

Nexus between Money, Crime and Politics: A Study on the Nature of Electoral Violence in Bangladesh

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Introduction

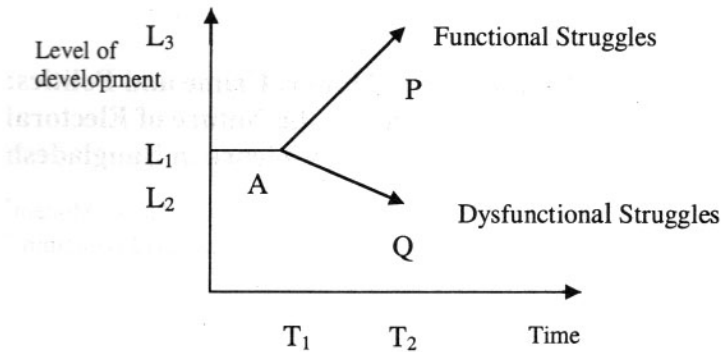
In the past the scale of political violence was limited in Bangladesh and party cadres were highly charged with political ideology for bringing changes in society to ensure political and economic emancipation of the common people. But things have changed with the change in political process and emergence of a new philosophy to assume power by any means. It can be argued that today's politicians are motivated by power, which they seek to achieve mostly through money and muscle instead of public support. It is in this context the current study examines the nexus between money, crime and politics in Bangladesh.

Money, Crime and Politics: A Conceptual Framework

Politics is an all-pervasive public activity involving man and society. The core of politics is power. It is indeed a power relationship. In other words, it is a struggle for power. Politics essentially involves conflicts and conflict resolutions. Thus, Ball (1977) defines politics as "an activity concerned with conflict, compromise, decision-making, power and authority" These conflicts or struggles can be either dysfunctional or functional. The struggles that initiate growth, spur creativity, increase information and ideas, reduce stagnation whatever such type of activities create the development of a country are called functional struggles and the struggles that do the opposite and hinders the development of a country are known as dysfunctional. This can be illustrated by the following figure:

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In the preceding figure we can see that a country's level of development can go either way and can reach at point P or Q at time T_2 from A. Here point P's level of development is greater than A's that is $L_3 > L_1$; so this is functional struggle and as point Q indicates the opposite that is $L_1 > L_2$; this is dysfunctional struggle. This dysfunctional struggle mainly indicates destructive politics. These destructive politics lead to criminalization of politics.

Crime is "an offence punishable by law." It is an evil act of doing harm or injury to others. In criminology, criminalization or criminalisation is "the process by which behaviours and individuals are transformed into crime and criminals" (Michalowski:1985)

"Criminalization of politics" is a political buzzword. Criminalisation of politics may be termed as a systematic act of subversion of the usual course of politics by illicit means intended to attain private gains or coterie ends. It gives rise to a kind of situation where there are a great deal of erosion of values, organized violations of norms, rules and principles, dearth of security of life, liberty and property, lack of transparency and accountability, dominance of muscle power and black money, plunder of resources, rampant corruption, denial of justice and rule of law, contraction of popular sovereignty leading the underworld and unconventional forces to establish substantial control over the political process (Harun-or-Rashid:2002). As a matter of fact, criminalization of politics involves three interrelated elements money, crime and political power. We can explain the entire relations on the basis of demand and supply. Political power demands persons who can perpetuate or obtain power and criminals can supply that by committing crime and supplying money.

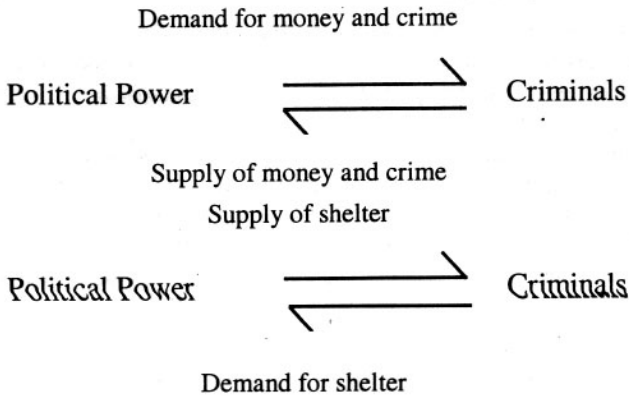


Figure 2: Relationships between Political Power and Criminals

On the other hand, criminals demand power primarily for the sake of getting shelter from the wrath of the law enforcing agencies and letter to obtain positions, prestige, enhance their territory of influence and so on and political power can supply that. Thus politicians and criminals found themselves as bosom buddies and make it difficult to distinguish one from other. Again money and crime are interlinked. For producing black money, one requires to rely on various types of criminal activities. On the other hand, to perform and manage those criminal activities, one requires money. Thus, a cyclical relationship is built up between the two. The relations among crime, money and political power are sketched in the following figure:

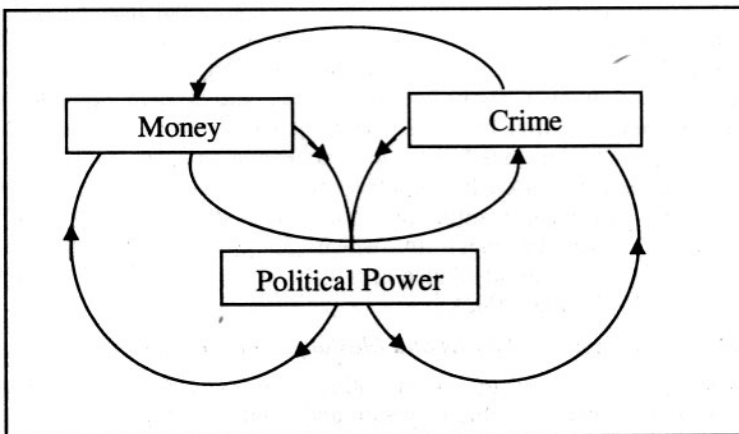


Figure 3: The relations among crime, money and political power

Political Violence in Bangladesh

Political violence in the country has grown alarmingly over the years, and is now tearing apart the social fabric and causing havoc to the nation's fragile democracy. In 1997, Amnesty International reported 'dozens of political activists were killed and hundreds more injured in clashes between opposition and government supporters' (Amnesty International: 1997). In 2000, Amnesty international further reported that political confrontation between the major opposition parties and the ruling Awami League, which were at times violent, dominated politics in Bangladesh (Amnesty International: 2000). Similarly, in 2004, Amnesty International further reported,

"Dozens of people died in violence during and after local elections in the first quarter of the year. Several opposition politicians were assassinated. Corruption and poor governance remained key factors blocking economic prosperity. The government reportedly pressured judges to dismiss criminal charges against ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party supporters. Most sessions of parliament were boycotted by the main opposition party, Awami League" (Amnesty International: 2004).

Political violence has led Bangladesh into a deep crisis of governance. With increasing crime and violence the law and order situation is about to collapse. Killing, rape, abduction, hijacking have increased alarmingly over the years. In 2002 alone, 283 people were killed as a result of violence of one sort or the other, 35 of them for political reasons in September 2001 alone, shortly before the national elections. The failure of the police to maintain law and order led to such a situation that the government had to summon the armed forces to curb terrorism. The army-aided crackdown on *mastaans* (hoodlums) began on October 17, 2003, and lasted for over a month: more than 25 people died in their custody, during and after interrogation. It is noteworthy that, despite the allegations of human rights violations by human rights organizations', the general people were seemingly relieved from the overwhelming feeling of insecurity that had prevailed prior to the crackdown. This implies that people's faith in the rule of law has eroded seriously. People's mistrust of state authority and the effectiveness of legal institutions is also reflected in the incidents of *gonopituni* (mass beatings) in which alleged criminals are killed mercilessly. More than 40 alleged criminals were reportedly killed in mass beatings in 2002 (BSS: 2002).

Students, Unemployed Youths and Mastaans enter Politics

It is to be noted that all the major political parties in Bangladesh organize and support activist, militant youth and student wings. These groups generally have access to firearms but also widely utilize petrol bombs, molotov cocktails and various kinds of crude, hand-made bombs made of

gunpowder, shrapnel and ground glass, hockey sticks, wooden rods and knives of all kinds. It is not uncommon for college and university campuses to be the location of shoot-outs and running gun battles between rival student political factions with automatic weapons (The Holiday :2004). Educational institutions are frequently forced to close down on account of such outbreaks of violence, particularly in the public, state-owned institutions. Political parties have traditionally relied on their student cadres to throw their weight behind party campaigns using violence and intimidation if necessary. In addition, students reflect the pulse of the land. They have ousted dictators in 1968 and 1990; and brought feuding political parties to the negotiating table. The control of the campus symbolically represents control over the country. Hence, political parties are reluctant to leave youths alone. There is a trade-off, however, in terms of money politics and opportunities for entry into political careers. Student cadres with access to important contacts are able to obtain cuts from business contracts and tenders, using tactics of threats, intimidation, persuasion and physical force (Ruud:2006).

Business, Money and Politics

Since independence, there has been a significantly increasing business representation in the Bangladesh Jatiya Shangshad (parliament). Particularly since 1975, parliaments tend to be dominated by businessmen and industrialists. As they all had direct and indirect linkages with civil and military bureaucrats, they were in a position effectively to influence the policy process (Monem: 2006).

Objectives of the Study

The overall objective is to study violence in the electoral process of Bangladesh with a specific reference to the growing tendencies to rely on (black) money and criminalized politics to win elections'. The specific objectives are as follows:

- a) To assess nature and trend of electoral violence as found over the last three elections based on secondary information
- b) To assess the rising cost of elections as officially stated and money actually spent by political parties in general and individual candidates in particular.
- c) To study how the unemployed youth, students are inducted and made musclemen under the party backing and in turn used by the politicians to their own advantages.
- d) To present a case study of a crime ridden and high-risk category constituency (Lalbagh under Dhaka district) known for electoral violence to trace the use of money and *mastaans* by the candidates.

- e) To assess nature and trends of violence in the selected constituency-actors linked to it and also to examine who gets nominated, role of candidates in the constituency selected and look at their electoral conduct, amount of money spent their link to any acts of violence or crime

Methodology used and Data Sources

This study combines qualitative and quantitative research adopting a flexible approach to serve the specific requirements of the topic. It is based on both primary and secondary sources. The researchers reviewed the available secondary literature relevant to the subject. They examined 4 national dailies to cover a period of six months around the time of each election in 1990-91, 1996 and 2001. The papers are *Janakantha*, *Bangladesh Observer*, *Ittefaq* and *Inqilab*. These represented different political opinions.

Five Focus Group Discussions and 20 interviews formed the basis for the collection of primary data in the sampled constituency of Lalbagh. A number of in-depth and semi-structured interviews were also conducted. Respondents were selected by simple random sampling. They represented a cross section of the population, either residing in the area of the sampled constituency, or living elsewhere in neighbouring areas but are familiar with the sampled constituency's election process, candidates, election campaign, election related violence and other crimes etc. See figure below for FGDs:

Table 1: Profile of the FGD Respondents

| Location | Occupations | No of Participants |
|--------------------|--|--------------------|
| Lalbagh fort area | Small Shop Owner, Day labourers, school teachers, factory workers, house wife, unemployed | 12 |
| Kamrangirchar area | Small Shop Owner, Day labourers, school teachers, house wife, unemployed, garment workers, Govt. officials, NGO staff, doctor, Engineers | 10 |
| Hazaribagh | Garments owners and workers, leather industry owners and workers, artisan, slum-dwellers | 12 |
| Azimpur | Govt. officials, doctor, Engineers, teachers, architects, house-wife, unemployed youth | 10 |
| Chawk bazar | Wholesale shop owners, small Shop Owners, | 10 |

The research team became acutely aware that in the charged atmosphere of the pre-election phase in national politics, respondents were not forthcoming with their views in public discussions. It thus became essential to supplement findings through interviews.

The Lalbagh constituency was chosen for detailed analysis because it is one of the most notoriously crime infested areas with a penchant for violent electoral politics. Its location in Dhaka was also a favourable aspect as it simplified access and transport for the team. The case study permitted a change in approach from a macro perspective based on secondary sources materials, to a micro-analysis based on FGDs and interviews.

MP Profiles and their Socio-economic Background

Since independence, there has been significantly growing business representation in the Bangladesh Jatiya Shangshad (parliament). Particularly since 1975, parliaments had been dominated by the businessmen and industrialists. As they all had direct and indirect linkages with civil and military bureaucrats, they were in a position effectively to influence the policy process (Monem: 2006). The table below indicates the increasing business representation in parliament under successive regimes.

Table 2: Occupational Background of MPs (in percentage)

| Year of election | Nature of Occupation | | | | | |
|------------------|----------------------|----------|--------------|----------|-------------|--------|
| | Law | Business | Professional | Politics | Agriculture | Others |
| 1991 | 19 | 59 | 14 | 2 | 4 | 2 |
| 1996 | 11 | 71 | 12 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2001 | 4 | 84 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 1 |

(Source: Talukder Maniruzzaman, "The Fall of the Military Dictator: 1991 Elections and the Prospect of Civilian Rule in Bangladesh," *Pacific Affairs*, No. 65 (1992), pp. 203-23.; Mobasser Monem's own calculation of the occupational background of the MPs of 1986 and 1996 parliament on the basis of the book containing information on MPs. Ministry of Law and Parliamentary Affairs, 997 and 2001, Government of Bangladesh.)

The businessmen dominated 2001 parliament. An astoundingly high 84% of the MPs represented businessmen turned politician category. It is to be noted that professional politicians represented only 6 percent of the total,

while the law and agriculture as occupational categories represented 4% and 3% respectively in the parliament of 2001.

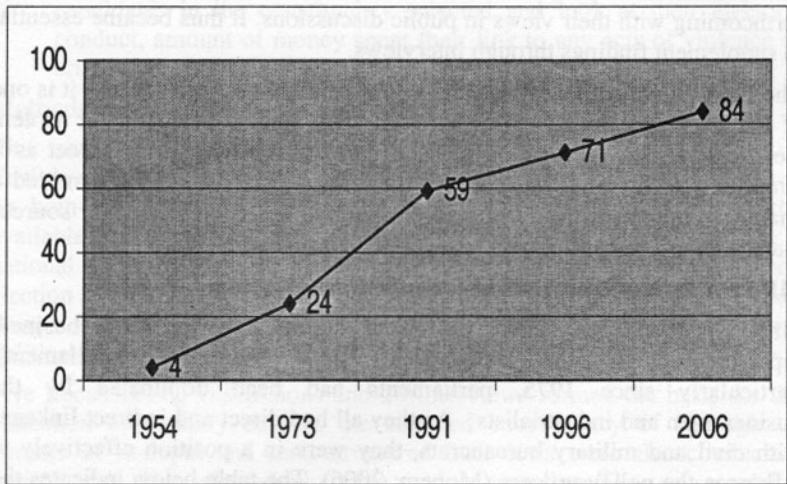


Figure 4: Increasing Trend of Representation of Businessmen in the Election (%)

In the parliamentary elections held in 1986, 1991 and 1996, business representation in parliament had been significant. In the 1979 parliamentary election, businessmen captured 28% of the total seats, while they captured 57% seats in 1986, 59% in 1991 and 71% in the 1996 election. This development is in striking contrast to colonial and immediate post-colonial periods when the majority of politicians were lawyers or had law degrees (Murshid:1995). It can be argued that politics and business are closely intertwined in Bangladesh. According to Kochanek (1994), in India, businessmen function largely behind the scenes to protect their interests, in Pakistan, businessmen become politicians, and in Bangladesh, politicians are often businessmen.

The table below shows the age ranges of the members of 2001 parliament. It shows that a significant numbers of MPs are young in age. A total of 101 MPs are aged between 35 and 50 years which represent about 38% of the total.

Table 3 : Age Range of MPs of 2001 Parliament

| Age Range | Number of MPs |
|-----------|---------------|
| 35-39 | 7 |
| 40-44 | 17 |
| 45-49 | 37 |
| 50-54 | 50 |
| 55-59 | 64 |
| 60-64 | 54 |
| 65-69 | 46 |
| 70-74 | 12 |
| 75-79 | 10 |
| 80-85 | 3 |
| Total | 300 |

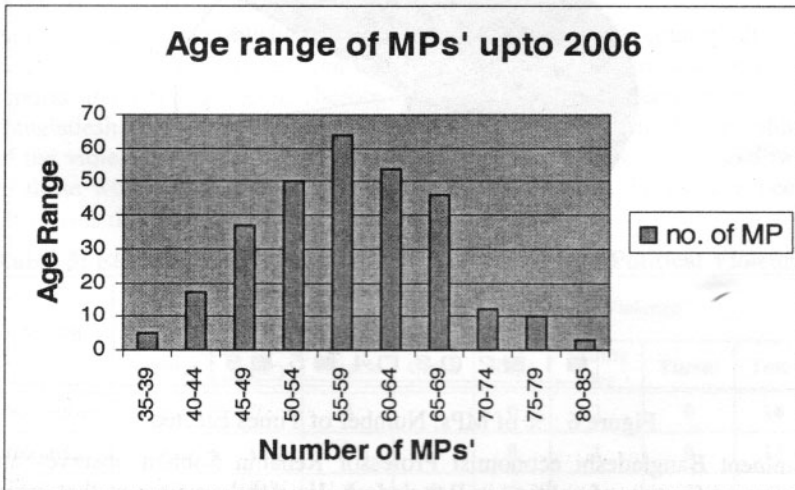


Figure 5: Age Range of MPs' up to 2006

In 2001 parliament, out of 300 MPs a total of 78 MPs got elected for the first time, which represented about 42 per cent of the total. Number of MPs got elected 5 times were 18 and only 5 MPs of the parliament got elected for the 6 times.

Table 4: Number of Times the MPs got elected

| Number of Times Elected | Number of MPs |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| 1 | 78 |
| 2 | 77 |
| 3 | 59 |
| 4 | 62 |
| 5 | 18 |
| 6 | 5 |

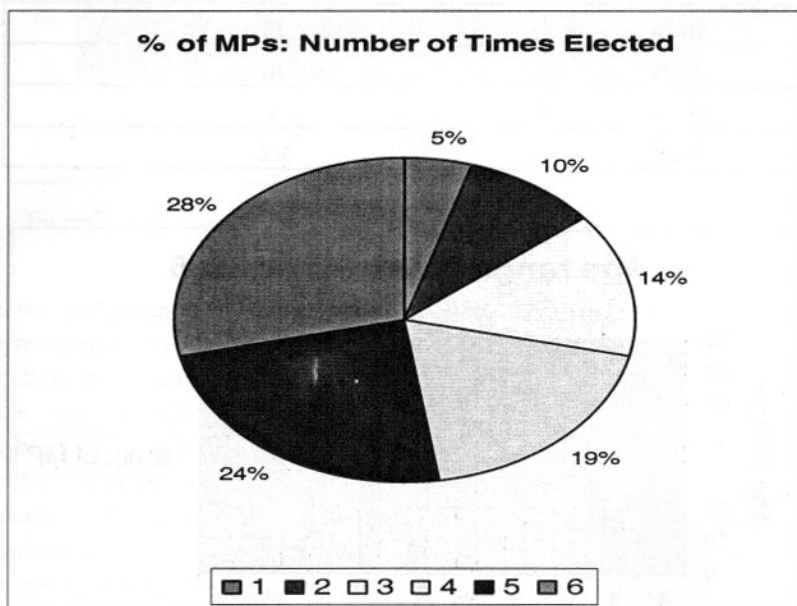


Figure 6 : % of MPs: Number of Times Elected

Eminent Bangladeshi economist Professor Rehamn Sobhan observes an 'commodification of politics' in Bangladesh. He rightly maintains that, over the years elections in Bangladesh have become a costly process, and thus have increasingly become a rich man's game (Sobhan : 2002). In Bangladesh politics a class of people has emerged and become dominant, who view politics as a business investment and spend large sums of money in the electoral process which needs to be recouped when in power. Businessmen entered in the electoral politics and politicians became

businesspersons. Thus, honest and dedicated politicians without wealth have now little or no prospect of surviving in politics of Bangladesh. This applies not only for elections to parliament but also to local elective bodies. Politics now in Bangladesh has become a game played by the rich for the rich and for the accumulation of riches.

Analysis of Last Three Elections and Nature of Electoral Violence

Here we attempt at bringing together the incidences of violence published in a number of selected newspapers over three months before and after last three elections-1991, 1996 and 2001 and to review those incidences from several points of views. The newspapers from which the news have been collected are: *Janakantha*, *Bangladesh Observer*, *Ittefaq* and *Inqilab*. While compiling the news, particular attention has been given to avoid any sort of overlapping that might cause to double counting of any news. Also, in considering the figures of casualties, the minimum number mentioned in the respective news have been taken. Therefore, the figures presented in the tables may rather underestimate the realities rather than overestimating those in any way.

Analysis of the Findings of the Newspaper Reviews

Not all the news published in every newspaper of the country during election period could have been collected. We were able to scan only the reports and news 3 months before and after last three elections held in Bangladesh. We have chosen these reports carefully to highlight the nature of the violence and their consequences. Table below shows the breakdown of those with respect to the nature of terrorist activities. There have been terrorisms of all types.

Table 5: Election 91: Incidence and Various Forms of Political Violence

| Month | Incidents of Various Forms of Political Violence | | | | | | | |
|----------|--|--------|--------|-------|------|--------------|--------|-------|
| | Murder | Injury | Attack | Clash | Rape | Setting Fire | Threat | Total |
| November | 1 | 7 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 16 |
| December | 4 | 11 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 18 |
| January | 4 | 29 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 41 |
| February | 8 | 33 | 11 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 57 |
| March | 3 | 3 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 13 |
| April | 3 | 10 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 17 |
| Total | 23 | 93 | 24 | 11 | 0 | 8 | 3 | 162 |

There had been 162 cases of violence reported in the newspaper published between November and April'1991. It is apparent from the table that most violence occurred in the month of February in which 8 incidents of murder and 33 incidents of injuries. Besides, there had been other forms of political violence such as attacks on the rival political party leaders, workers and supporters, setting fire on the offices and residences of rival political party leaders and supporters and incidences of clashes between rival political party supporters and workers.

Table 6: Election 96: Incidents of Various Forms of Political Violence

| Month | Incidents of Various Forms of Political Violence | | | | | | | Total |
|--------------|--|------------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------------|------------|
| | Murder | Injury | Attack | Clash | Set Fire | Threat | Hall Capturing | |
| March | 35 | 38 | 17 | 12 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 104 |
| April | 9 | 27 | 11 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 56 |
| May | 5 | 8 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 15 |
| June | 24 | 27 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 55 |
| July | 6 | 12 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 22 |
| August | 2 | 24 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 31 |
| Total | 81 | 136 | 36 | 24 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 283 |

Following the February 1996 election the results of which was rejected by the main opposition political party Awami League on large scale rigging and low voter turnout, there had been an escalation of political violence in the month of March. A total of 35 incidents of murder and 38 incidents of injuries which occurred alone in March 1996. The election month (June) also witnessed numerous incidents of various forms violence. It is interesting to note that with the political changeover the student front of the victorious party captured the control of student halls of residence at the University of Dhaka.

Table 7: Number of Political Violence during the Different Elections

| | Election 1991 | Election 1996 | Election 2001 |
|-----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 3 months before | 16 | 104 | 100 |
| 2 months before | 18 | 56 | 58 |
| 1 month before | 41 | 15 | 211 |
| Election month | 57 | 55 | 214 |
| 1 month later | 13 | 22 | 73 |
| 2 months later | 17 | 31 | 77 |

The above table presents a comparative picture of incidence of political violence over three elections. The most important finding is that there had an escalation of violence in the election month in case of all three elections under review. It is appears from the table that there had been more incidences of political violence three months before election in 1996 and 2001. Incidences of violence were found to be more in the election month and two months following election in 2001. On the whole, the incidence of violence had been less in 1991 election compared to 1996 and 2001 elections. It also appears that number of incidence of political violence had been on the rise since 1991.

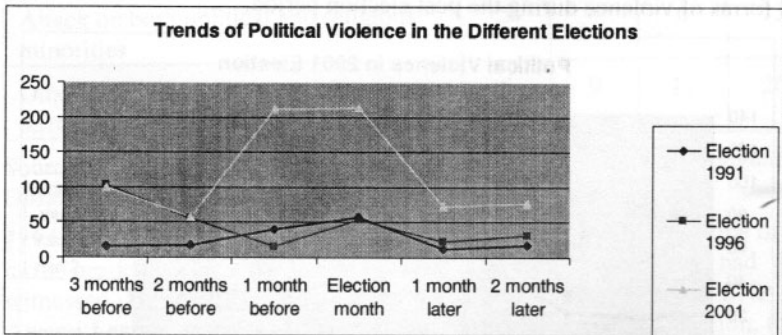


Figure 7: Trends of Political Violence in the Different Elections

The table below shows the breakdown of the nature of violence before and after the 2001 election on the basis of the news and reports published in four Newspapers namely *Janakantha*, *Bangladesh Observer*, *Ittefaq* and *Inqilab*. The largest victims of terrorist attacks by the ruling party terrorists were the political minorities, i.e., those who were defeated in the election (Awami League). These are the attacks that are purely political in nature. Attacks on political opposition have also been tied with attacks on religious minorities.

Table 8: Forms of Violence: Parliamentary Election in 2001

| Month | Incidents of Various Forms of Political Violence | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|--|--------|--------|-------|------|---------------|--------|---------------|-------------|-------|
| | Murder | Injury | Attack | Clash | Rape | Set ting Fire | Threat | Acid Throwing | Kidnap-ping | Total |
| July | 17 | 56 | 16 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 100 |
| August | 20 | 31 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 58 |
| September | 55 | 132 | 19 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 211 |
| October | 55 | 81 | 44 | 2 | 17 | 4 | 7 | 0 | 4 | 214 |
| November | 20 | 33 | 14 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 73 |
| December | 20 | 27 | 21 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 77 |
| Total | 187 | 360 | 118 | 25 | 18 | 6 | 13 | 1 | 5 | 733 |

The tables shows that a total of 95 incidents of killing and 121 incidents of injuries which occurred because of the post election violence in 2001. It may be mentioned here that there were, of course, a lot more deaths, injuries and rapes reported during that time. But these figures refer to only those which were done by the politically backed terrorists.

The month before the election witnessed more violence compared immediate earlier months. Number of violent acts increased in the election month. But what is significant is that there had been increasing incidence of all forms of violence during the post election period.

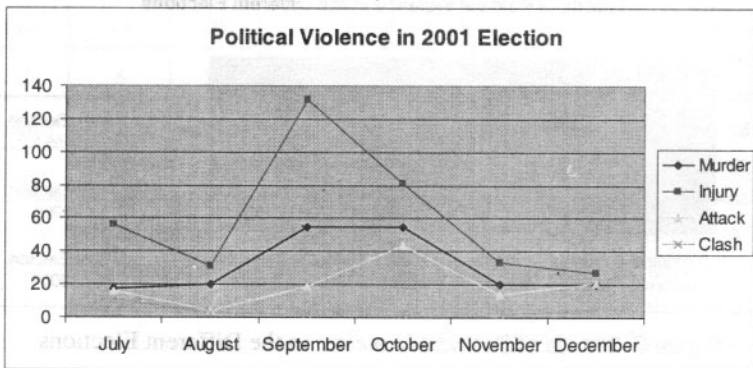


Figure 8: Political Violence in 2001 Election

The above graph demonstrates that the election month (October) and its previous month witnessed maximum casualties. The graph presents the trends that show the number of various major forms of political violence over six months (July to December) in 2001.

Case Study of Lalbagh Constituency: Nature of Electoral Politics and Violence

Lalbagh Constituency consists of three Thanas namely Lalbagh, Hazaribagh and Kamrangir char with a total area of 12.19 Sq. Km. It is known to be one of the most crime ridden electoral constituencies within the Dhaka district. The constituency has a total population of 47,6565 and average literacy rate is about 46%.

Lalbagh Constituency: Under Last Three Elections (1991, 1996, 2001)

Lalbagh is known to be one of the most crime-ridden electoral constituencies. Pre and post elections violence are quite common phenomena in the constituency. Everyone in the city of Dhaka is aware of this fact. In 2001 election both the candidates of BNP and AL resorted to money and muscle for winning elections. Let us look at the nature and extent of electoral violence in Lalbagh over last three elections.

Table 9: Lalbagh Constituency: Nature and Extent of Pre and Post election Violence as Reported in the Newspapers-1991-2001

| Nature of Violence | 1991 | 1996 | 2001 | Total |
|--|------|------|------|-------|
| Political violence | 9 | 11 | 14 | 34 |
| Attack on both political and religious minorities | 5 | 4 | 6 | 15 |
| Other types of violence by ruling party terrorists | 6 | 9 | 11 | 26 |

Source: Calculated from newspaper clippings (*Janakantha, Bangladesh Observer, Ittefaq and Inqilab*)

1991 Election: It is considered by the participants of the FGD as one of the most peaceful elections the people of Lalbagh constituency had ever witnessed. However, there had been occasional clashes between BNP and Awami League workers and supporters. Particularly, before election, there had been instances where the musclemen and armed cadres of both the political parties were engaged in factional fighting, sabotaged their rivals' political rallies and meetings, and carried out bomb and arson attacks on party election campaign booths, ransacked the residences of the opponents.

1996 Election : Both BNP and Awami League leaders and supporters have violated the minimum standards of human rights. Both sides have used and sometimes armed their youth wings to perpetrate violence against opponents. Just before the polls, gun battles and other armed confrontations

broke out frequently in the streets of Kamrangir Char, and Lalbagh fort areas. Several journalists and news photographers reporting on the violence were assaulted and threatened by supporters and workers of both political parties. The police arrested opposition activists for acts of violence, they failed to arrest BNP militants who had engaged in similar crimes. During an arms recovery drive ahead of the election, the army troops stormed over a hundreds of houses, destroying property and indiscriminately beating people and engaged in indiscriminate and arbitrary arrest of leaders of both political parties. At least 200 people alone from Kamrangir Char thana were arbitrarily detained, and many of them were severely tortured in custody (The Prothom Alo:1996).

2001 Election : There had been several incidences of armed clashes in Chawkbazar, Hazaribagh, Lalbagh and several places in Kamrangir Char between BNP and Awami League and Jatiya Party workers before election. The police and paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) responded to serious armed clashes with tear gas and rubber bullets, on some occasions they also fired indiscriminately at demonstrators. Subsequent to such clashes, the police and paramilitary also resorted to indiscriminate arrests of suspected workers and supporters, in some cases arresting children. BNP claimed that the members of the law enforcing agency were working in favour of Awami League regime and arbitrarily arresting only BNP men (The Bangladesh Observer:2001). On the pretext of searching for illegal arms, the police conducted a brutal raid at suspected residences of Awami League and BNP leaders and workers. In protest of such act of the caretaker government two major political parties orchestrated massive street demonstrations in the constituency which at times turned violent, leading to thousands of casualties, and extensive property damage. On the election day, voter queues were attacked in Lalbagh Fort area under Lalbagh thana, and Ashrafabad, Sultanganj and Hujurpara areas under Kamrangir Char thana and Kalunagar, Baraikhali and Saikaritol areas under the Hazaribagh thana. Since the elections results came out the terrorists backed by the winning alliance had been launching all types of attacks on their opposition. Awami League leaders, activists and supporters had been the victims of unlimited terrorism.

Lalbagh Constituency: Findings of the Focus Group Discussions

This section is based on the findings of the FGDs and in-depth personal interviews in Lalbagh Constituency under Dhaka district. We asked the participants a number of questions during the FGDs and most of the respondents were in agreement to suggest that electoral violence had been a dominant feature of the electoral process of the constituency.

Incidence of Electoral Violence in the Constituency : Electoral violence was less during the election held in 1991 and violence had increased significantly during the election held in 1996 and in 2001 level of violence reached its peak. In total 13 people were killed in election related violence in the constituency in 2001 (before and after election). At least, 700 people were injured, some of them seriously, owing to the clashes between rival political parties during elections.

Forms of Violence in the Constituency : Violence took place in various forms, but mostly used forms included shoot-outs, exhibition of fire arms, use of *lathi* (sticks), hockey sticks and iron rod to hit or terrorise the supporters of rival political parties. Besides, particularly during the 2001 election the use of *chapati* (special knives) was quite common in some instances and in some areas. A total of 11 supporters of different political parties had been stabbed brutally in various locations in the constituency during the 2001 election alone. Referring to 2001 election, the participants mentioned that candidates of two major political parties left no stone unturned to terrorise the supporters of the rival political party. Both the candidates have their own pet groups of *mastaans*, and some of them were their permanent associates and some were recruited temporarily from outside to help the candidates during the elections and most of the outsiders possessed guns and it was an open secret.

Oppression of the Supporters of the Opposition Political Parties : Some of the FGD participants were found to be fearful to provide information. It was hard to find out supporters of the opposition political party even in an area which is known to be dominated by supporters of the opposition political parties (these are the areas where the opposition candidate own in most centres during last two elections (1996, 2001). The opposition political party supporters and activists were regularly harassed by police at the will of the MP representing the ruling party. These were deliberately done in order to deplete local support base of the major opposition political party.

Political Tactics Adopted to Deplete the Opposition's Support Base

Numerous opposition political party supporters and activists were arrested and convicted on false charges and put them in jail. This has been a common practice and this has happened during/after all the elections between 1991 and 2001. Incidence of harassment and arrest of opposition political party increased particularly when the opposition political party announced anti-government political activities. Most FGD participants stated that repressions on the opposition increased significantly after the election in 2001. There had been violent attacks on the processions of the opposition political party. There had been occasions when the opposition

political party supporters and activists were not allowed to take the procession from the local area to the city centre where the rally was supposed to be held. FGD participants in Kamrangirchar pointed out that the maastans of the ruling party being supported by the local police stopped the procession at the bridge connecting the Kamrangirchar area and the city.

Modes of Payment of the Musclemen of the Ruling Party : It was pointed out by the FGD participants that some of the maastans are on regular payroll while some are recruited as and when necessary on payment. One local contractor mentioned that mostly the local area development contracts are awarded to the ruling party leaders and supporters. It was pointed out that some maastans are awarded local development contracts, while others informally impose toll on the contractors and collect their commissions secretly if those contractors are not linked with the ruling political party. It is actually a two-way dependency relationship.

Unfair Preparation of Voter List : The preparation of voter list has always been politically motivated (1991-2006). The MP of the ruling party's instruction was followed in the preparation of the voter lists and in most cases the supporters of the opposition political party were identified in a subtle way and they were not given the forms for enlistment. In some cases, the women voters of the household of the opposition political party supporters were not registered/enlisted. The local authority remained inactive/silent even when the specific complaints were lodged by the families concerned.

Election Expenditures of the Candidates : The candidates hardly adhere to the Election Commission's regulation with regard to election expenditure per candidate which is 5 lakh Tk. The FGD participants maintained that the candidates spent 5 lakh Taka only in less than few hours. The candidates in Lalbagh constituency spent astoundingly high amount of money in their respective election campaigns. The FGD participants stated that the current Member of Parliament spent about 5 crore Taka in the election held in 2001 and his counterpart the defeated candidate spent 6 crore Taka. The candidates see this expenditure as an investment for future. Once elected they know they will have high return. It was pointed out by the FGD participants that after the 2001 election most local area development contracts were awarded to the construction firm owned by wife of local MP. Similarly, after the 1996 election, the then MP of the constituency awarded the contracts either to his relatives or friends or to the people connected to the ruling party.

The Election Expenditure Heads : It is very difficult if not impossible to have accurate idea about election expenditure heads of the candidates. However, on the basis of the information received from the FGD

participants we have made an attempt to calculate total amount of money spent by the candidates of two major political party-BNP and Awami League in the election held in 2001. The FGD participants maintained that in general the election expenditures of the major candidates are on the rise. On the basis of the information gathered from the FGD participants the candidates of the major political parties spend more money now than in the past.

Table 10: Amount of Money Spent by Candidates of Major Political Parties

| Election Year | Total amount of money spent by BNP and Awami League Candidates (in Crore Tk) | | |
|---------------|--|--|----------------|
| | Amount Spent by BNP Candidate | Amount Spent by Awami League Candidate | Total Spending |
| 1991 | 1.5 | 2 | 3.5 |
| 1996 | 3 | 4 | 7 |
| 2001 | 5 | 6 | 11 |

The participants of the FGD could recall the most important heads of the candidates' election expenditures which included the following:

- a. Running election offices
- b. Running election campaign booths
- c. Buying lists of voters
- d. Printing and distributing posters, manifestos, pamphlets, leaflets
- e. Holding meetings
- f. Making public contacts
- g. Using microphones
- h. Writing the election slogans etc. on the walls (graffiti)
- i. Payment made to *maastans* loyal to the candidates
- j. Money spent on election campaigns on print and electronic media
- k. Bribing election officers including returning officers
- l. Bribing members of the law enforcing agencies including Police and Ansars in charge of polling centres

Table 11: 2001-Election: An Estimate of Election Expenditure on Running Election Campaign Booths in Lalbagh Constituency

| Political Party | Number of Campaign Booths | Total Number of Workers/Campaigners involved (all booths) | Money Spent per booth per day | Total amount of money spent (over two months) |
|-----------------|---------------------------|---|-------------------------------|---|
| Awami League | 310 | 7750 | 4000 | 1,2,40,000 |
| BNP | 300 | 7500 | 5500 | 1,6,50,000 |
| Total | 610 | 15250 | 9500 | 2,8,90,000 |

(Calculated on the basis of the information given by the FGD participants)

Above table shows that the combined spending of the candidates only on running election campaign booths during 2001 election amounted to 2 crore, 8 lakh and 90 thousand Taka. These figures are indicative. This helps us to understand how the money was spent by the candidates for winning election.

Money Spent on Buying out Voters : The candidates of both the major political parties tend to spend a lot of money to buy out voters. In fact, the workers of the election campaign booths located in various parts of the constituency are used to identify and pursue the willing voters who want to sell their votes in exchange for cash . It was opined by most of the FGD participants that workers of both the party prepare a list before election and the willing voters are offered money on the night before the election day. The amount of money which is on offer usually varies between 2000 and 2500 Tk. per household. Once such payment is made to the household, the supporters and workers of the concerned political parties make sure that the members of the household actually vote for the candidates from whom they have accepted money. It is ensured by the informal polling agents appointed informally by the major political parties who operate within the polling booth. These informal polling agents are appointed by bribing the members of the law enforcing agencies. These informal polling agents make sure that the members of the household who took cash from their respective parties handover the ballot papers secretly to them after collecting them from the pooling officer. Later on, arrangements are made by the informal polling agents to stuff the ballot box with ballot papers after stamping them in favour of their own candidates.

Increasing Incidences of Illegal Collection of Toll : Collection of toll has increased and it also has taken different forms. The businessmen while having the discussion informed that earlier (before 2001) the maastans connected to the ruling party or local MP demanded toll from each wholesale shop in Chawkbazar area (part belonging to Lalbagh). Each shop owners had to pay nearly whatever amount demanded by those maastans. In the event of refusal to pay the amount demanded, the businessmen were threatened to be killed in extreme cases. Similar views were expressed by the garment and leather industry owners. Two businessmen were abducted from the Chawkbazar in 1997, later they were set free after they agreed to pay the amount of money demanded by the maastans. The victims filed a suit against those who were involved in the incident, but the police did not take any serious attempt to arrest them.

Changed Forms of Collection of Illegal Toll : The businessmen mentioned that after the creation of RAB by the government which came to power in 2001, the toll collection has taken a new form. Currently, the businessmen are requested (not pressurised) to pay certain amount of money through their association to the youth organisations and mostly these youth organisations belong to and operate under the auspices of the ruling party and local MP. At present, toll is collected in a subtle manner. FGD participants in Kamrangirchar informed that people were asked to pay so called "Unnayan Ortho" for the construction or repair of the road, dam or filling the low land or ponds near their houses. People complained that those construction works were contracted to close associates of the MP and they always estimated the costs and charged an inflated amount and people were forced to pay the asked amount. Those who refused to pay the estimated/demanded amount, the maastans or associates of the MP threatened to grab a part of their land. In extreme cases, land grabbing has occurred.

Local opposition activists/supporters are arrested on false charges at the will of the MP or his close associates and then taken to local police station. Police later demanded bribe from the relatives of the victims to free them. The victims informed that police shared this money generated through bribe with the ruling party maastans and associates of the local MP. They also stated that the OC of the local police station usually gets appointed or transferred at the will of the local MP. There is a mutually dependent

relationship between the police and the close associates of MP. The FGD participants termed this as a new form of "Chadabaji"(illegal toll collection).

Concluding Remarks

Political violence and confrontational politics in Bangladesh have risen to a frightening level over the years and it is now tearing apart the social fabric and causing havoc to the nation's fragile democracy. One other significant aspect of our present day politics is that both the major parties, the BNP and the Awami League, in order to gain greater political advantages over one another, resorted to money politics. This has also created a tendency to resort to violence to solve political differences: as a result, a breed of young people has entered national politics who are commonly known as '*mastaans*'. They have emerged as a major factor in politics as well as in the social life of Bangladesh. Most of the political figures patronize *mastaans* in order to ensure election victory and retention of political authority in their constituencies.

Politicians are increasingly using *mastaans* as a political resource in the contest for political office and state patronage to access public resources. In recent times, the Amnesty International reported that Bangladesh polity has witnessed serious escalation of violence and hundreds of political activists were being attacked, injured and killed in clashes between opposition and government supporters. In 2002 alone, 283 people were killed as a result of violence of one sort or the other, 35 of them for political reasons in September 2001 alone, shortly before the national elections.

The restoration of the democratic process in 1990 and the holding of three successive elections in a fairly free and fair environment, followed by peaceful transfer of power, have generated hope for further consolidation of democracy in the country. A key requirement in this connection is to replace the current confrontation and acrimony between the major political parties with dialogue and mutual accommodation for the creation of trust and confidence. It is believed that this will be facilitated by the party in power providing space to the opposition to play its due role in the Sangsad and to conduct political activities unhindered.

The Sangsad agenda are predominantly dominated by the government and there are allegations that opposition members are not allowed sufficient time or opportunity to articulate their points of view on the floor of the House. Hardly any serious discussion takes place on crucial budget

proposals, nor are members whether in opposition or government able to make any meaningful contributions. Also important is the role of the committees of the House which everywhere perform the vital task of scrutinizing bills placed before the House and monitoring activities of the government. Committees provide the opposition an opportunity to effectively put forward their position on issues before the House.

Unfortunately, in spite of some positive changes brought about in the system during the seventh Sangsad, the committees are not functioning well so far as the present Sangsad is concerned because, due to the bitter differences between the BNP and AL, these are yet to be constituted. As regards the opposition, the boycott of the Sangsad after the election and for a while thereafter calling of frequent hartals and opposing most government policy initiatives and innovations are seen to be calculated to obstruct the legitimate operation of the party in power. The issues need to be addressed with goodwill through discussion as is done in other democracies.

Another unfortunate feature of Bangladesh politics has been the tendency on the part of the party in power to push the opposition to the periphery. This is in spite of the fact that in the last three freely held elections the gap in the number of popular votes received by the two major parties that formed governments was very narrow. For example in the 2001 election BNP and AL respectively received 40.97 and 40.13 per cent popular votes but 193 and 62 seats in the Sangsad. So far as Jamat-e-Islami is concerned, it secured 17 seats as against 14 seats of Ershad's Islami Jatiya Okyo Front although its popular votes totalled about half of the latter. The point is that the opposition has, on most occasions, represented a nearly equal number of people in the country. In any case consensus and mutual accommodation is the key to democratic governance and the country needs to develop a strong democratic practice and culture. Serious effort is needed on the part of the government to take the opposition on board on major policy issues and, equally, the latter should respond responsibly and constructively to such gestures. We must act now to bring some drastic modifications in our political system to make the democracy meaningful. Without doing so no qualitative improvement in our politics is possible.

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