



# **Election FAQs: Bangladesh**

*Local Elections*

*May 2024*

Asia-Pacific

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

2011 Crystal Drive | Floor 10 | Arlington, VA 22202 | USA | [www.IFES.org](http://www.IFES.org)

Publication Date: May 14, 2024

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Election Snapshot.....	1
When is Election Day?.....	1
Why are these elections important? .....	2
Who are citizens voting for on Election Day? .....	3
What is the electoral system? .....	3
What is the legal framework for conducting the elections? .....	3
Who is eligible to run as a candidate?.....	3
Are there reserved seats for women? What is the gender balance within the candidate list? .....	4
What are the campaign expenditure limits?.....	4
What is the election management body? What are its powers? .....	4
Who can vote in these elections?.....	5
How many registered voters are there? .....	5
Is postal voting or out-of-country voting allowed?.....	5
Who can observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation? .....	6
Who is managing security on Election Day? .....	6
Where are vote counting and tabulation held? .....	6
When will results be announced?.....	7
How will election disputes be adjudicated? .....	7
Resources.....	7
Disclosure .....	8

## Election Snapshot

- **Election Day:** May 8, May 23, May 29, and June 5
- **Registered voters:** 121,775,450 (62,090,137 men; 59,684,389 women)
- **Seats:** 495, of which elections for 479 have been scheduled, and 16 are to be scheduled
- **Candidates:** At the time of this FAQ release, 3,416 candidates are confirmed for the elections scheduled for May 8 and May 23. The candidate lists for subsequent election phases are not yet finalized.
- **Campaign expenditure and donation limits:** BDT 2.5 million (\$22,790) for those contesting for a chairperson or vice chairperson seat; BDT 100, 000 (\$911) for those contesting for a reserved women’s vice chairperson seat.

## When is Election Day?

The Bangladesh Election Commission (BEC) set the dates for polling for 479 *upazila parishads*, which are the subdistrict councils, in all eight divisions of the country. These local elections will be held in five phases, the first four in May and June 2024. Although Bangladesh has 495 *upazilas*, the dates for the remaining 16 *upazila parishad* elections will be scheduled for a fifth phase election once their current terms end. A breakdown of election dates and number of seats contested is listed in the table below.

2024 Upazila Elections Election Dates and Seats <sup>1</sup>					
Division	Phase 1: May 8, 2024 <sup>2</sup>	Phase 2: May 21, 2024	Phase3: May 29, 2024	Phase 4: June 5, 2024	Phase 5: TBD
Rajshai	24	19	14	10	1
Rangpur	19	21	13	5	0
Khulna	19	25	11	3	2
Barishal	5	14	13	9	1
Dhaka and Mymensingh	42	41	25	12	2
Sylhet	11	11	10	7	2
Cumila	32	29	15	3	5
Chattogram			11	6	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>16</b>

The seats of 25 candidates who would have run in the first phase were uncontested. These include six chairperson seats, nine vice chairperson seats, and 10 women’s vice chairperson seats. Therefore, no elections will take place in Bagherhat Sadar, Munshiganj Sadar, or Shibchar in Madaripur or in Parshuram in Feni. Similarly, unopposed candidates for the role of chairperson in Saghata (Gaibandha) and Singra (Natore) were declared winners, eliminating the need for

<sup>1</sup> The Daily Star. (2024, April 24). [EC postpones elections in 3 Bandarban upazilas](#).

<sup>2</sup> This list includes four *upazilas* for which all seats were unopposed.

elections for those positions.<sup>3</sup> Initial results from the May 8 elections show a low turnout rate of under 40%.

It is important to note that the *upazila parishad* elections are one of three subnational government elections that Bangladesh holds. At the subnational level, Bangladesh has *zila parishad* (district level) elections, *upazila parishad* (sub-district level) elections, and union *parishad* elections, the latter of which is the lowest tier of local government. Because the *zila parishad* elections occurred in 2022, and the *union parishad* from 2021 to 2022, neither of these other local elections is anticipated until 2026 or 2027.

## Why are these elections important?

*Upazila parishads* are part of Bangladesh's local government structure. The local government level consists of eight divisions. Under them are 64 *zila* (district) *parishads*, 495 *upazila parishads*, and 4,554 *union parishads*—the smallest local government units. All those bodies are elected directly, although only *upazila parishads* will be elected in the upcoming elections, while the *union parishads* and *zila parishads* are not anticipated until 2026 or 2027.

Where *upazila parishads* are responsible for handling administrative matters, maintaining law and order, and providing services related to the welfare of the populace. They also develop and carry out local plans for social and economic development. Their key responsibilities include creating employment opportunities, establishing programs to combat poverty, preparing development plans, and building and maintaining infrastructure. *Upazila parishads* routinely report to district law and order committees and other higher authorities on their handling of law and order.

Although *upazila* elections primarily impact only local governance structures and thus do not have the power to change the government that parliamentary elections do, they still play crucial roles in shaping the political landscape for members of Parliament (MPs), as their ability to intervene in their constituencies depends heavily on the outcome of those elections. As a result, sitting MPs have a strong interest in these elections, often backing their preferred candidates.

Each *upazila* has an elected chairperson and two vice chairpersons, at least one of whom must be a woman. *Upazila parishads* also have general seats which are indirectly filled by the chairperson of each *union parishad* within the relevant *upazila* and the mayor of each municipality within the *upazila* areas. Additionally, one seat for every three general seats is reserved for a woman who is a member of the union *parishad* or municipal corporation. Reserved seat members are elected by women members and councilors from the local government councils, although this process has not been followed in practice for years, and has yet to be clarified for this round of elections.

---

<sup>3</sup> The Daily Star. (2024, April 24). [25 elected unopposed in first phase of upazila polls.](#)

## Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

For each *upazila parishad*, citizens will vote for one chairperson and two vice chairpersons, at least one of whom must be a woman. Each voter will receive three ballots—one each to select a candidate for the role of chairperson, vice chairperson, and female vice chairperson for the voter's respective *upazila*. The candidates who receive the highest number of votes for the positions are elected.

A total of 1,588 candidates submitted nomination papers to contest the first phase of the 2024 *upazila* election on May 8. Of those, 554 candidates submitted nominations for chairperson positions, 605 for vice chairperson positions, and 429 for women's reserved vice chairperson positions. A total of 1,828 candidates submitted nomination papers to contest the second phase of the elections in 160 *upazilas* slated for May 21. Of those, 605 candidates submitted nominations for chairperson posts, 694 for vice chairperson posts, and 529 for vice chairperson posts reserved for women. This year, the Bangladesh Election Commission required all *upazila* election candidates to submit nomination papers online.<sup>4</sup>

## What is the electoral system?

*Upazila parishad* members will be elected through the first-past-the-post system. Each voter will receive three ballots—one each to select a candidate for the role of chairperson, vice chairperson, and female vice chairperson for the relevant *upazila*. A candidate's name may appear on only one ballot; a candidate must be a resident of an *upazila* to contest the election there.

## What is the legal framework for conducting the elections?

Articles 9, 11, and 60 of the Constitution of Bangladesh establish local governments. The Bangladesh Local Self-Government Act (2015) provides for the partisan election system that replaced the previous non-partisan system. The *Upazila Parishad Act* (1998) stipulates that the term of the *upazila parishad* should be five years from the date of its first meeting following the election.

## Who is eligible to run as a candidate?

A person is eligible for election for the position of chairperson or vice-chairperson if he or she

1. Is a citizen of Bangladesh;
2. Is 25 years or older; and
3. Is registered as a voter.

---

<sup>4</sup> The Daily Star. (2024, March 26). [All aspirants must submit nominations online: EC.](#)

No person is eligible to be elected and hold the position of chairperson or vice-chairperson, among others, if he or she:

1. Renounces or loses Bangladeshi citizenship;
2. Is declared “unnatural” by any competent court authority;
3. Has been declared insolvent and has not discharged the liability;
4. Has been convicted of a criminal offense involving moral turpitude and sentenced to imprisonment for a term of not more than two years, and less than five years have passed since his or her release;
5. Holds any office of profit in the Republic or any other local authority of the Council Permanent tenure; or
6. Is a member of Bangladesh’s National Assembly or the chairperson or member of any other local authority.

## Are there reserved seats for women? What is the gender balance within the candidate list?

One of the two vice chairperson seats in each *upazila parishad* is reserved for a woman. Women can be elected to any general seat as well. However, only five women were elected to the general chairperson position in 2019, and none were elected to the general vice chairperson positions.

## What are the campaign expenditure limits?

The Bangladesh Election Commission issued a circular on March 19, 2024 that cited sub-rule (1) of rule 51 (a) regarding campaign expenditure limits. Candidates contesting for the post of chairperson or vice chairperson may spend no more than BDT 2.5 million (\$22,775) for the election; those contesting for the post of woman vice chairperson may spend no more than BDT 1 lakh (\$911).

## What is the election management body? What are its powers?

The Bangladesh Election Commission (BEC) is a constitutional body consisting of a chief election commissioner (CEC) and four election commissioners. Election commissioners can be removed following the same process as for the removal of judges of the Supreme Court. An election commissioner may resign in a letter addressed to the president. Article 126 of the Constitution requires all executive authorities to assist the BEC in its functions, which include supervising all matters related to the conduct of an election, appointing poll workers, and allocating polling centers. The BEC can require any person or authority to perform or assist in such functions for the purpose of conducting an election. The BEC is supported by a secretariat whose role was strengthened by the Election Commission Secretariat Act (2009). The secretary is the

administrative head of the secretariat. Among other qualifications, members of the CEC and election commissioners must be Bangladeshi citizens; be at least 50 years old; and have at least 20 years of work experience in government, semi-government, private, judicial, autonomous, or other institutions.

## Who can vote in these elections?

According to the Constitution of Bangladesh, citizens 18 years or older can register to vote. Prospective voters can register to vote in Bangladesh if they meet the following criteria:

1. Are citizens of Bangladesh;
2. Are at least 18 years of age;
3. Have not been declared by a competent court to be of “unsound mind;”
4. Reside in the constituency where they wish to register; and
5. Have not been convicted under the Bangladesh Collaborators (Special Tribunals) Order, 1972.

Separate voter lists are prepared for female and male voters for each polling center in each *upazila*. If a person’s name is not included in the voter list, he or she cannot vote in the election. The voter list is updated annually to include the names of eligible voters who have turned 18, remove the names of voters who have become ineligible since the last update, and correct entries for people who changed their places of residence. The Bangladesh Election Commission issues smart national identity cards to all voters.

## How many registered voters are there?

The most recent draft update from the Bangladesh Election Commission announced the total voter count in the country at 121,775,450 (62,090,137 male voters and 59,684,389 female voters).<sup>5</sup> No process currently exists for registering Bangladeshis who reside overseas.

## Is postal voting or out-of-country voting allowed?

Bangladesh’s legal framework does not include out-of-country voting; however, postal voting is permitted for certain voters who will be away from their constituencies on Election Day. Article 27 of the Representation of the People Order and Section 8 of the Voters’ List Act, 2009 outline the specifics of postal voting. Individuals assigned polling duties, government employees residing away from their constituencies due to job postings, expatriates, and prisoners are eligible to exercise postal voting. Those voters must submit applications to their respective returning officers within 15 days of the announcement of the election.<sup>31</sup> Upon receiving a postal ballot, the voter must record his or her vote and expeditiously post the ballot paper to the returning officer.<sup>32</sup> Although the clear legal framework for this legal provision exists in Bangladesh, postal voting has remained dormant for many years and is unlikely to be fully functional in the upcoming election.

---

<sup>5</sup> The Daily Star. (2024, January 21). [Bangladesh now has over 12.17cr voters, EC says in latest draft update](#).

## Who can observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation?

The Bangladesh Election Commission (BEC) election observation policy requires organizations and individuals interested in monitoring polls on Election Day to register with and be approved by the BEC. In accordance with the policy, the BEC provides written authorization to individuals or teams of observers to monitor any elections under its jurisdiction. Interested parties must submit written applications to both the local and central BEC offices. According to the BEC, 96 local organizations are currently authorized as local election observers and may monitor polling through the end of 2028. Only those approved by returning officers may monitor elections in the districts for which they have received clearance. Article 91C of the Representation of the People Order, 1972, permits election observers to monitor polls by remaining near polling stations, entering polling booths or stations with the presiding officer's, permission, or attending vote counting and result consolidation. A committee led by the returning or assistant returning officer of the constituency issues identity cards and vehicle stickers to approved observer organizations in line with the Election Observation Policy 2023. Observers' authorization lasts for a period five years. The BEC has also promulgated Guidelines for International Election Observers and Foreign Media.<sup>6</sup>

## Who is managing security on Election Day?

Security on Election Day will largely be managed by law enforcement personnel who will be present inside or outside each polling station as instructed by the presiding officer. In cases of misconduct within a polling station or failure to comply with the presiding officer's lawful orders, the presiding officer can order the removal of the individual from the premises with the assistance of a law enforcement officer.

The Bangladesh Election Commission aims to assign at least 17 police and members of the ansar (an auxiliary paramilitary force) to regular polling centers, and 18 or 19 officers at higher-risk locations. The Border Guards Bangladesh will also be deployed. A judicial magistrate has been assigned to each *upazila* until two days after the election to oversee adherence to the Election Code of Conduct, and an executive magistrate will be stationed in each union or municipality from two days before the election until two days after to ensure safety and security, including through the deployment of mobile and striking forces.

## Where are vote counting and tabulation held?

Once voting concludes, vote counting and tabulation are held at the polling center. The presiding officer is tasked with verifying the validity of the ballot papers in the presence of contesting candidates and their election agents or polling agents. Then the officer counts valid votes for each candidate separately. Upon request, the presiding officer is supposed to provide a certified copy

---

<sup>6</sup> Bangladesh Election Commission Secretariat. (n.d.). [Guidelines for International Election Observers and Foreign Media](#).



of the counting statement and display a copy at the polling station for public viewing. Subsequently, after receiving the statement of the counting of votes from each polling station, the returning officer consolidates the results and declares the candidate who received the most the winner and publish a public notice stating the name of each contesting candidate and the total number of votes obtained as a result of the consolidation.

## When will results be announced?

The *Upazila Council Act 1998* mandates the Bangladesh Election Commission (BEC) to publish the names of all persons elected as chairperson, vice chairperson, and female vice chairpersons in the Government Gazette as soon as possible after the election. However, unofficial results are typically announced 8 to 12 hours after vote counting is complete. The BEC publishes the names of the elected candidates in the Government Gazette following the declaration of results, generally within three to five days.

## How will election disputes be adjudicated?

For the resolution of election-related disputes, the Bangladesh Election Commission (BEC) may establish election tribunals, each comprising a judicial officer with the rank of sub-judge. The BEC may also establish election appellate tribunals, each consisting of a judicial officer with the rank of district judge. The *Upazila Parishad Act of 1998* gives election tribunals exclusive authority to address any disputes regarding election proceedings; such matters cannot be brought before any other court or authority. Only candidates nominated to contest an election are eligible to raise questions to an election tribunal or seek redress regarding any aspect of that election. The BEC retains the authority to transfer an election petition from one election tribunal to another or from one appellate tribunal to another, either independently or in response to an application by one of the involved parties. The tribunal or appellate tribunal to which the petition is transferred will hear the application or appeal from the stage at which it was transferred.

## Resources

- [The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh](#)
- [Upazila Parishad Act, 1998](#)
- [Upazila Council \(Amendment\) Act, 2011](#)
- [Upazila Parishad Election Rules, 2013](#)
- [Upazila Parishad Election Rules, 2013 \(Amendment\)](#)
- [Representation of the People \(Amendment\) Act, 2023](#)
- [Political Parties Registration Law, 2020](#)
- [Guidelines for International Election Observers and Foreign Media, 2023](#)

## Disclosure

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Bangladesh Election Commission as of May 14, 2024 to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any International Foundation for Electoral Systems policy or technical recommendations.

This paper is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The information herein is provided by the author(s) and does not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.