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THE ALLIANCE FOR FAIR ELECTION & DEMOCRACY

FINAL REPORT

BANGLADESH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION
& NATIONAL REFERENDUM 2026





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AFED's Observation of the 2026 Bangladesh Parliamentary Election and National Referendum

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This report reflects the findings of the AFED 2026 election observation report. AFED observed the election period with the financial support of the European Union and technical assistance of the European Partnership for Democracy. The views expressed in the document are those of AFED only and may not necessarily reflect the views of any donor organisation.

Foreword

It is my privilege, on behalf of the Alliance for Fair Election and Democracy (AFED), to present this Final Report on AFED's observation of the 2026 Bangladesh Parliamentary Elections and National Referendum. This report reflects the combined efforts of AFED's member organisations, observers, data management teams, trainers, coordinators, and partner institutions who worked with professionalism, discipline, and commitment throughout the election process.

The 2026 election period unfolded in a context that was both historic and highly demanding. Bangladesh witnessed a major political transition following the events of July 2024, followed by a reform-oriented pathway led by an interim government and culminated in a national referendum conducted alongside the parliamentary elections. In such a moment, credible and inclusive electoral processes were not only essential for democratic legitimacy, but also deeply connected to public trust and the restoration of confidence in democratic institutions.

Democratic transitions require strong public participation and active civic engagement. Bangladesh has a strong tradition of civil society contributing to credible and inclusive elections, with citizen election observation playing a particularly important role in promoting transparency and building public confidence. The 2026 parliamentary elections and referendum presented new opportunities and challenges. The Bangladeshi civil society rose to the challenge and demonstrated strong commitment to and interest in contributing to pave the way for a better democratic future in the country.

AFED is honoured to have contributed to this important effort. Established in July 2025, AFED had the ambition to re-build a national platform for citizen election observation, promote inclusiveness, transparency, accountability in Bangladesh's electoral processes, as well as contribute to informed public dialogue through evidence-based

reporting. It has been a challenging but rewarding journey, bringing together civil society organisations from across Bangladesh. Throughout this process, we have built new partnerships, exchanged ideas and experiences, and strengthened our collective capacity to observe elections. The 2026 parliamentary elections and national referendum gave us the opportunity to put this work into practice.

This report is a testament to the collective efforts undertaken and to the commitment of the many citizens, observers and partner organisations which were formed as AFED. The real strength of AFED's observation work was the dedication and professionalism of thousands of citizens who served as observers and volunteer staff. They generously gave their time, embraced the principles of ethical citizen election observation, and worked tirelessly to collect information on which this report is based.

Ultimately, this report is intended to serve as a constructive reference for electoral stakeholders. We share it with the Bangladesh Election Commission, government institutions, political parties and candidates, civil society, the media, development partners, and above all, the citizens of Bangladesh. We invite all stakeholders to read this report carefully and engage with its recommendations, and work together to ensure that future elections in Bangladesh are ever more peaceful, inclusive and credible.

Acknowledgement

AFED would like to extend its deepest appreciation to all individuals and institutions that supported AFED's observation of the 2026 Bangladesh Parliamentary Elections and National Referendum.

First, AFED expresses its sincere gratitude to the European Union (EU) for the financial support that made AFED's election observation possible, and to the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) for the technical assistance provided throughout the process. We also acknowledge the support through the relevant project framework that helped AFED implement and coordinate observation activities effectively.

Second, AFED acknowledges the leadership and contribution of AFED's member organisations across Bangladesh. The coalition's strength lies in its diversity and bringing unique expertise related to election participation and inclusion. AFED's member organisations ensured field-level readiness, mobilised observers, and contributed to the development of this report.

Third, AFED would like to thank all AFED observers, including Long-Term Observers (LTOs) and Short-Term Observers (STOs) and the teams that supported observation operations ranging from trainers and regional coordinators to data management teams, and volunteers. Without their commitment and professionalism, this observation would not be possible.

Finally, AFED would like to dedicate this report to the citizens of Bangladesh. Your participation in these elections, your commitment to democracy and your belief that every vote matters continue to inspire efforts to strengthen inclusive and peaceful elections.

Md. Harun-Or-Rashid

Member Secretary, on behalf of 30 citizen observer organisations
Alliance for Fair Election and Democracy (AFED)

Main Findings

The Alliance for Fair Elections and Democracy (AFED) observed the 2026 Parliamentary Elections and National Referendum across all 300 constituencies during the pre-election, election-day, and immediate post-election periods. The observation found that the election was generally peaceful, orderly, and well administered. The BEC successfully administered the election while introducing major reforms, including postal voting and the simultaneous conduct of the parliamentary elections and referendum. With over 127 million registered voters, polling operations, security, and vote counting were largely conducted in accordance with electoral procedures.

Pre-election Period

The 2026 election took place during an important democratic transition following the political changes of 2024. Public expectations for a credible and inclusive election were high. However, the pre-election environment remained politically charged, with widespread speculation about the potential for election-related violence. These concerns intensified following the assassination of the Dhaka-8 candidate Sharif Osman Hadi in December 2025, raising fears about the security situation ahead of polling day. The ban on the Awami League (AL) also contributed to uncertainty and heightened political tensions in the lead-up to the election. The Interim Government, working with the main political parties in the National Consensus Commission, introduced several significant electoral reforms, which were further detailed by the Bangladesh Election Commission (BEC) under their mandate. Changes were amongst others made to facilitate the postal voting, including for Bangladeshi citizens abroad and to conduct the parliamentary elections and national referendum on the same day.

The BEC's preparations for the elections were undertaken professionally and were largely completed on time. In the pre-election period, the BEC undertook a comprehensive programme of voter registration, candidate registration, recruitment and training of polling officials, voter education, security planning, and logistical preparations. However, many of the new legal and procedural reforms were introduced shortly before Election Day, leaving limited time for election officials, political parties, observers, and voters to fully understand and adapt to the changes.

Voter registration took place between February and November 2025. A total of 127 million voters were registered, an increase of around 8 million compared to the previous parliamentary elections. Although AFED did not observe the voter registration process directly, information gathered through meetings with stakeholders and a review of available documentation suggests that the process was generally credible and inclusive.

A total of 2,032 candidates representing 49 political parties, as well as independent candidates, contested the elections, making them competitive. On average, 6.8 candidates competed in each constituency. However, the nomination process was marked by the very low representation of women, with only 83 women candidates, representing just 4 per cent of all candidates.

The campaign environment was generally peaceful and competitive. Notably, many started campaigning before the official campaign period started. That said, once the official campaign period kicked off, political parties and candidates were able to campaign freely. AFED observers recorded only a few incidents of violence. The misuse of state resources was limited. Some isolated incidents of inflammatory and religious campaign rhetoric, and inconsistent enforcement of campaign regulations was also observed.

The elections saw the expansion of postal voting to new categories of voters, including Bangladeshi citizens living abroad. The BEC's efforts

to establish a functioning postal voting system and web-based voter registration for overseas voters, represented an important step towards making elections more inclusive.

Election Day

Election Day was generally peaceful, orderly, and well administered across the country. Most polling stations opened on time and were equipped with the required election materials. Election officials largely followed prescribed procedures, including demonstrating and sealing empty ballot boxes before voting began. The secrecy of the ballot was maintained in almost all polling stations observed. Notably, many polling stations were not accessible to persons with reduced mobility.

Security arrangements were extensive and effective. Uniformed security personnel were present in nearly all observed polling stations, contributing to a secure voting environment and helping prevent significant disruptions. Voter participation was orderly, and persons with disabilities, elderly and pregnant women received priority in the queue.

The counting process was conducted in accordance with electoral procedures in most observed polling stations. Party agents and accredited observers were present in most locations. Very few formal complaints were raised during counting in the observed locations, indicating broad acceptance of polling-station level procedures in the locations observed.

Polling station results were publicly displayed in most of the polling stations observed by AFED, although in some 10 per cent these rules were not followed. On 13 February, the BEC announced the final results.

AFED observers were generally granted access to observe the opening and the voting processes. However, in around one third of cases, AFED observers were not given full access at the counting stage. This reduced transparency at this critical stage of the process.

Post-election Period

The immediate post-election period was generally stable. However, a number of localised incidents of violence were reported following the announcement of the election results. These mainly involved clashes between supporters of rival candidates and political parties.

Few disputes or complaints were observed during vote counting in the polling stations monitored by AFED. A total of 35 election petitions were filed with the High Court Election Tribunal. Most were submitted by the BNP (21) and Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (12). The main grounds cited included discrepancies in result sheets, missing signatures of polling agents, alleged ballot stuffing, and other irregularities in the counting of votes.

By-elections took place in Bogura-6 and Sherpur-3 constituencies on 9 April 2026. AFED observation of these elections broadly reflected the same findings as on 12 February.

Recommendations

Overall, AFED's observation indicates that the 2026 Parliamentary Elections and National Referendum were administered in a generally peaceful, orderly, and transparent manner. Election authorities demonstrated strong operational capacity despite implementing significant electoral reforms within a limited timeframe. While the election represented meaningful progress in restoring public confidence in Bangladesh's electoral process and was conducted without large-scale disruption despite considerable pre-election anxiety among many stakeholders, further reforms are necessary to strengthen legal certainty, improve implementation of new procedures, promote greater political inclusion, and enhance public trust in future elections.

Recommendations to the Election Commission

Short term

- Civic and voter education efforts should be strengthened to ensure that all voters receive clear, accurate, and impartial information on how to vote. First-time voters, women, persons with disabilities, minority communities, remote populations and overseas voters should be particularly targeted.
- Election observation policy should be updated to allow accredited observers access to observe all stages of the electoral processes.
- Transparency in counting, tabulation, and results management should be strengthened through clear procedures, access for independent election observers, secure handling of election materials, and timely publication of detailed results, including online.
- Allocate at least ground-floor voting room and provide temporary ramps at the polling stations to cater for persons with limited mobility.

Medium and long term

- In line with the Constitution, the BEC could explore the possibility to create a mechanism for pre-registration of citizens who attain the age of 18 by Election Day to ensure that they are able to exercise their right to vote.
- Regularly update voters' photographs in the voter list to ensure accurate identification.
- Monitoring and management of postal voting should be strengthened through improved record systems, secure ballot handling, and effective oversight mechanisms.
- To promote women participation in the electoral process as well as in the election administration itself, the BEC should consider adopting a gender equality strategy.
- A comprehensive post-election review should be conducted with relevant stakeholders, and its findings should inform future electoral improvements and contribute to greater public confidence in the electoral process.

Recommendations to the Parliament

Medium and long term

- Amend the legal framework to allow accredited observers access to observe all stages of the electoral processes.
- The legal framework could be revised to provide persons with disabilities and election observers with access to postal voting or other alternative voting arrangements.
- Measures to increase the representation of women in the Parliament should be introduced.
- Amend the legal framework to establish clear, transparent and time-bound procedures for resolving electoral disputes to reduce uncertainty and strengthen public confidence in the process.
- In the future, any reforms of the legal framework governing elections well in advance to allow time for the establishment of required procedures and ensure that stakeholders get the time to become familiar with new rules.

Recommendations to political parties

Short term

- Political parties should take greater responsibility for ensuring peaceful elections by promoting non-violence among their members and supporters and responding promptly to incidents of election-related violence.

Medium and long term

- Political parties should enhance internal party democracy systems and ensure transparent processes for the selection of candidates.
- Political parties should adopt measures to increase women's participation gradually as candidates to ensure the implementation of the 5 per cent nomination commitment.

Recommendations to security forces

- All credible allegations of election-related violence, intimidation, or other electoral offences should be investigated promptly and impartially, with appropriate action taken where violations are confirmed.

Recommendations to civil society and the media

Short term

- Civil society should continue supporting BEC in civic and voter education. To make civic and voter education more effective, they could take actions to improve coordination and promote consistent messaging.

Medium and long term

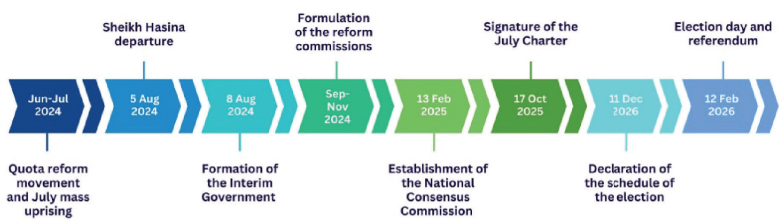
- The civil society and the media could have closer engagement with the Election Commission to monitor the electoral campaign online as well as in terms of fact-checking.

1. Political context

The 13th parliamentary elections and national referendum held on 12 February 2026 were conducted during an unprecedented period of political transition in Bangladesh. The polls followed several years of political polarisation and disputed electoral processes, culminating in the mass uprising of July 2024, which resulted in the resignation of the government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her departure from the country. These developments marked a significant turning point in the country's political landscape and generated widespread public demand for democratic reform, greater political accountability, and the restoration of confidence in electoral institutions. The transition also created heightened public expectations that future elections would address longstanding concerns regarding electoral integrity, political pluralism, and equal participation.

The political environment surrounding the 2026 elections differed markedly from that of the two preceding parliamentary elections. Those elections were characterised by intense political contestation, opposition boycotts, and persistent concerns regarding electoral credibility, contributing to diminished public confidence. Against this backdrop, many citizens regarded the 2026 election as the first genuine opportunity in more than a decade to exercise their right to vote freely and independently. The election was therefore viewed not only as a contest for political office but also as a referendum on the country’s democratic transition and the credibility of its electoral institutions. Consequently, the election emerged as one of the most significant political events in recent years, carrying exceptionally high public expectations for a credible, inclusive, and peaceful democratic process.

Following the political transition, an Interim Government (IG) led by Professor Muhammad Yunus assumed responsibility for governing the country and preparing the conditions necessary for democratic elections. Restoring public trust in state institutions became one of its principal priorities. To this end, the interim administration initiated a comprehensive reform process through consultations with political parties, civil society organisations, professional associations, and constitutional experts. The reform process was intended to establish broad political consensus on institutional changes considered necessary to strengthen democratic governance and prevent the recurrence of previous electoral disputes. This process culminated in the adoption of the July Charter in 2025, which proposed more than 80 constitutional and institutional reforms addressing electoral governance, the judiciary, law enforcement, public administration, and other key democratic institutions.



Key Milestones in Bangladesh's Political and Electoral Transition

To enable citizens to express their views on these proposed reforms, the IG decided to hold a national referendum concurrently with the parliamentary elections. As a result, voters cast two separate ballots on Election Day: one to elect Members of Parliament and another to approve or reject the proposed package of constitutional and institutional reforms. The simultaneous conduct of the parliamentary elections and the referendum represented an unprecedented development in Bangladesh's electoral history and reflected the broader objective of enabling political transition with institutional reform.

The electoral landscape was further reshaped by the suspension of the Awami League's (AL) political activities and cancellation of its registration, preventing one of Bangladesh's traditionally dominant political parties from participating in the election. Consequently, electoral competition centered primarily on the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the Jamaat-e-Islami-led alliance, the National Citizen Party (NCP) formed by leaders of the 2024 student-led movement, other old and new parties, and independent candidates. This marked a significant departure from the longstanding two-party rivalry that had defined Bangladesh's electoral politics for several decades.

Many civil society organisations reported that the operating environment improved allowing greater engagement in democratic processes following the transition. However, some organisations continued to experience administrative challenges related to registration and project approvals by the NGO Affairs Bureau. This was particularly so for foreign-funded organisations. Whilst the Bureau made some adaptations of their procedures, uncertain approval timelines and extensive documentation and reporting requirements continued to affect the work of the civil society.

2. Legislative framework

Bangladesh is committed by most relevant conventions linked to the organisation of inclusive and credible elections, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the UN Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). Notably, international conventions must be incorporated into national law to take effect, and further democratic and electoral laws ought to ensure a thorough review of the degree to which changes are required for full application of Bangladesh international commitments.

The legal framework governing the 13th Parliamentary Elections and the national referendum held on 12 February 2026 was based on the Constitution of Bangladesh and a number of electoral laws and regulations, some of which were adopted under the IG. The Constitution of Bangladesh provides the fundamental principles governing elections and guarantees the right of citizens to vote. It furthermore establishes the BEC, sets out its main responsibilities and requires executive authorities to assist it.

The primary legal instrument regulating parliamentary elections is the Representation of the People Order (RPO), 1972. The RPO provides detailed provisions on candidate nomination, political party registration, campaign rules, election administration, voting and counting procedures, electoral offences, and dispute resolution. Several additional pieces of legislation provide additional details on the election roll, structure and mandate of the Election Commission, political party registration, constituency delimitation etc. Notably the RPO also grants the Election Commission the authority to issue directives and regulations necessary for the conduct of elections.

In the lead-up to the 2026 election and within the framework of the reform process and July Charter dialogue, several amendments and

regulatory adjustments were introduced to improve transparency, accountability, and inclusion in the electoral process. Legal amendments, in turn, required changes to several processes and procedures related to e.g. election administration, voter education, polling-day operations, observer accreditation, and electoral dispute management.

Amendments to the RPO

On 3 November and 8 December, the IG adopted amendments to the RPO. Changes made introduced the “No Vote” option in constituencies where only one candidate was contesting, increased campaign spending limits, discontinued the use of electronic voting machines (EVMs) and empowered the BEC to annul constituency results in cases of irregularities. In addition, BEC was granted authority to new adjudicatory or dispute resolution power and suspend an election at any stage if it determines that a free, fair and lawful vote cannot be ensured due to coercion, intimidation, or corruption. The regulatory framework introduced a number of changes around candidacy. Prospective candidates must submit income tax documentation for the most recent tax year with their nomination papers and are prohibited from holding certain administrative positions in educational institutions within their constituencies. Also, candidates who are declared fugitives by the courts are now barred from contesting elections. It also recognises the armed forces as law enforcement agencies during elections.

Extension of postal voting to new categories of voters

A number of changes were introduced to promote participation. The 2025 amendment to Art. 27 of the RPO expanded eligibility for postal voting to eligible overseas Bangladeshi citizens, detainees, election officials and government employees on election duty or posted outside their constituencies. Although postal voting has been available for in-country categories also in the past, its implementation has been limited. Ahead of the 2026 elections, the BEC issued implementing circulars and procedures for in-country and overseas postal voting and

developed. The system was supported by a digital platform known as the “Postal Vote BD” application, which was intended to facilitate registration and ballot distribution for eligible voters. The legal amendments, together with their operational implementation, represented a significant development towards enabling more eligible voters to exercise their right to vote thus broadening electoral participation.

The Electoral Rolls (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025, authorised BEC to publish an updated voter list, when necessary, at any time of the year before the announcement of the election schedule. This enables citizens turning 18 after the annual cut-off date of 1 January to be included in the list. The amendment also provided the legal framework for the registration of voters residing abroad.

The Cyber Security Ordinance

The IG also introduced amendments to the cyber security framework, including changes to penalties and procedural safeguards. It recognises internet access as a civic right and establishes the legal framework governing the digital environment, including online political campaigning and public debate. While these reforms address some concerns, civil society organisations continue to raise issues regarding its broad provisions of harmful contents and grants law enforcement unchecked power without oversight, which introduce potential restrictions on freedom of expression.

The Referendum Ordinance

The presidential order on the July National Charter (Constitutional Amendment) Implementation Order, 2025, promulgated on 13 November 2025, authorised the BEC to hold a referendum and to make necessary legal arrangements. The Order was framed to seek public consent on specific constitutional reform proposals arising from the July Charter. Against this background, the Referendum Ordinance of 25 November contains the details on the conduct of the referendum, which was scheduled to be held simultaneously with the Parliamentary elections.

Updated policy on election observation

The BEC adopted the Election Observation Policy 2025, which replaced the previous observer accreditation framework. The policy revoked all existing registrations and required citizen election observer organisations to undergo fresh accreditation under new eligibility criteria. The revised framework lowered the minimum age for individual observers from 25 to 21, required accreditation cards to be issued at least three days before election day and established clearer accreditation criteria and observer responsibilities. However, it remains fundamentally restrictive and is not in line with good practices (see Section 12).

Public awareness and understanding of electoral changes

Although the legislative reforms were intended to strengthen transparency, participation, and electoral integrity, several laws and implementing instruments were adopted relatively close to election day. Consequently, election officials, political parties, observer organisations, media and voters at large had limited time to familiarise themselves with the revised legal framework, adapt operational procedures, and receive adequate training on the new requirements.

The truncated reform timeline reflected the exceptional circumstances of democratic transition and the need to establish a new electoral framework within a limited period. However, future electoral reforms should be adopted sufficiently in advance of elections to allow adequate time for operational implementation, timely dissemination of new regulations, capacity-building for election officials and other stakeholders, and comprehensive voter education. This would be consistent with widely recognised international good practices on the stability of electoral law, which seeks to promote legal certainty and adequate opportunities for stakeholders to understand and adapt to new regulatory frameworks.

3. Election administration

The BEC is an independent constitutional body established under Article 118 of the Constitution and mandated to conduct parliamentary elections and referendums. The previous Commission resigned amid the 2024 uprising, prompting the formation of a Search Committee under the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Appointment Act, 2022, to recommend replacements. In November 2024, AMM Nasir Uddin was appointed as the Chief Election Commissioner, alongside four Election Commissioners, appointed by the President following recommendations of the Search Committee. The Commission is supported by a secretariat, the Electoral Training Institute, and field offices at divisional, district and upazila levels responsible for implementing electoral operations.

The BEC announced the election schedule on 11 December 2025. On the same day, 69 Returning Officers were appointed. Most were recruited from the ranks and files of the government administration. Whilst legally allowed to appoint ROs from among its Secretariat, the BEC thus continued the tradition of relying on government officials. Notably, only 55 per cent of the local election officials interviewed by AFED observers considered that appointments had been done on the basis of experience and competence. Given the considerable powers vested in Returning Officers, some stakeholders questioned whether the appointment of government officials to this role provided sufficient safeguards for perceived impartiality. Nevertheless, AFED's interviews with candidate teams indicated a generally high level of confidence in the ROs: 87 per cent perceived them as impartial, and only slightly decreased to 85 per cent after the elections.

The recruitment and training of some 800,000 polling officials took place between 22 January and 7 February. Training covered electoral laws, polling procedures, management of the simultaneous parliamentary elections and referendum through a dual-ballot system, and vote counting. The BEC also issued operational manuals, polling instructions, and procedural guidelines to election officials and

returning officers to facilitate the implementation of recently adopted legal and administrative reforms. Through extensive media engagement, the Commission ensured to make its engagement on various activities known to the general public.

AFED long-term observers met with 444 local election officials throughout the country, 257 interviews in the pre-election period and 187 in post-election. Local election officials assessed their own preparedness as very good (69 per cent) and good (30 per cent). When asked about their perceptions on the main challenges, local officials listed the conduct of the campaign (20 per cent), dealing with misinformation and rumours on social media (19 per cent), complexity of complying with election rules and regulations (14 per cent), and uncertainty around security (12 per cent) as the main issues of concern. Some also mentioned dealing with political pressure or influence (9 per cent) and effective coordination with observers and media (7 per cent). LTOs furthermore reported that 83 per cent of all appointed personnel had been trained. Among those that identified shortcoming, the main challenges cited were time constraint, inadequate training content, and shortage of personnel.



Source: AFED long-term observer reports during the pre-election period

The BEC also provided administrative support to candidates. According to AFED observer interviews, 87 per cent of candidate teams considered that they had equal access to this support.

Trust in the BEC was critical to the credibility of the electoral process and the outcome. In meetings with more than 750 party and candidate teams on the ground during the pre-election and post-election period, 83 per cent considered the BEC to be independent and impartial. Overall, this indicates a relatively high degree of trust in election authorities responsible for main election day policies and operations on part of political parties and candidates. Taking into consideration how the Commission under the AL government was perceived as lacking independence and impartiality, the current BEC appears to have taken important steps towards building a more credible institution.

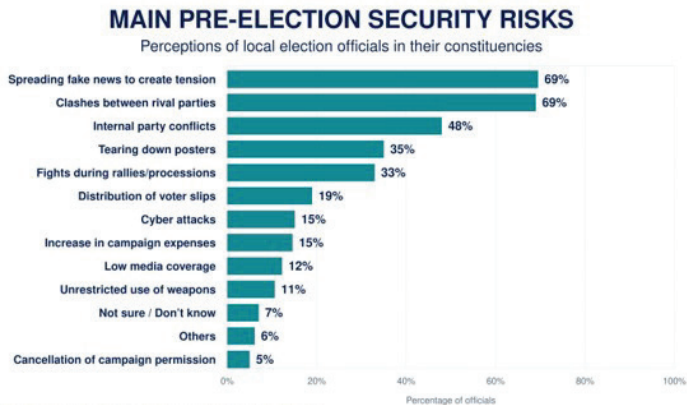


Election security

The election was supported by an unprecedented nationwide security operation aimed at ensuring a peaceful, orderly, and credible electoral environment. Approximately 958,000 law enforcement personnel were deployed across the country, including 100,000 members of the Bangladesh Army, 150,000 police personnel, and more than 550,000 Ansar and Village Defense Party (VDP) members. Security planning was informed by a comprehensive risk assessment, with more than half of the country's approximately 43,000 polling centres classified as

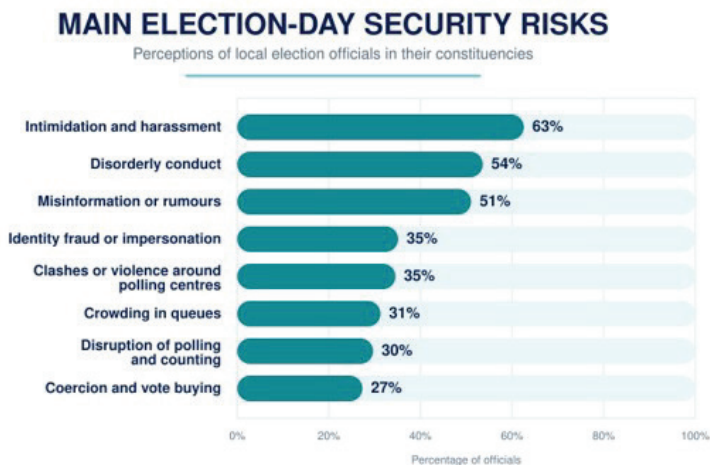
high- or moderate-risk, allowing for targeted deployment of security resources. Security planning also incorporated contingency arrangements for rapid response to election-related incidents, protection of election materials during transportation, and security during the counting and tabulation processes. To strengthen transparency and incident response, the BEC introduced several technological measures for the first time, including over 40,000 body-worn cameras for police personnel, drone-based aerial surveillance, and CCTV coverage at more than 90 per cent of polling centers. Security operations were implemented through a coordinated three-tier system comprising static security at polling centers, mobile patrol teams, and rapid-response strike forces, under the joint supervision of the BEC, the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the Armed Forces Division. The BEC retained overall responsibility for directing election security operations, while operational support was provided by the respective law enforcement agencies in accordance with the constitutional requirement that executive authorities assist the BEC in the discharge of its functions.

Local election officials pointed to the spreading of fake news and creation of tensions, clashes between rival parties, internal party conflicts, the tearing down of posters and fights during rallies and processions as the main security risk in the constituency where they operated.



Multiple risks could be identified. Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

Regarding the conduct of election day, the local election officials were most concerned about intimidation and harassment (63 per cent), disorderly conduct (54 per cent), and the spread of misinformation or rumours (51 per cent). Some operational threats like impersonation, violence, and crowding were also identified. In response, the Election Commission coordinated with law-enforcement agencies ahead of election day, including through security planning, risk assessments, deployment arrangements, and communication between election and security officials. These preparations broadly addressed the risks identified; however, the prominence of intimidation, misinformation, and disorderly conduct shows that preparedness needed to extend beyond physical security. It also required clear rules of engagement, rapid incident reporting and response, protection against partisan interference, enforcement against coercion and vote buying, effective queue and polling-centre management, and timely communication to counter false information.



Multiple risks could be identified. Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

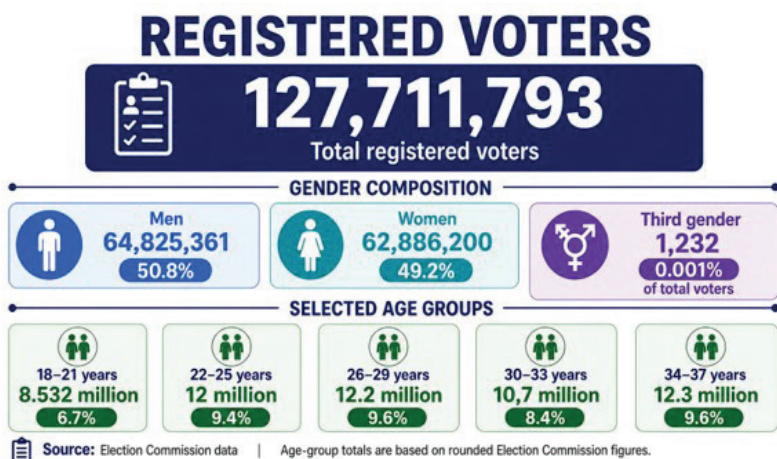
4. Voter registration

AFED did not directly observe the voter registration process and is therefore not in a position to assess the accuracy, completeness, or overall quality of the voter list. The information presented in this section is based on AFED's engagement with relevant stakeholders and its review of available documentation, rather than direct observation. These sources nevertheless indicate that progress was made in certain aspects of electoral administration and inclusiveness.

According to BEC data, the finalised voter list contained 127.71 million registered voters, including 64.83 million male voters, 62.89 million female voters, and 1,232 third-gender voters. The voter register constituted the official basis for determining eligibility to vote in both the parliamentary elections and the national referendum. Improvements contributed to bringing electoral practices closer to principles of universal suffrage reflected in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Art 25.

Eligibility

A number of measures were introduced to expand the right to vote. In Bangladesh, citizens are eligible to register as voters if they are at least 18 years old and reside in the constituency where they register. In the past, an early cut-off date for voter registration meant that citizens who turned 18 before elections were unable to vote. In the 2024 election, the cut-off date was more than a year before the election day. Positively, based on the Electoral Rolls (Amendment) Ordinance, promulgated by the IG in June 2025, the BEC was enabled to extend the registration period, allowing citizens who would turn 18 by 31 October 2025 to register as voters. While this did not allow all newly eligible 18-year-olds to vote, it represented a meaningful step towards expanding participation among young voters, reflecting the spirit of the July uprising, which was largely driven by young people.



Based on the introduction of provisions allowing prisoners to vote by post, the BEC issued guidelines for their registration by which prison authorities nominated two representatives to undertake the registration on BEC’s behalf. A separate system was set up to register voters from abroad - see more in Section 8.

At the same time, the law continues to prevent persons of “unsound mind” from voting. It is notable that this is not in line with international commitments signed by Bangladesh.

Registration Process

The voter registration process took place in the period February to November 2025. The BEC initiated the work by undertaking a comprehensive nation-wide door-to-door campaign with the aim to delete deceased voters from the existing voters roll as well as to register new voters. New voters were obliged to visit the local registration center in order to capture biometric data (finger print, photo and iris scan). Based on the provisional voters list, claims and objections were handled by the BEC before the final voters list was published in November 2025.

The updated voters list increased the number of registered voters by some 8 million compared to the January 2024 elections. The BEC reported that the updated voter register closed the gap between male and female registered voters.

Concerns were raised regarding the presence of deceased individuals on the list and potential inclusion of unauthorised individuals (e.g. cases of Rohingyas in voter lists), which prompted the Election Commission to initiate further verification. Additional efforts to enhance awareness and voter registration in hard-to-reach areas are needed to continue promoting inclusiveness.

5. Registration of political parties and candidates

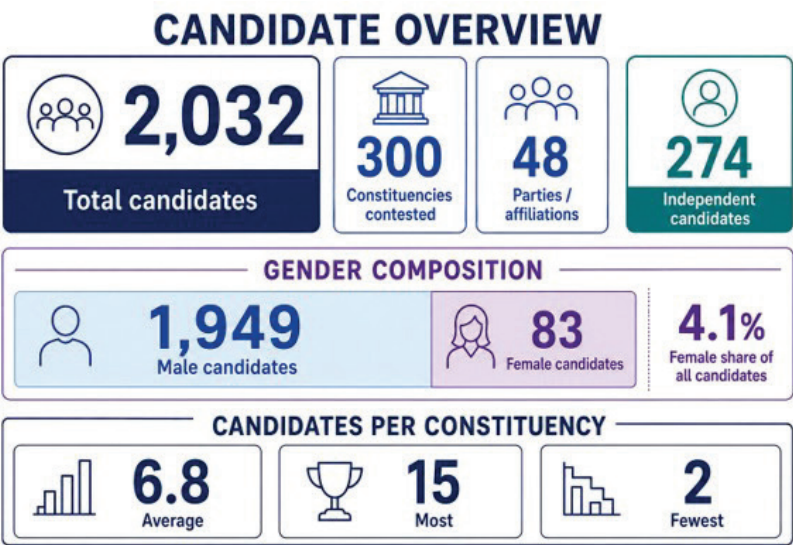
Political parties registration

The candidate nomination process took place in a significantly altered political environment following the 2024 uprising. On 12 May 2025, the IG prohibited all activities of the AL and its associated and affiliated organisations under the Anti-Terrorism Act 2009, as amended in 2025, pending the completion of proceedings before the International Crimes Tribunal concerning alleged killings, crimes against humanity and other serious offences committed during the uprising. The restrictions extended to publications and publicity through conventional and online media, as well as meetings, processions, rallies and conferences. The BEC subsequently suspended the AL's registration, preventing the party from nominating candidates.

The party landscape expanded in other respects. The IG lifted the prohibition on Jamaat-e-Islami in August 2024, and the Supreme Court ordered the restoration of its registration in June 2025, enabling the party to return to parliamentary elections after more than a decade without registration. The NCP, established on 28 February 2025 by leaders associated with the July uprising, also contested its first parliamentary election. Of the 59 political parties registered to participate in the election, 51 submitted candidate nominations,

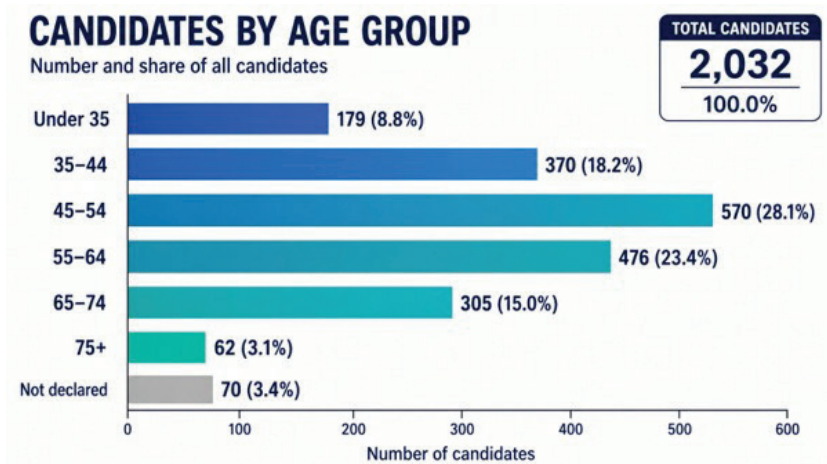
indicating broad formal participation. The formation of electoral alliances further shaped candidate selection and reduced the number of direct contests among allied parties, most notably the BNP-led alliance and the Jamaat-e-Islami-led alliance, which later included the NCP.

Candidate Nominations



To stand for elections, candidates need to be of 25 years of age and meet the eligibility criteria set out in the Article 66 of the Constitution and Article 12-15 of the RPO. Candidates could be nominated by a registered political party or contest as independents. Party-endorsed candidates were required to submit evidence of the party’s formal nomination, while independent candidates were generally required to demonstrate support from one per cent of the electorate in the relevant constituency. Nomination papers and supporting documents, including latest income tax records and an affidavit disclosing compliance with the statutory qualification requirements, were submitted to the BEC by 29 December, scrutinised between 30

December and 4 January, followed by appeals and reviews. A total of 2,568 prospective candidates submitted nomination papers. At the end, total candidates were 2,032 from 300 constituencies, so 723 nominees were rejected. The three nomination papers submitted by Khaleida Zia were, following her death, not scrutinised.



Media attention during the nomination focussed on the nomination of “rebel” BNP candidate, i.e. persons that chose to stand without the party’s endorsement and showcasing considerable internal disputes within the BNP. Some discussions also rose around the candidates associated with the AL. Finally, commentators in the media noted that political parties were not always able to explain how their candidates were selected, signifying the need for political parties to enhance internal party democracy and transparency in how they work.

Following the nomination process, three parties - BNP, Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB) and Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami - fielded more than 200 candidates each. The Jatiya Party fielded some 190 candidates and the NCP around 30. Some 270 candidates contested as independents, many of them constituting BNP rebel candidates.

CONSTITUENCY COMPETITION

Across 300 constituencies

1. CANDIDATE RANGE



15

Most candidates in a seat



2

Fewest candidates in a seat

2. LEVEL OF COMPETITION



16 seats

with 3 or fewer candidates



38 seats

with 10 or more candidates

3. CANDIDATE DIVERSITY



72 seats

with at least one female candidate

VS



228 seats

with no female candidate



167 seats

with at least one independent candidate

MOST AND LEAST CONTESTED SEATS

Based on the number of candidates



5 MOST CONTESTED SEATS

Candidates

1.	Dhaka-12	15
2.	Gopalganj-2	13
3.	Narayanganj-4	13
4.	Dhaka-14	12
5.	Dhaka-17	12



5 LEAST CONTESTED SEATS

Candidates

1.	Pirojpur-1	2
2.	Chattogram-15	3
3.	Chuadanga-1	3
4.	Chuadanga-2	3
5.	Cox's Bazar-1	3

Candidate Eligibility Issues

The Constitution and the RPO established several grounds for disqualification, including foreign citizenship or allegiance, a declaration of unsound mind by a competent court, undischarged insolvency, holding certain offices of profit, specified criminal convictions, loan default and outstanding liabilities to government service providers, as applicable under the law. Returning Officers

examined the nomination papers, considered objections and could conduct summary inquiries before accepting or rejecting a candidature.

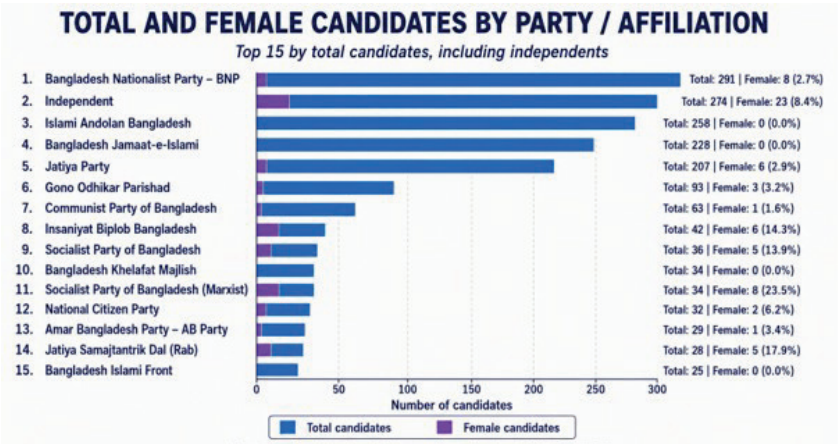
For the 13th parliamentary elections, the Bangladesh Bank's Credit Information Bureau (CIB) reviewed candidates' credit information and submitted two lists to the Election Commission after nominations closed on 29 December 2025. Based on the first list, the Commission rejected the nominations of 82 identified loan defaulters. A further 31 individuals appeared on a second list but had obtained High Court stay orders and were consequently permitted to contest; nine were subsequently elected and took their seats in Parliament. The case illustrates the important role of coordination among the Election Commission, Bangladesh Bank and the courts in determining candidate eligibility.

While BEC applied the information provided by CIB, candidates were still able to contest after obtaining judicial orders indicating inconsistency or disqualification provision. Greater transparency regarding the status of candidates' loans, the grounds for regularisation and judicial relief, and the Commission's final eligibility decisions would enable more effective public scrutiny and strengthen confidence in the consistency and fairness of candidate-eligibility enforcement.

Another issue is related to dual citizenships. Article 66(2) of the Constitution disqualifies a person from election to Parliament if the person acquires the citizenship of a foreign state. During the nomination scrutiny and appeal process, BEC considered objections related to alleged dual citizenship of 25 candidates. At the end, BEC approved 23 candidacies and cancelled two. In several cases, candidates were cleared after presenting documents indicating that they have renounced or applied to renounce their foreign citizenship. The controversy was on whether applying for renunciation was sufficient or whether renunciation had to be formally completed before nomination. BEC stated its decisions were intended to facilitate inclusive participation and were taken without bias.

Women during the nomination

Women remained significantly underrepresented throughout the candidate nomination process. Out of 2,568 nomination papers submitted, only 109 (4 per cent) came from female hopefuls. Following scrutiny, appeals and withdrawals, 83 women were included in the final list of 2,032 candidates, representing 4 per cent. Women’s representation varied considerably across political parties: BNP nominated eight women among 291 candidates (3 per cent) and NCP two among 32 (6 per cent), whereas Jamaat-e-Islami together with 27 other parties did not nominate any women. Although some smaller parties recorded higher proportions - including the Socialist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist) at 24 per cent and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Rab) at 18 per cent, their small candidate lists meant that these shares translated into only eight and five women, respectively. Independent women accounted for 23 candidates, or 8 per cent of all independent candidates. Overall, the figures demonstrate that women’s inclusion was uneven and remained particularly weak among parties fielding the largest numbers of candidates.



Percentages show female candidates as a share of each/affiliation’s total

AFED urges the BEC, as the statutory guardian of the RPO, to actively promote and facilitate the nomination of women candidates by all political parties, ensuring that the RPO's commitment to inclusion translates into tangible electoral outcomes.

This falls significantly short of the July Charter commitment of at least 5 per cent women candidates and suggests that further efforts are needed to advance equal participation of women in political and public life, in line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The low number of women candidates indicates that substantial barriers to women's political participation persist. Structural barriers such as male-dominated party decision making, unequal access to campaign resources, concerns about harassment and violence discouraging women to involve in politics. Persistent social and cultural norms also discourage women's participation in political life and are also likely to have contributed to limited participation of women as candidates.

6. Civic education and election information

The BEC had the primary responsibility for voter and civic education during the 2026 National Parliament Election and Referendum. At the national level, the BEC implemented a broad voter information campaign aimed at increasing public awareness of voting procedures, voter rights, and the referendum question. Given that the 2026 polls combined a parliamentary election with a national referendum for the first time, voter education assumed particular importance in helping voters understand the dual-ballot process, ballot marking procedures, and the distinct purposes of the two votes. The Commission utilised multiple communication channels, including television, radio, printed leaflets, banners, social media platforms, official announcements, and public awareness campaigns. Nationwide publicity materials included millions of leaflets and thousands of banners distributed through district and local election offices. The Chief Election Commissioner also addressed the nation through Bangladesh Television (BTV) and Bangladesh Betar immediately before polling day to provide guidance

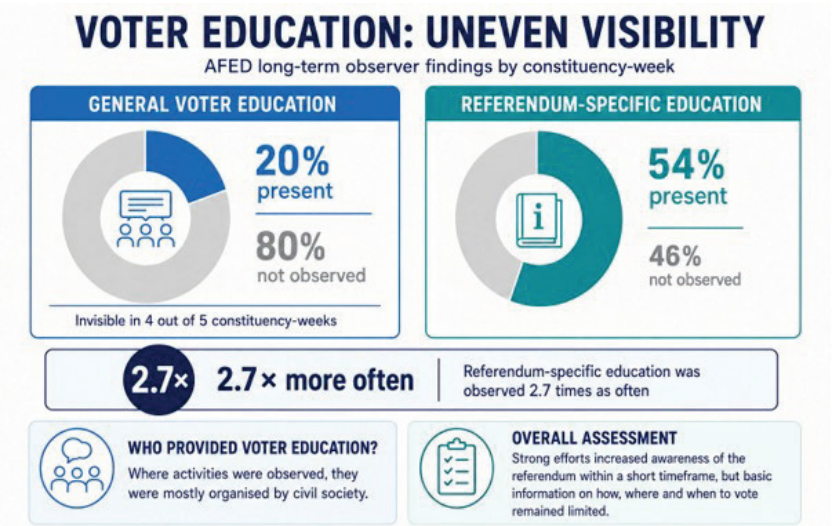
on voting procedures and encourage participation. The Commission also published voter information through its official website and digital platforms, providing voters with access to electoral regulations, polling information, and educational materials.

At the district level, election officials were responsible for disseminating voter information through local administrative structures, voter awareness meetings, and the distribution of educational materials. Public outreach initiatives included mobile awareness campaigns such as "Voter Awareness Vehicle" and "Super Caravan" programmes, which travelled across districts and upazilas to promote voter participation, explain voting procedures, and encourage engagement among youth, women, and first-time voters.

Civil society organisations, including AFED network member organisations, played a complementary role in voter education. Through community-based outreach activities, they provided information on voter rights, voting procedures, and the importance of electoral participation. Several organisations focused specifically on marginalised groups and communities with historically lower levels of political participation. Civil society organisations also contributed to improving public confidence in the electoral process by encouraging informed participation, peaceful engagement, and understanding of electoral rights and responsibilities. Civic education initiatives supported by the international community also targeted youth, women, and marginalised communities through television programmes, social media content, community radio broadcasts, public service announcements, and grassroots awareness campaigns in remote areas.

In monitoring the pre-election environment, AFED's long-term observers reported that the presence of voter education materials or activities was only in 20 per cent of the constituency-weeks observed, while 80 per cent recorded none. In contrast, referendum-specific voter education was found in 54 per cent or 2.7 times more often. In other words, information about the referendum reached most of the

country while basic guidance on how, where and when to vote was invisible in four out of every five places observed. Locations where observers identified voter education activity were present, mostly organised by civil-society. AFED commends the authorities for having strengthened the measures to increase voter awareness, and for strong efforts also linked to make the referendum more widely known in a fairly short timeframe.



Source: AFED long-term observer reports

AFED observers recorded visible campaigning in favour of a “Yes” vote in 86 instances by political parties, 56 by the IG, and 14 by NGOs. The IG's active involvement in campaigning for a “Yes” vote provoked controversies among political parties and criticism by the Election Commission. Representing the state authority, the IG should have remained neutral and focussed on information rather than political campaigning.

7. Election campaign

The election campaign provided a ground for political parties and candidates eagerly engaging with supporters and reaching out to voters.

Interviews conducted by AFED with 741 candidate teams indicated that the campaign environment was generally open, with 89 per cent reporting that they were able to campaign freely in their constituencies. This was consistent with AFED observations on the ground, where 94 per cent reported that all candidates were able to campaign freely, without obstruction. Only in less than two per cent, party or candidate teams expressed that they had faced denial of permission for venue location, indicating that the right to assembly was protected during the campaign.

Formal restrictions relating to campaign permission or venue allocation were comparatively rare, reported in only 10 interviews (slightly more than 1 per cent). Nevertheless, 13 per cent of candidate teams reported interference or other obstacles involving authorities or local leaders.

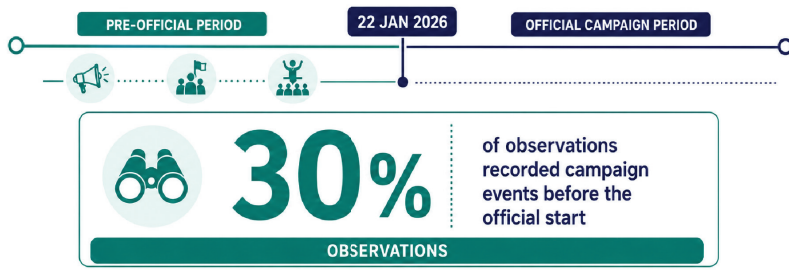


Source: AFED candidate-term interviews

The electoral campaign officially started on 22 January. However, AFED observers reported campaign activities before the official campaign in almost one third (30 per cent) of the observations. Early start signifies an intense and competitive campaign, but also showcase that parties and candidates were not complying with rules and regulations.

CAMPAIGNING BEFORE THE OFFICIAL PERIOD

Official campaign began on 22 January 2026



In almost half of the campaigns observed, the Election Commission organised joint events in which all candidates were present on the same stage to announce their commitment to comply with the code of conduct and to discuss their election manifestos. Such initiatives are likely to have contributed positively to build trust in the electoral process. With regards to manifestos and thematic focus of candidate campaigns, issues linked to corruption, employment, education and development projects were the most salient issues in the campaigns observed by AFED.

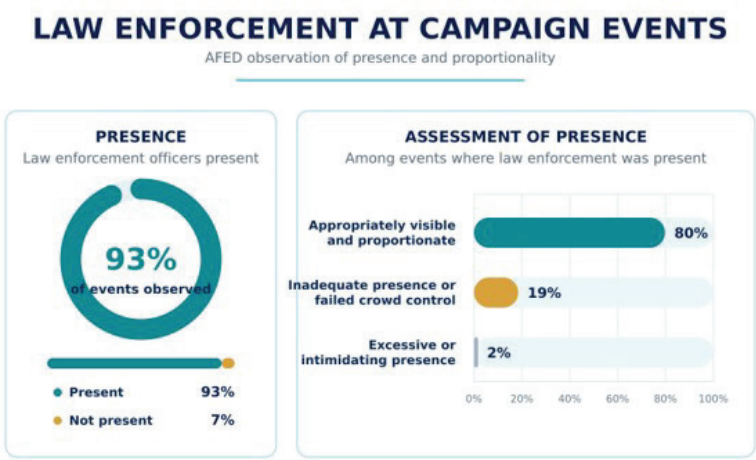
AFED observers were informed about 33 incidents of cash or in-kind vote buying and gift-giving, such as essential items, transport tokens or mobile recharges, which is strictly prohibited by law. However, during campaign events, AFED directly observed 62 cases of food distribution and three cases of the handing out of money.

There was a substantial number of breaches against the rules established for campaign materials, with numerous cases reported. Based on 765 observations during the pre-election period, AFED long-term observers reported that campaign materials used colour in 16 per cent of cases, exceeded size limitations in 73 per cent of cases and used prohibited images in 5 per cent of the cases. In 26 per cent of the cases observers took notice of campaign materials (such as leaflets, banners, etc.) on walls, trees, vehicles, electricity pole and/or government infrastructure.

A quarter of the BEC officials that AFED observers met with around the country confirmed having documented campaign violations. Such cases were most often dealt with through the issuance of warnings and instructions; field investigations and verifications, and through the involvement of law enforcement.

Among 258 Election Commission officials that AFED observers have met, 37 noted that they had received documented campaign violations, resulting in issuance of warnings and instructions as well as further investigations.

AFED observers noted a limited number of instances of the use of state resources during the campaign. Campaign activities were observed in government buildings in seven cases, while candidates or political parties were reported to have used government vehicles, offices, logos, staff or other state resources in eight cases. In addition, government officials were observed supporting, endorsing or campaigning for a candidate in ten cases.



Assessment percentages refer only to events where law enforcement officers were present. Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number. Source: AFED campaign-event observation

Law enforcement officers were observed to be present in 93 per cent of the campaign rallies observed. Their presence was assessed by AFED observers as appropriately visible and proportionate in 80 per cent, but as inadequate in 19 per cent.

Incidents of violence and intimidation were present in the campaign period. A total of 10 per cent of the candidate teams that AFED interviewed confirmed that they or their supporters had been victims of attacks, clashes or vandalism; and 22 per cent noted incidents of intimidation.

AFED took note of reports on elections-related killings and violent incidents in the campaign period, for example in Bhola, Bagerhat, Patuakhali, Chittagong, Sirajganj, and Mymensingh districts. AFED received 25 reports from political parties and candidate teams of incidents of riots, clashes and physical assaults on party supporters, volunteers, or campaign workers. However, political stakeholders submitted complaints only in half of the cases. In addition, they reported 75 cases of incidents of intimidation and harassment AFED to update for the full campaign period observed.

8. Postal voting

For the first time in Bangladesh's electoral history, the BEC operationalised a postal voting system for the 13th Parliamentary Elections. Although absentee voting provisions were first incorporated into the RPO 1972 through amendments in 2008, they remained unimplemented for over nearly two decades. It used a hybrid model combining digital registration through the Postal Vote BD mobile application with physical ballot casting and return through the postal system.

OCV registration ran from 19 November 2025 to 5 January 2026 and covered 148 countries. A total of 767,233 overseas voters registered, equivalent to approximately 6 per cent of the estimated 13 million Bangladeshis living abroad and substantially below the BEC's target of five million. Twenty-five eligible countries recorded no applications. Saudi

POSTAL VOTING IN THE 2026 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

First nationwide implementation • Digital registration + physical postal ballots

TOTAL REGISTERED

1,527,776

OCV and ICPV combined

OUT-OF-COUNTRY VOTING

767,233

50.2% of all postal registrations

IN-COUNTRY POSTAL VOTING

760,543

49.8% of all postal registrations

FOUR ELIGIBLE VOTER GROUPS UNDER RPO ARTICLE 27

Bangladeshis abroad

767,233

Out-of-country voters

Government officials

575,200

Posted outside their constituency

Election-duty personnel

179,653

169,643 officials + 10,010
Ansar/VPD personnel

Detainees / legal custody

5,690

Endorsed by the jail authority

REGISTRATION-TO-ACCEPTANCE

OUT-OF-COUNTRY (OCV)

61.5%

471,973 ballots accepted by Returning Officers

IN-COUNTRY (ICPV)

79.1%

601,524 ballots accepted by Returning Officers

OCV REGISTRATION REACH

767,233 overseas voters registered across 148 countries
5.9% of the estimated 13 million Bangladeshis living abroad
BEC target: 5 million • 15.3% of target reached
25 eligible countries recorded no applications

TOP REGISTRATION COUNTRIES

Saudi Arabia	239,186
Malaysia	84,293
Qatar	76,139

ICPV: 575,200 government officials + 169,643 election-duty personnel + 10,010 Ansar/VPD personnel + 5,690 persons in detention or lawful custody

Arabia had the highest number of registrations, with 239,186, followed by Malaysia with 84,293 and Qatar with 76,139. ICPV registration covered 575,200 government officials, 169,643 election-duty personnel, 10,010 Ansar and VDP personnel and 5,690 persons in detention or lawful custody. In total, 1,527,776 voters registered under the two postal-voting modalities.

Voting process

Approved voters received a package containing a ballot paper, instructions, a prescribed declaration and a return envelope addressed to the relevant Returning Officer. After receiving the package, voters were instructed to scan the envelope's QR code through the application and complete an additional identity verification. They then marked the ballot with a tick or cross against the preferred candidate's symbol, signed the declaration, sealed the documents in the designated envelope and returned them through the postal system. The BEC required completed ballots to reach the Returning Officer by 4:30 p.m. on election day; later arrivals were excluded from the count.

At the Returning Officer's office, designated officials scanned the QR code of each returned envelope and generated constituency-specific records of distributed and received ballots. Duplicate identifiers, envelopes that had not undergone the prescribed QR verification and late arrivals were separated and excluded. Accepted envelopes were stored in sealed constituency ballot boxes. Candidates or their agents were invited to observe the sealing process, providing an important measure of transparency and chain-of-custody control.

Counting and tabulation

Postal-ballot counting began after polling closed at 4:30 p.m. The Returning Officer appointed a Presiding Officer and supporting polling personnel for each constituency. Candidates, agents, accredited observers and journalists were permitted to be present. Ballots could be excluded where more than one candidate was selected, the voter's intention could not be determined, the declaration was unsigned, an unauthorised mark was used or other prescribed requirements were not met. AFED also noticed that the OCV parliamentary ballot listed all 119 electoral symbols, not constituency-specific candidates, resulting in 57,898 invalid votes.

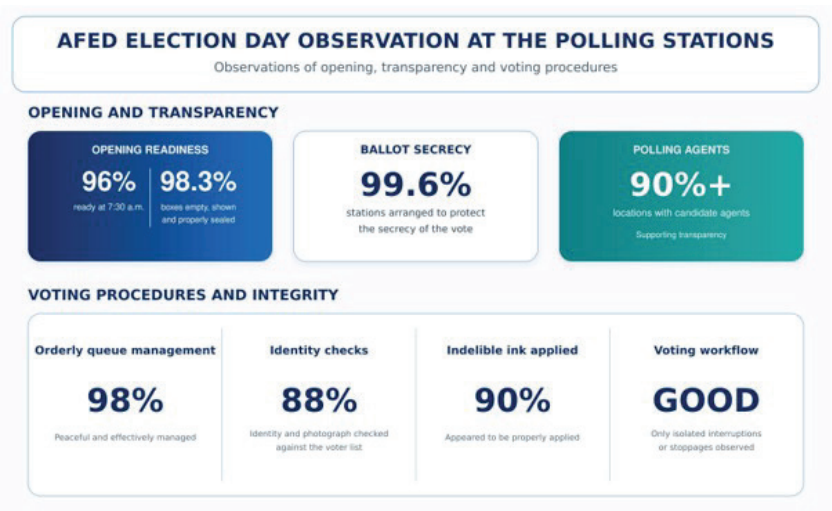
9. Election day and election results

Opening and voting

The opening of the polling centers was scheduled for 7:30 am and nearly all (96 per cent) polling stations observed were ready to open on time. Polling stations were well set up, ballot boxes were seen to be empty, shown to those present, and properly sealed prior to the start of voting. AFED observers noted that in almost all the centers, polling stations were arranged in a manner that ensured the secrecy of the vote. Furthermore, candidates polling agents were present in more than 90 per cent of the locations visited, contributing to enhance transparency in the process.

Voters were lined up in an orderly and peaceful manner, with effective queue management by polling station officials observed in at least 98

per cent of cases. Integrity measures for voters’ identification were largely respected in the observed PS. In at least 88 per cent of the polling stations observed, polling officials checked voters’ identity and photographs against the voter lists before issuing ballot papers and at least in 90 per cent of observed cases, the ink appeared to be properly applied. There was an overall good work flow in the polling stations, with only a few isolated incidents of the voting process being interrupted or stopped.



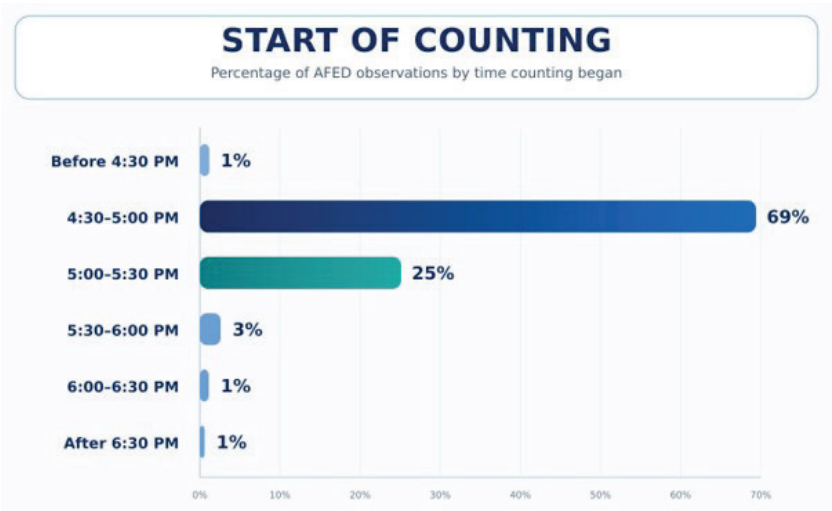
Percentages refer to AFED observed polling stations.

AFED observers noted that uniformed security personnel were present throughout the day in nearly all polling centers, contributing to general order.

Closing and counting

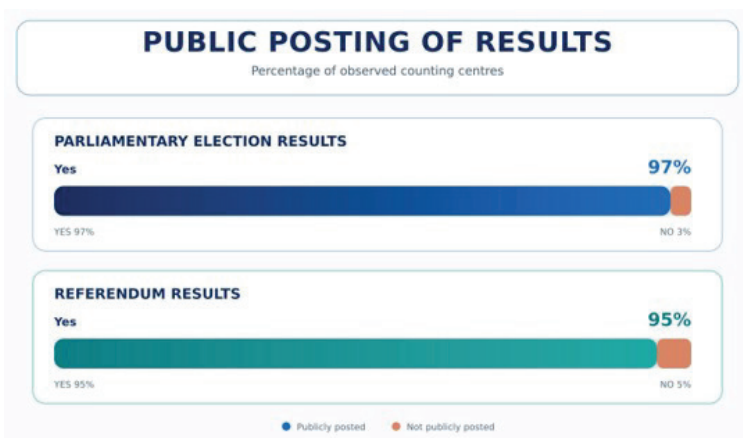
AFED observed the closing and counting in 1,375 polling stations. The closing of the polling stations was observed as orderly. AFED observers noted that, in over 90 per cent of the polling stations where closing was observed, voters in the queue were allowed to vote in line with established procedures.

The counting operations started timely in at least 90 per cent of the polling stations observed.

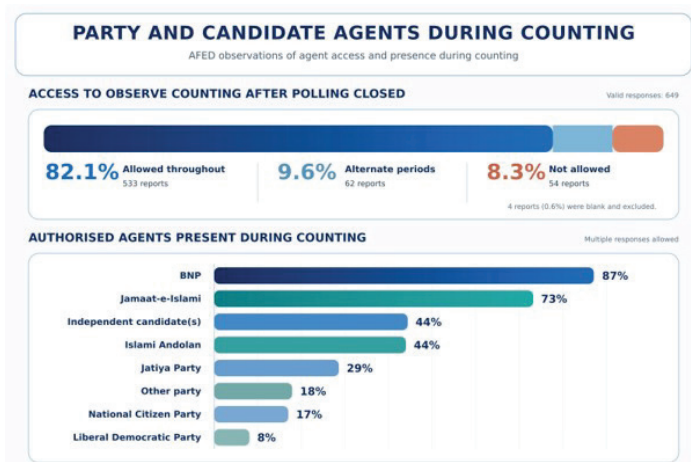


Invalid and valid ballots were assessed accurately, with no complaints recorded in at least 88 per cent of observed counting locations. During observation, only 12 cases involved interference, intimidation or harassment during the counting process. In 54 cases, party or candidate agents raised complaints with the presiding officer, indicating some level of dispute. In 18 cases, counting was not completed by the time AFED observers left.

Polling stations results from the parliamentary elections and national referendum were posted in 97 and 95 per cent of the polling centers observed, respectively. AFED long-term observers witnessed 41 and 73 cases where the posting of the results was not in line with existing procedures.



Authorised party and candidate agents were mostly allowed to stay in the polling stations after closing to observe the count, thus supporting transparency. However, AFED LTOs observed 103 cases where party and candidate agents had only partial access and 61 cases where their presence was refused. During counting, BNP party or candidate agents were present in 92 per cent of the locations, Jamaat-e-Islami agents in 78 per cent, NCP agents in 16 per cent, and independent candidate agents in 48 per cent.



At least one party or candidate agent was named in 95% of reports

By-elections

By-elections took place in Bogura-6 and Sherpur-3 constituencies on 9 April 2026. AFED deployed some 53 election day observers to follow the process.

Overall, polling stations were well prepared for by-election voting. All polling stations observed were set up to protect the secrecy of the vote. However, 16 per cent were not accessible to voters with disabilities and mobility limitations. In all polling stations observed, the ballot box was shown to be empty before polling began, and all were ready to open on time.

Voting in the by-elections generally took place in a peaceful and orderly manner, with uniformed security personnel being present in all polling stations observed by AFED. Queuing was orderly and priority was given to elderly persons, persons with disabilities and pregnant women. Polling officials largely followed voter identification procedures. AFED observers noted, however, 20 cases of proxy voting and 14 cases of suspected proxy voting.

Some challenges were observed during voting. Campaign materials were visible near polling stations in 32 per cent of the observations. In 24 polling stations, persons other than security personnel were observed directing or controlling voters' movement outside the polling station, while in 30 polling stations they appeared to instruct voters. In six polling stations, voters were reportedly obstructed from entering the polling station. No cases of vote buying were observed. National minority voters were treated in the same way as other voters in 206 polling stations (94 per cent), while different treatment was reported in 12 polling stations (6 per cent).

The counting process started on time in all polling stations observed. Party agents were generally allowed to observe the count, with representatives of BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami and independent candidates most frequently present. AFED observers did not report any cases of intimidation or harassment during counting. Valid and invalid ballots

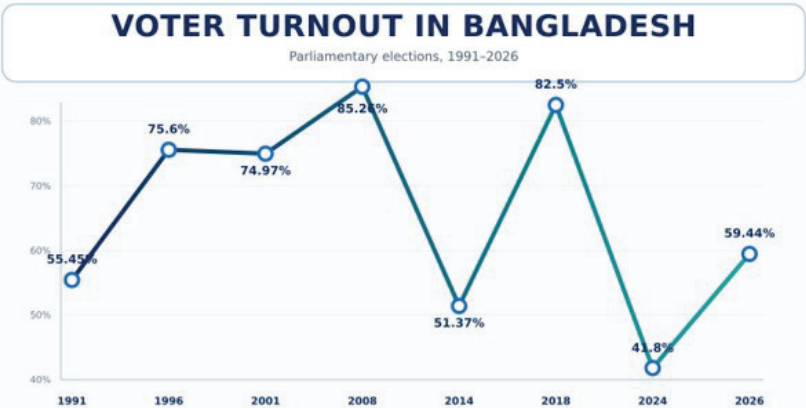
were assessed correctly in all but three polling stations, and complaints from party or candidate agents were observed in only three cases. Election results were posted outside the polling station in all but three polling stations.

As on Election Day on 12 February, AFED observers were generally able to observe voting without, or with only limited, restrictions. However, they encountered more restrictions when observing the counting process.

Declaration of the results

The declaration of results was done in two stages. Election results were first announced by the RO at constituency level. On 13 February, the Election Commission declared and gazetted the final results of 297 constituencies. The result forms for all polling stations are available on the BEC’s website. However, as they are uploaded as images, they are not easily accessible for analysis or further use.

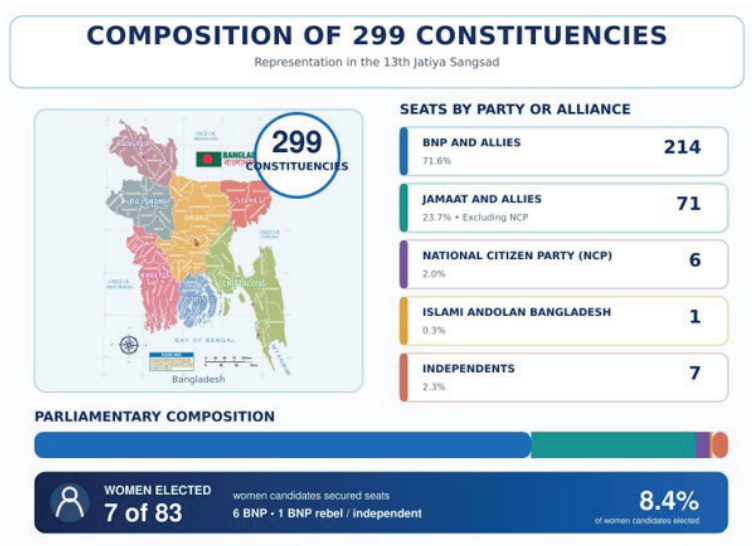
The turnout for the parliamentary elections was 59.44 per cent, slightly lower than the turnout for the national referendum at 60.26 per cent. Although representing an increase in participation compared to the



*2026 turnout recovered to 59.44%
17.64 percentage points above 2024, but below the levels reported in 1996, 2001, 2008 & 2018*

2024 elections, many had expected higher participation taking into consideration that the elections took place against the background of the July uprising and envisioned as the beginning of a new democratic path for Bangladesh.

The results showed a decisive victory for the BNP alliance who, following the by-elections, secured a total of 214 seats. Jamaat-e-Islami's alliance picked up 71 seats, out of which the NCP won 6 seats. Seven seats were secured by independent candidates whereas Islami Andolan Bangladesh won one seat. With its alliance securing more than two-thirds of the parliamentary seats, BNP was enabled to form the next government. On 17 February, BNP party chairman Tarique Rahman was sworn in as the new Prime Minister, heading a government comprising 48 government ministers.

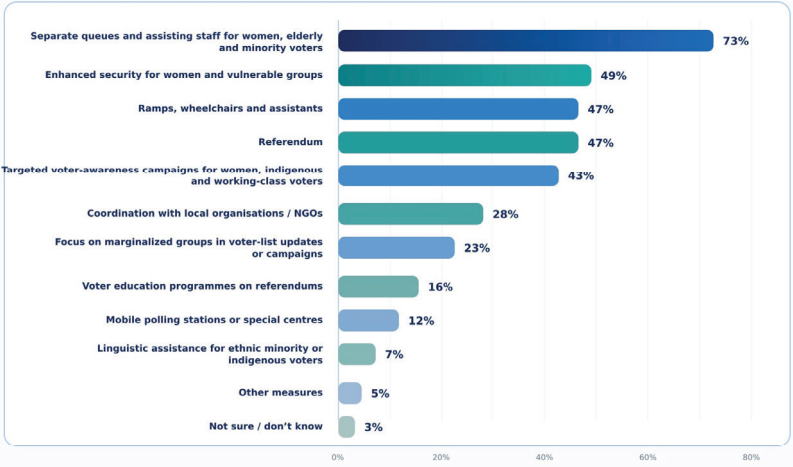


10. Inclusion of marginalised groups

The BEC appeared to have taken electoral inclusion seriously, as reflected in AFED's interviews with local election officials. The most frequently reported measures included separate queues and assistance for women, older persons and minority voters (73 per cent), enhanced

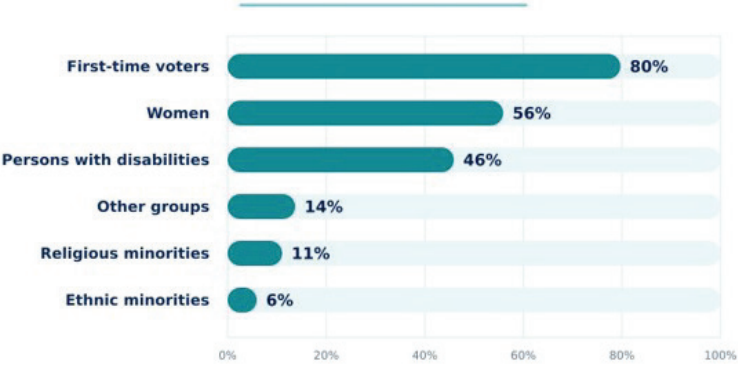
EC MEASURES FOR INCLUSION AND REFERENDUM AWARENESS

Percentage of local election officials identifying each measure



TARGET GROUPS FOR VOTER EDUCATION

Reported in AFED interviews with 444 local election officials

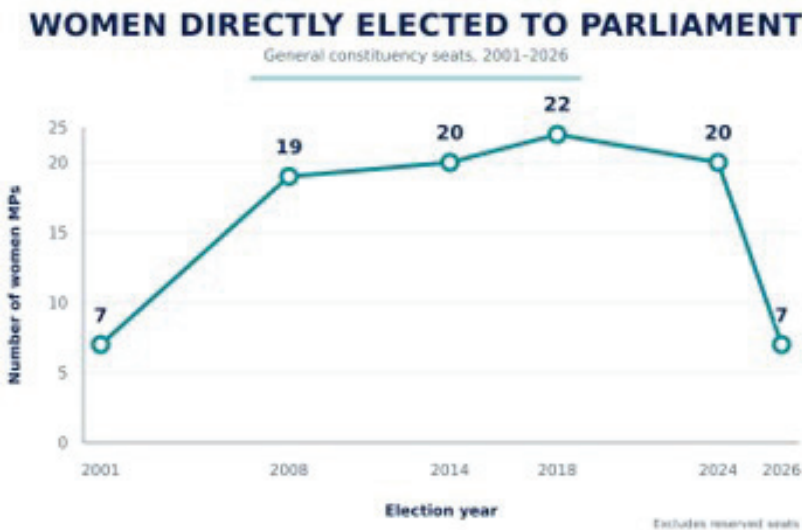


Multiple responses allowed; percentages therefore sum to more than 100%
Source: AFED interviews with local election officials.

security for women and vulnerable groups (49 per cent), and facilities and assistance for voters with disabilities (47 per cent). Nevertheless, less frequently reported measures, such as linguistic assistance for ethnic minority and indigenous voters (7 per cent), mobile or special polling facilities (12 per cent), and referendum voter education (16 per cent), indicate that implementation was uneven and that more targeted support is needed to address specific barriers faced by underrepresented groups.

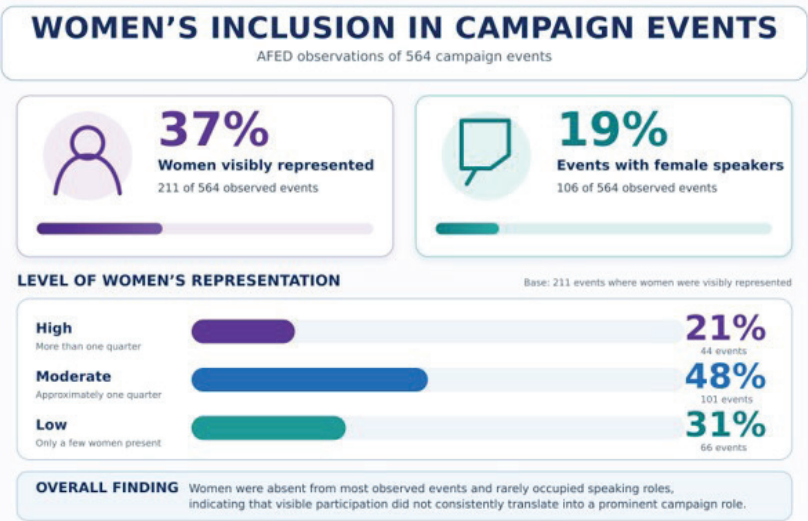
Women

Only seven women were eventually elected in the elections that took place on 12 February. This constitutes the lowest number of directly elected women representatives since 2001, suggesting that Bangladesh is going backwards rather than forward in terms of promoting women in elected positions at the national level. The electoral system (i.e. the first-past-the-post) combined with lack of proactive engagement by political parties to effectively include



The Constitution reserves 50 seats in Parliament for women. These seats are allocated to political parties based on the number of seats they win in the parliamentary elections. While the system increases the number of women in Parliament, it has been criticised, including by women's organisations, for limiting women's opportunities to be elected directly by voters and creating a “secondary” category of parliamentarians. Since candidates for the reserved seats are nominated by the political parties, the selection process is largely decided by party leadership. After the election results were finalised, the BEC allocated the reserved seats to the political parties. The parties thereafter submitted the list of their candidates who were declared elected on 30 April.

Women’s inclusion in observed campaign events was limited, particularly in visible and speaking roles. Women were visibly represented in only 37 per cent of the 564 events observed, while 63 per cent recorded no visible representation of women. Even where women were present, their participation was generally modest: among the 211 events with visible female representation, women constituted



more than one quarter of participants in only 21 per cent, approximately one quarter in 48 per cent, and only a small proportion in 31 per cent. Women's participation as speakers was substantially lower, with female speakers observed at just 19 per cent of events. These findings suggest that women's presence did not consistently translate into meaningful or prominent participation and that the campaign was largely dominated by men.

While the BEC published gender-disaggregated data on registered voters, it does not record turnout figures broken down by gender. This data would be useful to better understand the participation of women as voters in the process.

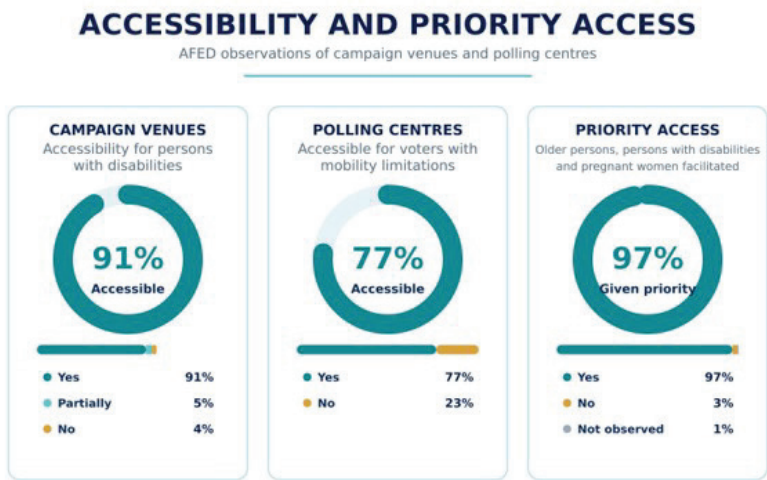
Inclusion also means that different groups are represented in the election administration. Apart from one female commissioner, women in BEC leadership positions are limited. When asked whether gender balance or minority representation were considered during the recruitment of polling staff in the constituencies, 70 per cent of the local election officials interviewed by AFED said this was not the case. AFED election day observers nevertheless noted that female polling officials constituted a crucial work force on Election Day, which underlined their important role in Election Day operations.

The multiple challenges to women in the electoral process is concerning. In the future, the BEC could develop a gender inclusion policy and a clear strategy for promoting the inclusion of women as voters, as candidates and in the election administration itself.

Persons with disabilities

The effective inclusion of persons with disabilities in the electoral process is essential for ensuring that elections are fully inclusive and representative. Bangladesh has some 3.3 million voters with disabilities and enabling them to participate on an equal basis as any other voter is an important measure of the accessibility and overall quality of the electoral process.

Campaign venues were largely accessible to persons with disabilities. In 91 per cent of the campaigns observed by AFED observers were accessible to persons with disabilities.



Percentage rounded to the nearest whole number; totals may differ from 100%
Source: AFED campaign-event and election-day observation

Persons with disabilities faced considerable challenges with access to polling stations on Election Day. As reported by Organisations for Persons with Disabilities, vehicle restrictions affected the possibilities of persons with disabilities to reach polling stations. The possibility to grant persons with disabilities dispensation from such restrictions could have facilitated their equal participation.

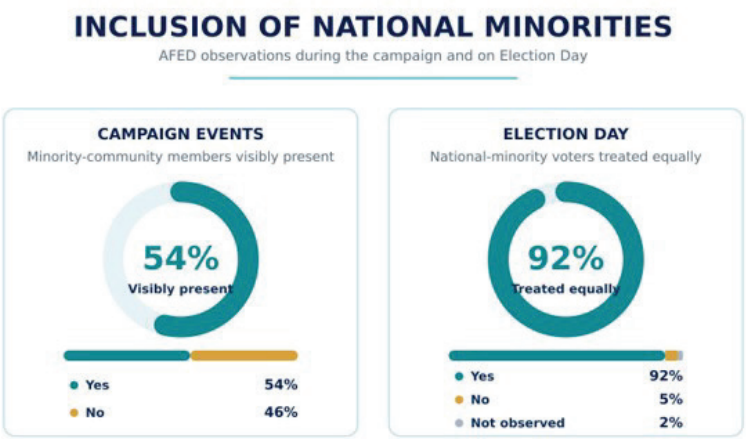
Access to the polling stations are further compounded by physical barriers in the schools where elections in Bangladesh are organised. Based on AFED observations, 23 per cent of the polling stations were not accessible to persons with limited mobility, due to e.g. lack of ramps and the location of some polling stations on upper floors. At the same time, well organised queuing systems are likely to have provided good conditions for all voters, including for persons with various special needs. Notably, AFED observed that in nearly all polling

stations observed, persons with disabilities and others in need such as elderly and pregnant women were given priority or facilitated access to vote.

Minorities

Bangladesh is home to a diverse range of ethnic and religious minority communities whose equal participation in elections is important to ensure an inclusive electoral process.

According to AFED election observation data, members of minority communities - Hindu, Christian, Buddhist and other communities, indigenous/ethnic minority groups - were visibly present in more than 54 per cent of the campaign events observed by AFED. Only 6 per cent of the local election officials that AFED met highlighted ethnic minorities as a target group for voter education. Positively, reports from observers on the voting proceedings also took note of minority groups being treated in the same manner as others in more than 90 per cent of the polling stations observed.



Percentage rounded to the nearest whole number; totals may differ from 100%
Source: AFED campaign-event and election-day observation

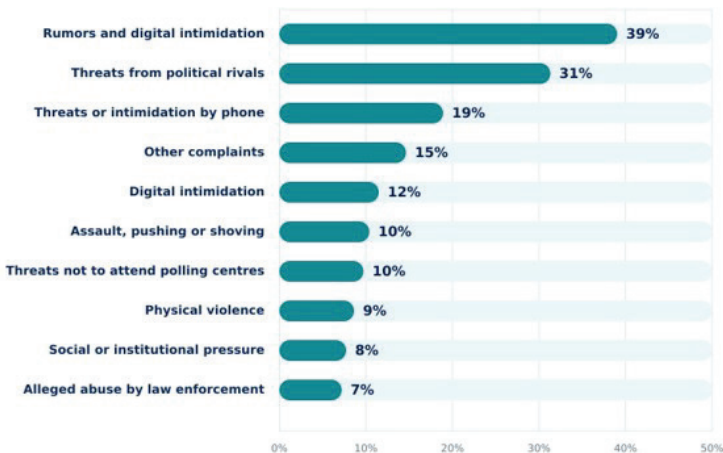
Previous elections have seen concerns regarding the participation, security and political representation of minorities. AFED noted that, for the first time, civil society election observation efforts specifically observed the elections from the perspective of minority participation, which contributes to better understanding of key challenges as well as the identification of solutions to enhance participation and representation of these groups.

11. Complaints and dispute resolution

Nearly all local election officials interviewed by AFED observers reported having received complaints during the election period. Most complaints concerned rumours, digital intimidation and threatening phone calls. Some 10 per cent and 8 per cent also reported receiving complaints relating to intimidation of a physical nature, including assault, pushing and shoving, as well as physical violence. Notably, 10 per cent reported complaints that individuals had been threatened to prevent them from attending polling stations.

MOST FREQUENT COMPLAINTS REPORTED

Based on AFED interviews with local election officials



*Multiple responses allowed; percentages therefore do not sum to 100%
Percentages are based on 444 interviews; 439 records selected at least one option.*

The volume and range of legal challenges was filed across multiple judicial forums, reflecting both broader constitutional concerns about the electoral legal framework and constituency-level grievances. In total, at least 44 distinct legal challenges were identified, spanning into three categories: five broader constitutional writ petitions challenging the election/ referendum process itself, four pre-election candidacy disputes with suspended results, and 35 post-election result petitions were filed before the High Court Election Tribunal.

Constitutional and Process Challenges

A total of five write petitions were filed challenging the electoral legal framework and constitutionality of the entire electoral process. Two petitions challenged the legality of holding the parliamentary elections and the constitutional referendum simultaneously on 12 February 2026, arguing the Constitution does not provide for elections or referenda under an IG. Two further petitions challenged the validity of the July National Charter and the associated Referendum Ordinance 2025, contending there is no constitutional basis for a referendum of this kind and that its results should be annulled. One additional petition sought postponement of the election on security grounds, citing the continued absence of thousands of firearms looted during the 2024 uprising. While none of these petitions halted the elections, they represented a continuing constitutional dimension to the post-election legal landscape.

Pre-election Candidacy Disputes

Four BNP candidates contested the election while nomination disputes remained pending before the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, with results in three constituencies remaining formally suspended pending final judicial disposition. In Chattogram-2, Chattogram-4, and Sherpur-2, the Appellate Division permitted candidates to contest but prohibited BEC from gazetteering their results until the cases are resolved. In Sherpur-2, a candidate faced dual citizenship challenges, until he was declared valid a few weeks before election. In Chattogram 2, the Supreme Court approved

the BNP candidate to continue his MP duties. In Chattogram-4, however, the Appellate Division on 30 June 2026 allowed an appeal by Jamaat-e-Islami candidate and annulled the candidacy of BNP candidate on loan-default grounds, despite he had received the highest number of votes. These cases illustrate how unresolved or prolonged eligibility disputes can create uncertainty even after election.

Post-election Results Petitions

A total of 35 election petitions filed before the High Court Election Tribunal, constituted under Section 49 of the RPO, 1972, and presided over by a single bench of Justice Md Zakir Hossain. Petitioners came from four parties: 21 candidates from the BNP, 12 from Jamaat-e-Islami, one from Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, and one from the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the latter two both members of the Jamaat-led 11-party alliance. The majority of petitions were filed between 26 February and 11 March 2026, within a month of the official results being declared. Common grounds cited include discrepancies in result sheets, absence of polling agents' signatures, alleged ballot stuffing, and broader vote count irregularities. In all accepted cases, the Tribunal ordered the seizure and preservation of ballot papers and result sheets by the BEC pending hearing, with substantive hearings scheduled between April and May 2026. The strongest relief sought was in the Sherpur-1 petition, which called not only for a recount but for outright cancellation of the result and the holding of a fresh election.

12. Election observation

Whilst increasingly restricted under the previous regime, the 2026 electoral processes demonstrated a strong commitment to enhanced transparency by way of granting the civil society improved access to the process. The BEC accredited a total of 55,454 from 81 accredited citizen election observer organisations and almost 400 foreign observers.

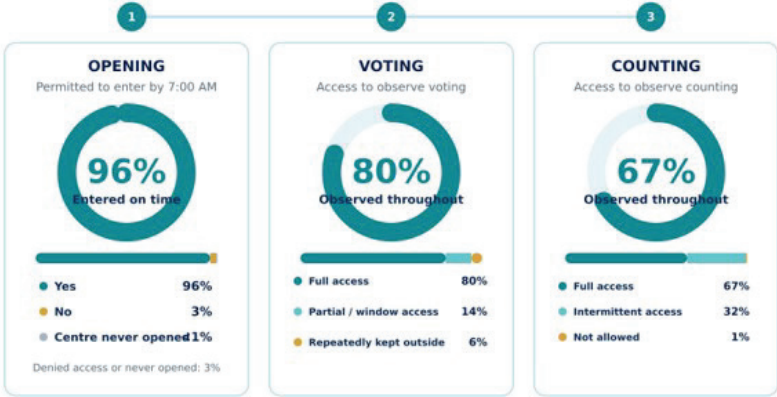
The Election Observation Policy adopted on 27 July provides greater openness to citizen election observation. Yet it continues to place a number of limitations on how citizen groups can conduct effective observation. Most importantly, it restricts citizen observation to only three days. Whilst AFED in practice experienced no restrictions to its long-term observation engagement, the right of election observers to observe the entire electoral process should be catered for in the policy framework. Moreover, the policy prohibits the presence of stationary observers inside polling stations whilst this is essential to detect and document procedural irregularities and a common methodology used by citizen observers throughout the globe.

The BEC launched a new registration process requiring all organisations to reapply, meaning that prior registrations were not carried over. The initial exercise conducted in August and September 2025 was criticised in the media and the BEC positively re-opened the process which contributed to inclusion of additional organisations. In late December and early January, the BEC organised briefings for accredited organisations to present its procedures and assist citizen observers in understanding the relevant rules and processes. The decision of the BEC to withdraw the accreditation of a citizen observation organisation with more than 10,000 accredited observers after investigations linked to their credibility demonstrated willingness to take action against organisations lacking credibility.

Election officials at the local level welcomed AFED long-term observers and willingly participated in interviews, demonstrating an open and transparent attitude. On election day, AFED observers were generally granted access to observe the opening and the voting processes. However, in one third of cases, observers were not given access at the stage of the count. This raises concerns regarding transparency at this critical stage and steps should be taken in the future to guarantee the right of observers to have full access to this part of the process.

AFED OBSERVER ACCESS ON ELECTION DAY

Access during opening, voting and counting — rounded percentages



Percentage rounded to the nearest whole number; blanks excluded and totals may differ from 100%
Source: AFED election-day observation

International election groups observing the elections included the European Union, ANFREL and the Commonwealth. AFED exchanged with international election observer groups both at leadership and field levels.

13. Conclusion

The 2026 parliamentary elections and national referendum took place during a period of profound political transition and represented an important opportunity to restore confidence in Bangladesh's democratic institutions. While many positive steps were taken, the findings in this report show that further efforts are needed to strengthen the inclusiveness, transparency and integrity of future electoral processes.

The recommendations presented in this report are intended to support practical improvements by the government institutions and the parliament, the BEC, political parties, and civil society, while recognising the progress already achieved.

With local government elections expected to begin in October 2026, there is an immediate opportunity to apply the lessons learned from these elections. Addressing practical issues such as polling station accessibility, observer access, voter education, campaign practices and the participation of women and marginalised groups can further strengthen public confidence in the electoral process. AFED hopes that this report will contribute to constructive dialogue and practical action, helping Bangladesh continue its democratic transition through increasingly inclusive, transparent and credible elections.

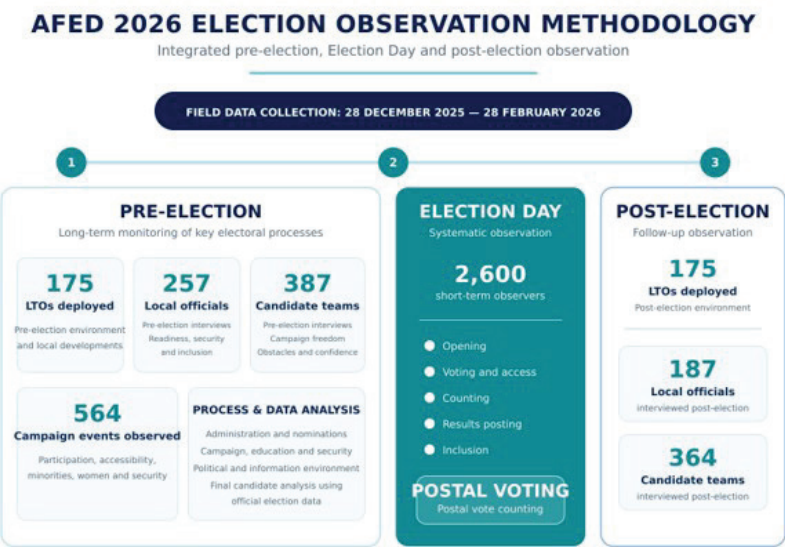
14. About AFED and AFED's observation methodology

The Alliance for Fair Elections and Democracy (AFED) is a national coalition of 30 civil society organisations that formed in July 2025 with a view to work on promoting credible, inclusive, transparent, and democratic electoral processes in Bangladesh through citizen election observation, civic education, research, advocacy, and electoral reform initiatives.

AFED established a secretariat at the Light House, Dhaka office at Banani and equipped with staff and necessary logistics. During the 2026 Parliamentary Elections, AFED implemented a nationwide citizen election observation mission with technical support from the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) under the AHEAD Bangladesh project, and financial support from the European Union. The coalition deployed long-term observers, proportional-based observers, covering electoral violence, inclusion, media, and civic space. This represented one of AFED's methodologically advanced coordinated observation efforts in recent years and generated valuable operational and institutional experience.

AFED's methodology combines long-term observation and short-term Election Day observation, which makes our findings and assessments rigorous and aims to contribute to post-election reforms. AFED deployed 175 Long-Term Observers across the country in the period 28 December 2025 thru 28 February 2026. Long-term observers observed a total of 564 campaign events and undertook 741 interviews

with candidate/campaign teams as well as 444 interviews with election officials locally in the constituencies where they were deployed.

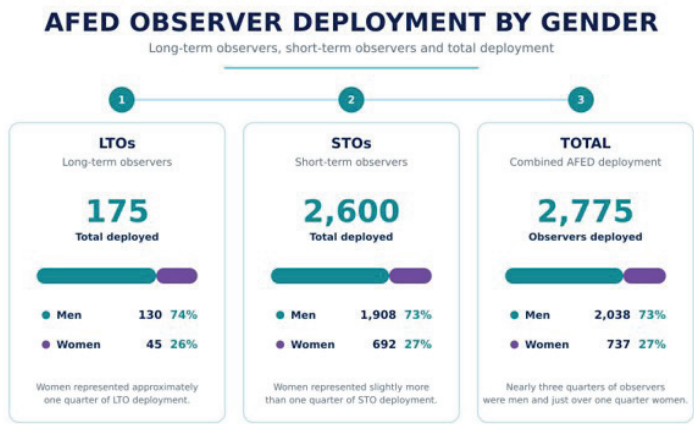


*Methods combined structured interviews direct observation and standardized reporting forms.
Findings reflect the location, stakeholders and processes observed by AFED.*

Although AFED initially intended to conduct a sample-based observation (SBO), the conditions necessary for implementing a statistical robust exercise could not be fully secured within the available timeframe. The compressed electoral calendar, delays in obtaining complete polling station information, limitations affecting observer accreditation and deployment planning, and the considerable logistical and technical demands of recruiting, training, and communicating with observers across a nationally representative sample made it difficult to preserve the methodological requirements of an SBO. AFED therefore adapted its approach and deployed observers more broadly to collect systematic qualitative and quantitative evidence on election day procedures. While the resulting findings provide valuable insights into the polling stations observed, they should not be interpreted as statistically representative of all polling stations nationwide.

On Election Day, almost 2,600 accredited observers were deployed in proportion to geographic areas. All observation activities were conducted independently and impartially by trained observers adhering to a strict Code of Conduct, with conclusions and recommendations derived from verified field data. AFED’s election observation activities are supported by the European Union and the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD).

Women represented 27 per cent of AFED’s observer deployment, with a similar proportion among both long-term and short-term observers.



Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.
Source: AFED observer-deployment records.



AFED Member Organisations

1. Abdul Momen Khan Foundation, Dhaka;
2. ASHIKA Development Associates, Rangamati;
3. Banchte Shekha, Jahore;
4. Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts (BITA), Chattragram;
5. SEBA Foundation, Mymensing;
6. Bonhishikha, Dhaka;
7. Blind Education Rehabilitation Development Organization (BERDO), Dhaka;
8. Bangladesh NGO's Network for Radio Communication (BNNRC), Dhaka;
9. Democracywatch, Dhaka;
10. Digitally Right, Dhaka;
11. FEMA, Dhaka;
12. GRAUS, Bandarban;
13. Integrated Social Development Effort (ISDE), Cox's Bazar;
14. Institute of Development Affairs (IDEA), Sylhet;
15. Light House, Bogura;
16. MOVE Foundation, Dhaka;
17. Noakhali Rural Development Society (NRDS), Noakhali;
18. Pollisree, Dinajpur;
19. Rights Jessore, Jashore;
20. Rupantar, Khulna;
21. Sabalamby Unnayan Samity (SUS), Netrokona;
22. Sariatpur Development Society (SDS), Sariatpur;
23. SERAC Bangladesh, Dhaka;
24. Trinamul Unnayan Sangstha (TUS), Khagrachhari
25. Bakultali Mahila Sangshad (BMS), Kurigram;
26. Integrated Community Development Society, Bhola;
27. Najrul Sriti Sangsad (NSS), Barguna;
28. Manab Shayhayak Kendra (MSK), Joypurhat;
29. Indigenous Peoples Development Services (IPDS), Dhaka;
30. Development Organization of the Rural Poor (DORP), Dhaka.

Photo Gallery



AFED Master Training on 4-6 December 2025



AFED representatives met with the BEC Chief of Commissioner



AFED Launching Event on 7 January 2026



Master Training of AFED Election Day Observer



AFED Pre-Election Press Conference on 9 February 2026 at the National Press Club, Dhaka



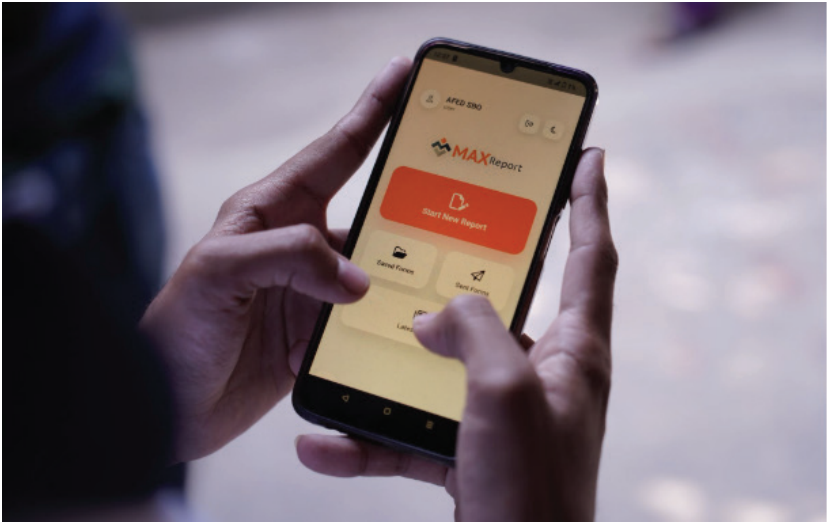
During pre-election period EU Observation Mission led by Mr. Ivars Ijabs meet local observer group including AFED at Hotel Intercontinental, Dhaka



AFED observer team at the Election Day lead by Taleya Rehman



Women voters were waiting at a Banani Polling centre, Dhaka to cast their vote.



Online reporting system used by AFED with technical support from EPD and it's partner (EDGE)



AFED observer at polling centre while declaration of the counting results



AFED observer team led by Light House with law enforcement agency (police)



AFED observer observed the counting process



AFED observers observed the counting of the postal ballots.



AFED Press conference at the data centre on the Election Day



The EU Ambassador and the Head of Delegation Mr. Michael Miller along with volunteer, AFED member & staff and EPD senior leadership were together at AFED data centre.



The EU Ambassador and The Head of Delegation Mr. Michael Miller along with Ambassador of Sweden to Bangladesh Nicolas Weeks, Ambassador of Norway to Bangladesh is H.E. Mr. Håkon Arald Gulbrandsen, Md. Harun-Or-Rashid AFED Member Secretary and EPD's Project Director Anastasia Wibawa and EPD's Senior Advisor, Michael Lidauer were at the Data centre.



Commonwealth observer mission led by former president Ghana visiting AFED data centre, Mr. Harun-Or-Rashid, Member Secretary of AFED brief about the observation process.