



# 2016 ELECTORAL ROLL AUDIT



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# Executive Summary

The Election Working Group (EWG) conducted this independent audit of the 2015-16 electoral roll of Bangladesh. This audit was conducted nationwide through the use of list-to-people and people-to-list surveys. The list-to-people survey allowed EWG to assess the accuracy rate of data about each voter (e.g. voter's name, her/his father's name, husband's name, mother's name, date of birth, profession, address), the number of unrecognized voters, and the number of deceased voters on the electoral roll. The people-to-list survey determined the number of missing voters, the gender gap, and the reasons for non-registration by eligible citizens.

The list-to-people survey was designed to draw a representative sample of registered voters from the electoral roll in order to check the accuracy of the list, while the people-to-list sample was designed to be representative of the adult population of Bangladesh. For the list-to-people survey, EWG randomly sampled 3,000 registered voters from the electoral roll and verified their information through interviews with the voters themselves or with family members, neighbors, or others who could verify important information about the sampled voters. For people-to-list survey, EWG contacted 3,000 households located within a selected gridline (e.g. East/West/North/South side) of the 3,000 individuals visited for the list-to-people survey, and captured data about 10,386 voting-age adults (born on 1 January, 2000, or before) not registered as voters.

## Key findings

*More than 90% information on the electoral roll is correct:* The EWG's Electoral Roll Audit (ERA) identified that voter information recorded on the roll was more than 90% correct for each type of data. Individual error rates were as follows: 3.4% incorrect names; 7.9% incorrect father's/husband's name; 7.1% incorrect mother's name; 3.7% incorrect date of birth; 5.8% incorrect occupation; and 5.4% incorrect address.

*Inaccuracy of voters' information is higher among male than female:* The audit identified the overall inaccuracy rate was higher among male (56.5%) voters than female (43.5%).

*Inaccuracy rate is higher in rural areas:* The overall inaccuracy rate was found to be 6.5 times higher in rural areas (84.7% of total inaccuracies) compared to urban areas (15.3% of total inaccuracies), with the highest number of inaccuracies found with voters' mothers' names (90.7% of total inaccuracies).

*Deceased, migrated, and unrecognized voters are included on the electoral roll:* The ERA identified 3.0% deceased voters, 9.4% migrated voters, and 1.8% unrecognized voters on the electoral roll. Among unrecognized voters, 56.4% were found in urban areas, while 43.6% were found in rural areas. The ERA found that the names of 18.2% urban area voters out of 720 urban voters verified existed on the roll although they had migrated, while this rate in the rural areas was 6.7%. The rate of migrated female voters (12.5%) was double than that of male voters (6.4%); the main reason of such findings is that the girls were registered at the address of their father, but did not update their registration after getting married.

*3.31% eligible persons are not registered as voters:* The ERA found that 96.69% of eligible citizens were on the voter registry, while 3.31% of eligible persons were not included. The two main reasons identified were unavailability of the individual when the data collector visited the household (56.1%) and failure to provide supporting document (16.3%).

*Highest rate of non-registration is found in Chittagong:* The ERA found the highest rate of non-registration in Chittagong (39.5% of total number of eligible but unregistered citizens), which also showed the highest gender gaps in the draft supplementary and final electoral rolls of 2014, 2015, and 2016. The second highest rate of non-registration was found in Khulna (15.7%), while the lowest was in Barisal (3.8%).

*The rate of non-registration is higher among women:* The rate of non-registration of eligible individuals was approximately 8% higher among women than men.

## **Recommendations**

- The EC should conduct a special update for the correction of voter information;
- The EC should conduct special voter education activities about how to delete deceased voters or update information about migrated voters due to lack of citizen awareness;
- The EC should ensure 100% coverage of door-to-door visits by data collectors during electoral roll updates;
- The EC should develop and implement comprehensive voter education activities, and provide specific dates for when activities will occur in specific areas;
- To address underrepresentation of women on the electoral roll, the EC could conduct special awareness program in the areas where there is gender gap;
- Because a birth certificate is mandatory for voter registration, the EC should work with local government bodies to provide birth certificates free of cost by door-to-door or other service, especially for poor and marginalized citizens;
- The EC should fully decentralise the registration process to make it easier for new voters to register, for existing voters to make corrections to their information, and for family members to remove the names of deceased voters.
- To enhance the participation of voters, especially young and first time voters, in the democratic process, the EC should initiate national voter's day in Bangladesh to raise awareness among voters;
- In order to ensure full credibility of the electoral roll, as well as full EC control over electoral roll updates, the EC should recruit its own officials (Regional Election Officers and District Election Officers) as Appellate Authority;
- Because electoral roll audits are an integral part of a transparent and accountable voter registration process, the EC should, after every updating, engage civil society or other independent organizations to conduct an audit of the electoral roll.

# Chapter One: Introduction

## 1.1 Importance of Credible Electoral Roll

The right of all adult citizens to participate in the affairs of their government is one of the cornerstones of democracy, and this universal right is directly connected to the voter registration process. In almost all countries, voters must be registered in order to be eligible to participate in an election. Voter registration not only verifies the eligibility of individuals to vote, but also prevents ineligible persons from voting and guards against the same individual voting multiple times. Fundamentally, complete and accurate electoral rolls are essential to the integrity of the electoral process and the legitimacy of election results.

The international standards for voter registration state that the register must be comprehensive, inclusive, accurate, and up to date, and the process must be fully transparent. Voter registration should begin with the principle that all citizens who have reached the required age have the right to vote. Furthermore, according to United Nations standards, people should not be denied registration as voters on the basis of such factors as race, sex, language, or religion. Article 25 of the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) pertains directly to voter registration: “Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any distinction and without unreasonable restrictions ... to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections, which shall be by universal and equal suffrage...”. In General Comment 25, the United Nations Human Rights Committee, the body charged with providing interpretive guidance on the implementation of the ICCPR, states that:

“... States must take effective measures to ensure that all persons entitled to vote are able to exercise that right. Where registration of voters is required, it should be facilitated and obstacles to such registration should not be imposed. If residence requirements apply to registration, they must be reasonable, and should not be imposed in such a way as to exclude the homeless from the right to vote. Any abusive interference with registration or voting as well as intimidation or coercion of voters should be prohibited by penal laws and those laws should be strictly enforced. Voter education and registration campaigns are necessary to ensure the effective exercise of article 25 rights by an informed community...”<sup>1</sup>

Transparency, accuracy, and inclusiveness are key aspects to ensure the integrity of a voter registration process, and to enhance public confidence in the electoral process. An election cannot be called free, fair, and credible without an accurate and credible electoral roll.

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<sup>1</sup>Paragraph 11 of General Comment 25 (*The right to participate in public affairs, voting rights and the right of equal access to public service*), adopted at the UN Human Rights Committee on 12 July 1996; see [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org).

## **1.2 Electoral Roll: The Legal Framework of Bangladesh**

The Constitution of Bangladesh vests the Election Commission (EC) to prepare the electoral roll.<sup>2</sup> In addition, there are two relevant laws regarding the administration of the electoral roll: 1) the Electoral Roll Act, 2009; and 2) the National Identity Registration Act, 2010.

The Electoral Roll Act authorizes the EC to prepare, update and maintain the electoral roll. To do so, it has the authority to recruit registration officers and assistant registration officers, whose duties include incorporation, amendment and correction of the draft electoral roll, and can delegate authority to another entity to conduct voter registration<sup>3</sup>. The law specifies that the EC is responsible to prepare a computerized database and, pertinent to transparency, the law clearly defines that the final electoral roll shall be published for the citizens on the EC website and will be replaced by the updated electoral roll.

The National Identity Registration Act authorizes the EC to collect biometrics data, such as fingerprints, hand geometry, palm prints, iris scans, facial recognition, deoxyribonucleic acid, signature and voice, for the purpose of producing, distributing and correcting National Identification (NID) cards.

## **1.3 The Current Electoral Roll of Bangladesh**

Before 2007, voter registration in Bangladesh was conducted manually every five years prior to each parliamentary election through door-to-door data collection using paper forms which were later used to draw up a handwritten draft electoral roll. The Registration Officer (RO) then posted the draft electoral roll at her/his office and invited objections and claims from voters. Any objections and claims submitted by voters were submitted to an Appellate Authority for review and decision regarding necessary corrections by the RO. After review by the Appellate Authority, the RO made necessary changes, after which the handwritten final electoral roll was published. During this period, the accuracy of the electoral roll was often questioned by political parties and other stakeholders.

In 2007 and 2008, with support from various development partners, the EC created the first electoral roll with photos and a digital database with the help of the Bangladesh Army. According to the legal framework, the electoral roll must be updated every year; since 2008, the roll has been updated five times: in 2009, 2012, 2014, 2015 and 2016<sup>4</sup>. As of last three updates released on February 1, 2015, January 31, 2016, and 31 January 2017, the complete statistics of the voters are given in the following table (Table 1.1).

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<sup>2</sup>Article 119 of the Constitution of Bangladesh

<sup>3</sup> For example, EC recruits school teachers as voter registration enumerators.

<sup>4</sup> In 2016, no door-to-door visit was made as data was collected for 2 years during 2015 update.

Table 1.1: Statistical Information of Voters after updating in 2014, 2015 and 2016

No. of voters	Statistics after 2014 update	Statistics after 2015 update	Statistics after 2016 update
No. of total voters	96,198,652	99,898,553	101,781,050
No. of male voters	48,451,642	50,320,362	51,473,502
No. of female voters	47,747,010	49,578,191	50,307,548
Male: Female	50.37:49.63	50.37:49.63	50.57:49.43

Source: (1) 2014: Summary of the updating of electoral roll published on February 1, 2015 by the EC (2) 2015: Daily Prothom Alo, 01 February 2016 (3) 2016: Daily Protom Alo, 02 February 2017

## 1.4 Electoral Roll Update Procedure in Bangladesh

According to the electoral legal framework, Bangladesh has a continuous voter registration process which allows any eligible person to register to vote during voter roll updates once a year, as well as at any time throughout the year, except during the period between the announcement of elections and election day<sup>5</sup>. In practice, as outlined in Section 1.3 above, the EC conducted annual updates five times over the course of seven years between 2009 and 2016. In order to update the electoral roll yearly, the EC appoints Upazila/Thana Election Officers as registration officers (RO); while officials from public/autonomous bodies and school teachers are recruited as assistant registration officers (ARO). Huge numbers of enumerators, technical experts, supervisors are recruited for updating voter list. Enumerators are usually local school teachers or other community members and often have previous enumeration experience with the EC or the government.

The registration process has two points of contact with registrants. The first one is a door-to-door visit by enumerators to deliver registration forms. The second one is at registration centers where each voter registration form is processed and bio-data is captured. Generally, Union Parishad offices and educational institutions are set up as registration centres. In addition, registration centres are opened in jails and hospitals to provide an opportunity for eligible prisoners and hospitalized persons to register. The door-to-door exercise helps to ensure the registration of women as well as the elderly, disabled and sick, and allows enumerators to facilitate the completion of individual registration forms. In general, each enumerator is assigned to visit 300–400 households. During updating, EC conducts four types of activities: (i) inclusion of new voters; (ii) deletion of deceased voters; (iii) correction of information on the existing list; and (iv) migration of voters from one place to another.

The enumerators, during door-to-door visits, carry all types of forms and complete those as applicable. New voters are given a date and time to visit a registration centre where data-entry operators enter the data from the new voter registration forms into laptops and take photographs and fingerprints of each voter digitally using a camera and fingerprint scanner. If someone is unable to visit the registration center (e.g., because they are elderly, disabled, or sick), a mobile registration team of data-entry

<sup>5</sup> Once an election schedule is announced, new registration, update, migration or deletion is prohibited as per law.

operators is dispatched. After completion of data collection in each voter area<sup>6</sup>, data-entry operators return to the *Upazila* Election Office to upload the data to the *upazila* election server, run a first data-crosscheck to identify potential double registration at the *upazila* level, and print a draft voter list. The draft electoral roll is then displayed in the voter area for a set period of time, giving voters the opportunity to verify and correct data or challenge the right of other voters to register. Voters who find their data incorrect can apply to the responsible Appellate Authority<sup>7</sup> for correction. Generally, the EC recruits officials from the Administration Cadre of the Government service, such as Deputy Commissioners and Additional Deputy Commissioners, as Appellate Authority. During the 2014, 2015, and 2016 updates only 35%, 36%, and 26% EC officials were recruited as Appellate Authority (Table 1.2) although there were enough number of officials to recruit as Appellate Authority. The dependency on administration for this sensitive stage of registration might create a question of credibility of the roll.

Table 1.2: Officials Recruited as Appellate Authority in 2014, 2015, and 2016 during Electoral Roll Update

Year	No. of Upazilas/City Corporation where Election officials were appointed as Appellate Authority	No. of Upazilas/City Corporation where Officials from Admin Cadre/others were appointed as Appellate Authority
2014	178	317
2015	181	315
2016	108	305

Source: Election Commission circulars published on 18 December 2014, 14 December 2015, and 21 December 2016

Finally, data collected during the verification period are incorporated into the voter list, and provisional ID cards are distributed through the *Upazila* Election Office. In late 2016, EC started distributing SMART Cards instead of laminated paper-printed ID cards.

## 1.5 Credibility of Bangladesh’s Electoral Roll 2008-2014

Several electoral roll audits and assessments have been conducted in Bangladesh since 2006. In October 2006, before the postponement of the Ninth Parliamentary Election<sup>8</sup>, a Pre-Election Assessment Mission of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) conducted a statistically rigorous survey of the 2006 electoral roll (updated 2001 electoral roll and a supplemental list), and found that approximately 12.2 million names or 13% of the total number of voters on the electoral roll were either

<sup>6</sup> In rural areas, a voter area consists of a village or a part of a village or more than one village; for urban areas, it consists of a *mahalla*, a part of *mahalla* or more than one *mahalla*.

<sup>7</sup> An Appellate Authority is recruited for an upazila/city corporation; sometimes officials are given responsibility in more than one upazila.

<sup>8</sup> The 9<sup>th</sup> Parliamentary Election was originally scheduled on 22 January 2007

in error or duplicates; this exceeded the traditional 5% margin of error.<sup>9</sup> The major source of error was migration, and rural centers were more prone to such error.<sup>10</sup> Another study by Brotee, a local NGO who had undertaken a nationwide door-to-door enumeration of voters, found 17.3% excess voters in the 2006 electoral roll prepared under the supervision of the Ninth Election Commission.<sup>11</sup>

In 2008, after the Ninth Parliamentary Election, the International Foundation for Electoral System (IFES) conducted an audit<sup>12</sup> of the electoral roll with photos prepared in 2007-2008 on behalf of UNDP with the cooperation of the EC. Key findings included: (i) the data was captured with a high degree of accuracy; (ii) there was no discernible difference by gender in the accuracy of the list; (iii) the high accuracy rates were geographically uniform; and (iv) nearly all eligible voters were included on the roll.

A Fact Sheet about the 2014 electoral roll (supplementary) update published by the EC on February 1, 2015, saw only 44% of newly added voters being women. This was a significant underrepresentation of women, as they made up 49.94% of the population according to the 2011 population census. While the 2014 complete electoral roll had a gender breakdown of 50.37% men and 49.63% women, it was estimated that over 558,000 women were missing from the 2014 roll update (drat supplementary roll), which highlights an ongoing trend since the roll was renewed in 2008.

Table 1.3: Gender gaps in six Upazilas of Feni Districts as of supplementary electoral roll published on January 1, 2015

Upazilla	Male	Female	Total New	Difference	Gender Gap
Chhagalnaiya	4,126	1,874	6,000	2,252	37.53%
Daganbhuiyan	6,803	2,768	9,571	4,035	42.16%
Feni Sadar	10,670	5,425	16,095	5,245	32.59%
Fulgazi	2,667	1,390	4,057	1,277	31.48%
Parshuram	2,179	1,290	3,469	889	25.63%
Sonagazi	6,757	3,128	9,885	3,629	36.71%

However, although the gender gap decreased in the 2016 update (Table 1.1), it still does not match with the population census. If this trend were to continue, the integrity of the electoral roll would be called into question as more and more women would be left off the electoral roll, and denied their democratic voting rights.

<sup>9</sup> Md. Abdul Alim (2014). PhD Thesis: Electoral Governance and Political Parties: Bangladesh Perspectives, Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> IFES (2008). Assessment of the Photo Voter List in Bangladesh (available at: [http://content-ext.undp.org/aplaws\\_assets/1672724/1672724.pdf](http://content-ext.undp.org/aplaws_assets/1672724/1672724.pdf)).

# Chapter Two: Audit Methodology

## 2.1 Objectives of the Audit

The EWG conducted this audit with a view to assist the EC to maintain a credible electoral roll for the upcoming elections. The specific objectives of the audit are as follows:

- determine the rate of accuracy of the data (voter’s name, father’s/ husband’s name, mother’s name, date of birth, occupation, address) contained on the electoral roll;
- determine the number of deceased voters still included on the roll;
- determine the number of voters who migrated, but whose names remain on the roll in the area of previous residence;
- determine the number of unrecognized voters – those whose names were found on the roll, but could not be recognized/identified at the recorded address – on the electoral roll;
- Determine the gender gap on the electoral roll; and
- Determine the extent to which eligible voters were not registered during the registration process.

## 2.2 Checklist and Sampling

EWG used two types of surveys to conduct this audit:

- A *List-to-People* survey determined the rate of accuracy of the data (voter’s name, his/her father’s/ husband’s name, mother’s name, date of birth, profession, address) contained on the electoral roll, the number of unrecognized voters, and the number of deceased voters on the roll. EWG randomly sampled 3,000 registered voters (1,500 males and 1,500 females) from 100 sampled voter areas at the city corporation, municipality, and union levels throughout Bangladesh. The number of sampled voter areas was selected to ensure proper representation from all divisions. To ensure a representative urban-rural split in the sample, EWG followed the 2011 census ratio of urban to rural population (23.30 : 76.60), resulting in a sample of 2,280 rural voters and 720 urban voters.

**Table 2.1: Selection of Male and Female Voters from Rural and Urban Areas**

Areas	No. of city corporations/municipalities/Unions area)	No. of voter area	Male	Female	Total
City Corporations (Urban)	2	4	60	60	120
Municipality (Urban)	20	20	300	300	600
Unions (Rural)	38	76	1,140	1,140	2,280
Total		100	1,500	1,500	3,000

- A *People-to-List* survey determined the number of missing voters, the gender gap, and the reasons for non-registration by eligible citizens. EWG collected data from 3,000 households located within a selected gridline (e.g. East/West/North/South side) of the 3,000 individuals visited for the *List-to-People* survey, and captured data about 10,386 voting-age adults (born on 1 January, 2000, or before) not registered as voters.

### **2.3 Source of the Electoral Roll for Audit**

During the city corporation and municipal elections held in 2015 and union parishad elections held in 2016, the EC provided electoral roll without photographs to candidates for a fee; EWG purchased the electoral rolls from the relevant RO offices of the sampled areas. This survey thus used electoral rolls of:

- Four voter areas in Dhaka North and Chittagong city corporations collected prior to the 28 April 2015 elections in these city corporations. The EC published these electoral rolls on 31 January 2015.
- 20 voter areas in 20 municipalities collected prior to 30 December 2015 municipal elections. The EC published these electoral rolls on 31 January 2015.
- 76 voter areas in 38 unions collected prior to the union parishad elections held between 22 March-04 June 2016. The EC published these electoral rolls on 31 January 2016.

# Chapter Three: The Audit Findings

## 3.1 List-to-People Audit

The Electoral Roll of Bangladesh (without photo) contains the name, father's/husband's name, mother's name, date of birth, occupation and address of the voters. As discuss in Section 2.2, the *List-to-People* survey identified the overall accuracy of the existing electoral roll 2015 and 2016 of Bangladesh.

### 3.1.1 Deceased, migrated and unrecognized voters on the Electoral Roll (national)

The ERA identified 3.0% deceased voters, 9.4% migrated voters, and 1.8% unrecognized voters<sup>13</sup> (Table 3.1).

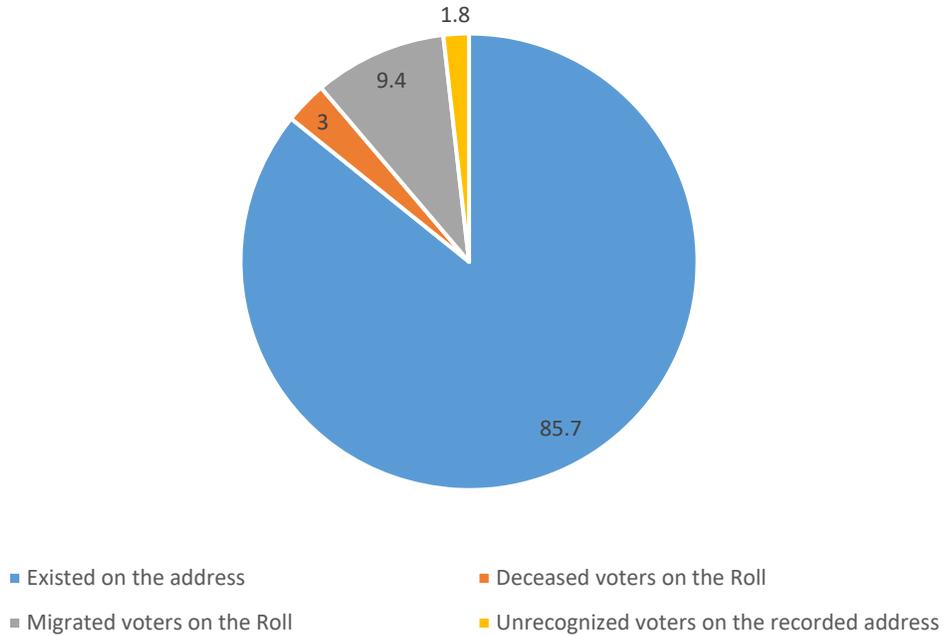
**Table 3.1: Deceased, migrated and unrecognized voters on the electoral roll**

Description	Total	
	n	%
Total number of voters verified	3,000	100.0%
Voters existed at the address	2,572	85.7%
Deceased voters on the Roll	90	3.0%
Migrated voters on the Roll	283	9.4%
Unrecognized voters on the Roll	55	1.8%

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<sup>13</sup> Although the names of these voters appeared on the electoral roll, EWG did not find them at the addresses recorded by the EC. EWG data collectors and Supervisors cross-checked these voters three times with the villagers and union parishad members; however, no one could provide information about them.

**Graph-1: Deceased, migrated and unrecognized voters on the electoral roll**



**Box-1: Examples of unrecognized voters**

Case-1 (Male voter): Serial number on the roll: 383; Name: Md. Shahjahan; Voter No: 490192170141; Father: Md. Karimulla Hossain; Mother: Mst. Shahjadi; Occupation: Day Labourer; Date of birth: 07/05/1979; Address: Nadir Par, Dobordhan Kuti, Union: Newashi, Upazila: Nageswari, Dist. Kurigram; this voter is not found on the recorded address.

Case-2 (Male voter): Serial number 532; Name: Touhidul Islam; Voter No. 470646906739; Father: Md. Haibad Sheikh; Mother: Mst. Jamela Khatun; Occupation: Student; Date of Birth: 25/08/1983; Address: Koror Dhon, Botiayaghata, Khulna; this voter is not found on the recorded address.

Note: Translated into English from Bangla as stated on the electoral roll

**3.1.2 Deceased, migrated and unrecognized voters on the Electoral Roll by area**

Table 3.2 shows the rural and urban statistics (both number and percentage) on deceased, migrated, and unrecognized voters on the electoral roll. Among 55 unrecognized voters, 31 were found in urban areas (56.4%), while 24 were found in rural areas (43.6%). The ERA found that the names of 18.2%

of urban area voters existed on the roll, although they had migrated, while this rate in rural areas was 6.7%. Gender analysis of migration data showed that the rate of migrated female voters (12.5%) was double than that of male voters (6.4%); the main reason of such findings is that the girls were originally registered at the address of their fathers, but did not change their voter area after getting married. Pertinent to deceased voters, the rate was more than double in rural areas compared to urban areas (Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2: Deceased, migrated and non-existed voters on the electoral roll by areas**

Description	Total		Rural		Urban	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Total number of voters verified	3,000	100.0%	2,280	100.0%	720	100.0%
Existed at the address	2,572	85.7%	2,036	89.3%	536	74.4%
Deceased voters on the Roll	90	3.0%	68	3.0%	22	3.1%
Migrated voters on the Roll	283	9.4%	152	6.7%	131	18.2%
Unrecognized voters on the Roll	55	1.8%	24	1.1%	31	4.3%

**Box-2: Examples of deceased voters on the electoral roll**

Case-1 (Female voter): Serial number on the roll: 14; Name: Aimon Bibi; Voter No: 471143036493; Husband: Late Kanu Morol; Mother: Late Fuljan Bibi; Occupation: Housewife; Date of birth:27/02/1931; Address: Address: 37, Bandikhati, Paikgacha, Khulna; this voter died 5 years ago.

Case-2 (Female voter): Serial number 156; Name: Amena Khatun; Voter No. 471143036810; Father: Late Sorosh Ali Gazi; Mother: Late Shanto Bibi; Occupation: Housewife; Date of Birth: 02/03/1952; Address: 247, Bandikhati, Paikgacha, Khulna; this voter died 3 years ago.

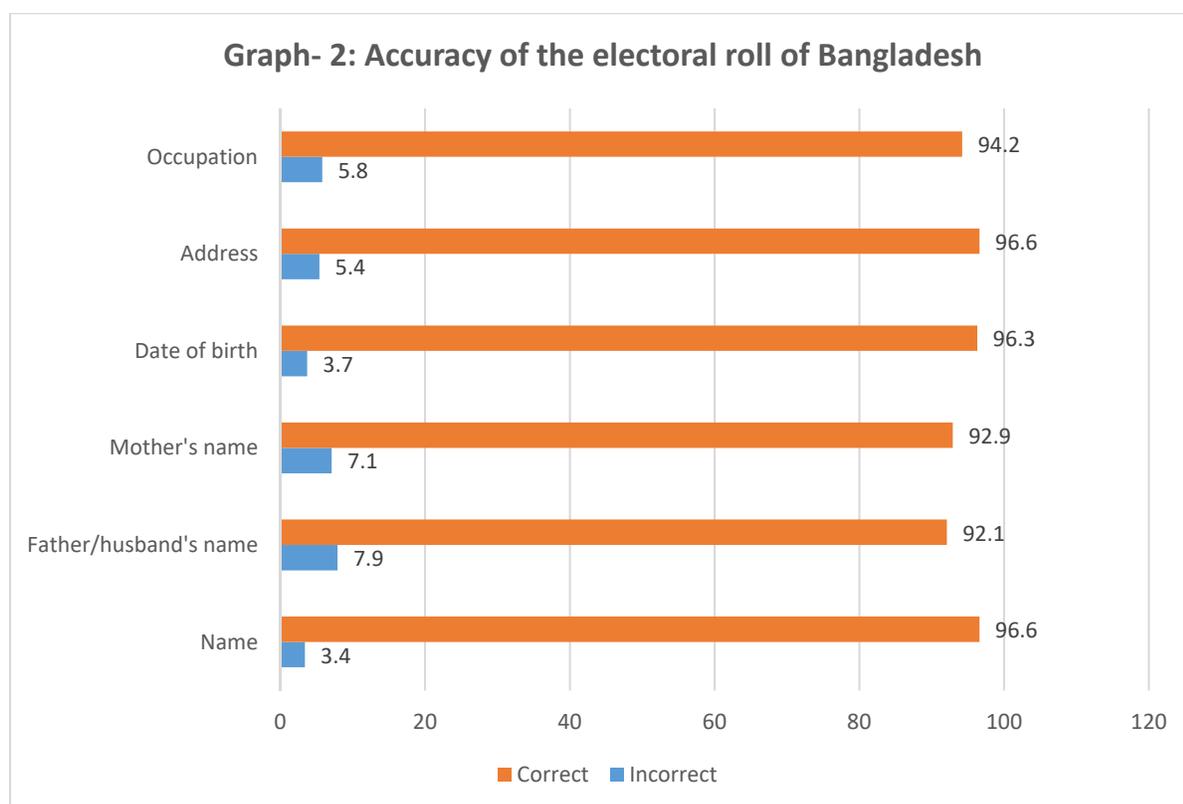
Note: Translated into English from Bangla as stated on the electoral roll

**3.1.3 Inaccuracy of voter information on the Electoral Roll (national)**

The ERA found that voter information recorded on the electoral roll was more than 90% accurate for each type of data at the national level. Error rates were as follows: 3.4% incorrect names; 7.9% incorrect father’s/husband’s name; 7.1% incorrect mother’s name; 3.7% incorrect date of birth; 5.8% incorrect occupation; and 5.4% incorrect address. Table 3.3 and Graph-2 show the details of the rate of correct and incorrect voter information at the national level of the electoral roll of Bangladesh.

**Table 3.3: Accuracy of voter information on the Electoral Roll**

Voter information	Total		Correct		Incorrect	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Errors with voter's names	2,572	100%	2,485	96.6%	87	3.4%
Errors with father's/husband's name	2,572	100%	2,370	92.1%	202	7.9%
Errors with mother's name	2,572	100%	2,389	92.9%	183	7.1%
Errors with date of birth	2,572	100%	2,477	96.3%	95	3.7%
Occupation	2,572	100%	2,422	94.2%	150	5.8%
Errors with address	2,572	100%	2,434	94.6%	138	5.4%



The majority of voter information inaccuracies was found among housewives (35.3%) and farmers (20.8%), and significantly higher in rural areas (84.7%) than urban areas (15.3%).

### Box-3: Examples of inaccuracy of voter information

Case-1: Serial number 197; Name: Mst. Rabeya; Voter No. 380730000032; Father: Md. Rezaul Karim; Mother: Mst. Jarina; Occupation: Student; Date of Birth: 01/01/1994; Address: Kathail, Kathail, Kalai, Joypurhat. She is a female voter, but her name is found on the male electoral roll.

Case-2: Serial number 203; Name: Mst. Samsunnahar Sweety; Voter No. 380730000040; Father: Md. Abdul Wadud; Mother: Mst. Josna Begum; Occupation: Housewife; Date of Birth: 30/12/1996; Address: Kathail, Kathail, Kalai, Joypurhat. She is a female voter, but her name is found on the male electoral roll.

Note: Translated into English from Bangla as stated on the electoral roll

#### 3.1.4 Inaccuracy of voter information on the Electoral Roll by area

Table 3.4 shows the details inaccuracy of voter information in rural and urban areas. The overall inaccuracy rate was found to be 6.5 times higher in rural areas (84.7% of total inaccuracies) compared to urban areas (15.3%), with the highest number of inaccuracies found with voters' mothers' names (90.7% of total inaccuracies).

Table 3.4: Inaccuracy of voter information on the Electoral Roll by areas

Voter information	Total		Rural		Urban	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Reported error in voter information	620	100%	525	84.7%	95	15.3%
Error with voter's name	87	100%	67	77.0%	20	23.0%
Errors with father's/husband's name	202	100%	179	88.6%	23	11.4%
Errors with mother's name	183	100%	166	90.7%	17	9.3%
Error with date of birth	95	100%	80	84.2%	15	15.8%
Error with occupation	150	100%	110	73.3%	40	26.7%
Error with address	138	100%	119	86.2%	19	13.8%

Note: In a few cases, multiple errors were found for an individual voter - hence, the total number for each of the errors has increased from the total number.

#### 3.1.5 Inaccuracy of voter information on the Electoral Roll by gender

Table 3.5 shows the inaccuracy of voter information by gender. The overall inaccuracy rate was higher among male voters than female, with the exception of voter's name.

Table 3.5: Inaccuracy of voter information on the Electoral Roll by gender

Voter information	Total		Male		Female	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Reported error in voter's information	620	100%	350	56.5%	270	43.5%
Error with voter's name	87	100%	43	49.4%	44	50.6%
Errors with father's/husband's name	202	100%	116	57.4%	86	42.6%
Errors with mother's name	183	100%	99	54.1%	84	45.9%
Error with date of birth	95	100%	50	52.6%	45	47.4%
Error with occupation	150	100%	111	74.0%	39	26.0%
Error with address	138	100%	83	60.1%	55	39.9%

Note: In few cases multiple errors were found for an individual voter- hence, the total number for each of the errors has increased from the total number.

## 3.2 People-to-List Audit

As discussed in Chapter Two, the *People-to-List* audit determined the number of missing voters, the gender gap, and the reasons for non-registration by eligible citizens. This section of the report describes the rate of registration/non-registration and reasons for non-registration along with area, gender and profession.

### 3.2.1 The rate of registration/non-registration

The ERA found that 96.69% of eligible citizens from the Bangladesh population were on the voter registry, while 3.31% eligible persons were missing from the roll although they were eligible to be registered as voters (Table 3.6).

Table 3.6: Summary of Scrutiny of Sample Persons of Age 18 years or over

Description	National	Rural	Urban
Number of persons verified (total eligible)	10,386 (100%)	7,865 (100%)	2,521 (100%)
Number of persons found on the electoral roll	10,042 (96.69%)	7,588 (96.48%)	2,454 (97.34%)
Number of eligible persons missing from the Roll	344 (3.31%)	277 (3.52%)	67 (2.66%)

The ERA identified the two main reasons as unavailability of the individual when the data collector visited the household (56.1%) and failure to provide supporting document<sup>14</sup> (16.3%). The full list of reasons for non-registration as described by the non-registered eligible persons themselves are shown below in table 3.7.

<sup>14</sup> For educated persons SSC/equivalent certificate is a must, while for non-SSC, Birth Certificate is a must for inclusion on the electoral roll.

**Table 3.7: Reason for non-registration (national)**

Reason for non-registration	Total	
	n	%
Data collector did not visit the household	24	7.0%
Data collector visited household but the person was not available	193	56.1%
Family members did not allow individual to register	21	6.1%
Failed to provide supporting document	56	16.3%
Completed the form, but did not go to registration centre	21	6.1%
Others	29	8.4%
Total	344	100.0%

### 3.2.2 Reason for non-registration by area

Table 3.8 shows the reasons of non-registration in rural and urban areas in details. The main reason in both rural and urban areas is unavailability of the individual when the data collector visited the household and failure to provide supporting documents. The ERA also found that 7.2% of eligible persons were not allowed to be registered by their family members in rural areas compared to 1.5% in urban areas.

**Table 3.8: Reasons of non-registration by area**

Reason of non-registration	Rural		Urban	
	n	%	n	%
Data collector did not visit the household	17	6.1%	7	10.4%
Data collector visited the household but the person was not available	161	58.1%	32	47.8%
Family members did not allow individual to register	20	7.2%	1	1.5%
Failed to provide supporting document	43	15.5%	13	19.4%
Completed the form, but did not go to registration centre	18	6.5%	3	4.5%
Others	18	6.5%	11	16.4%
Total	277	100.0%	67	100.0%

The EWG ERA also found that the rate of non-registration was more than four times higher in rural areas than urban areas.

### 3.2.3 Reason of non-registration by gender

The rate of non-registration of eligible individuals was found about 8% higher among women than men (see Table 3.9). The main reason of non-registration for both women and men was unavailability of the individual when the data collector visited the household, although it was found 17.3% higher among men. Failure to provide supporting documents was the second highest reason for non-registration, and found 7% higher among women than men. One of the mentionable reasons of non-registration of women was that ‘family members did not allow to register’ (10.3%).

**Table 3.9: Reasons of non-registration by gender**

Reason of non-registration	Male		Female	
	n	%	n	%
Data collector did not visit the household	7	4.4%	17	9.2%
Data collector visited household but the individual was not available	104	65.4%	89	48.1%
Family members did not allow to register	2	1.3%	19	10.3%
Failed to provide supporting document	20	12.6%	36	19.5%
Completed the form, but did not go to registration centre	12	7.5%	9	4.9%
Others	14	8.8%	15	8.1%
Total	159	100.0%	185	100.0%

The overall picture as audited by EWG was that, among non-registered eligible persons, 53.8% were women and 46.2% were men.

### 3.2.4 Non-registration by division

The ERA found the highest rate of non-registration in Chittagong (39.5%), which also showed the highest gender gaps in the draft supplementary and final electoral rolls of 2014, 2015 and 2016. The second highest rate of non-registration was found in Khulna (15.7%), while the lowest was in Barisal (3.8%). Table 3.10 also shows the rate of non-registration in Dhaka, Rajshahi, Rangpur and Sylhet.

**Table 3.10: Rate of non-registration by division**

Division	n	%
Barisal	13	3.8%
Chittagong	136	39.5%
Dhaka	31	9.0%
Khulna	54	15.7%
Rajshahi	32	9.3%
Rangpur	26	7.6%
Sylhet	52	15.1%

### 3.2.5 Non-registration by profession

Table 3.11 shows the rate of non-registration by profession; among the non-registered eligible persons, the highest rate was found among housewives (37.6%), while the lowest was found among expatriate individuals (4.7%). The non-registration rate was also significant among service holders (13.4%) and students (16.9%).

Table 3.11: Rate of non-registration by profession

Profession	n	%
Farmer	23	6.7%
Service holder	46	13.4%
Day labourer	18	5.3%
Business	26	7.6%
Expatriate	16	4.7%
Unemployed	17	5.0%
Student	58	16.9%
Housewife	129	37.6%
Others	10	2.9%

# Chapter Four: Conclusion and Recommendations

## 4.1 Conclusion

Developing and maintaining an accurate and transparent voter registration process and producing a credible electoral roll is a complex exercise. EWG's ERA found the overall accuracy of the electoral roll of Bangladesh is more than 90%, which is acceptable per international standards. Nevertheless, because a complete and accurate electoral roll is essential for the integrity of the electoral process and the legitimacy of results, EWG is making the following recommendations to improve the accuracy and credibility of the electoral roll for the next elections as well as to correct the electoral database of Bangladesh before issuing SMART Card to the registered voters.

## 4.2 Recommendations

### 4.2.1 Recommendations for improving the quality of current electoral roll (List-to-People)

#### **Recommendation-1:** *Conduct a special update for the correction of voter information*

The updating of the current electoral roll of Bangladesh is a continuous process. The preparation of this roll was started in 2007 and, in just eleven months, the EC completed registration of 80,508,311 voters. Given the huge number of voters and the short time provided to complete the process, the roll might have contained erroneous voter information. This might result in errors with voter information. In order to address this issue, the EC could conduct a special updating only to correct the errors on the current electoral roll.

#### **Recommendation-2:** *Conduct voter awareness campaign on deletion and migration*

The current roll contains the names of deceased and migrated voters. The EC itself is not fully responsible for this. When a voter dies, the family members of the deceased person must inform the EC to delete his/her name from the roll. Pertinent to migration, the voter should take the responsibility to update his/her information by notifying the appropriate authority. As Bangladeshi citizens are not fully aware about this process of migration and deletion, the EC could conduct special awareness program on the process of deletion and migration.

### 4.2.2 Recommendations on the inclusion of all eligible persons on the electoral roll (People-to-List)

#### **Recommendation-1:** *Ensure 100% door-to-door visit during updating of electoral roll*

The ERA findings show that one of the reasons for lack of registration is that data collectors/enumerators appointed by the EC do not achieve 100% coverage of households during the

door-to-door phase of electoral roll updates. As a result, some eligible persons are not included on the roll. During updating, the EC should take necessary steps to ensure that data collectors visit every household.

**Recommendation-2:** *Conduct comprehensive voter and civic education program*

While updating the electoral roll the EC conducts various types of awareness program, which are sometimes supplemented by NGOs assistance. However, because of the lack of comprehensiveness of these programs, people in many areas do not know about the update process. In addition, the EC's awareness programs provide a range of dates, rather than specific dates, when data collectors will visit specific areas, which decreases the likelihood that some eligible persons will not be home at the correct time. In order to address these issues, the EC should ensure comprehensive voter education program along with specific dates for individual areas.

**Recommendation-3:** *Conduct special awareness program in the areas where there is gender gap*

The audit found underrepresentation of women on the electoral roll. If this trend were to continue, the integrity of the electoral roll would be called into question as more and more women would be excluded from the electoral roll, and denied their opportunity to carry out their democratic voting rights. Hence, the EC should conduct gender-focus awareness program in the areas where there is gender gap.

**Recommendation-4:** *Make the Birth Certificate available for all*

Having a birth certificate is mandatory for voter registration; however, a citizen must travel to her/his local union parishad office, sometimes from remote areas, and pay a fee to get a copy. Some citizens, especially poor and marginalized individuals, may not be able to travel to the union parishad office and/or pay a fee. In such cases, the EC should work with local government bodies to provide birth certificates free of cost by door-to-door or other service.

### **4.2.3 Other Recommendations**

**Recommendation-1:** *Decentralization of updating*

At present, the voter registration process is partially decentralized. The EC has IT server stations in every upazila connected with the central server; however, except during the formal electoral roll update conducted by the EC each year, voters can only update their registration information at the EC head office in Dhaka. The EC should move ahead with full decentralisation of the process so that, throughout the year, updates to the electoral roll can be handled through the upazila election office, making it easier for new voters to register, for existing voters to make corrections to their information, and for family members to remove the names of deceased voters. This will improve effectiveness, accuracy, and transparency, and ensure full implementation of the continuous registration process enshrined in the legal framework.

**Recommendation-2:** *Declare and observe national voter's day*

A National Voters' Day could enhance the participation of voters, especially the youth, in the democratic process as seen in neighboring countries like India and Bhutan. The EC should initiate such a day in Bangladesh to raise awareness among voters.

**Recommendation-3:** *EC should recruit officials for Appellate Authority from its own staff*

Currently, the EC recruits a significant number of officials from the Administration Cadre of the Government service as appellate authorities, although it has a sufficient number of staff. In order to ensure full credibility of the electoral roll, as well as full EC control over updates of the electoral roll, the Commission should recruit its own officials (Regional Election Officers and District Election Officers) as Appellate Authority to reduce questions about government interference in updating the electoral roll.

**Recommendation-4:** *Conduct regular independent audit*

Audit is an integral part of voter registration as it helps to understand the accuracy of the electoral roll. The EC, after every updating, should engage NGOs or independent organizations to conduct an audit of the electoral roll.