

# Working out an electoral security model



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I have, in my previous article, highlighted the rationale for having armed forces on the ground during elections because of the highly tense political climate and the virulent atmosphere of confrontational politics, especially when the next general election is likely to be held without the dissolution of Parliament. It would be a daunting task for the Election Commission, however powerful it may appear theoretically, to conduct a free, fair and all-inclusive election without any violence, which characterised elections in the last few years.

I have also pointed out four factors that were proven to be a drag and observed in the elections between 2014 and 2016, including the last Union Council elections in which more than 100 lives were lost in violence. Security is a factor that remains ignored at the planning stage. The necessity of a proactive, long-term plan is less understood by the relevant quarters.

The nature of an election makes it vulnerable to a range of security threats such as that against the participants, infrastructure, information and materials. Electoral violence has been a matter of concern in Bangladesh since the first general election in 1973. It takes an enormous amount of effort for the Electoral Management Body (EMB), stakeholders and the security apparatus to assess, plan and monitor the election process and handle matters related to resources and

deployment. Electoral security requires meticulous planning by the EC with the scale of violence increasing with every election, and this has been the case since the liberation, particularly between the two main political groups. Since 1991, electoral violence has resulted mainly from conflicts between the supporters of Awami League and BNP in the general elections, and the rival groups in local elections. It is generally seen that violence is more intense in all kinds of local elections, especially in rural areas.

Nevertheless, electoral violence in Bangladesh is not the by-product of ethnic clashes unlike in countries in Africa and parts of Asia, yet at times it is directed against a particular political and minority group. Violence often serves as a tool used to skew election results in favour of particular parties or candidates. In the general elections, violence is orchestrated more under the influence of political parties than individual candidates, but the opposite is observed in local body elections, although of late these have also turned into multiparty elections. The reason behind that is, in parliamentary or general elections, what is at stake is 'state power' which is not the case in other elections. According to an election analyst, "a careful observation of the last five parliamentary elections suggests that different motives are behind electoral violence in Bangladesh. The main reason is to influence the electoral process, but it is possible to disaggregate further motives behind the violence".

Election violence is not unique in Bangladesh but here it is more intense than the other three South

Asian countries namely India, Nepal and Pakistan. However, the strongest of all reasons for the unabated violence during elections in Bangladesh is the confrontational politics between the two main political parties and the resultant antagonistic bipolar politics. Under such circumstances, a patron-client system casts shadows on all the

identified as supporters of the opponent, restrict the space for rival party or candidates, and gain ascendancy over rival party supporters. Election-day violence is meant to intimidate voters, polling personnel, manipulate ballots and influence vote counting. Post-poll violence is aimed at punishing rival candidates or assumed groups of

during elections held under CTG whereas the scale was higher in elections held under party governments. But the key reason for dispute lies in the incumbent government's attempts to influence the electoral process, resulting in voters' mistrust of the electoral system. Examples include the February 1996 and January 2014 elections; though on

Little rational thought has gone into the planning for electoral security in Bangladesh, and no concept has been developed either. Electoral security arrangements require systemic planning based on thorough assessment of all the relevant factors. In this regard, every aspect of security has to be taken into consideration. After assessing the situation and the reality on the ground, the entire security planning needs to be made in a way that covers various phases from pre-poll to post-poll.

The need for tighter electoral security has been felt particularly in elections under party governments. Security measures employed were not based on pro-active planning, rather on the massing of security agencies which in many cases have proved to be ineffective. This can be seen from the points of expenditures and outcomes. For example, deployment of all available agencies including the armed forces in 2014 could not prevent the worst violence in the history of parliamentary elections in Bangladesh. The same thing happened to local elections held under EC (for example, over 101 people were killed in the Union Council elections in 2016 despite the heaviest-ever deployment of security forces.)

Therefore, it is not the number of forces but how security is planned that matters more. We need to devise a plan based on a template made out of past experiences and future anticipations in this charged political environment—which will also serve us in future elections. Let it be prudently decided by the EC, which is the guarantor of violence-free elections.



Since 1991, electoral violence has resulted mainly from conflicts between the supporters of Awami League and BNP in the general elections, and the rival groups in local elections.

PHOTO: STAR

DR. ABDULLAH SHIBLI

FOR many years now, Greece has been considered the "sick man" of the European Union (EU). The Greek economy was on the verge of collapse right after the major world economic and financial meltdown that happened in 2009 and 2010. Thanks to the financial assistance from IMF, EU and the European Bank (ECB), Greece was able to avoid declaring bankruptcy and stay on the path to economic recovery. It's been a few years since then, and I undertook a ten-day visit to the birthplace of Western civilisation to see first-hand how the country is doing, and most importantly to assess how the

ordinary person fared during the brutal years of budget cutbacks and austerity measures imposed by Greece's benefactors. In my view, it was a close call and the Greeks have a few more years to go before it can finally say "we survived!"

A few words summarising what happened is in order. The Greek government borrowed heavily during the period 1999-2007 to fund extravagant projects, including the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens and to cover up its practice of deficit financing. Greece's debt-to-GDP ratio rose to 127 percent in 2009 and to 146 percent in 2010. Greece faced the twin challenges of inability to service its international debts and meet its domestic obligations. In May 2010, the IMF, ECB, and European Commission (EC) offered a bailout package of more than 110 billion Euros on a quid pro quo basis: Greece promised to undertake a

programme of structural reforms (drastic spending cuts, tax rises, and labour market and pension reforms), other austerity measures, and privatisation in return for the loan to be released in four tranches.

Unfortunately, Greece dragged its feet in implementing its side of the bargain, and needed a second bailout in 2011. In an article published by *The Daily Star* on July 15, 2011, entitled "A Greek Tragedy", I wrote very pessimistically, "Only time will tell if Humpty Dumpty, after the fall, can be put together again. Or are we in for a long-drawn out Greek Tragedy!" Many, including myself, were sceptical if the Greek electorate would put up with the budget cuts, reduction in public services, and regulatory oversight by bureaucrats in Brussels. There was the possibility that Greece would leave EU and trigger a "Grexit" crisis.

Fortunately, however, since those

dark days of 2014, the Greek economy appears to have been on the mend. Unemployment has dropped from a peak of 27 percent to 23 percent, and the national budget has had a surplus in the latest quarter. Of the three countries—Italy, Spain and Greece—in the EU which were hit the hardest by the economic crisis of 2009-2012, Greece has made the most remarkable comeback.

For the past few months, I wanted to visit the country which received such poor grades from me. And even now, many European journalists who got tired of Grexit have coined the term "Grecis" for "sick of Greece". What is life like for the average person? Why hasn't Greece pulled out from EU and why does it still use the Euro? These are some of the questions I had when I landed in Athens on August 12th. My first impression is that while the man on the street hates the government's belt-tightening measures, Prime Minister Tsipras has managed to keep the creditors happy. And a majority of Greek citizens want to remain in the EU! However, there are still some big uncertainties that lie ahead for the

Greek economy.

My travels in Greece took me to the bustling bazaars of Plaka and Omonia in the heart of Athens and to the flea market in Monastiraki on the foothills of Acropolis, as well as to the tourist attractions in Delphi and Agora. We also wanted to visit the island of Crete, the "honeymoon capital" in the Mediterranean Sea. The cab driver who took us from the airport to the hotel confirmed that Crete has seen a sharp increase in tourists coming in from all corners of Europe, but it is still not at a level comparable to the pre-Crisis days. Business owners in every commercial centre we visited on the island, including the "souks" (small shops) in Chania and Heraklion, confirmed that there has been an uptick in tourist cash flows. However, there is also a mood of despondency and Cretans point to the "good old days" of yesteryears.

The hard-nosed bailout negotiations with EU have also taken its toll on the Greek mood and psyche. They feel very apologetic for their past economic policies and citizens point their fingers at the politicians. Protest demonstrations

are an everyday feature and during our stay, on the night of August 19th, a section of the city centre near Omonia was cordoned off to foreigners. The next morning, police in riot gear could be seen patrolling the streets in front of our hotel, and the uniformed officers advised us to avoid certain areas.

On the positive side, Greece is still a great bargain, and the major tourist attractions such as the Parthenon and other historical sites are very well-maintained, and the Mediterranean islands of Santorini, Crete and others offer great bang for the buck. While Greece has very few major industries, the Ministry of Culture appears to have done well to preserve and promote its historic sites. The infrastructure, including transportation, and the hospitality sector and facilities are still in A1 condition. And finally, the culture of hospitality is ingrained among the Greeks and that is likely to keep the appreciative tourists from the resurgent European economies and beyond coming back and back again.

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Protesters gather outside the Hilton hotel in Athens, where Greek officials hold meetings with the representatives from its creditors on March 1, 2017.

PHOTO: AFP

**QUOTABLE Quote**

BETTER than a thousand hollow words, is one word that brings peace.

**BUDDHA**  
INDIAN ASCETIC AND SAGE ON WHOSE TEACHINGS BUDDHISM WAS FOUND

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- 1 Climbers' spikes
- 7 Start a hand
- 11 2004 Will Smith movie
- 12 Huron neighbor
- 13 African ox
- 15 Zellweger of "Chicago"
- 16 Betting group
- 18 Mardi Gras wear
- 21 Field crop
- 22 Thin mattresses
- 24 In the style of
- 25 Knight's address
- 26 Tell tales
- 27 Store visitor
- 29 Piccolo's cousin
- 30 Authentic
- 31 Took the bus
- 32 Low point
- 34 "Now You See Me" actor
- 40 Skating jump
- 41 Avoided
- 42 Hand over
- 43 Cared for
- DOWN**
- 1 Snapshot
- 2 Nest-egg account
- 3 High point
- 4 King of the fairies
- 5 Prize funder
- 6 Leave speechless
- 7 Conquer
- 8 Stretch of history
- 9 Feel poorly
- 10 Zodiac cat
- 14 Largest bone
- 16 Arctic
- 17 Make speeches
- 19 Sturdy
- 20 Cutlery piece
- 21 Upper limit
- 22 Fish feature
- 23 Spot
- 25 Kind of power
- 28 Irritate
- 29 With no serious intent
- 31 Biathlon need
- 33 Song for two
- 34 Comic Bernie
- 35 Chopping need
- 36 Cardinal color
- 37 Throw in
- 38 Director Ang
- 39 Strange

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

S H I V A D O L T S  
H E R O S I N A W E  
E X A C T S E T I N  
A R A B E N D  
P A S T O R A L  
A L A I T R O W E L  
L O G O N S C A R E  
L E A N O N A R I D  
S W E E T P E A  
R A M T O N I  
I R I S H S O D A S  
O N C U E U N I T E  
T O K E N E S S E X

**ঈদ মোবারক**

কোরবানিকৃত পশুর উচ্ছিষ্টাংশ পরিবেশসম্মতভাবে অপসারণে করণীয়ঃ

সিটি কর্পোরেশনের নির্ধারিত স্থানে পশু কোরবানি করুন।  
রাস্তার উপরে পশু জবাই করা হতে বিরত থাকুন।

পশু জবাইয়ের পূর্বে গর্ত করে, গর্তের মধ্যে রক্ত, গোবর ও পরিত্যক্ত অংশ রেখে মাটি চাপা দিন।

জবাইকৃত পশুর উচ্ছিষ্টাংশ যত্রতত্র না ফেলে ডাস্টবিন অথবা নির্ধারিত স্থানে ফেলুন।

কোরবানির বর্জ্য অপসারণ বা কোরবানির গোশত বিতরণে পরিবেশসম্মত ব্যাগ/পাত্র ব্যবহার করুন।

কোরবানিকৃত পশুর বর্জ্য দ্রুত অপসারণে সিটি কর্পোরেশন অথবা পৌরসভা/ইউনিয়ন পরিষদকে সহায়তা করুন এবং সুস্থ পরিবেশ নিশ্চিত করে ধর্মীয় ও নৈতিক দায়িত্ব পালন করুন।

**পরিষ্কার-পরিচ্ছন্নতা ঈমানের অঙ্গ**

পরিবেশ অধিদপ্তর, পরিবেশ ও বন মন্ত্রণালয়