58 out of 300 seats as terrorism-prone constituencies based on their crime records at the time of the 8th parliamentary elections, and studied the election results of those constituencies. Eleven constituencies which had arguably been affected most by terrorism were designated the "Core Terrorism Prone Areas" (CPT). Another 19 constituencies were classified as "Medium Terrorism Prone Areas" (MTP). Still another 28 constituencies were categorised as "Broadly defined Terrorism Prone Areas" (BDTP). Election results show that Awami League won 3 seats in 1991, 7 seats in 1996 and only 1 seat in 2001 in the 11 CPT areas. On the other hand, BNP won 7, 3 and 10 seats, respectively, in the same areas. In the 58 terrorism prone area seats, Awami League bagged 20, 38 and 7 seats respectively, while the BNP alliance won 31, 17 and 49 seats. Clearly, the 4-party alliance won more seats in 2001 in all terrorism prone areas. According to Dr. Karim, two factors affected the performance of Awami League candidates in 2001: the alliance arithmetic (i.e. BNP's formation of an alliance with Jamaat and two other parties) and the more unfavourable "violent" image of their candidates in those constituencies. Thus, while widespread violence and terrorism are a reality in the electoral politics of countries like Bangladesh, voters, given the chance, appear to have voted against candidates with such images.

Area	No.	Seats won by AL			Seats won by BNP			Seats won by others		
		1991	1996	2001	1991	1996	2001	1991	1996	2001
Core terrorism prone areas (CPT)	11	3	7	1	7	3	10	1	1	0
Medium terrorism prone areas (MPT)	19	9	11	4	8	7	15	2	1	0
Broadly defined terrorism prone areas (BDTP)	28	8	20	2	16	7	24	5	1	2
All terrorism prone areas	58	20	38	7	31*	17	49	8	3	2

*Represent 4-party alliance seats for BNP (it was 30 seats)

Source: Warned Karim, Elections Under a Caretaker Government, (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 2004)

Thus, while widespread violence and terrorism are a reality in the electoral politics of countries like Bangladesh, voters, given the chance, appear to have voted against candidates with such images.

Official influence

Neutrality of the government in power, and of other relevant institutions including the Election Commission, is a prerequisite for free, fair and acceptable elections. Undue official influence can, in fact, cause havoc on election outcomes. Bangladesh's experience shows that such influence can work at every step of the election process and distort election results.

In Bangladesh, one of the sources of unwarranted official influence was the lack of independence of the EC. Although the EC was set up as an independent constitutional body in Bangladesh, it was brought under the president's secretariat during the Ershad regime as part of an administrative reorganisation scheme. This clearly enabled the chief executive of the republic to interfere in its functioning.

The use of the EC for partisan ends has always been a problem in Bangladesh, but it was more so during the last government. For example, during the early part of The 4-party alliance government, the secretary of the EC was totally partisan, and he and some of his colleagues often pursued their partisan interests even by defying the commission. He was also instrumental in hiring dozens of ruling party cadres as grassroots level election officers, some of whom were later released by the reconstituted EC. The request of the chief election commissioner, who was totally frustrated, to transfer the secretary was not also heeded by the government. This particular person, it may be noted, was later rewarded by the last government by elevation to the position of election commissioner.

In Bangladesh, the appointment of election commissioners has also been a means of exerting influence on the elections. During the Awami League regime, one former government official, who took a public position against the first BNP government, was appointed election commissioner. However, all the appointments of the 4-party alliance government were more or less partisan, and some were nakedly so. In fact, the Chief Election Commissioner Justice M.A. Aziz's appointment, made on partisan considerations, was recently found to be unconstitutional by the High Court. More seriously, one of the commissioners even sought the BNP nomination for parliamentary election.

During the last regime, the partisan EC made a mess of the preparation of the electoral roll, allegedly padding the numbers with the fake registration of over one crore voters. The electoral roll issue became