

EYE ON ELECTION

A publication of Election Working Group (EWG)

September, 2013

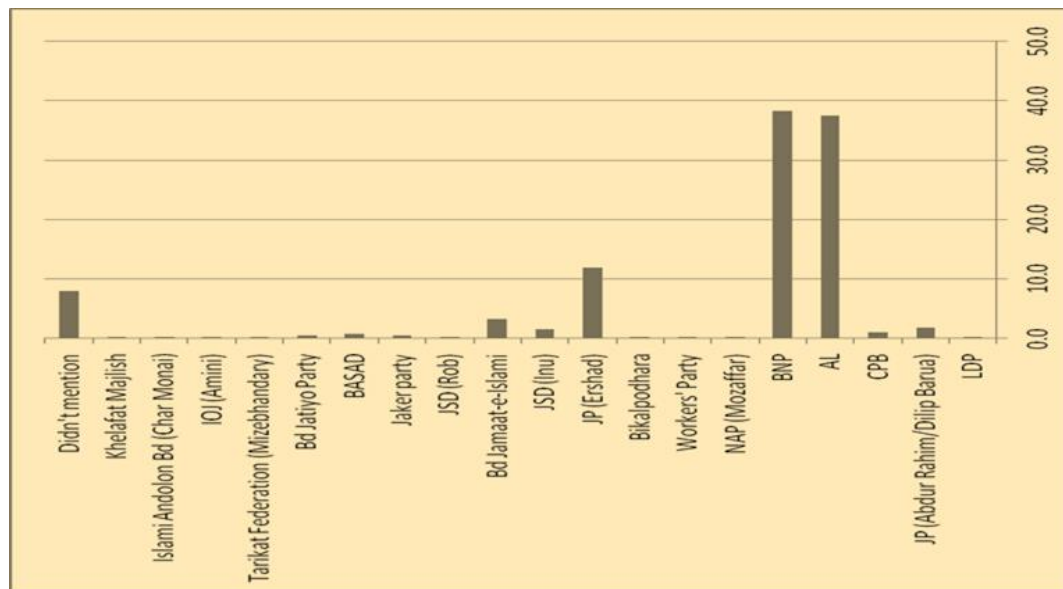


Figure 1: Number of persons seeking party nominations by political party designation.
(See Section 1 – Political Parties: Attempts to obtain nominations.)

ABOUT EWG

The Election Working Group (EWG), a non-partisan network of 29 leading civil society organizations in Bangladesh, was formed in 2006 with the goal of enhancing the transparency and accountability of elections and other democratic processes. Since its establishment, the EWG has observed national and local elections in collaboration with the Election Commission Bangladesh (ECB); it has provided civic / voter education; and, conducted advocacy on election-related issues, including recommendations for further improving the election process. In partnership with the ECB, the EWG played a significant role in assuring the credibility of the 2008 parliamentary election.

For the forthcoming 10th Parliamentary Elections, long term observers (LTOs) were deployed as of June 2013. LTOs currently monitor the pre-election and campaign environment in a total of 209 Upazilas / Thanas, in 118 constituencies, and 55 districts. In addition to election-related observation, areas of EWG focus, for the 10th Parliamentary election, include civic / voter education on the voting processes, tolerance, and representation; deployment of short term observers (STOs) to monitor election-day activities and processes; and, advocacy to further strengthen election processes in Bangladesh.

EWG PARTNERS

Association for Community Development (ACD)
 Action on Disability and Development (ADD)
 Banchte Shekha
 BCDJC
 Bangladesh Development Society (BDS)
 Bangladesh Manobadhikar Sammonny Parishad (BMSP)
 Coast Trust
 Democracy Watch
 Dak Diye Jai (DDJ)
 GonoKalayanSangstha (GKS)
 GonoUnnayan Kendra (GUK)
 Institute for Environment and Development (IED)
 Jatiya Nirbachon Parjobekkhon Parishad (JANIPOP)
 Jagoroni chakra Foundation (JCF)
 Khan Foundation
 Light House
 Mass-Line Media Centre (MMC)
 Manabik Shahajya Sangstha- (MSS)
 NABLOK
 National Development Program (NDP)
 Noakhali Rural Development Society (NRDS)
 Palishipara Samaj Kallayan Samity (PSKS)
 Rights Jessore
 RUPANTAR
 Shariatpur Development Society (SDS)
 SOLIDARITY
 Srizony Bangladesh
 UTTARAN
 Wave Foundation

In Summary

For the month of September 2013, EWG observers focused on four sub-themes: (1) Election- Related Violence, (2) Pre-Election Campaigning, (3) Local Administration, and (4) Role of Media. Observation reports for the month indicate a number of changes in the elections environment: (i) the use of state-owned resources to garner campaign-related support is continuing; (ii) levels of election-related violence have decreased; (iii) local media coverage in favor of candidates and parties has increased; and, (iv) pressure on local media to report or refrain from reporting on campaign and election-related stories has decreased.

1. Political Parties

1.1 Pre-election campaign

Use of state-owned resources:

As was indicated in the June-August EWG Eye on Elections report, use of state-owned resources in the pre-campaign period by MPs / ministers and other political party leaders, is common in Bangladesh. Observers reported 12 incidents of MPs / ministers

CONTENTS

• Summary	1
• Political parties	1
• Election-related violence and Intimidation	2
• Role of Local Administration	3
• Role of Media	3
• Conclusion	4
• Methodology	4

utilizing state-owned resources to ask for votes, in 8 out of 118 constituencies (6.8% of constituencies). The number of similar incidents reported in September is slightly up from the 5.1% reported for the June-August period. State resources mobilized for campaigning included government vehicles, police and Rapid Action Battalion personnel.

From among the MPs/ministers who used state resources for campaigning, two were female, and 10 were male. (I.E. Twenty percent (20%) of the MPs/ministers that used state-owned resources for campaigning were women.) At present, the total current percentage of female MPs/ministers in government is 8.6%; this includes 70 women in Parliament, including 50 in reserved seats, and six female ministers.

Display of campaign materials:

Although there is no legal prohibition on the display of campaign materials before the official campaign period, such active ties may influence the voters and indicate spending that may exceed ECB limits. Campaign materials were observed in all 118 constituencies. From among the 235 candidates, and the 11 registered parties they represent, none of the campaign materials displayed were from leftist party candidates (e.g., Communist Party of Bangladesh, Workers Party of Bangladesh). Female candidates represented 14.5% percent of the total 235 candidates that displayed campaign materials. As previously indicated women comprise 20% of all MPs.

Attempts to obtain nominations:

In all 118 constituencies a total of 392 political party members were reported to be vying for nominations from 19 registered political parties.

From this total, 48 party members (12.3%), were female. Strategies to win party nominations included opinion polls to assess voters' views regarding a person's potential candidacy in the next parliamentary election (this occurred in 14 constituencies). Other approaches included displaying campaign materials at the constituency level, building and maintaining good relationships with central and local party leaders, and attending social events at the local level.

2. Election-related violence and Intimidation

Although pre-election violence¹ is often common in some areas of Bangladesh (e.g. in the highly contested, and in minority / indigenous areas), a lower number of such incidents occurred in September as compared to the previous reporting months.

For September, EWG observers reported a total of six cases of violence, in three constituencies; in comparison, 10 cases of election-related violence were reported in the June-July period, and 12 incidents were reported for August. Incidents of violence include physical harm to individuals, group clashes, and intimidation (Table-1). A total of 240 people were reportedly involved in these incidents.

Table-1: Pre-election violence by type, and actions taken by responsible authorities

Type of violence	Cases		Actions taken
	Number	%	
Group Clash	3	50.0%	FIR ² filed
Physical harm	1	16.7%	FIR filed
Intimidation	1	16.7%	FIR filed
Other	1	16.6%	FIR filed
Total	6	100.0%	

¹ Violence reported on by LTOs is specifically focused on elections-related issues and campaigns, not on general political issues. FIR stands for the First Information

² Report filed with the police or other security agencies after an incident takes place.

3. Role of Local Administration

As a general standard, citizen groups and political parties may request the use of local government premises for meetings and other activities. In one out of 118 observed constituencies, EWG LTOs found that a political party applied to use local government premises for an executive committee meeting, but was denied approval.

4. Role of Media

Public opinion may be influenced positively or negatively through publication of news reports that favor or disparage a particular party or candidate. In addition, threats against the media can inhibit accurate reporting that might damage a party or candidate. In September, two national dailies published four articles that encouraged votes for particular parties. EWG observers also reported that 46 local newspapers, in 14 out of the 118 sample constituencies (11.9%), published articles that favored particular candidates or political parties (Table-2). In comparison, EWG observers reported that in the June-August period, 16 local papers published stories favoring a party or candidate, in 11 constituencies (15.3%).

Table-2: Local newspapers that published news / stories in September 2013 favoring particular political parties or candidates

Published news/story	Constituencies		Number of newspapers
	Number	%	
Yes	14	11.9	46
No	104	88.1%	NA
Total	118	100.0%	

No attacks, threats or pressure against media outlets or reporters were cited for September. In contrast, observers reported such incidents in five constituencies in the June-August period.

5. Conclusion

A relatively quiet pre-campaign environment continued in the 118 constituencies observed by the EWG LTOs in September 2013. EWG observer reports for September underline a number of issues on which the ECB might focus to ensure that the forthcoming elections will be free and fair:

Use of state-owned resources for campaigning:

The use of state owned resources for campaigning gives unfair advantage to politicians and parties. While there was a slight increase in the use of such resources in the month of September, continued and more extensive utilization of such resources negatively affects the overall environment and fairness of the political process. To ensure a more level playing field, a new provision can be added to the RPO, or new legislation enacted, empowering the ECB to demand that local authorities remove all campaign materials in the six month period prior to elections.

Election-related violence:

Election-related violence decreased in September (6 cases), as compared to June-July (10 cases), and August 2013 (12 cases). In September, reports indicate that it was generally ruling party activists who initiated acts of violence against members of opposition political parties. It is clearly critical, that all parties, and party supporters, adhere to a code of conduct that prohibits the use of violence as a form of expression or campaigning.

