

EYE ON ELECTION

A publication of Election Working Group (EWG)

14-26 December, 2013



Electoral Regions	Total number of Constituencies	Selected Constituencies
Rangpur	33	22
Rajshahi	39	19
Faridpur	15	04
Khulna	36	25
Barisal	21	10
Mymensingh	38	12
Dhaka	41	21
Sylhet	19	07
Comilla	35	09
Chittagong	23	11
Total	300	140

Table 1: Coverage of constituencies under the "Eye on Election" program

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 140 constituencies, and 53 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.

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IN FOCUS

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, conducted advocacy on election-related issues, and issued recommendations for further improving the election process. In partnership with the ECB, the EWG played a significant role in ensuring the credibility of the 2008 parliamentary election.

EWG's "Eye on Election" program is designed to observe election-related events and collect citizens' views on the upcoming 2014 election on a monthly basis in various constituencies across the country. From the month of November, EWG has added 25 more constituencies where there is a high presence of minority communities. Currently 176 LTOs are working in 140 constituencies covering all ten electoral regions in 53 of the country's 64 districts. The coverage of constituencies by the LTOs is shown in Table 1.

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This report covers part of the campaign period starting from 14 December and continued up to 26 December 2013. Although candidates had 21 days to conduct campaign, this report covers 13 days. Moreover, out of 140 sampled constituencies there was no elections in 67 constituencies as there was no contesting candidates in these constituencies.

The most significant issue for this period is the election campaign. Other significant issues that have specific relevance during this period include election preparation and administration at the local level; compliance with the election code of conduct by political parties; early campaigning by political parties; the overall security environment; and the role and influence of national and local media. All these areas were observed by EWG LTOs (long term observers) during the reporting period.

The following are some of the key highlights of EWG findings during this period:

- District election officers published the preliminary list of polling stations in 131(95%) of the 138 constituencies on which reports were obtained.
- Returning officers published a list of temporary polling personnel in 89 (66%) of the 134 constituencies on which reports were obtained.
- Election officials in 133 constituencies (96% of 139 constituencies) reported that

they had received copies of the final electoral roll for their constituencies. Observers also noted that in over a third of these constituencies, the electoral roll was received after the official deadline had passed.

- Voters in almost all the 133 constituencies where the final electoral roll was available had access to the electoral roll in order to check their serial number.
- Candidates or their agents found practically no discrepancies in the electoral roll.
- Reports of unfair use of state resources for campaigning purposes by candidates were received from just three constituencies.
- Written permission to hold meetings (with location, date and time) obtained from concerned authority was obtained by the candidates or parties for 71 percent of reported meetings.
- Campaign meetings held on roads and obstructing movement of people and traffic were observed only in three constituencies.
- There were practically no violations of the campaign period code of conduct relating to the type of picture used on posters; affixing only black and white posters; having printers' name and

address and date of printing on the posters; writing or sticking drawings on walls; campaigning in mosques, temples, churches or any other place of religious worship; causing damages to public or private property; using mikes and other sound-enhancing equipment after eight in the evening to two in the afternoon; taking unfair advantage of state resources by government privileged persons; candidates going to see any government development work or attending any meetings associated with development projects; and MPs' attending executive committee meetings of educational institutions.

- The local police appeared to be well prepared to meet with election-related violence.
- Police officials have largely remained neutral during this period and were not involved in campaigning or other political activities of political parties.
- Instances of political and election violence in the constituency were observed in one-third of constituencies. There were 87 instances of violence recorded in 46 constituencies. Legal action

was taken by the police in 87% of the recorded incidents of violence during the observation period.

- Incidents of violence regarding minority issues were practically negligible.
- Incidents of women voters and voters from minority ethnic and religious groups facing any kind of problems with regard to the 2014 national election other than from election office, political party representatives and other local stakeholders (NGOs, religious leaders, etc.) were practically non-existent.

1. Election Preparation and Administration

1.1 Transparency/openness of election officers: Transparency and openness of election officers including returning and assistant returning officers was judged by considering if the election officials in the sampled constituencies were willing to meet with the LTOs and to share information with them. Election officials were seen to be open and transparent on both these counts—election officials met with the LTOs in all 140 constituencies in the sample. Willingness of election officials to share information with LTOs was observed in 138 of 139 constituencies for which reporting was done (N = 139).¹

1.2 Selection of Polling Stations: The district election officer published the preliminary list of polling stations in 131 (or 94.9%) of the sampled constituencies (N = 138). The local election office received objections on the preliminary list in only three of the constituencies (2.3%) in which the preliminary list was published.

Five objections were recorded—these related to changing the location of the previous polling stations, and lack of adequate number of polling stations.

1.3 Recruitment of temporary polling personnel: The Returning Officer published a list of polling personnel in 89 (66.4%) of the sampled constituencies (N = 134). There were no objections to the preliminary list in any constituency.

1.4 Training on conduct of elections: During the reporting period, 130 trainings were given to upazila election officers and staff, 86 trainings to zila election officers and staff, and 10 trainings to temporary training personnel in the 140 constituencies in the sample (Table 2). Sixty nine percent of the trainings to upazila and zila election officers and staff were training of trainers (TOTs). These trainings were meant mainly for the election officers; however, three TOTs were given to office assistants and computer operators at the upazila level, and two at the zila level. Amongst temporary polling personnel, two TOTs were provided, one to an

election officer and one to a polling officer. Following the TOTs the election officials are supposed to conduct trainings for presiding officers and assistant presiding officers. Thirty trainings on the Candidate Management System and the Results Management System (CMS/RMS) were provided to office assistants and computer operators at the upazila level, and 23 at the zila level. Five IT (computer fundamentals and administration) trainings were given to upazila and zila election officers. In addition, there were four AMS (Administrative and Management System) trainings for office assistants and computer operators at the upazila and zila levels, and one electoral training for an upazila election officer and five for polling officers. Both CMS and RMS are directly related to the election administration as the election officials assist the returning and assistant returning officers to scrutinize candidates as per laws and regulations, and compile results. On the other hand AMS training is useful for overall management.

1.5 Accessibility of Electoral Roll

As per law it is mandatory that the electoral roll must be made available in each of the constituencies before declaration of the election schedule. During the observation period, election officials in 133 constituencies (95.7%, N = 139)

¹ Henceforth, the symbol N will be used to refer to the number of constituencies on which LTOs reported in answering any question in the checklist.

received copies of the final electoral roll for their constituencies. Information on the date the electoral roll was received was available in 106 constituencies. It was seen that 37 of

these 106 constituencies (35%) received the electoral roll after November 25, 2013 which was the last day for receipt of these rolls under the existing rule.

Voters in almost all the constituencies (98%) had access to the electoral roll in order to check their serial numbers. Access was in the form of printed copies of the electoral roll in 49.2% of the constituencies (N = 128), CDs (32.8%), or both (18%). Observers were given access to the electoral roll in 61.5 percent of the constituencies.

Candidates or their agents found no discrepancies in the electoral roll in any of the sampled constituencies.

2. Compliance with the Election Code of Conduct during the Campaign Period

2.1 Unfair advantage of state resources: It is well known that state resources such as government vehicles or premises should not be used while soliciting for votes. This is usually quite common, particularly for election candidates of the ruling party who have easier access to these state resources. During the observation period, however, only three such instances of abuse of code of conduct were observed in three of the constituencies (N = 139). All three incidents were perpetrated by Awami League candidates; two involved use of government houses and one involved use of a government office. This has gone down from the month of November when LTOs observed

Trainings to upazila/thana election officials/staff							
	Training of trainers (TOT)	CM S/RMS	IT/Computer fundamentals and administration	Office management	AMS	Electoral	Total
Upazila Election Officer	90	0	3	0	0	1	94
Office Assistant	2	26	0	1	1	0	30
Computer Operators	1	4	0	0	1	0	6
Total	93	30	3	1	2	1	130
Trainings to zila election officials/staff							
Zila Election Officer	55	0	2	2	0	0	59
Office Assistant	1	22	0	0	1	0	24
Computer Operators	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Total	57	23	2	2	2	0	86
Trainings to temporary polling personnel							
Election Officer	1	2	0	0	0	0	3
Office Assistant	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Polling Officer	1	0	0	0	0	5	6
Total	2	3	0	0	0	5	10

Table 2: Summary of trainings given to upazila and zila election officials and staff

25 incidents in which an MP or a Minister had used state-owned resources in campaigning for votes.

2.2 Disruption of meetings:

Occurrence of this type of event was practically negligible, it being observed only in 6 constituencies or 4.4 percent of the constituencies (N = 138) that a party or an individual disrupted a meeting conducted by a rival candidate. There were only eight such incidents; of those, the Awami League candidates were the affected parties in three, the Jatiya Party (Ershad) in one, and other parties in four. The police were informed of the incidents only in two of the eight cases.

2.3 Permission to hold meetings:

Written permission to hold meetings (with location, date and time) obtained from concerned authority is mandatory under the code of conduct, but was obtained by the candidates or parties only for 25 of the 35 reported meetings (71.4%). The Awami League and Jatiya Party obtained written permission for almost 80 percent of their meetings. The other parties were not so disciplined and held only 43 percent of their meetings with the required permission.

2.4 Informing police authorities about intended meetings:

Another requirement under the code of conduct is that local police authorities be informed about an intended meeting and its location, date and time at least 24 hours prior to the meeting.

It was observed that such information was given to the police for 26 of the 35 meetings (74.3%).

2.5 Campaign meetings obstructing movement of people and traffic:

Campaign meetings held on roads and obstructing movement of people and traffic were observed only in three constituencies (2.2%, N = 136). Only four such meetings were observed; one by an Awami League candidate, one by a Jatiya Party candidate and two by candidates of other parties. The code of conduct prohibiting such incidents was followed in almost 98 percent of the constituencies.

2.6 Use of posters, leaflets and handbills:

The code of conduct requires candidates or their supporters not to affix posters, leaflets or handbills on buildings, walls, trees, fences, electricity or telephone poles, and vehicles such as buses, trucks, trains, steamers, launches, rickshaws and other vehicle types. During the observation period, there were 330 reported cases of violation of the code in 108 constituencies. Awami League candidates were responsible for 139 violations in 44 constituencies, Jatiya Party (Ershad) for 36 violations in 15 constituencies, and other parties for 155 violations in 49 constituencies.

2.7 Type of picture used on poster:

According to the code of conduct, the candidate's picture used on a poster should be a portrait and

should not show the candidate leading a procession, praying, or some such pose. Reports on type of picture used in posters were available from 105 constituencies, but violations of the code were observed only in 14 constituencies, six by Awami League candidates, one by a Jatiya Party (Ershad) candidate, and seven by candidates from other parties.

2.8 Use of color posters and banners: There was practically no use of color posters or banners as prohibited by the code of conduct.

2.9 Posters depicting printer's name and address and date of printing:

The code of conduct requires posters to depict printer's name and address and date of printing. Compliance was observed in approximately 90 percent of the cases.

2.10 Writing on walls and use of campaign-related writing or drawing:

The code of conduct prohibits writing on walls and using ink or paint in campaign-related writing or drawing and displaying it on buildings, poles, houses, bridges, road islands, road dividers, vehicles or any other structure other than walls. As reported by LTOs, instances of these were practically negligible.

2.11 Campaigning in mosques or other places of religious worship:

Campaigning in mosques, temples, churches or

any other place of religious worship is against the code of conduct. LTOs observed that such campaigning was practically negligible during the observation period.

2.12 Damages to public or private property during campaigning:

Only 12 such incidents were observed in 12 of the sampled 140 constituencies (8.6% of constituencies), with Awami League responsible for five incidents, and other parties for seven.

2.13 Campaigning of any type done before December 15, 2013:

Campaigning before December 15, 2013 which is against the code of conduct was observed in 62 constituencies (54.4% of constituencies, N = 114). The Awami League candidates violated the code of conduct in this respect in 28 constituencies (45.2%), the Jatiya Party in 13 constituencies (21.0%), and other parties in 21 constituencies (33.9%).

2.14 Use of mikes and other sound-enhancing equipment:

Use of mikes and other sound-enhancing equipment after eight in the evening to two in the afternoon during campaigning is against the code of conduct. Use of mikes were observed in 88 constituencies (83% of constituencies, N = 106). However, there were violations of the code in terms of the time

allowed for use of microphones. Violations occurred in 73 of the 88 constituencies (83%).

2.15 Unfair advantage of state resources by government privileged persons:

Government privileged persons (Prime Minister, MPs, MP, Minister, State Minister, Advisor, Speaker, Deputy Speaker, others of equivalent rank) are usually known to use state resources such as government vehicles or premises while soliciting for votes. This is against the electoral code of conduct for the campaign period. In the observation period, there was only one instance of abuse of this code of conduct in the 140 constituencies. There were 14 such incidents during the previous observation period, and 25 incidents during the month of November.

2.16 Candidates going to see any government development work or attending any meetings associated with development projects:

Such incidents were negligible. There was only one instance in which an Awami League candidate advertised development projects of the incumbent government by being there.

2.17 Visiting educational institutions:

Another abuse of code of conduct happens when an MP or his/her representative attends a meeting of Nirbahi Committee or associate meeting of an educational institution during the campaign period. Again, abuse on this score is

negligible; there was only one such instance in the 140 sampled constituencies.

3. Security Environment

3.1 Transparency/Responsiveness

: Senior police officials were willing to meet with the LTOs in 133 constituencies (95.7%; N = 139)]. Moreover, they were willing to share information with the LTOs in 126 constituencies (90.6%, n = 139). These indicators reflect a very high degree of transparency or responsiveness of police officials to public enquiries.

3.2 Code of Conduct and Training for Police:

Police officials are aware of a Code of Conduct or special instructions for police during the pre-campaign period in 135 constituencies (98.5%, N = 137). Regarding training, police officials are aware of training (92.8%, N = 138). This is a sharp increase from 78 percent observed during the 26 November-13 December 2013 period.

3.3 Security Plans and Police Resources:

The local police have security plans for the election campaign period (to tackle political rallies, etc.) in 126 constituencies (93.3%, N = 135). According to police and election officials that the LTOs consulted, the police are well equipped to deal with any challenge or difficulty during the election campaign period in 126 constituencies (92.6%, N = 136).

In the 10 constituencies in which the police consider they are not fully equipped, the action they have taken was to request the central authorities for an enhancement of their numbers. LTOs were also informed that the EC has a plan for the campaign period incorporating full cooperation from the police in coordination with other security forces (such as RAB, Ansar etc.) in 131 constituencies (99.2% of the constituencies, N = 132).

3.4 Role of Police in Political Campaigns: Police officials have largely remained neutral during this period and have been observed to be involved in campaigning or other political activities of political parties in only a negligible percentage of constituencies (5 constituencies, or 2.2% with N = 134). However, police officials in two constituencies have been observed to cause problems for the campaigns of some political parties.

3.5 Incidents of Political and Election Violence in the Constituency: Instances of political and election violence in the constituency were observed in 46 constituencies (33.1% of constituencies, N = 139). There were 87 instances of violence recorded in these 46 constituencies, of which about 45 percent were attacks on individuals, 32 percent attacks on houses/buildings, and 49 percent attacks on vehicles. There were 19 deaths and 267 injuries resulting from such incidents.

During the June-August period, 118 constituencies were sampled, and only 22 cases of violence were observed. In October 2013, the occurrence of election-related violence was again low—7 incidents were observed in 7 constituencies out of 118 in the sample.

In November, however, the violence escalated; LTOs observed the occurrence of 190 incidents of election-related violence in 71 constituencies (50% of the constituencies in the sample). In the first half of December, the violence appeared to continue almost at the same level as in November. Counting the second half of December, the number of violence incidents reported in December has increased to 269, the number of deaths 61 and the number of injuries 1,511. These are significant increases over the corresponding figures reported for November.

From 50 violence incidents on which complete information is available, the Awami League was responsible for 18 percent, BNP for 26 percent, Jatiya Party for 2 percent, Jamaat for 40 percent, and other parties for 14 percent. Regarding the targets of violence, from complete information available for 59 incidents, the Awami League was targeted in 46 percent of the cases, BNP in 12 percent, Jatiya in 5 percent, Jamaat in 15 percent, other parties in 22 percent.

Legal action was taken by the police in 76 of the incidents (87.4% of the 87 recorded incidents of violence during the observation period.

3.6 Incidents of violence regarding minority issues: Such incidents were insignificant, having occurred only in four constituencies (4.3%) of the 92 constituencies on which information is available. Four incidents were reported; all those incidents occurred in Khulna where the affected minorities were Hindus and dalits².

4. Role of Media

4.1 Newspaper engagement in campaign through news reports: Instances of local newspapers publishing news (including editorials) either in favor or in disgrace of any candidate or political party were observed by LTOs in 9 constituencies (6.6%, N = 136), down from 13 percent of the constituencies in the previous observation period (November 26 - December 13). There were 21 such instances (down from 40 during the previous observation period). Of these 21 instances, the Awami League figured in 9 (42.9%), Jatiya Party (Ershad) in 3 (14.3%), and other parties in 9 (42.9%).

Instances of national newspapers publishing news (including editorial) either in favor or in disgrace of any candidate or political party in a constituency were observed by LTOs only in 8 constituencies (5.9%, N = 136). There were 25 such instances of reporting in national newspapers regarding candidates in the 8 constituencies during the period under review, of which 48 percent concerned the Awami League,

²A **dalit** is a person without a place in the Indian caste system. They are known as untouchable caste.

12 percent Jatiya Party (Ershad), and 40 percent other parties. In both local and national newspapers, the news favored or disfavored particular candidates by asking for votes on behalf of a particular party/candidate, naming a specific person as the appropriate candidate, and maligning/discrediting any specific candidate.

4.2 Attacks on journalists and media houses: Journalists/media houses were attacked by disgraced party/candidates in reaction to the news published by media in only three constituencies (2.2%, N = 136). There were three incidents of violence, two in Chittagong and one in Rangpur; all the incidents involved attacks on journalists. Deaths were not reported, but there were five reported injuries, all in the Chittagong incidents.

5. Problems faced by Women, Adibashi and Religious Minority Voters

5.1 Special problems faced by women: LTOs observed if women voters faced any kind of problems with regard to the 2014 national election other than from election office, political party representatives and other local stakeholders (NGO, religious leader, etc.).

Such instances were seen to be negligible during the observation period. They were reported only in five constituencies (3.7% of constituencies, N = 136).

Identified problems in the five constituencies were lack of safety/security due to threats and consequent inability to lead a normal lifestyle.

5.2 Special problems faced by adibashi and religious minority voters: Incidents of special problems faced by adibashi and religious minority voters were also negligible during the observation period. They were reported only in four constituencies (3% of constituencies, N = 134).

Identified problems in the four constituencies were a sense of fear and insecurity due to threats and anticipation of repression.

A NOTE ON THE METHODOLOGY

Checklists were designed to allow the LTOs to probe the situation in the constituencies in a systematic manner. The checklists are organized by theme and sub-theme. There were four sections in the checklists used for the current observation period December 14 to December 26, 2013 grouped under the following three themes. These were:

Theme: Political Parties

- Election related violence
- Code of conduct during the campaign period

Theme: Media

- Role of media

Theme: Election Administration

- Election administration and preparation
- Security

Data sources of the checklist questions included observation, print media, official circulars and notices issued by local administrations, election-related documents and notices, police reports, and political party records. The 143 constituencies observed by the EWG were selected on the basis of national representation and partner presence; as such, constituencies were chosen from all 10 regions and 55 districts of the country. In the current observation period, information from 140 constituencies is available.

For further details regarding the methodology used, please see the first issue of *Eye on Elections* (June-August 2013).



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