



January 6, 2014

Election Working Group

Preliminary Statement on 10th Parliamentary Elections Held on January 5, 2014

Introduction

The Election Working Group (EWG), a non-partisan network of 29 leading civil society organizations in Bangladesh, was formed in 2006 with the shared goal of enhancing the transparency and accountability of elections and other democratic processes. The Group is governed by a strict code of conduct to carry out comprehensive election observation throughout the country. Since its establishment, EWG has been observing Parliamentary, City Corporation and other local government elections, conducting advocacy on election-related issues as well as suggesting recommendations for further reforms in the electoral process.

Unlike many previous elections, the overall elections day environment was marked by low enthusiasm of voters, low turnout and incidents of violence.

Scope and Methodology

In order to observe elections day, EWG selected 75 constituencies covering 43 districts (out of 59 districts where elections were held). These districts were selected from all 7 divisions. The original plan was to cover 1,950 polling stations and 9,750 polling booths. EWG applied for 9,750 accreditation cards and received 8,699; but was able to successfully deploy 8,444 observers in 8,444 polling booths in 1,689 polling stations in the 75 constituencies. The remaining 255 observers could not be deployed due to violence; non-cooperation by the Returning / Assistant Returning Officers and Presiding Officers. Moreover, in a few polling stations law enforcement agencies forced the EWG observers away following orders from the local incumbent / sitting MPs.

For the 10th Parliamentary Elections, 26 EWG partner organizations, and seven non-EWG partner organizations undertook a limited observation mission. The seven non-EWG partner organizations were called upon to assist with monitoring areas with large minority/indigenous populations. As no voting took place in 153 constituencies due to there being no other candidate, and given the security situation throughout the country, EWG decided to carry out only limited observation activities. The limited observation monitored issues relating to voter turnout and the security situation in and around polling stations. The EWG observers did not undertake monitoring activities around the electoral process on the elections day, and therefore cannot comment on matters relating to procedural irregularities or fraudulent activities. But obviously there were a number of incidents which were observed.

Key Findings

EWG observers recorded voter turnout figures at three points throughout the day, 10:00am, 12:30pm, and 4:00pm (i.e. at the close of polls). As recorded from the polling personnel at the observed stations, average voter turnout was 30.1 %, with female turnout (31.2%) slightly higher than male turnout (28.9%). Voter turnout varied across constituencies, with the lowest recorded turnout at 6.4% (Dhaka-17) and

highest turnout at 74.0% (Gopalganj-1). The aggregated average turn out figures are given in the following table:

Time	Avg. Female Voter Turnout (%)	Avg. Male Voter Turnout (%)	Avg. Voter Turnout (%)
10:00am	6.9	4.8	5.9
12:30pm	19.4	16.3	17.9
4:00pm – close of polls	31.2	28.9	30.1

EWG observed 72 instances of violence in the immediate vicinity of polling stations. Such violence was most prevalent in Rajshahi (23) and Rangpur (21) Divisions. Within polling stations, EWG observed 47 cases of violent activity. The division of Rangpur (21) recorded the highest occurrence of such violence. 21 cases of voters being obstructed on their way to the polling stations were recorded, while 5 cases were reported of voters being forced to go to the polling station. Some other cases that were reported include: hijacking and burning of ballot boxes, cocktail blasts at stations, Presiding Officer ran away due to violence, and temporary suspension of voting due to violence.

Challenges for Observers

In addition to violence in some areas, non-cooperation from some elections officials and incumbent MP(s), EWG faced difficulties in receiving the relevant accreditation cards for its observers. In each of the selected constituencies, EWG requested for 130 cards, but in 31 constituencies, the partner organizations received fewer cards than they had requested. In two constituencies, although 130 accreditation cards were issued, EWG observers were told to deploy 72 observers per constituency without showing any specific reason. Moreover, in a few constituencies EWG observers were asked to collect their accreditation cards in person from the Returning Officers' offices that were located far away and transport was a challenge due to blockade and hartal. In one instance, the observers were challenged and physically assaulted by some local people.

Concluding Remarks

Although this is the national election after five years, voter turn out was significantly lower than the previous two Parliamentary elections i.e. 74.37% in 2001 and 85.93% in 2008. The usual enthusiasm and festive mood from voters and other citizens were not found this time.

For further information:

Md. Abdul Alim
 Director
 Election Working Group (EWG)
 House-5, Road-8
 Baridhara, Dhaka 1212
 Tel: +880 2 8826941 to 43
 Cell: 01733568044
 E-mail: aalim@ewgbg.org