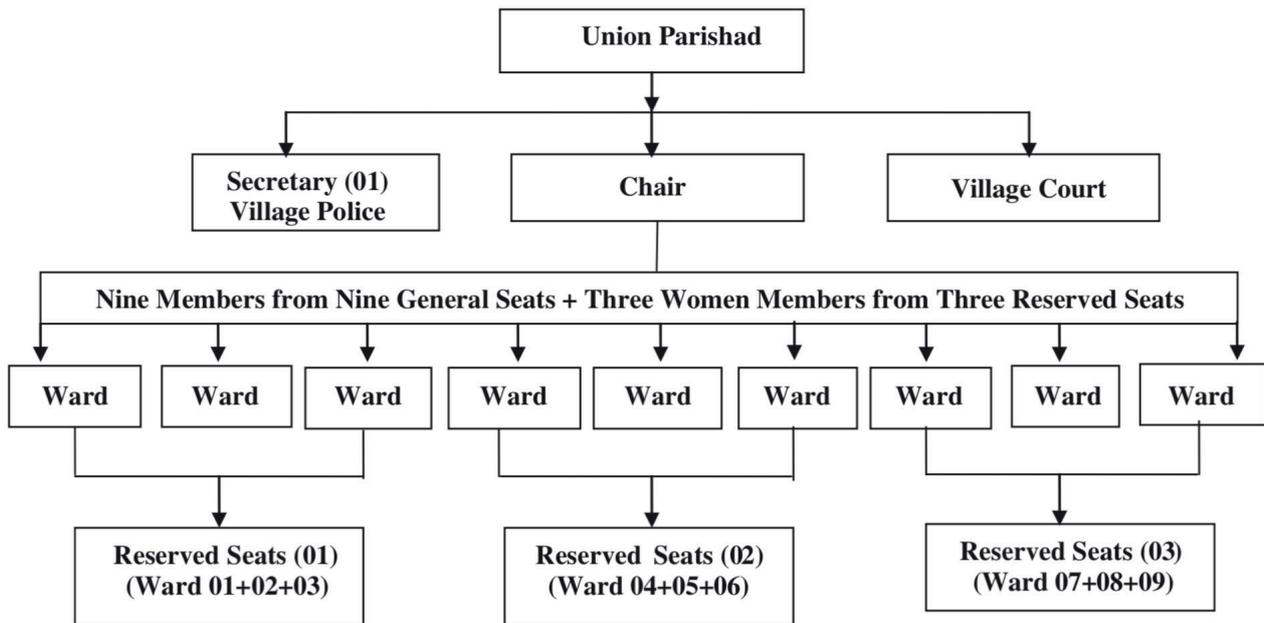


Figure 2: Current structure of the UP in Bangladesh

When BNP led, four Parties' Alliance Government came to power in 2001. It passed the Gram Sarkar (Village Government) Act of 2003 to establish the wards as supporting institutions of UPs, but the High Court rippled the function of the law declaring the law is contrary to the constitution in 2006 (Huq, 2016; Chowdhury and Panday, 2018). The military-backed caretaker government in 2008 issued the Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance, and the parliament ratified it as the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act of 2009. Based on that law, Bangladesh has three rural local government institutions, the UP, UPZ, and ZP. Except for ZP, the other two tiers function with local representatives (Sarker and Khalid, 2018; Sarker and Nawaz, 2019).

Nevertheless, the reforms were taken into consideration of the electoral politics. In October 2015, the government proposed partisan elections for local government institutions, and since then, the Bangladesh government has been holding elections for local government institutions under party lines. This policy change has marked the local government institutions' election, especially the UP, with intensive violence. In the 2016 UP election, there were 145 deaths due to election violence.

Why and How the Reform Took place?

The regime party leaders show and analyze the data that due to the significant number of nomination aspirants from its own party making their votes fragmented and with this chance opposition leaders are getting marginal majority and winning the elections and getting into the local government offices. If there are opposition party leaders in the local government offices, then it is difficult to maintain the strong power base of the party activists in the rural communities using state resources. When the opposition party leaders are becoming elected, they will use the state resources to recruit their own party activists with the state resources. The regime party leaders were not liking it, and this is why they thought for a change. This is why the regime party leaders proposed that all the positions in every local government elections will go under the partisan election. Then cabinet ministers decided on the top position of the local government institutions will go on partisan election (Sarker and Nawaz, 2019; Saha, 2017). Then it became a law for partisan election in the local government institutions with all the formal procedures.

Violence in Local Government Election: Case of UP Election

Violence in the local government elections is prevalent in Bangladesh, and it happens more often than it appears in the media. The violence in the local government election and the other polls and political violence types are not clearly defined. During our fieldwork in 2017 in Magura, we have seen people point out that sometimes people will use the violence for their rage during the election because election violence has some indemnity. There has been no trial for election violence as an offense. In the UP election of 2016, several cases have been filed in the formal courts, but none has seen the final judgment. In the following, we will discuss the causes of violence in the local government election concerning the UP election in Bangladesh and our fieldwork from 2017.

The violence starts with the preparation of the election. When the potential candidates begin to plan and make their field in their respective constituencies, they begin to show their power try to get rid of the other possible candidates and create an environment of fear. Then when the nomination process begins, that escalates another phase of violence to show the party authority, local people, and the other candidates who are the most powerful. Then again, there is the election competition and during the election campaign, candidates' followers time to time, get into violence as there always remains the tension and threat of violence.

On the other hand, due to the lack of proper opposition in the electoral field, the candidates nominated from the regime political party and the independent candidate who is also a follower of the party get into violence. Specifically, the intraparty violence (this kind of violence takes place among same party members for taking post position in the party, taking nomination, or any kind of party related activities), and grouping violence result from this lack of candidates from solid opposition parties. And finally, when the election results come out, there is the time to show the people and the losing candidates who is the most powerful and make them powerless just with violence and the threat of violence.

New Trend in the UP Office

After winning the election, the AL nominated chairmen started to acute their power in the locality. As we have already discussed, the UP is the lowest tier of the local government institution in Bangladesh, and the UP distributes state resources in those local areas. In this respect, UP plays a significant role in spreading state resources among the rural population. However, after the 2016 UP election, we noticed some new changes during our fieldwork.

Party Leaders: The majority of the UP chairmen are the ruling party patronage, the local ruling party leaders. So, they have some obligation for their party and party members. Some chairmen supported different political parties in the previous UP elections, but their primary identity was the chairman, but now it has become obsolete. Because after getting the nomination from the party, they had to look after the party's interest and party members. One of the respondents, a member of the respective UP, told us that the chairman of the separate UP is also the president of the ruling party's union committee, the Upazila Committee, and other political positions. These political affiliations of the chairman are hampering the functionality of the respective UP (Fieldwork 2017).

Party-Based Resource Distribution: Most of the social safety net programs are monitored and implemented for the marginalized rural poor population by the UP. The local chairman and members list the people who need social safety net support. In the past, it was done by the local elderly or elites. However, after the partisan election and partisan chairmen in the chair, the local political party members became the influencers of the listing for social safety net receivers. Many of the respondents have claimed that to be the receiver of the social safety net support, they will have to be the follower of the ruling party; otherwise, they will not put their names on the list (Fieldwork 2017).

UP Member/Chairman are the New Power Hub: The local elites were the landlords, government officials, superior political leaders, etc. And now, the newly elected UP members and chairmen became the power hum of the area. Because with the state resources in the UP, the members and chairman became the patrons for the clients in the area, and they can provide clientelist opportunities through the UP office. The people in need don't look for the local elites, landlords, or government; instead, they go to the local UP member or chairmen for help. Since they have a position in the UP and are also politically positioned in the ruling party, it is easier for them to solve any problem, from administrative to political (Fieldwork 2017).

UP Office as the Party Office: Political parties have offices at the district level and sometimes Upazila levels but not very often at the UP level. This has remained for many, many years. However, with the change in the partisan election in the local government elections, the local UP office has become the party office for the ruling parties. Because most of the chairmen are the members or the posted leaders of the ruling party and need to maintain their political activities to remain in the political positions, they use the UP office as their party office. One of the members who support the opposition political party but the chairman of the respective UP is ruling party leader does his party activities such as meetings,

decision meetings, member collection, in the UP office, and the members are not comfortable with this. Still, they cannot say anything because of the political pressure from the ruling party.

Quasi-Judicial Practice on Party Line: UP in Bangladesh also works as a village court according to the village court act 2006 (Huq, 2016). This quasi-judicial practice is in doubt, given that most of the UP chairman are political leaders and nominated by a particular political party. One of the general citizen respondents from our field area told us they could expect neutral judgment from a nominated ruling party Chairman of the UP. If any person supporters of BNP go to the UP for judgment, the UP chairman lingers the process of village court. However, the chairman does the opposite when any AL leaders/ followers go to the UP for justice. And usually, the judgment goes in favor of the ruling party.

New List of Beneficiaries: In the past, the local beneficiaries didn't need the political background to access the UP and its resources. However, to get any service or help for those who need the political recommendation (Chowdhury and Panday, 2018). Without any recommendation from the ruling party leaders from the respective area, they cannot get on the list of beneficiaries. During our fieldwork, the UP secretary makes a list of beneficiaries for social safety net programs. One of the respondents told us he was not listed on the beneficiaries list because he has a relative who is the local leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Still, he badly needs social safety net support.

Persuading New Party Members Through UP Office: By providing support through UP resources, the UP members and chairmen bring new members to the party and strengthen their group. In addition, they are also trying to abolish the other political opposition by suppressing the members of those groups and depriving them of the benefits of the UP resources. In addition, as local political leaders for the ruling party and UP chairman, it is easier for them to bring people into their group by providing scientific opportunities to the other group members. By doing this, the opposition party and groups will be weaker.

Awami League (AL) by Force: We have seen many supporters of other political parties in the past in our field. Still, they are politically inactive or joined the ruling party because of the pressure from the AL leaders or to do their business in peace. One of the business owners in our field area told us he used to support Jataya Party in the past. Still, after the 2016 UP election, the local ruling party members put immense pressure on him to become politically inactive or join the party. Otherwise, the local ruling party supports/goons were disturbing his local business by occasionally vandalizing his shops in the local market. This is why he left politics and now is a full-time businessman.

We can see from the above discussion that after introducing the partisan election in the local government institutions, especially the functionality of the UPs has changed. The elite class has shifted from neutral political elites to partisan political elites. In addition, the political party activities have increased, and each UP office has become the local party hub/office of the ruling party. Furthermore, the elected chairman of the UP, who are also the local leaders of the ruling party, are trying to establish their group in the locality by providing clientelist opportunities towards the local party supporters.

Analysis of our Findings

With the literature review and data from the field, we have found some exciting findings towards the changing nature of the UP functionality. This has brought some exciting results for our current topic of partisan election and the accommodating party leaders in the government offices. The UP members were elected based on their image, leadership, and locality contributions in the past. However, with this move from the non-partisan to the partisan election, the local government institutions have made the political competition obsolete locally (Huq, 2016; Chowdhury and Panday, 2018; Sarker and Nawaz, 2019). There were patronage networks, competitive politics, rural elites based on the land and resources, and respect for the elderly. However, the local government election amendment has systematically put these indicators out of the local politics by forcing out the opposition candidates, rigging votes through violence, aided by the ruling party hoodlums. In addition, the election commission and the local administration have helped the process by allowing the ruling party members during the election violence and seriously undermined the competitive politics in rural Bangladesh.

Furthermore, the demand for nomination from the ruling party has increased, and due to the increased demand, there has been evidence of nomination trade for candidacy for local government institutions. The candidates pay the local posted leaders who nominate the local government candidacy. Nonetheless, some leaders took the money but didn't nominate the aspiring candidate who paid the money.

Furthermore, the other local government institutions' elections under the new rule face the saving trend of lacking competitive politics and election. Likewise, giving the local government office to the party leaders might bring some long-term harm such as lack of democratic practices among the rural local leaders, irregularities in the resource distribution by the UP, marginalized, vulnerable poor people might be out of the reach of the local government institutions. Finally, the grouping sectarian politics will bring more confrontation and violence to local politics. In addition, the UP offices are now filled with local political leaders, so it is not accessible by the local people who need services from the UP. UP has become a hub for service-providing agencies, including banks, government documentation, etc. Still, due to the political nature, one particular group of people, especially the people following the opposition political party and people with different ideologies from the ruling party, are deprived of the local UP's services (Khan, 2015; Saha, 2017). In addition, the current political practices might not be healthy for the future political landscape because the current system will break down the political institutions like elections, democratic practices of leaders, local government institutions. By the current practice of the local government in the party line election, it is vital to ensure the level playing field for the other opposition parties to participate freely in the election. Nevertheless, when there is a change in the national political landscape, and the ruling party will change will become the opposition party, they will also face the same problem (Huq, 2016; Chowdhury and Panday, 2018). This is why it is crucial to saving these institutions for themselves.

Way Forward for Current Research

Based on our theoretical understanding and empirical evidence, partisan elections have reduced electoral competition in the local political landscape. The interactions among the local political leaders, social leaders, and the administration have to be more vibrant so that the local people can address the current situation of the UP (Jütting et al., 2005; Saha, 2017). The UP has become one particular party hub in the locality, but it was not (Sarker, 2006; Sarker and Khalid, 2018; Sarker and Nawaz, 2019). It demands more qualitative and quantitative surveys by increasing sample size to address the issue with more evidence. Furthermore, some comparison with countries from South Asia, Africa, and Latin America needs to be done to how other countries are doing. Especially on the public service delivery and partisan political factions in the local politics need to be explored more by our researcher to see how the situation impacts the national and regional political ecosystem.

Final Thought

The current study has pointed out how the local government becomes a local party government. The non-partisan election to the partisan election in the local government has decreased the competitive politics at the local level. Ideally, there shouldn't be any problem with the political competition and partisan election. Still, in reality, the ruling party leaders have used the local administration and security forces to manipulate the whole election system. The nexus among the local political leaders, superior political leaders, local administration, and security forces is evident, as we can see in the UP election of 2016. The local government institutions were always in the hold of the local elites, including the political party and independent elites.

This is one of the way that the political parties hold up individuals by promising them with goods or positions to keep supporting their party. Whichever party is in power they will keep the system as it is because it serves the purpose of keeping the party base in rural Bangladesh. Before there was no partisan election but the patronage politics was running by the party elites through the elected leaders of the locality. Those leaders were the local elites and respected and they helped maintain the balance between the general citizen and party activists. But now the system has made difficult for people with party identity to get nominated and win elections and changed the process of patron-client relations. Nevertheless, in the recent change, the systemic capturing of local government institutions by one particular political party or the ruling party is intriguing. The local government institutions have become the more party-based state resource distribution centers and local political party hubs. If this continues to go, then the local and national political ecosystem will have some problems in the future. If the election system remains the same, then these local political party strongmen with superior political party leaders, local administration, and security forces will always grab the office of the local government by manipulating the election and eventually the distribution of the state resources which are meant for the vulnerable, marginalized poor people in rural Bangladesh.

Disclosure statement

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