

# Public Trust in the Independence of the Bangladesh Election Commission: Evidence from Four National Elections (2008-2024)

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## Abstract

This study investigates the trends of public trust in the independence and impartiality of the Bangladesh Election Commission (EC) by examining four national parliamentary elections held between 2008 and 2024. Employing a qualitative research approach, this article synthesizes empirical survey findings, institutional assessments, election observer reports and pertinent secondary sources to evaluate how public perceptions of electoral integrity evolved in response to political, legal and institutional developments. This analysis is grounded in the broader relationship between free, fair, and credible elections and democratic governance in Bangladesh. The findings indicate that public trust in the Election Commission fluctuated significantly across the electoral cycles. Elections conducted under the non-party caretaker government system were widely perceived as comparatively free, competitive, and credible, contributing to higher citizen trust in the EC's independence. In contrast, elections held under the incumbent party governments in 2014, 2018 and 2024 were marked by opposition boycotts, limited electoral competition, allegations of administrative bias, and inconsistent enforcement of electoral rules, which collectively weakened public trust and raised concerns about legitimacy. This study further identifies key structural and contextual factors influencing trust, including the constitutional and legal framework governing elections, the appointment process and autonomy of election commissioners, enforcement of the electoral code of conduct, effectiveness of complaint and appeal mechanisms, and the roles played by political parties, civil society, the media, and

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state institutions. Persistent political polarization, limited cooperation among stakeholders, and constraints on the EC's legal and financial autonomy have posed significant challenges to maintaining impartiality in electoral governance. Overall, this article claims that restoring public trust in Bangladesh's electoral process requires strengthening the institutional independence of the Election Commission, ensuring transparent and accountable governance during elections, and implementing durable reforms that support free, fair and credible elections as the foundation for democratic stability.

### Keywords

Bangladesh Election Commission, Public Trust, Electoral Independence, Electoral Integrity, Free, Fair and Credible Elections, Democratic Governance, Electoral Reform

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## 1. Introduction

Free, fair, and credible elections constitute the cornerstone of democratic governance and political legitimacy. Elections provide citizens with the opportunity to choose their representatives through a competitive and transparent process, thereby ensuring public participation in state authority and accountability in governance. In democratic systems, elections function not merely as a procedural exercise but as a central regulatory mechanism through which democratic values are institutionalized and sustained (Dahl, 1971). When elections are conducted impartially, voters are able to exercise their political rights freely; conversely, flawed electoral processes can undermine public trust, destabilize political systems, and weaken democratic institutions (Norris, 2014).

The practice of elections is not a modern phenomenon. Historical evidence shows that electoral mechanisms existed in ancient Greece and Rome, while during the medieval period elections were used to select Roman emperors and popes (Phiddian, 2007). In the context of Bengal, early forms of electoral selection can be traced to the Pala dynasty, where Gopala was chosen by leading figures through a consensual process, reflecting proto-democratic practices in the region (Ahmed, n.d.).

In Bangladesh, the electoral process serves as a key indicator of democratic performance. The Constitution of Bangladesh establishes the Election Commission (EC) as an independent constitutional body entrusted with conducting national and local elections. Bangladesh follows a parliamentary system of government, making regular parliamentary elections essential for the formation of government and the continuity of democratic rule. Articles 118 to 126 of the Constitution outline the composition, authority, and functions of the Election Commission, emphasizing its independence, neutrality, and responsibility to ensure fair elections (Islam & Haque, 2023).

Despite strong constitutional provisions, the role and independence of the Elec-

tion Commission have increasingly become subjects of debate. Although the EC is legally recognized as an autonomous institution, concerns persist regarding political influence, uneven enforcement of electoral laws, and declining public confidence in recent electoral cycles (Transparency International Bangladesh, 2018). Since independence, Bangladesh has experienced multiple forms of governance—including parliamentary democracy, presidential rule, and military regimes—resulting in fluctuating democratic practices and contested electoral outcomes (Jahan & Mahmud, 2008).

While elections have been held regularly at both national and local levels, numerous observers and scholars claim that electoral discipline and adherence to established rules have often been compromised. Allegations of irregularities, administrative bias, opposition boycotts, and uncontested seats have raised questions about the credibility of elections and the effectiveness of parliamentary democracy (International Crisis Group, 2015). Against this backdrop, this study aims to identify the causal factors affecting the independence and impartiality of the Election Commission of Bangladesh and to assess potential institutional and political solutions to restore public trust in the electoral process.

## 2. Election Commission in Bangladesh: Historical Background

The first national parliamentary election of independent Bangladesh was held on 7 March 1973 under the leadership of the Election Commission headed by Justice M. Idris. This commission served from July 1972 to July 1977 and laid the institutional foundation for electoral governance in the newly independent state (Riaz & Rahman, 2016). The second parliamentary election took place on 18 February 1979 under Justice A. K. M. Nurul Islam, the longest-serving Chief Election Commissioner in Bangladesh's history, whose tenure spanned from 1977 to 1985 (Chowdhury & Panday, 2018).

Between 1985 and 1990, Justice A. T. M. Masud led the Election Commission during a period of military rule. The third and fourth parliamentary elections held in 1986 and 1988 respectively were conducted under authoritarian governance, raising concerns about electoral competitiveness and legitimacy (Jahan, 2005). From 17 February 1990 to 24 December 1990, Khan served as the chief election commissioner of Bangladesh. He oversaw the first democratic election in Bangladesh after military dictator Hussain Mohammad Ershad was overthrown by a popular revolt in 1990.

The initiation of the non-party caretaker government system marked a significant turning point in Bangladesh's electoral history. Parliamentary elections held in 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2008 under caretaker governments were widely regarded as comparatively free, fair and credible by domestic and international observers (United Nations Development Programme, 2009). These elections contributed to higher public trust in the Election Commission and strengthened democratic legitimacy.

However, the abolition of the caretaker government system through the Fifteenth Constitutional Amendment in 2011 significantly altered the electoral landscape. Subsequent elections held under incumbent governments—particularly the 2014, 2018 and 2024 parliamentary elections—were characterized by opposition boycotts, uncontested seats, allegations of vote manipulation and declining public trust (Riaz, 2019). The 2014 election saw 153 out of 300 parliamentary seats uncontested, while the 2018 election faced widespread criticism regarding electoral integrity despite opposition participation (Moon, 2019).

Since independence, Bangladesh has formed thirteen Election Commissions and conducted eleven parliamentary elections along with presidential elections, referendums and numerous local government polls. Although the Election Commission enjoys constitutional independence in principle, its effective functioning has often been constrained by political polarization, limited administrative autonomy, and insufficient cooperation from ruling governments and political actors (Akter, 2023).

This historical trajectory demonstrates that constitutional guarantees alone are insufficient to ensure electoral credibility. The effectiveness of the Election Commission ultimately depends on institutional autonomy, political neutrality, enforcement capacity and cooperative democratic norms among key stakeholders.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

This study conceptualizes the Election Commission of Bangladesh (ECB) as a central institution of electoral governance whose effectiveness depends primarily on its independence, neutrality and enforcement capacity. Independence refers to the ability of the Commission to function without undue influence from the executive, political parties or other state actors, while neutrality denotes impartial conduct throughout the electoral cycle. A crisis of independence and impartiality, therefore, signifies institutional, political and administrative constraints that hinder the organization from free, fair, transparent and credible elections.

The theoretical foundation of this study draws primarily on the electoral governance framework developed by Mozaffar and Schedler (2002). According to this framework, elections extend far beyond the act of voting and must be understood as a multi-stage governance process involving rule formulation, implementation and adjudication. Failures at any of these stages can undermine electoral credibility and citizen trust.

#### 3.1. Three Levels of Electoral Governance

Mozaffar and Schedler conceptualize electoral governance as a system operating across three interrelated levels: rule-regulation, rule administration and rule adjudication. These levels provide an analytical lens for evaluating the performance of the Election Commission of Bangladesh (Mozaffar & Schedler, 2002).

This framework highlights **Table 1** that credible elections depend not only on the legal framework but also on effective enforcement and impartial adjudication of electoral disputes.

**Table 1.** Three levels of electoral governance.

Level	Description	Key Elements
<b>1. Rule Regulation</b>	Establishment of legal and procedural foundations governing electoral competition	Electoral formulas, constituency delimitation, district magnitude, size of the legislature, election timetable, voting rights (franchise), campaign regulations
<b>2. Rule Administration</b>	Operationalization and administration of electoral rules	Voter, party and candidate registration, voter education, campaign finance oversight, polling station management, voting, counting and result tabulation, election monitoring
<b>3. Rule Adjudication</b>	Interpretation of rules and resolution of electoral disputes	Complaint submission, case processing, dispute resolution mechanisms, enforcement and publication of rulings

### 3.2. Autonomy of the Election Commission

The independence of an Election Commission is closely tied to its institutional autonomy which can be assessed through three key dimensions:

#### 1) Legislative Autonomy

Legislative autonomy refers to the Commission's constitutional and legal protection from executive interference. This includes secure tenure of commissioners, clear constitutional mandates, and authority to regulate electoral affairs independently.

#### 2) Financial Autonomy

Financial autonomy ensures that the Election Commission has adequate and predictable funding approved by the legislature rather than controlled by the executive. Independent budgetary authority allows the Commission to invest in electoral logistics, technology, and personnel without political pressure.

#### 3) Institutional Independence

An independent Election Commission requires a transparent and non-partisan appointment process. Commissioners should be selected through inclusive mechanisms involving neutral stakeholders, with safeguards ensuring political impartiality and accountability.

These dimensions collectively determine the ECB's capacity to function as a credible electoral management body.

### 3.3. Theoretical Underpinning: Rational Choice and Electoral Integrity

Although no single unified theory fully explains free, fair and credible elections, this study draws on rational choice theory, public choice theory, and electoral integrity theory for conceptual clarification.

Rational choice and public choice theories assume that political actors—voters, candidates and institutions—act based on cost-benefit calculations.

Complementing this perspective, Pippa Norris's Electoral Integrity Framework emphasizes that flawed elections—characterized by malpractice, lack of competitiveness and weak institutional oversight—undermine political legitimacy, suppress voter turnout and encourage protest politics (Norris, 2014). This framework is particularly relevant to Bangladesh's 2014 parliamentary election which was widely criticized for being non-competitive due to opposition boycotts and uncontested seats. The subsequent political unrest, loss of life and economic damage illustrate how deficits in electoral integrity can destabilize democratic governance.

### **3.4. Analytical Relevance to Bangladesh**

By integrating electoral governance theory with rational choice and electoral integrity perspectives, this study provides a multidimensional framework for assessing the independence and performance of the Election Commission of Bangladesh. The framework enables a systematic analysis of how institutional weaknesses, political interference and flawed rule enforcement contribute to declining public trust across electoral cycles, particularly in elections held under incumbent governments.

## **4. Instrumental Factors Undermining the Independence and Impartiality of the Election Commission in the 11th Parliamentary Election (2018)**

### **4.1. Background of the 11th Parliamentary Election**

The 11th Parliamentary Election of Bangladesh was held on 30 December 2018, resulting in a decisive victory for the Bangladesh Awami League-led Grand Alliance. The election schedule was initially announced on 8 November 2018 by the Chief Election Commissioner, K. M. Nurul Huda, with polling planned for 23 December 2018. However, following political pressure and logistical considerations, the election date was postponed to 30 December 2018.

A total of 39 registered political parties participated, including the two major political blocs: the Awami League-led Grand Alliance and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-led Jatiya Oikyafront. Altogether 1,848 candidates contested the election, including 128 independent candidates. Voting was postponed in the Gai-bandha-3 constituency due to the death of a candidate, and rescheduled for January 2019.

The election involved over 104 million registered voters who cast ballots at more than 40,000 polling stations nationwide. Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were used for the first time in six constituencies, marking a technological shift in the electoral process of Bangladesh.

### **4.2. Pre-Election Political Environment and Electoral Violence**

The pre-election period was characterized by widespread political violence, arrests and intimidation, particularly targeting opposition parties. Between early and late

December 2018,

- Dozens of violent incidents were reported
- Several fatalities occurred
- Thousands of opposition leaders and activists were reportedly injured or arrested

Such conditions significantly constrained opposition campaigning and created an uneven electoral environment. Electoral violence not only discouraged voter participation but also weakened the Election Commission's ability to ensure neutrality and fairness.

### **4.3. Restrictions on Communication and Information Flow**

On 29 December 2018, mobile internet services (3G and 4G) were suspended nationwide, followed by a complete shutdown on election night. These restrictions limited:

- Communication between voters and political actors
- Media reporting and independent verification
- Real-time election observation

This raised serious concerns regarding transparency and the Election Commission's operational autonomy, as such measures were executed through executive authority.

### **4.4. Post-Election Assessments and International Reactions**

Following the election, several international observers and foreign governments expressed reservations regarding the credibility of the electoral process. A United States Department of State human rights report noted deficiencies affecting the freeness and fairness of the election. Despite these observations, the ruling party rejected the criticisms and maintained that the election was conducted legitimately

#### **4.4.1. Constitutional and Legal Provisions**

Articles 118 - 126 of the Constitution of Bangladesh establish the Election Commission as a constitutionally independent body with extensive legal authority. The Representation of the People Order (RPO), 1972, further empowers the Commission to conduct elections fairly.

Despite these provisions, the Election Commission's operational dependence on the executive branch—particularly for administration, security, and enforcement—has undermined its autonomy.

#### **4.4.2. Appointment Process and Executive Influence**

Election Commissioners are appointed by the President who acts on the advice of the incumbent government. This appointment mechanism has often been criticized for lacking transparency and bipartisan consensus, resulting in public perceptions of political bias.

Although the Election Commission (Appointment) Act, 2022 introduced for-

mal procedures for appointments, the Commission remains administratively dependent on the executive, limiting its functional independence.

#### **4.5. Political Interference and Unequal Playing Field**

Successive governments—particularly during the 10th and 11th parliamentary elections—have exerted significant influence over electoral administration. The Election Commission’s inability to resist such pressure has contributed to:

- Low voter turnout
- Opposition disengagement
- Erosion of public trust

As a result, elections have increasingly been perceived as procedural exercises rather than genuine democratic contests.

#### **4.6. Lack of Political Consensus and Party Cooperation**

Political parties play a central role in democratic governance; yet Bangladesh’s electoral culture is marked by deep polarization and limited inter-party cooperation. Moreover, many parties lack internal democracy and election boycotts have become common.

Without the cooperation of political parties, even a legally empowered Election Commission cannot effectively conduct participatory elections. This lack of trust among political actors directly weakens the electoral neutrality.

#### **4.7. Electoral Violence and Declining Public Trust**

Electoral violence has become a recurring feature of Bangladesh’s political culture. Repeated incidents of violence before and during elections have discouraged public participation and normalized coercive politics.

The failure to effectively prevent or prosecute election-related violence further erodes public trust in both political institutions and the Election Commission.

#### **4.8. Absence of a Neutral Election-Time Government**

The abolition of the non-party caretaker government system through the 15th Constitutional Amendment (2011) fundamentally altered Bangladesh’s electoral framework. Elections are now conducted under the incumbent governments, raising concerns about neutrality. The Election Commission depends heavily on government ministries, law enforcement agencies and civil administration, compromising its independence without an election-time neutral administration.

#### **4.9. Historical Context of Electoral Credibility in Bangladesh**

Bangladesh’s electoral history demonstrates that elections conducted under non-party caretaker governments (1991-2008) were generally perceived as more credible and competitive. In contrast, elections held under incumbent governments—particularly in 2014 and 2018 and 2024—suffered from legitimacy deficits. The 11th parliamentary election reflects this broader historical pattern of declining

electoral credibility following the removal of institutional safeguards.

#### **4.10. Implications for Democratic Governance**

The cumulative effect of political interference, weak enforcement, lack of consensus and administrative dependence resulted in:

- Reduced voter confidence
- Limited political competition
- Questionable electoral legitimacy

These trends pose serious challenges to democratic consolidation in Bangladesh.

The crisis of independence and impartiality of the Election Commission during the 11th parliamentary election can be traced to:

- Executive dominance over electoral administration
- Politicized appointment of commissioners
- Absence of an election-time neutral government
- Electoral violence and opposition suppression
- Weak enforcement of electoral laws
- Lack of inter-party cooperation and trust

Unless these structural and political issues are addressed through institutional reform, consensus-based governance and genuine political commitment, the credibility of future elections in Bangladesh will remain at risk.

### **5. Results and Discussion**

#### **5.1. Discussion**

Since independence, Bangladesh has experienced repeated tensions between its constitutional commitment to electoral democracy and the political realities of election administration. 11 parliamentary elections were conducted between 1973 and 2024 under the supervision of 13 Election Commissions, each operating in distinct political environments. The empirical evidence suggests that the political context in which the Election Commission (EC) operates has been the single most influential factor shaping public trust, electoral competitiveness and credibility.

The theoretical framework of free, fair and credible elections—encompassing an enabling legal framework, universal suffrage, independence of the election authority, neutral administration, voter security, political competition and freedom of expression—exists comprehensively in Bangladesh’s constitutional and legal design. Articles 118 - 126 of the Constitution and the Representation of the People Order (RPO) 1972 establish the EC as an independent constitutional body. However, the gap between formal and functional independence has persisted across electoral cycles.

##### **5.1.1. Legal and Institutional Effectiveness**

The findings show that Bangladesh possesses a robust legal architecture for elec-

tions, compared to that of many established democracies. Electoral laws guarantee secret ballots, direct voting, equal suffrage, and access to the media and observers. Nonetheless, institutional dependence on the executive branch, particularly regarding law enforcement and civil administration, constrains the EC's operational autonomy during elections held under the incumbent political governments.

### 5.1.2. Electoral Context and Credibility

A clear pattern emerges from the analysis of past elections:

- Elections held under non-party caretaker governments (1991, 1996, 2001, 2008) demonstrated higher levels of competitiveness, voter participation, administrative neutrality and acceptance by political parties and international observers.
- Elections held under the incumbent political governments (1973, 1979, 1986, 1988, 2014, 2018 and 2024) were marked by boycotts, allegations of manipulation, uncontested seats, voter intimidation and declining public confidence.

This contrast strongly suggests that public trust in the independence of the EC is context-dependent rather than institution-dependent.

### 5.1.3. Independence of the Election Commission in Practice

Although constitutionally autonomous, the EC's reliance on government-controlled law enforcement agencies undermines its neutrality in contested elections. Reports of partisan behavior by security forces, insufficient deployment to ensure voter safety and executive interference weakened voter confidence, particularly in elections held after the abolition of the caretaker government system.

The 2014 parliamentary election exemplifies this crisis: widespread violence, voter suppression, uncontested constituencies and opposition boycotts severely compromised the electoral legitimacy. Conversely, the 2008 election—conducted under an army-backed caretaker government—aided from enhanced security, a credible voter list, and competitive participation, reinforcing public faith despite extraordinary political circumstances that year.

### 5.1.4. Political Parties and Electoral Behavior

Political parties play a dual role as stakeholders and disruptors of electoral credibility. The findings indicate that confrontational political culture, mutual distrust, election boycotts, monetization of candidacies and post-election rejection of results systematically weaken democratic consolidation. The dominance of financial and muscle power has further eroded the representational quality of elections, replacing ideological competition with patron-client dynamics.

### 5.1.5. Government Neutrality and Centralization

The highly centralized executive structure in Bangladesh amplifies the influence of incumbent governments on electoral outcomes. The inability of the EC to discipline public officials during election periods due to legal and administrative constraints reinforces executive dominance. Electoral credibility remains fragile without the impartial conduct of the governments.

### 5.1.6. Role of Auxiliary Actors

Free and credible elections also depend on auxiliary institutions such as the media, civil society, the judiciary and election observers. While media access and observer participation exist, their effectiveness diminishes when electoral outcomes lack broad political acceptance. The absence of a specialized Electoral Court, unlike in countries such as South Africa, further weakens dispute resolution and public confidence.

## 5.2. Results

### Electoral Outcomes and Public Perception: The 2008 Case

The Ninth Parliamentary Election in 2008 stands out as a notable example of electoral credibility in Bangladesh. The election was conducted peacefully, voter turnout was high and the results were accepted domestically and internationally. The Awami League-led Grand Alliance secured a decisive victory, underpinning the perception of legitimacy.

In **Table 2**, the results indicate that citizen trust in the EC correlates strongly with political neutrality, security conditions, and inclusiveness of competition rather than solely with legal safeguards.

**Table 2.** Comparative result patterns (1973-2024) (Van Ham & Garnett, 2019; International IDEA, 2014).

Electoral Context	Competitiveness	Voter Participation	Trust in EC	Acceptance of Results
Caretaker Government	High	High	Strong	Broad
Political Government	Low-Moderate	Uneven	Weak	Contested

The comparative analysis of **Table 3**, demonstrates that elections held under neutral caretaker governments were more competitive, credible, and broadly accepted. Conversely, elections under incumbent political governments often faced boycotts, uncontested seats, and allegations of manipulation, undermining democratic consolidation.

**Table 3.** Key election results: 1991-2008 (Wikipedia Contributors, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c, 2025g).

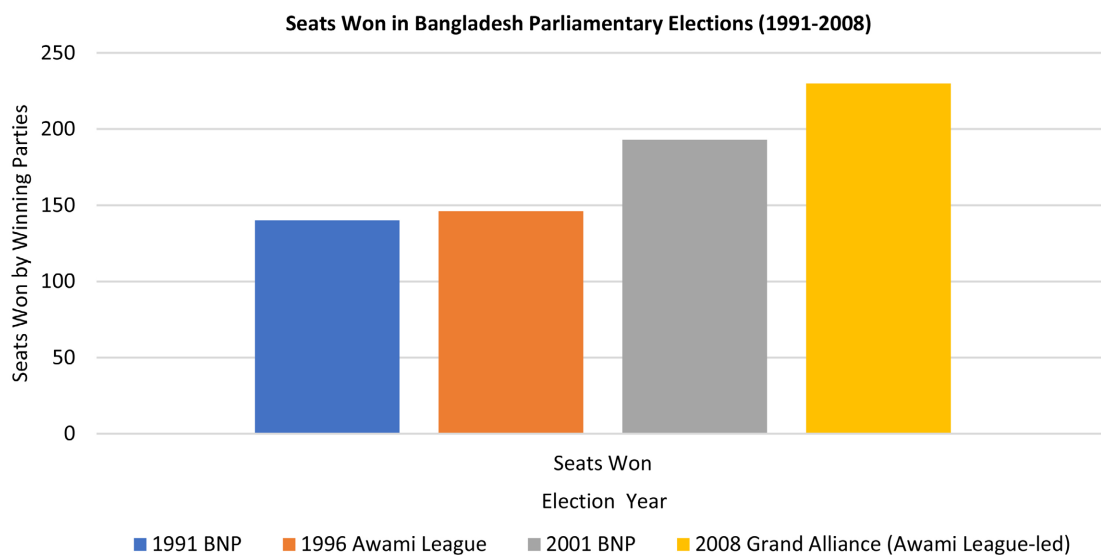
Year	Winning Party/Alliance	Seats Won	% of Casting Votes	% of Total Voter Turnout	Notes
1991	BNP	140	30.81	55.45	Held under caretaker government; competitive election
1996	Awami League	146	37.44	75.60	Excluding 30 reserved seats for women; held under caretaker government

Continued

2001	BNP	193	40.97	74.97%	Caretaker government ensured competitive and credible election
2008	Grand Alliance (Awami League-led)	230	48.04	87.13%	Peaceful election with high participation; “no vote” option negligible

Strengthening the independence and capacity of the EC, ensuring parliament’s responsiveness, and reforming political party structures are crucial for sustainable democratic governance. Implementing these recommendations will enhance electoral credibility, foster public trust and consolidate democracy in Bangladesh’s political landscape.

**Figure 1** depicts the number of parliamentary seats won by the leading parties in Bangladesh from 1991 to 2008. It shows the alternating dominance of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Awami League-led alliances, with the Grand Alliance achieving the highest seat count in 2008. The chart highlights the trends in electoral success and the shifting political landscape over these four elections.



**Figure 1.** Seats won by Winning Parties in Bangladesh Parliamentary Elections (1991-2008).

### 5.3. 2008 Parliamentary Election (9th National Parliament Election)—29 December 2008

#### Key Statistics

**Total Seats:** 300

**Total Votes Cast:** 70,648,485

**Voter Turnout:** Data not explicitly provided, but majority participated

General Structure for Describing Key Observations from a **Table 4:**

**Table 4.** Electoral performance of political parties in Bangladesh's 9th National Parliamentary Election (2008) (Wikipedia contributors, 2025c).

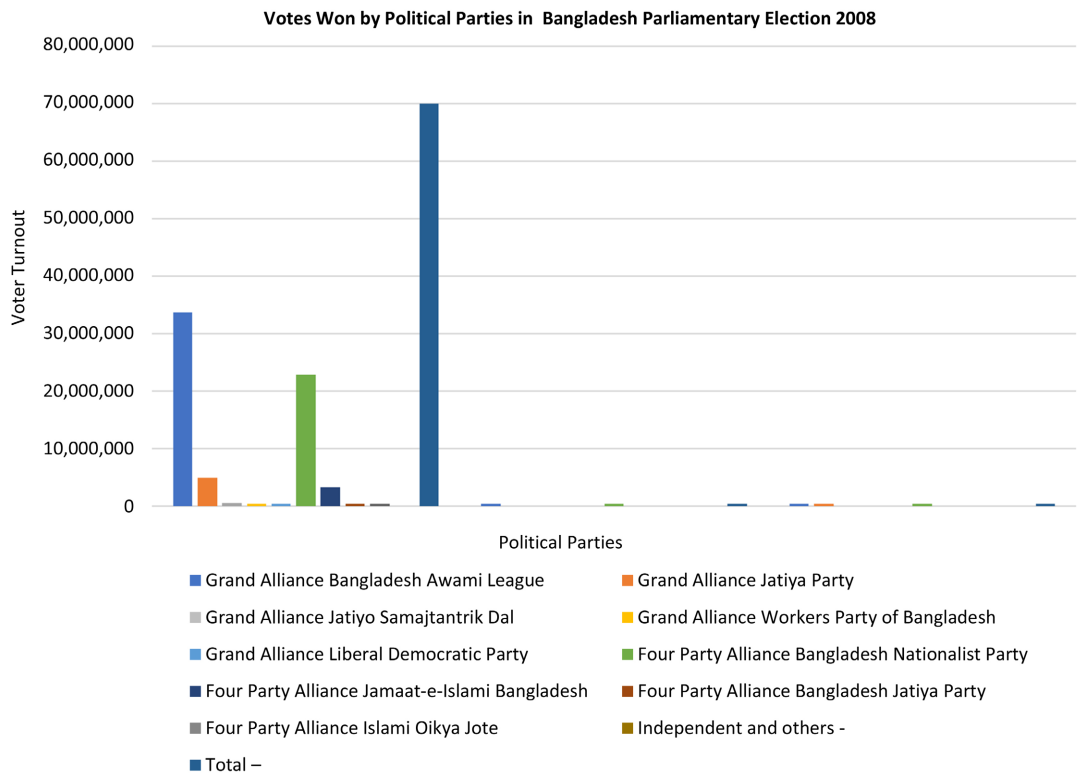
Alliance	Party	Votes	% of Votes	Seats Won
<b>Grand Alliance</b>	Bangladesh Awami League	33,634,629	48.04	230
	Jatiya Party	4,926,360	7.04	27
	Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal	506,605	0.72	3
	Workers Party of Bangladesh	262,093	0.37	2
	Liberal Democratic Party	191,679	0.27	1
<b>Four Party Alliance</b>	Bangladesh Nationalist Party	22,757,101	32.5	30
	Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh	3,289,967	4.7	2
	Bangladesh Jatiya Party	173,292	0.25	1
	Islami Oikya Jote	108,415	0.15	0
<b>Independent and others</b>	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	-	<b>70,012,191</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>300</b>

- The Grand Alliance, led by the Awami League, won a decisive majority, capturing 230 seats (an increase of 168 seats).
- The Four Party Alliance, led by BNP, suffered significant losses, winning only 30 seats.
- Independents and smaller parties together accounted for 4.9% of votes and 4 seats.
- The election was considered peaceful and credible with high voter participation and acceptance of results by most stakeholders.

**Figure 2** shows the distribution of votes and seats among major political parties in the 2008 Bangladesh parliamentary election. The Awami League-led Grand Alliance received the highest number of votes and secured the largest number of seats, followed by the Jatiya Party and Bangladesh Nationalist Party. Minor parties, including the Workers Party, the Liberal Democratic Party, and Jamaat-e-Islami, won relatively few seats. The chart highlights the dominance of the Grand Alliance and the wide gap in the representation between the ruling coalition and the opposition parties.

#### 5.4. 2014 Parliamentary Election (10th National Parliament)—5 January 2014

The 10th general election in Bangladesh was held on 5 January 2014 under highly controversial circumstances marked by a major boycott by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and many opposition parties, resulting in a significant number of uncontested seats and low voter turnout (Wikipedia contributors, 2025d).



**Figure 2.** Distribution of votes among Political Parties in the Bangladesh Parliamentary Election, 2008.

### Key Statistics

- **Election Date:** 5 January 2014
- **Total Parliamentary Seats:** 300
- **Seats Contested:** 147 (out of 300)
- **Seats Uncontested:** 153 (candidates elected without voting) (*IFES Election Guide, 2014*)
- **Approximate Voter Turnout:** ~40% (varies by calculation and contested seats) (*Anadolu Agency, 2024*).

Key observations from **Table 5** include:

**Table 5.** Distribution of seats and vote shares.

Alliance/Party	Votes (approx.)	Percentage of Valid Votes	Seats Won
<b>Grand Alliance</b>			
Awami League (AL)	12,357,374	72.14%	234
Jatiya Party (Ershad)	1,199,727	~7.00%	34
(Other allies: Workers Party of Bangladesh, Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal, etc.)	included in totals	-	combined smaller numbers
<b>Opposition and Others</b>			

**Continued**

Other participating parties and independents	not a major share	-	Remaining seats e.g., Independents and smaller party representatives
<b>Total Seats</b>	-	-	300

- The Awami League dominated with 72.14% of valid votes and 234 seats (the highest single-party tally).
- The Jatiya Party (Ershad), a major Grand Alliance partner, secured ~7.00% of votes and 34 seats.
- Smaller Grand Alliance members contributed minor additional seats.
- Opposition parties, independents, and others held only the remaining seats with a very small combined vote share.
- The results reflect a highly skewed distribution favoring the ruling Grand Alliance in the 300-seat parliament ([Anadolu Agency, 2014](#)).

This keeps the description factual, highlights the landslide nature (very high vote % and seat dominance for AL), and guides the reader back to the table without repeating every detail. If this table is from a specific context (e.g., comparing across elections or analyzing turnout), add a linking sentence like: “Compared to previous elections, this represents one of the highest vote concentrations for the ruling party.”

**Political Context and Observations**

- Major Opposition Boycott: The BNP and other key opposition parties boycotted the election due to demands for a neutral election-time caretaker government, resulting in 153 uncontested seats ([Dhaka Tribune, 2014a](#)).
- Low Turnout: Voter participation was significantly lower than in previous elections, with estimates of approximately 39% - 40% in contested seats ([Dhaka Tribune, 2014b](#)).
- Criticism of Legitimacy: The opposition’s boycott and uncontested seats raised questions about the election’s competitiveness and broad democratic legitimacy.

The 2014 Bangladesh general election resulted in a landslide victory for the Awami League-led Grand Alliance due to the opposition’s decision to abstain. The majority of seats were uncontested, and voter turnout was substantially lower than in fully competitive elections, reflecting deep political tensions over electoral processes at the time.

**5.5. 2018 Bangladesh General Election Results (11th Parliament)**

**Election Date:** 30 December 2018

**Total Seats in Parliament:** 300

**Registered Voters:** Approximately 104,142,381

**Voter Turnout:** 82.58%

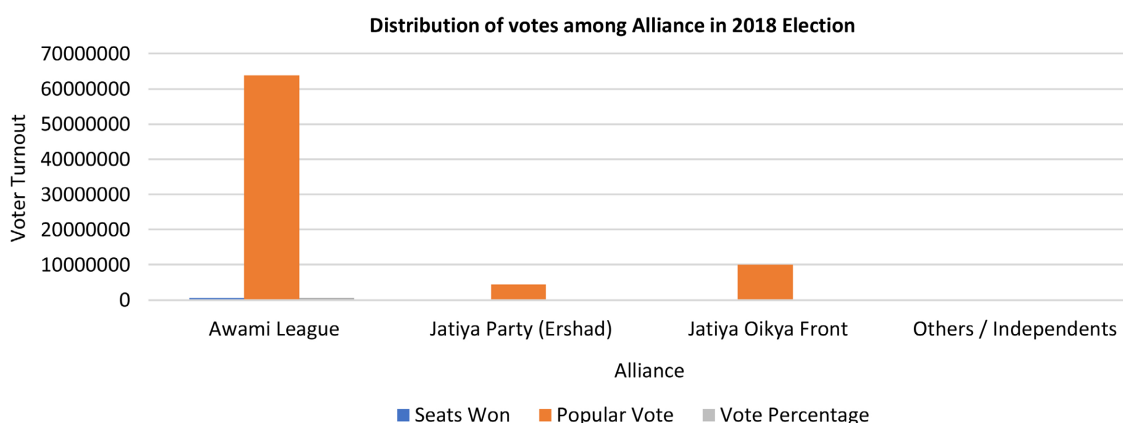
Key observations from **Table 6** include:

**Table 6.** Distribution of seats among Party/Alliance (Wikipedia contributors, 2025e).

Alliance/Party	Seats Won	Popular Vote	Vote %
Grand Alliance			
Awami League	257	63,805,379	74.96%
Jatiya Party (Ershad)*	24	4,443,351	5.22%
Jatiya Oikya Front (Opposition)	6	9,985,202	11.73%
Others (Minor Parties/Independents)	-	-	-
Total	300	-	-

- The Awami League secured a commanding 257 seats out of 300, backed by 74.96% of the popular vote (63,805,379 votes), marking a substantial landslide.
- The Jatiya Party (Ershad), as a Grand Alliance partner, won 24 seats with 5.22% of votes (4,443,351).
- The Jatiya Oikya Front (opposition-aligned) received a notable 11.73% vote share (9,985,202 votes) but translated into only 6 seats, indicating inefficiencies in seat conversion.
- Others (minor parties and independents) filled the remaining seats with minor or unallocated vote shares.
- The results demonstrate extreme seat concentration within the Grand Alliance, giving it supermajority control of parliament.

**Figure 3** shows that the 2018 Bangladesh national election resulted in a landslide victory for the Awami League-led Grand Alliance, which secured 257 out of 300 parliamentary seats, reflecting approximately 75% of popular votes. Opposition parties, including the Jatiya Party (24 seats) and the Jatiya Oikya Front (6 seats), had minimal representation while minor parties and independents held the rest of the seats. This distribution highlights the dominance of the ruling coalition, the limited presence of opposition voices and the influence of the first-past-the-post system on seat allocation, raising questions regarding parliamentary competitiveness and political pluralism.

**Figure 3.** Distribution of votes among alliance/party in the Bangladesh National Election 2018.

### 5.5.1. Key Points from the 2018 Election

- With 257 out of 300 seats, the Awami League-led Grand Alliance won a landslide victory and continued to be the leading political force in the Jatiya Sangsad.
- The Jatiya Oikya Front, which included the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and allied groups, managed to win only 6 seats, marking one of the lowest seat tallies for the opposition in decades ([Business Standard \(ANI\), 2018](#)).
- Smaller parties and independents captured the remaining seats, reflecting a fragmented but minimal presence outside the two main political blocs ([Daily Sun, 2018](#)).
- According to a detailed center-wise analysis, Awami League candidates received approximately 76.86% of the valid votes, while the paddy sheaf symbol (BNP/coalition vote) accounted for approximately 13.45%, and the plow symbol (Jatiya Party) for approximately 5.38%.

### 5.5.2. Voting Pattern and Participation

- The election saw broad voter participation, with turnout rates exceeding 80% in many constituencies, although turnout varied significantly across regions.
- Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were used in several centres, but the majority of votes were cast using traditional ballot papers.

### 5.5.3. Context and Interpretation

- The 2018 election was more competitive than the 2014 polls, with the main opposition participating; however, the results were still heavily skewed toward the ruling alliance ([The Financial Express, 2018](#)).
- Opposition parties raised concerns about irregularities and electoral fairness, although the official results showed a strong electoral victory for the ruling parties ([Dhaka Tribune, 2018](#)).

## 5.6. 2024 Bangladesh Parliamentary Election Results—12th Jatiya Sangsad

**Election Date:** 7 January 2024

**Total Parliamentary Seats:** 300 (298 contested, 1 postponed, 1 withheld)

**Voter Turnout:** 41.8% (disputed)

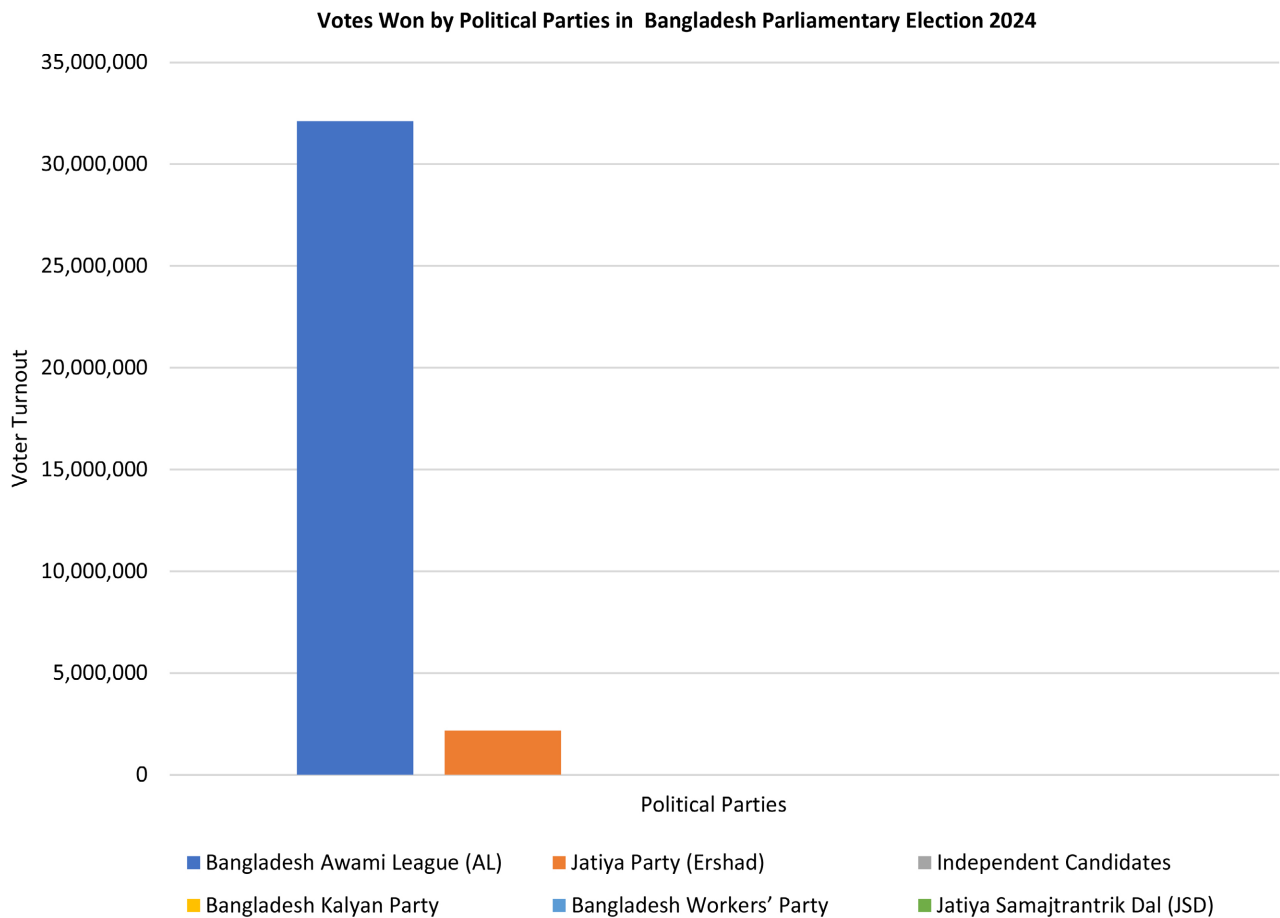
Key observations from [Table 7](#) include:

**Table 7.** Distribution of votes and seats in 2024 election.

Alliance/Party	Popular Votes	Percentage of Votes	Seats Won
Bangladesh Awami League (AL)	32,113,240	63.85%	224
Jatiya Party (Ershad)	2,179,673	4.33%	11
Independent Candidates	-	-	62
<b>Bangladesh Kalyan Party</b>	-	-	1

## Continued

Bangladesh Workers' Party	-	-	1
<u>Jatiya Samajtrantik Dal (JSD)</u>	-	-	<u>1</u>
<b>Total Seats</b>	-	-	300



**Figure 4.** Distribution of votes among alliance/parties in Bangladesh National Election 2024.

As shown in **Figure 4**, public trust in the Election Commission varies significantly across different electoral contexts. Elections conducted under caretaker governments demonstrate higher levels of voter participation, competitiveness, and public confidence, whereas elections held under incumbent political governments exhibit comparatively lower trust, reduced competitiveness, and contested legitimacy.

- The Bangladesh Awami League (AL) won the largest share with 224 seats, establishing a clear parliamentary majority.
- Independent candidates ranked second, securing 62 seats (often described as providing nominal contestation in a low-competition environment).
- The Jatiya Party (Ershad) gained 11 seats, maintaining its role as a junior partner/allied opposition.

- Minor allied or supportive parties each won 1 seat: Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), Bangladesh Kalyan Party, and Bangladesh Workers' Party.
- Results covered 300 seats at announcement, underscoring the AL-led coalition's overwhelming control of the legislature.
- Turnout varied significantly across constituencies, with the lowest participation ( $\approx 13\%$ ) in Dhaka-15 and the highest ( $\approx 87\%$ ) in Gopalganj-3 (where the Prime Minister won overwhelmingly) (IFES Election Guide, 2018).

### 5.6.1. Key Points from the 2024 Elections

- The ruling Awami League (AL) secured a large majority, enabling its leader to continue as Prime Minister for another term.
- A significant number of parliamentary seats were won by independent candidates, reflecting local dynamics and, in some cases, arrangements within the broader political landscape (Wikipedia contributors, 2025f).
- The Jatiya Party (Ershad) remained the largest formal opposition party in the parliament, albeit with a relatively small seat count (The Business Standard, 2024).

### 5.6.2. Turnout and Participation

- Nationwide voter turnout was low ( $\sim 41.8\%$ ), widely attributed to opposition boycotts and voter disengagement in many areas (Dhaka Tribune, 2024).
- Large variations existed across constituencies: some areas reported very low participation (as low as  $\sim 13\%$ ), while others recorded much higher engagement. Rates.

### 5.6.3. Analytical Notes

- The 2024 election result continued a trend of dominance by the ruling party, often amid significant opposition absence or reduced participation (The Daily Star, 2024; Al Jazeera, 2024).
- The large number of independent winners suggests complex local-level political dynamics, including candidates informally associated with major parties or local elites.

The relatively low turnout has been discussed as an indicator of public disengagement or protest abstention, especially compared with fully competitive elections in Bangladesh's past elections.

## 6. Recommendations

Parliamentary and local elections are the cornerstone of democratic governance in Bangladesh. While these elections have been controversial at times, they have also attracted high levels of citizen participation, demonstrating both support for democracy and engagement with political processes. However, the history of Bangladesh since independence illustrates the fragility of democratic institutions. To consolidate democracy and prevent setbacks due to corruption, violence, or partisanship, all stakeholders—Election Commission, Parliament, political parties and civil society—must act decisively.

## 6.1. Election Commission (EC)

### 1) Strengthening Institutional Capacity

The EC has demonstrated transparency and accountability, particularly in producing accurate national voter lists and fairly administering elections. Continued support from parliament and political parties is critical to ensure that the EC has the resources, legal authority, and operational autonomy needed for future elections.

### 2) Improving Voter Access and Education

Despite improvements in voter rolls and national ID cards, voters still face challenges in locating polling stations and confirming registration details. The EC should implement continuous voter education programs to ensure that citizens can participate independently without relying on political parties.

### 3) Professional Training and Ballot Secrecy

Election officials should receive ongoing professional training to enhance their non-partisanship and adherence to electoral protocols. Special attention should be paid to polling booth arrangements to safeguard ballot secrecy, which is critical to public confidence.

### 4) Nonpartisan Domestic Observation

Domestic election monitoring can strengthen transparency and citizen ownership of the electoral process. The EC should review accreditation procedures for domestic observers to ensure that they can operate independently of election officials, in alignment with international standards.

### 5) Campaign Finance Management

Current expenditure limits often do not reflect actual campaign costs. The EC should review campaign finance regulations in consultation with political parties and independent experts, and ensure the robust enforcement of the code of conduct.

### 6) Timely Complaint Adjudication

The EC should continue to resolve complaints transparently and promptly, drawing lessons from successful interventions in past upazila elections where the reallocation of neutral staff restored public confidence.

### 7) Ongoing Dialogue with Political Parties

Continued consultation on the code of conduct and electoral procedures will help dispel doubts regarding the EC's impartiality and enhance election credibility.

## 6.2. Parliament

### 1) Enhancing Institutional Responsiveness

Beyond election management, the parliament must ensure effective and transparent governance. Opposition MPs should engage constructively in legislative processes, respect democratic norms, and avoid boycotts as a form of protest.

### 2) Protecting Minority Rights

Parliamentary rules should safeguard the rights of minority parties and enable equitable participation in debates and decision-making.

### **3) Promoting Accountability**

Members of parliament must recognize their dual responsibility to their political party and constituents. This entails upholding transparency, delivering services, and participating in constructive dialogues.

## **6.3. Political Parties**

### **1) Internal Democratization**

Political parties should enhance internal transparency, particularly in candidate selection, finance management and decision-making procedures. Open and inclusive structures reduce the risk of corruption and authoritarian practices when parties gain power.

### **2) Commitment to Democratic Norms**

Parties must accept election outcomes, refrain from boycotts or street protests, and resolve disagreements within the constitutional mechanisms.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that the credibility of elections in Bangladesh is inseparably linked to public trust in the independence and neutrality of the Election Commission (EC), which, in turn, shapes the legitimacy of the democratic governance. By examining four national parliamentary elections—2008, 2014, 2018 and 2024—this study reveals a clear downward trend in public trust corresponding to the perceived erosion of electoral competitiveness, inclusiveness and institutional autonomy.

The 2008 election, conducted under a non-party caretaker framework, stands out as a benchmark for electoral credibility, characterized by high voter turnout, broad political participation, and widespread domestic and international acceptance of the results. In contrast, elections held under incumbent governments—particularly in 2014, 2018, and 2024—were marked by opposition boycotts, allegations of administrative bias, uneven enforcement of electoral laws and restrictions on political competition. These conditions significantly weakened citizens' ability to exercise their electoral choice, thereby undermining their trust in the EC and diminishing the democratic legitimacy of elected governments.

The findings further indicate that constitutional provisions and election-related laws alone are insufficient to ensure free, fair, and credible elections if the broader political environment constrains the operational independence of the EC. The study shows that electoral governance in Bangladesh is influenced by multiple interacting actors—incumbent governments, political parties, law enforcement agencies, civil society, and the media. When these actors fail to operate within a framework of mutual trust, restraint, and accountability, the EC's formal authority becomes ineffective. Consequently, elections risk becoming procedural exercises rather than genuine expressions of the popular will.

Declining voter turnout, limited electoral competition, and public perceptions of intimidation and uneven enforcement have further eroded confidence in the recent elections. Public disengagement reflects not political apathy but rather

skepticism regarding the meaningfulness of participation in an electoral process perceived as predetermined. This erosion of trust poses long-term risks to democratic stability, social cohesion, and the rule of law.

In conclusion, restoring public trust in Bangladesh's electoral system requires more than administrative reform. It demands genuine political commitment to electoral integrity, strengthened legal and financial autonomy of the Election Commission, inclusive dialogue among political parties and effective safeguards against executive interference. Without credible elections accepted by all major stakeholders, democratic governance in Bangladesh will remain fragile. Rebuilding trust in the Election Commission is, therefore, not merely an institutional challenge but a foundational requirement for sustaining democracy and protecting the political rights of citizens.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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