



**The Changing Landscape of Bangladesh's Election Campaigns: A  
Cross-Sectional Study on National and Local Level**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Bangladesh, a nation with a long-standing democratic tradition, holds regular elections at both national and local levels. Election campaigns in Bangladesh are vibrant and essential to the democratic process, significantly impacting public interest, participation, and election results. Each campaign represents distinct ideologies and policy proposals, attracting voters' attention through various means. This study aims to identify the changing landscape of Bangladesh's election campaigns. While previous research has focused on the nature, purpose, cost, and impact of digital media on Bangladeshi campaigns, and voters' expectations about candidates and campaigns, this study investigates the historical trends and evolution of campaign strategies since Bangladesh's independence. Employing a mixed-methods approach in Sirajganj and Trishal upazilas, the study utilized a questionnaire survey (N=100) alongside key informant interviews with seven individuals directly involved in election-related activities. Data analysis using SPSS revealed an evolution of campaign strategies in Bangladesh since independence and assessed the utilization of digital media in both national and local elections. The study further explores the differences between campaign strategies at both national and local level elections and found that local elections take a community focused approach, tackling local pressing issues. This level of campaigning depends on neighborhood events, door-to-door canvassing, and grassroots mobilization. On the other hand, to reach a wider audience, national-level campaigns use broad mass media outreach, such as radio, television, and social media.*

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## **1. Introduction**

Bangladesh is a South Asian country with a parliamentary style of government. A latest data of Bangladesh Election Commission (EC) reflects the total number of voters of the country is 127.6 million (Bangladesh Election Commission, 2025). The country operates primarily under a dual-tiered system of governance, consisting of a national or central level and a local level. Typically, elections are conducted democratically at each of these levels once every five years. This is the process by which people exercise their franchise and elect their representatives, who subsequently deliver efficient and effective services for the people.

Elections are a fundamental component of the democratic system, providing citizens with the opportunity to exercise their right to choose the individuals who will govern. Nevertheless, elections in Bangladesh have been utilized as tools to provide the administration with a chance to validate its authority (Huque & Hakim, 1993).

Since its establishment as an independent country in 1971, the election has consistently been a crucial barometer of the political atmosphere and trajectory. The election campaign plays as X- factor in ensuring success in any election, especially in the Indian subcontinent. This is mostly because people are highly engaged in, excited and emotional about the political process. During election campaigns, factors such as religious beliefs, family history, level of education, and socioeconomic status are used as important indicators. In the "pre-modern" phase, political organizations had significant control over the electoral campaign process. A party-dominated communication system was seen in this phase (Enli, 2017). The rise of broadcast media, especially television, created a major shift. It started a "modern" and later "professionalized" era of campaigning, where media-focused strategies and political marketing became

dominant (Römmele & von Schneidmesser, 2016); (Schafferer, 2006).

The way election campaigns are run today is affected by changes in democracy and technology happening around the world. Countries with fair and excellent electoral systems can teach us a lot about how to run an effective election campaign. Sweden, Norway, and Canada are frequently seen as exemplars due to their electoral systems that are characterized by transparency, inclusivity, and responsibility. The use of technology in these democratic nations has enabled effective voter participation and protected the integrity of their voting systems. Democratic traditions of the countries in South Asian region are both diverse and comprehensive, making it a noteworthy case study. India, being the largest democracy in the world (BBC, 2024), manages the complexities of organizing elections across a vast range of states, but the new technology, including digital media, is crucial in effectively reaching the large and diverse group of voters.

The evolution of election campaigns in Bangladesh since their inception has undergone a noteworthy alteration. Political parties and candidates' strategies, forms of communication, and approaches to outreach have evolved in response to the changing socio-political context. According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), 59.2% of the households of Bangladesh now have access to the internet and 74.9% families have at least one smart phone (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2025). Bangladesh is home to 60 million social media user which consists 34.3% of the total population (Kemp, 2025). Considering the situation, the use of digital media in political campaigns in Bangladesh has increased significantly in recent years, mirroring worldwide trends. Social media platforms, news websites, and TV channels have become essential instruments for political communication, enabling candidates to interact with people in

a more direct and immediate manner. However, it is still unclear if online popularity or physical appearance leads to real electoral success (Bilson et al., 2025). This study explores the patterns of election campaigns and its evolution over the years.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

The political landscape of Bangladesh has seen multiple transformations since gaining independence in 1971. Whenever a political party or individuals have introduced innovative or imitative initiatives or when unforeseen political incidents have arisen, it has benefited the parties in their election campaigns and enabled them to seize power. In contemporary times, a salient occurrence has been the upsurge in the utilization of digital media in electoral campaigns. Bangladesh, like other countries across the globe, has experienced the swift incorporation of digital platforms into many parts of life, including political involvement. Additionally, analyzing election campaigns in Bangladesh at national and local levels offers a detailed perception of the country's political scenario. The unlike dynamics and interests pertaining to these elections result in unique strategies employed by political entities.

This study aims to scrutinize the historical trends, thereby facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the transformation of election campaigns throughout the years. The study uses a cross-sectional approach to look at how election campaigns change over time and what factors affect them. It focuses on the role of digital media and the differences between campaigns at the national and local levels. The study aims to contribute valuable insights by looking into these issues.

The landscape of election campaigning keeps changing significantly worldwide and this is also the case in Bangladesh. In Western democracies, many studies have examined the shift from traditional to digital methods. Studies include topics such as how social

media reduces news consumption gaps in Norway (Haugsgjerd & Karlsen, 2022) and what factors affect political knowledge among first-time voters in Romania (Gherghina & Marian, 2024). However, there is very little research on how these changes happen in the Global South, especially in Bangladesh. Bangladesh has an active and often tense political culture, a fast-growing internet and social media base, and a history of both democratic elections and instability (Mahmud, 2022). In the 2018 national election, all major parties used social media more, even though the election was controversial (Sakib et al., 2024; Muzaffar et al., 2020).

The study area is narrow but specific to identify relations among the variables. Here, the changing landscape of Bangladesh's election campaigns is a dependent variable, and independent variables are- election financing, digital media utilization, incentives to the voter, over ambitious manifesto, influential issues, national and local level campaign pattern. The study aims to add a standard source of knowledge that may be helpful to recover the gaps of institutional patterns and help policy makers as study material.

### **1.2 Objectives**

To examine the changing landscape of election campaigns in Bangladesh.

Specific objectives:

- To analyze the historical trends and evolution of election campaigns in Bangladesh since independence.
- To evaluate the role and extent of digital media usage in election campaigns in Bangladesh.
- To compare the patterns and strategies of election campaigns at the national and local levels.

### **1.3 Literature Review**

The purpose of an election campaign was highlighted in (Sarker et al., 2013): to inform voters about political parties' programs and candidates' merits and demerits. The ruling party, Awami League (AL) candidate used multiple microphones and displayed large party symbols and colorful banners, and also obstructed the campaign of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) candidate. In this way, they violated the election code of conduct but no action was taken by the Election Commission. The BNP demanded army deployment for a fair election, but the EC refused, leading to accusations of bias and threats of a movement against the EC. The author also found that election campaigns represent a pivotal endeavor undertaken by candidates and political parties on an impending election, to achieve extensive support from the voters. A systematically executed campaign strategy has the potential to generate significant differences in terms of public support and electoral outcomes among the candidates.

The paper of (Mahmud, 2022) examined the nature of election campaigns in Bangladesh and how they influence the behavior of voters. The study analyzed awareness and attitudes towards election campaigns in order to understand why citizens vote the way they do. Campaign plays a very crucial role to get support from the public and through the campaign political parties get opportunity to present their manifesto in front of the people. Posters, public meetings, Facebook, tv, magazines and processions are the common campaign medium used by the candidates. Campaign promises have an influence in voters' decisions. The study also highlighted that the current electoral campaign in Bangladesh is not helpful in the election of candidates. But it did not explore the impact of social media on election campaigns, which is becoming increasingly important in modern times. Furthermore, it did not examine the role of the media in

shaping of public opinion and influencing voting behavior.

Cost of election campaigns is an important factor which has been highlighted by (Majumder, 2019). Election campaigns involve a lot of money. During the election period, supply and flow of black money increases. There is a fixed amount for election campaigns fixed by the election commission. As per the Election Commission rules, a candidate can spend a maximum of BDT 2.5 million for campaign expenses in a constituency during parliamentary elections. But TIB research found that, candidates spent 3 times higher than the fixed amount in the 2018 parliamentary election.

The paper (Al-Zaman et al., 2019) investigated the impact of digital media on electoral campaigns in Bangladesh, specifically analyzing how political actors and parties used digital media during the 2018 parliamentary election. Currently, digital media is considered a game changer and it is more effective than traditional media. The main aim of digital campaigns is to capture public sentiment, especially of the young generation. Election campaigns through placard, banners, festoon, and graffiti are fast becoming obsolete and now campaigns have converted to a digital media-based system. Both Political leaders and the party invest much of their time and effort in digital media such as their Facebook page for campaigning purposes to inform people about their development activities. The users of digital media are the most updated entities and through digital media, they can easily form public opinion in favor or against a political party or individual. For this reason, digital media campaign was seen extensively in the 11th Jatiya Sangsad Election. The two major political parties were equally active in the digital campaign by posting photos, videos, and others. But the common features of both party's digital campaign are to criticize other party. They did not consider the impact of digital media on the quality of political discourse or the potential for misinformation

and propaganda to spread through digital media.

The paper (Balo & Shawon, 2019) discussed the use of social media in election marketing in Bangladesh and its impact on voting behavior. It highlighted that social media is an important tool for creating awareness and political knowledge among voters which changes their mentality towards politics and attracts voters in election marketing. Social media also helps to build a relationship between politicians and people through online campaigns, which generates public trust for the politicians. The study also focused on the importance of social media for politicians to reach out to their voters and influence their political views.

The paper (Chowdhury et al., 2022) aims to identify voters' expectations about candidates and campaigns in Bangladesh. Demographic structure is an important consideration for persuasiveness of an election campaign. The paper identified significant variations among different demographic groups in Bangladesh in terms of their preferences for campaign media and the desired characteristics of candidates and campaigns. Some of the variations identified in the study include:

Different media preferences between male and female voters, with female voters preferring billboards, social media, and the use of family members in campaigns, while male voters prioritized road rallies, direct postal mail, and billboards. The importance of different candidate attributes, with leadership ability being more vital among voters than the symbol of the party or the party of the candidate. (Chowdhury et al., 2022).

Voters' and candidates' mutual interaction has been addressed as "The most direct interaction" (Hossain, 1995). This occurs mostly when election campaign begins, voters have easier chance to interact with the candidates than other times. Candidates seek

support and try to attract voters through their different campaign styles. Voters also have vigilant observations on the candidates' tactic & style of campaigning which are related to them. The judgement about candidates and voting decisions of the voters have been formed with the launching of the campaign, as well as candidates' innovative strategies whatever they need.

Election campaign compared as the festival by (Hossain, 1995), which described that people who have not the eligibility to vote, they also can participate and engage themselves with the election campaign. Male voters have more tendency to participate in the election campaign than females. Candidates take different initiatives in the campaign such as- rallies, public or personal meetings, banners, posters and audio-visual which accelerate their communication with the voters.

#### **1.4 Historical Trends of Bangladesh's Election Campaigns (1973-2018)**

Bangladesh has experienced a complex political history since its independence in 1971. The country has witnessed periods of military rule, political instability, and democratic transitions. Let us first briefly explore the historical trends of Bangladesh's election campaign, by looking at previous elections' campaign trends.

##### **1.4.1 First General Election (1973)**

"Following the adoption of the Constitution on November 4, 1972, Prime Minister Mujibur Rahman declared that the country's first general elections would be held on March 7, 1973. The AL announced its election manifesto on the basis of the 4 principles of nationalism, democracy, socialism and secularism, and discussed the national situation sector- wide, advocating domestic economic progress through rural uplifting, changes in district administration, flood control and reform of the educational system,

while promising to follow a neutral and non-aligned foreign policy seeking friendship with all countries" (Arefin, 2003).

Research of (Jahan, 1974) highlighted the 1973 election campaign's scenario. Pre-election statements by political leaders of different parties and results show that conspiracy, high pricing, political repression, and corruption were major campaign themes in the 1973 election. But the topic that was debated the most was conspiracy. As agents of "US-Chinese imperialists," the opposition parties were accused by the AL of plotting to demoralize Bangladesh's integrity and sovereignty. Both the NAP(M) and the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) denounced the other parties as agents of "US-Chinese imperialism" who were plotting to undermine Bangladesh's "socialist" policies. On the contrary, The AL, NAP(M), and CPB were deemed to be agents of "Soviet-Indian Social Imperialists" by the National Awami Party, Bhashani group (NAP-B), and JSD.

#### **1.4.2 Second General Election (1979)**

"Several incidents occurred following the first general election. Through the establishment of BAKSAL, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman restored dictatorship to Bangladesh. Then, Bangabandhu's assassination along with his entire family altered the political landscape of Bangladesh at the time. In an independent Bangladesh, Ziaur Rahman imposed martial law for the first time" (Arefin, 2003).

The 2nd general election campaign's overview was stated in (Khan & Zafarullah, 1979). Midway through 1978, a significant change occurred in Bangladesh's political history. With huge backing from the electorate, Major General Ziaur Rahman, the nation's military dictator who had taken charge in November 1975 following a military coup, returned to the presidency.

Ziaur Rahman was the driving force behind BNP's achievements. Many of the so-called party stalwarts might very well have lost in the absence of his personal involvement and dedication during the campaign. He ran a fierce campaign for all his incumbent "ministers" as well as other candidates he desired to see elected to parliament. It is widely thought that the head of the state's overenthusiastic campaigning for candidates with dubious backgrounds and questionable character had already severely damaged his reputation towards the public. Strangely enough, though, he not only permitted a few of these parties' leaders to become members of his own party, but he also personally campaigned for them and gave them party tickets for the elections. Subsequently, they joined former Jamaat-e-Islami members in his cabinet (a fanatical organization that had directly opposed the emergence of Bangladesh) (Khan & Zafarullah, 1979).

#### **1.4.3 Third General Election (1986)**

In Bangladeshi politics, HM Ershad made his debut following Ziaur Rahman's murder on May 30, 1981. On March 24, 1982, he led the army in a bloodless coup against the then-president Abdus Sattar, assuming the role of chief martial law administrator (Arefin, 2003).

In terms of politics, the economy, and foreign policy, Bangladesh saw a distinct change in 1986 compared to the preceding four years. The year started with the resumption of open political activities and a consensus among all parties involved to move from martial law to constitutional rule.

The 3rd general election's campaign was outlined in (Islam, 1987). The JP focused on Ershad's decentralization plan and development initiatives during the six-week election campaign. The public was warned by the party of what would happen if the "Awami-Baksalites" came back to power. On the other hand, the AL, which was the primary

opposition in the election, called Ershad's government a military dictatorship and promised to bring back parliamentary democracy. Specifically, the AL campaigned on the image of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. People were advised not to vote by the anti-election parties, particularly the BNP.

#### **1.4.4 Fifth General Election (1991)**

This election is referred to as the step toward the transition from a protracted period of martial law and dictatorship to democracy. Every political party united on a platform and called for Ershad's resignation. President of the Republic Hossain Mohammad Ershad (Jatiya Party- JP), who had held the position since 1983, resigned in December 1990 following several months of opposition groups' and students' protests' anti-government campaign. Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed took over as acting president and led an impartial caretaker government until general elections, originally scheduled for March 2, 1991, were held (Arefin, 2003).

The 5th general election's campaign was addressed in (Baxter, 1992). During its campaign, the AL advocated for a parliamentary system, which could only be implemented with the backing of two-thirds of the new parliament and verified by a referendum. As might be expected, the Jamaat ran on a platform of bringing Bangladesh closer to an Islamic political system. During the election campaign, the AL opted for the reinstatement of the 1972-1975 parliamentary system of government, while the BNP was dedicated to maintaining the current presidential form of government.

#### **1.4.5 Seventh General Election (1996)**

One of Bangladesh's most competitive and fair elections took place in June 1996. Begum Zia had to resign because of an AL non-cooperative movement that began on February 15. An interim government led by

former Chief Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman took office on April 3 (Arefin, 2003). The tone of the 1996 election campaign was described in (Kochanek, 1997). It was somewhat different from 1991. The BNP chose to run a primarily negative campaign, accusing the AL of being a pro-Indian stooge, anti-democratic, and politically inept, instead of defending its record. Given that Sheikh Hasina Wajid's arrogance had been a major contributing factor in her 1991 defeat, the AL campaign was considerably more modest and constructive. By expressing regret for any errors made by her father's 1972-1975 AL government and announcing that she would not be extending the 25-year treaty of friendship and cooperation with India, Hasina attempted to defuse the BNP attack. Aside from securing a fair share of Ganges water from India, she also pledged to protect the independence of the judiciary, free the media, eradicate terrorism on college campuses, support farmers financially, eradicate corruption and nepotism, repeal all laws that were oppressive, and stop political meddling in policymaking.

#### **1.4.6 Eighth General Election (2001)**

In the run-up to the 8th general election, there were violent clashes between supporters of the BNP and the AL. It was full of "Vendetta and Violence" focusing on the politics and administration, demonstrated in (Jahan, 2003). During the electoral campaign, the BNP made a commitment to mitigate crime rates, instances of violence, and corruption. But after the coalition led by the BNP won the election in October 2001, BNP supporters attacked Hindus and many Muslim AL members violently, killing, raping, stealing, and damaging property. Supporters of the BNP also threw out supporters of the AL from a number of important institutions. Some institutions were taken over to gain more power over large groups of people (like colleges and universities) and messages (like radio and TV); others were taken over to get money (like bus and train stations). People

and the media were shocked by the difference between BNP's campaign before the election to get rid of crime, violence, and corruption and its actions after the election, which included promoting violence and criminals and corruption. As early as 2001, the AL had to deal with public anger over the government's inability to stop the rising crime and violence. Even though the government admitted it had failed to keep the peace, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said it was the opposition's plan to bring down her government. Following the resolution of the crisis, Hasina announced during a visit to the holy city of Medina in early March that an election would be conducted in the upcoming summer, thereby generating optimism for a faster electoral process. Resigning early would have provided the AL (ruling party) with a slightly stronger ethical position to call for new elections, given the opposition's decision to abstain from participating in the legislative process. However, Hasina swiftly altered her stance right after the return from pilgrimage (Rashiduzzaman, 2002). Throughout history, the BNP has consistently maintained more favorable relations with Pakistan, frequently employing anti-Indian rhetoric as a means to enhance its popularity among the masses. Nevertheless, the BNP refrained from utilizing the anti-India rhetoric as a strategic tool during the electoral campaign of 2001. The subsequent occurrence involved the public appearance of Tareq Rahman, the eldest son of Khaleda Zia, as he assumed the formal role of leading the BNP. According to reports, Tareq Rahman was allegedly the architect behind the successful election campaign of BNP and assumed a pivotal role in decision-making following the elections, despite lacking any official designation. On June 22, he assumed the role of joint secretary-general of the BNP ((Jahan, 2003).

#### **1.4.7 Eleventh General Election (2018)**

During the pre-election period, there had been evidence of unconventional political

participation exhibited by the individuals involved. The 11th Jatiya Sangsad Election of Bangladesh holds significant political importance for two specific reasons. Firstly, it marks the first instance in which digital media has been extensively utilized for political campaigning and discourse. Secondly, the legitimacy and credibility of the 2014's election were subject to scrutiny from certain quarters. Hence, the present election was anticipated to serve as the pivotal means to reinstate democratic principles ((Al-Zaman et al., 2019). Social media like Facebook and Twitter have surpassed traditional media in public opinion formation in several global elections and referendums. Almost all politicians in Bangladesh were using social media for election campaigns. The official social media accounts of political parties were exposing their activities and spread around the country easily. AL demonstrated their development activities, initiatives, and criticized the rule of BNP era. On the other hand, BNP also excoriated the AL's incompetence to run the government in every cases. Election campaign got the Midas touch of internet and social media, audio-visual presentation specially music video which helped to get attention of voters about the candidates and parties.

#### **1.5 Literature Gap**

Most of the literature review focuses on the historical evolution of election campaigns, their nature and purpose, the impact of digital media on campaigns in Bangladesh and their impact on voting behavior, the cost of campaigns, and voters' expectations about candidates and campaigns. But there is limited exploration in some areas; those are: changes in campaigns from a voter's perspective; how influential the digital media is from a voter perspective; incentives given to voters to manipulate their decisions; how overambitious the election manifesto is; and differences in local and national-level election campaigns. Previous literature is mostly introductory, and less comparative and

analytical. There has been inadequate analysis of campaign funding sources as well.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The study is designed as a mixed method approach study. In this study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect data. The study areas are Belkuchi and Trishal upazila of Bangladesh. Belkuchi upazila is 22 km south of Sirajganj district headquarters and 10 km south of Kaddar More. It is the 2nd smallest upazila in Sirajganj district with 164.31 sq km. (Bangladesh National Portal, 2025a). Trishal upazilla is 21 km far from the district headquarters and the total area is 338.73 sq km. (Bangladesh National Portal, 2025b). Both upazila represents two different districts (Mymensingh and Sirajganj) of two major divisions (Mymensingh and Rajshahi) of the country.

### 2.1 Sampling

Both non-probability purposive sampling and simple random sampling have been used. Total population of the study was all voters and elected representatives in the mentioned study area. To maintain the proper response from each area, samples were collected through purposive sampling (for KII) and randomly selected for the survey.

**Sample Size:** Total sample size was 107. Among the samples, 100 were surveyed, 7

were KII (Key Informant Interview) respondents. From Belkuchi and Trishal, there were respectively 55 and 45 respondents surveyed. KII responses have only been taken from Belkuchi upazila.

### 2.2 Data source and collection method

Two methods were used to collect primary data from respondents: KII and FIELD SURVEY. Among these KII were used to collect qualitative data through open-ended questionnaires and informal discussion with respondents about the topic. And Survey questionnaires were close ended which collected quantitative data for testing hypotheses through statistical tests. Secondary data sources were used for reviewing literature. Secondary data was collected through different online platforms, web articles, e-newspaper, journals, reports, documents and conference papers etc.

### 2.3 Analytical Process

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was utilized to analyze a set of 100 survey data. On the contrary, qualitative data has been manually analyzed, as 7 interviews have been conducted using open-ended questionnaires. The data has been analyzed using content analysis approach, considering the feedback and impressions provided by the respondents.

**Table 1.** Demographic Information

<b>Age</b>	18-24	24%
	25-35	33%
	36-45	16%
	46 and above	27%
<b>Gender</b>	Male	66%
	Female	34%
<b>Residence</b>	Urban	64%
	Rural	36%
<b>Education</b>	Primary or equivalent	16%
	High school or equivalent	12%
	Bachelor's degree	45%
	Master's degree	27%

<b>Income Range</b>	10 thousand to 20 thousand	57%
	21 thousand to 30 thousand	20%
	31 thousand to 40 thousand	10%
	41 thousand and above	13%
<b>Political Involvement</b>	Yes	24%
	No	69%
	Family or relatives involved	7%

### 3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the majority of respondents fell within the 25-35 age range. This age group represents the largest segment at 33%. The 18-24 age group accounts for 24% of the demographics. Individuals aged 46 and above constitute 27%, indicating a notable presence of older participants. The Table 1 shows a clear male majority and a predominantly urban population. Males make up 66% of the demographic, while females account for 34%. A significant 64% of individuals reside in urban areas, with 36% living in rural areas. A substantial 45% of individuals hold a bachelor's degree, and 27% have a master's degree, highlighting a highly educated demographic. The most common income range is 10 thousand to 20 thousand, accounting for 57% of the demographic. Furthermore, Table 1 shows a large majority (69%) reported no political involvement. Only 24% of individuals are directly involved in politics, and 7% have family or relatives involved.

A large majority of respondents (77%) agreed that they have observed changes in election campaign patterns since independence. Only 23% of respondents did not observe changes, which is a notable minority. A vast majority of respondents (96%) believe digital media has played a significant role in recent election campaigns in Bangladesh. Only 4% of respondents disagreed with the impact of digital media.

#### 3.1.1 Evolution of Campaign Strategies

As illustrated in Figure 1 and Table 2, most respondents believed that election campaign

strategies have evolved since the country's independence. A combined 71% of people either agreed (54%) or strongly agreed (17%) with this statement. Only a small portion, 10% in total, disagreed (6%) or strongly disagreed (4%), while 19% remain neutral on this. This indicates a widespread recognition of evolution in election campaigns since independence.

#### 3.1.2 Usage of Digital Media for Information

The results presented in Table 2 show that digital media is a common, but not constant, source of information for election campaigns. The largest group of respondents uses these platforms sometimes (32%), while a significant portion uses them often (24%). A smaller group uses them very often (6%). On the other hand, 21% never use digital media for this purpose, and 17% do so rarely. This suggests that while digital media is a key channel, a notable part of the audience use it less frequently.

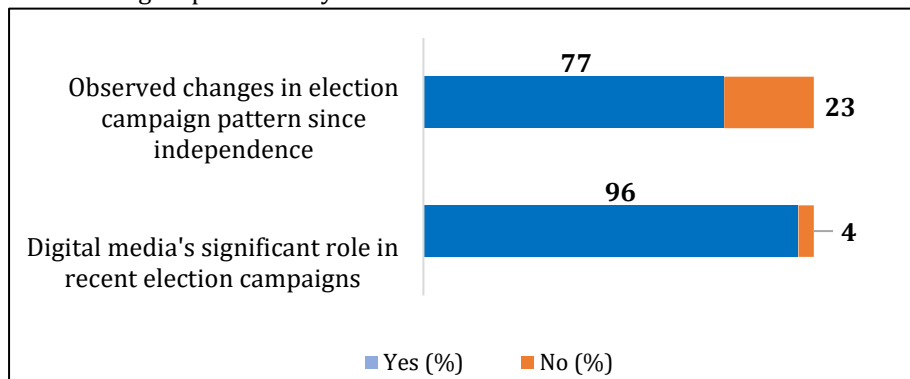
#### 3.1.3 Influence of Digital Media in Campaigns

As further detailed in Table 2, a combined 67% of respondents show there is a strong consensus that digital media is influential in election campaigns. This finds it either extremely influential (34%) or very influential (33%). 26% consider it moderately influential. Only a very small minority of 7% believe it is only slightly influential, showing that its impact is widely acknowledged by the public.

#### 3.1.4 Participation in National and Local Elections

Table 2 also indicates that nearly half of the respondents (49%) participate in both national and local elections, making them the most engaged group. A significant portion, 30%, do not participate in either type of election. A smaller group votes only in local

elections (17%), and 4% respondents participate only in national elections. This highlights a core group of consistent voters, a large group of non-voters, and smaller segments with specific voting habits.



**Figure 1.** Evolution of Election Campaigns in Bangladesh

**Table 2.** Respondents' view on Election Campaign Dynamics

1	<b>Election campaign strategies have evolved since independence</b>	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
		4%	6%	19%	54%	17%
2	<b>Usage of digital media platforms to gather info</b>	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
		21%	17%	32%	24%	6%
3	<b>Digital media's influential role in election campaigns</b>	Extremely Influential	Very Influential		Moderate Influential	Slightly Influential
		34%	33%		26%	7%
4	<b>Participation in both National &amp; Local election</b>	Yes, in both	Only local		Only national	None
		49%	17%		4%	30%
5	<b>Difference in campaign patterns between national &amp; local elections</b>	Very Significant Difference	Significant Difference	Moderate Difference	Slight Difference	No Difference
		3%	41%	34%	19%	3%

**Table 3.** Influencing Issues for voting Decisions

Influencing Factors	Number of %
Candidate Trust Integrity	31.6%
Party Affiliation	17.9%
Candidate Personality Qualification	38.3%
Camping Message	5.1%
Rally or public meeting with Celebrity Figures	2.6%
Normal Poster	4.6%

### 3.1.5 Perceived Differences in Campaign Patterns

Most people observe a difference in campaign patterns between national and local level elections. According to Table 2, a substantial 41% see a significant difference, while 34% notice a moderate difference. A smaller group of 19% perceives a slight difference, and only 3% see no difference at all. Another 3% believe the difference is very significant. Overall, this shows that respondents clearly distinguish between the styles of local and national political campaigns.

Different factors influence or attract voters to make decisions about their voting. Among various factors outlined in Table 3, candidates trust integrity and candidate personality qualification were the most preferred option by the respondents 31.6% and 38.3% respectively. Then party affiliation plays the next influencing factor (17.9%), after that campaign message (5.1%), Normal posting (4.6%) and last preferred option chosen by the respondent was Rally with celebrities only 2.6%.

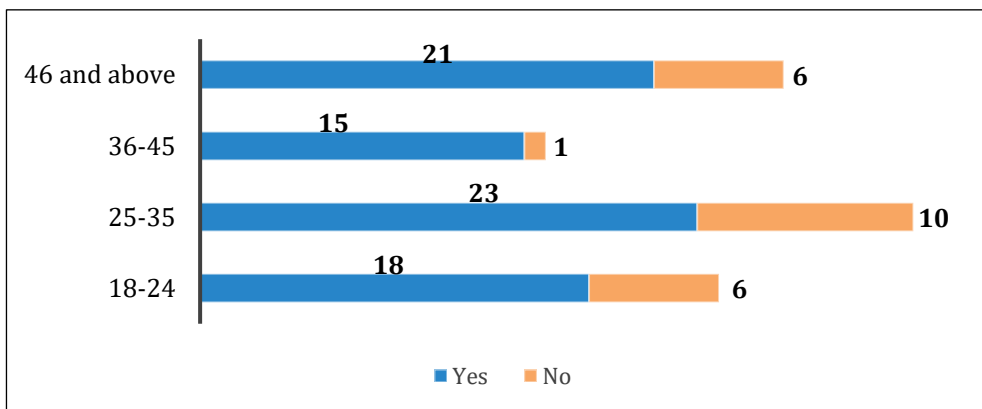


Figure 1. Age and election campaign strategies evolution

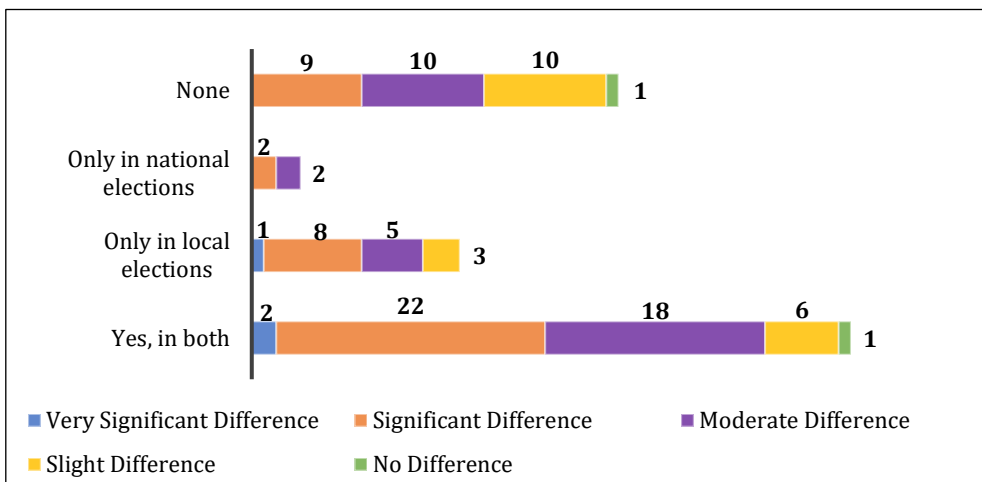


Figure 2. Election participation and campaign difference in local & national level

### 3.2 Relation or Comparison with Different Variables

This study collects data from different age groups. The total respondents of 18-24 age range were 24; of them 18 respondents have observed changes in election campaign strategies. Among 33 respondents of 25-35 age group, 23 respondents observed changes. 15 respondents from 36-45 age range observed changes and 21 respondents from the age range of 46 to above observed changes. As depicted in Figure 2, with the age range increases, the positive response on changes in election campaign strategies also increases. That means senior people who have observed many elections can easily catch the changes in the campaign strategies.

There was an open-ended question if the answer if this question is "Yes". The question was- What are the most significant changes in election campaign strategies in Bangladesh since the country's independence? The respondents mostly mentioned- "the inclusion of digital campaign by the digital media", also the mentioned "cash money has been provided as incentives to the voters to manipulate their voting decision."

Figure 3 shows that respondents who voted in both national and local level (49%, data from its frequency distribution), among them 22 respondents think there is "Significant Difference", 17 respondents think there is "Moderate Difference" and 7 respondents think there is "Slight Difference" between local & national election campaigns. Besides, there are also 2 respondents who think about "Very Significant Difference" between these two-level campaigns. Respondents who ever voted either national or local level, they have also said that there is mostly "significant or moderate difference" in election campaigns at these two levels. 17% respondents have participated in the local elections (data from its frequency distribution), among them 8 respondents think there is "Significant Difference", 4 respondents think there is "Moderate Difference".

Even respondents who didn't participate in any level elections yet, they also noticed campaign differences in local and national level elections (30%, data from its frequency distribution). Among them 9 respondents voted for about significant and slight differences respectively, and 11 respondents think moderate difference between these two-level campaigns.

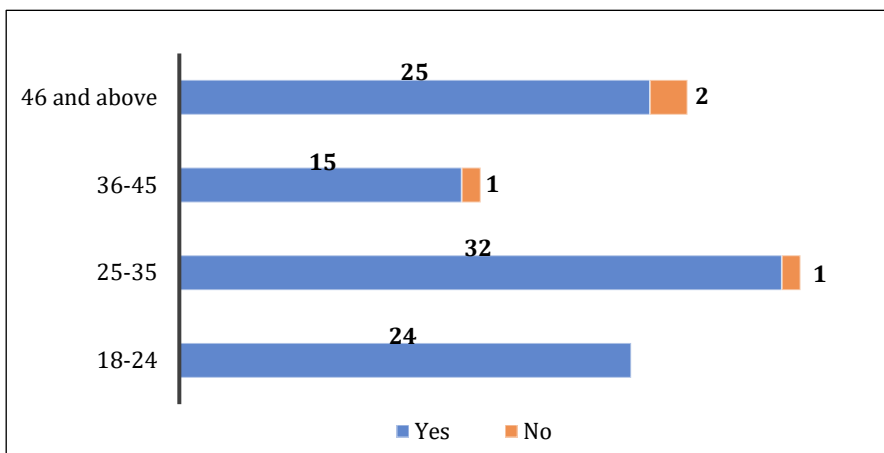


Figure 3. Age and Digital media influence

As illustrated in Figure 4, all the respondents with the age range of 18-24 believe that

digital media has played a significant role in election campaigns. Among 33 respondents

of 25-35 age group 32 respondents think in positive way. 15 respondents out of 16 from age group of 36-45 also believe in the same pattern. 46 and above age range consist of 27 respondents and of them 25 believe in digital media influence. People at lower age groups are more inclined towards digital media; for this reason, they can easily understand the influence of digital media over election campaigns. This group is more likely to use social media, digital platforms, and other online resources to get political information. Though older age groups are less inclined with Digital Media, they also believe that digital media has influence in election campaigns. Only a few respondents who are in older age group (2 respondents), believe that digital media has no influence in election campaigns. In light of content analysis of historical trends and evolution of Bangladesh's election campaign, Figure 5 summarizes the historical trends and evolution of election campaigns in Bangladesh.

### **3.3 Recurrent Points of Kiis**

Seven key informant interviews have been conducted in the Belkuchi upazila. Interviews are conducted with the Upazila election officer and elected representatives, including former ministers, Upazila chairman, paurashava mayors, and union chairmen. The purpose of interviewing them was to utilize their direct connection with the election campaign and extensive expertise gained from their professional and political careers. Some of common points of their discussion explained below:

#### **3.3.1 Campaign evolution over the years**

The election campaign in Bangladesh has undergone significant changes since its independence. Over the years, the style of election campaigns, both at the national and local levels, has evolved across the country. A upazila election officer stated that, candidates primarily reached out to voters by bullock cart because transportation facilities weren't

as advanced as they are now. However, modern transportation has come a long way, and most candidates use motorcycles.

Contemporary campaigns have adopted digital campaign styles rather than traditional. A former upazila chairman also mentioned the emergence of digital campaigns. He said that it wasn't long ago that campaign messages were miked by hand. After a long day of miking, the person may be tired. However, unlike in the past, campaign messages can now be recorded and played again, and there is even scope for combining male and female voices. The advent of digital technology has made this a reality. Party symbols are now used in local elections, which allows candidates to reach out to voters' emotions. This is especially effective in Bangladesh, where the people have a strong affinity for the party. A union chairman added that, the influence of money is present in today's election campaigns. Once satisfied with little, supporters' demands have grown in recent times. As the value of money has decreased and the prices of goods have increased, election expenses have also gone up. A former minister of Fisheries and Livestock, current zila parishad chairman said that, instead of going door to door, they sought votes from society's influential people during the previous election campaign. After that, they may convince others to cast ballots by spreading their message. But these days, candidates must go door-to-door to get votes. For instance, a wife may feel wronged, if a candidate requested a husband for his vote but ignored his wife.

#### **3.3.2 Key differences between national & local election campaign**

There are still a number of noticeable distinctions between the two levels' election campaigns, even though the gaps are closing. According to an election officer, personal campaign strategy and popularity matter at the local level. In contrast, symbolic identity is given more weight by voters at the national level than personal approach.

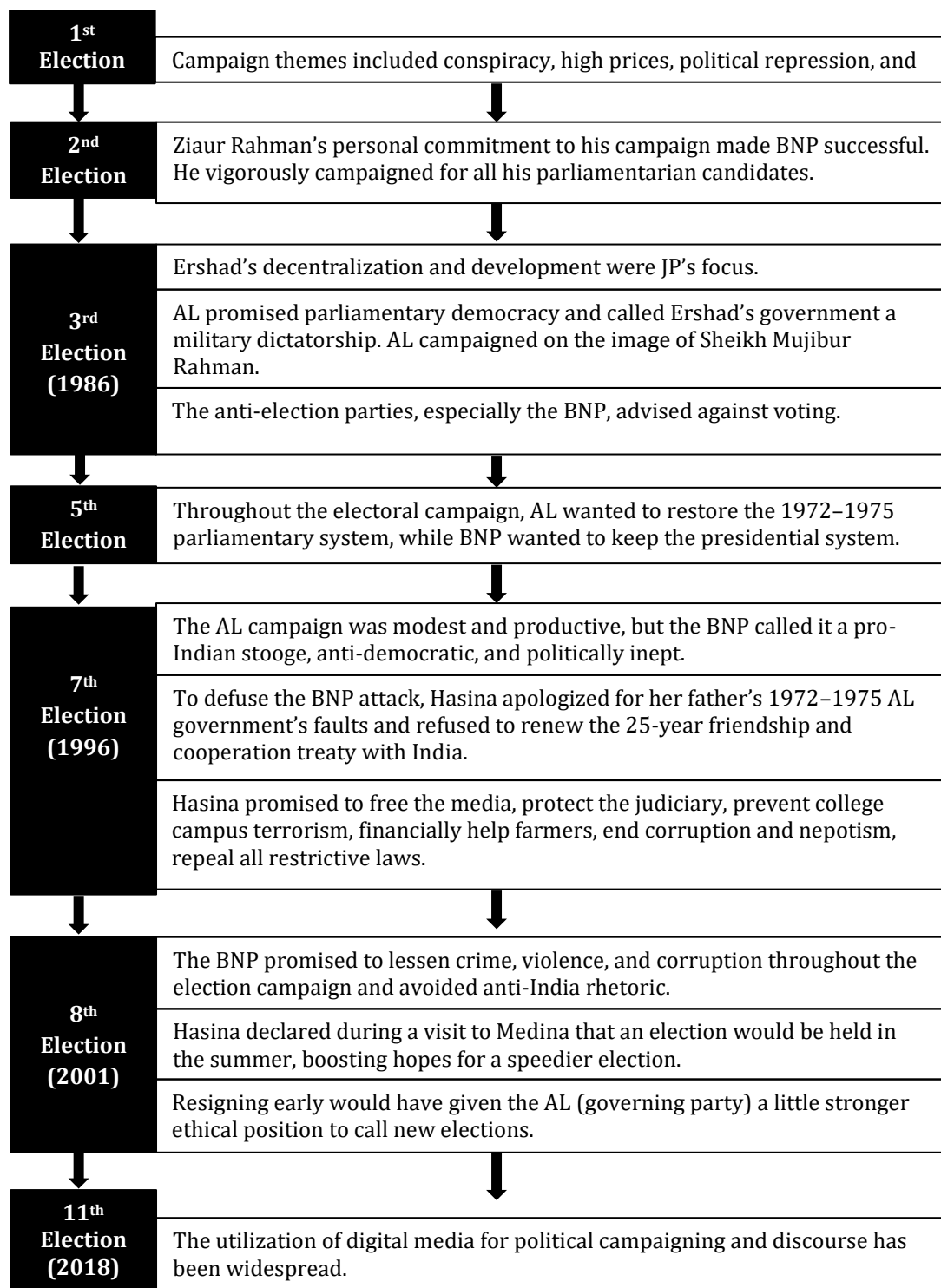


Figure 5. Overview of historical trends and evolution of election campaign in Bangladesh

Furthermore, he mentioned that, at the local level, he hasn't come across any written election manifesto; instead, most of it is delivered verbally. In contrast, national elections required a written election manifesto. A former upazila chairman said that campaign depends on the size of the area. The shorter the area, the easier it is to run election campaigns. Candidates can easily reach out to the voters at the local election campaign. However, it is impossible to reach every single voter at national election campaign. A former paurashava mayor mentioned that local elections are more competitive than national ones, and candidates receive less party support, this campaign is totally based on individual initiative. On the other hand, candidates receive greater party support in national elections, which are less competitive.

### **3.3.3 Utilization of digital media that influence election campaign**

Digital media have greater influence on the election campaign. A former upazila chairman mentioned voter turnout is higher than in the past and reaching out to voters is getting easier for election campaigns. Social media accounts are being used by political parties and candidates for campaigning. Even for offline gatherings, they announce the date and time online. A former paurashava mayor said that social media campaigns increase the attraction and influence younger voters. A former minister of Fisheries and Livestock also stated this point and added that, digital media helped them to know the standpoint and strategy of the opposition. Though each key informant emphasized the positive aspects of digital media in election campaigns, it also has drawbacks. A union parishad chairman said that it also spreads rumors among voters and misleads them with false information. A woman union chairperson mentioned that, though it enhances our campaigning message across the country, it can be a burden for us when we say something mistakenly, even if the slip of the tongue is met with a heavy troll.

### **3.3.4 Role of campaign in winning election**

An effective campaign is required to win any election. Whether it is an upazila election in Bangladesh or a presidential election in America, a campaign is always necessary to attract and gain the trust of voters. An upazila election officer stated that, the campaign is the ladder on which candidates ascend to the winning crown. They must promote themselves as a brand to voters and campaign in the appropriate manner. A former upazila chairman said that most Bangladeshis are politically illiterate; they only care about whose campaign is more appealing and innovative than others, and who is spending the most money; they are unaware of election manifestos. Most key informants agreed that campaigning is essential for winning elections and has a complete impact on voters. The more they campaign, the better their chances of winning, because campaigning is the most direct way to communicate with people.

### **3.3.5 Is the campaign budget sufficient so far?**

Election commission has set an expenditure limit for the candidates during their election campaign. There is a limit of election expense, according to Rule 51 of the Upazila Parishad Election Rules, 2013; a candidate contesting for the positions of chairman, vice chairman, or woman vice chairman is allowed to spend up to Tk 5 lakh in a parishad with up to one lakh voters, Tk 7 lakh in a parishad with up to one to two lakh voters, and Tk 10 lakh in a parishad with up to two lakh voters. Also, there is a limit of another expense which is personal of candidates. Rules of the Upazila Parishad Election Rules, 2013 According to Article 51, a candidate contesting for the post of chairman, vice chairman, or woman vice chairman can spend a maximum of Tk 50,000 in the case of upazila parishads with not more than 1 lakh voters, Tk 75,000 in the case of upazila parishads with not more than 1 lakh 1 to 2 lakh voters, and Tk 1 lakh in the case of parishads with two and more voters.

We can infer some of the budgetary limitations that candidates should be aware of when campaigning for election from the above cost limits. But the real scenario is different, most of the key informants said that present limitation of the budget is not sufficient at all for running campaign. An election officer himself said it should be increased by a minimum 50% from the present amount. A former upazila chairman mentioned that the money is too limited for them to run a campaign in practical manner. The increasing price of goods has an impact on the insufficient election budget. Previously each poster cost 50 paisa to Tk 1.5, which is now cost up to Tk 4. He provided a real-life example that, minimum 20 lakhs worth of leaflets need to be prepared for a 4 lakhs population. If one leaflet costs Tk 1.5, it will cost Tk 30 lakhs overall. A former union chairman was of the view that those who haven't enough money have lesser chance of winning the election, as money is the ultimate key in the election. A former paurashava chairman stated that a digital campaign increases the expense of an overall campaign, especially the fuel cost of their support staff. But a former union chairman thought that the budget is adequate only if they don't misuse the money. Candidates, in their desperation to win, spend money sometimes without a valid reason. Even he confessed that candidates provide cash money or gifts like saree, lungi, rice, oil, lentil to manipulate voters' decision.

### **3.3.6 Challenges of election campaign**

There are some challenges mentioned by the key informants. A former upazila chairman said that financial investment is increasing rapidly during the campaign. Excessive spending of money is like competition among the candidates. It paves the way for corruption if candidates somehow manage to win. In most cases, the return of investment will be with the profit. A former union chairman stated that the opposition sometimes spread rumors about them, even use physical power to demolish the campaign.

Tearing of posters is also a barrier for them. Voters expect bribes from the candidates. An honest, eligible candidate can be defeated if the voters become rigged by money the night before the election, mentioned by former paurashava mayor.

### **3.4 Discussion**

The analysis and results section focuses on key topics of the study for further discussion. Firstly, the historical trends and evolution of election campaigns have been observed through content analysis of previous years' election campaigns. In addition, the input from survey respondents and key informants has served as a solid foundation for the modifications in election campaign strategy since Bangladesh gained independence in 1971. Through the survey, I have not only determined the binary responses of the participants regarding the observed changes in election campaign patterns since independence, but I have also assessed their levels of agreement and disagreement with the evolution of election campaigns since independence. An analysis of the relationship between age and the evolution of campaign strategies reveals that older individuals, who have witnessed numerous elections, are adept at discerning the shifts in campaign tactics. The interviewees, including a former minister, former and current chairman, union chairman, paurashava mayor, and upazila election officer, were all interviewed as Key Informant Interviews (KII). They unanimously agreed that the election campaign in Bangladesh has undergone significant changes.

Secondly, the employment of digital media has surfaced in the election campaign of Bangladesh. The survey respondents and KIIs have indicated the significance of digital media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and TV channels in election campaigns. Besides the traditional campaign approach, candidates are conducting digital campaigns to fast reach a diverse community. Additionally, voters believe that digital

campaigning may be the biggest shift in the way elections are fought. Survey participants are utilizing digital media to access information regarding the election campaign. The younger age group exhibits a greater preference for utilizing digital media compared to the older age group. However, this issue does not impede the impact of digital media in election campaigns. In the future, there will be an increase in innovation and inclusive participation for both candidates and voters, as it is becoming increasingly apparent that this is the preferred option.

Thirdly, there exist distinct strategies that differentiate local election campaigns from national election campaigns. The survey data and key informant interview (KII) data have established a robust foundation in this matter. Survey respondents who have participated in at least one election event, either at the local or national level, have highlighted the minimal disparities between these two levels. Participants who took part in both levels have noted significant disparities between the two. Respondents who have participated in the entire election process, including campaigning and voting,

#### **4. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Bangladesh is a democratic country. For that reason, Bangladesh has experienced several elections since its independence. Election processes or strategies have changed from time to time, from casting vote in ballot paper election has shifted to EVM (Electronic Voting Machine) system. Not only has the election strategy changed, election campaign strategies have also changed. From independence to present time, different parties have done their election campaign in their own effective way.

In summary, this research paper has explored Bangladesh's changing election campaign landscape in Bangladesh, offering a thorough grasp of the Digital Media that influences the country's democratic process.

possess a clear understanding of the strategies employed by the candidates during that period. The Key Informants (KIIs) who currently hold or previously held elected positions also discussed the differences in campaign strategies. The primary factors that shape the campaign strategy are the geographical area of the locality and the number of voters. The campaign style is being influenced by both party involvement and party symbols.

Moreover, survey participants have observed that incentives are offered to voters during the campaign period to influence their voting choices. Key informants have indicated that in contemporary times, voters anticipate receiving incentives from candidates prior to voting. Electoral participants are engaging in the exchange of valuable votes for monetary compensation or other benefits, thereby elevating the likelihood of electing a corrupt representative. When a person with corrupt intentions is elected, their primary focus is often on retrieving the funds they have invested to buy votes. During an election campaign, it is crucial to prioritize the personal qualities of candidates and their trustworthiness and integrity.

The investigation has brought attention to the changes in election campaign tactics used by political parties that show how the campaign has evolved from conventional techniques like door-to-door canvassing to the digital media in reaching a wide range of voters. Digital media sites like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter provide new ways in promoting public participation in politics, where elections and campaigning play a major role. Social media allows political parties to communicate directly with potential voters.

Statistics show there are nearly 100 million voters in the country. More than half of the voters are young and almost all of them use internet and social media (Hossain, 2018). From these statistics it is clear that young generation are native users of internet.

Hence, political campaigners can leverage social media's potential to capture a significant number of voters' attention. The findings emphasize how important election campaigns are for influencing public opinion, encouraging political participation, and affecting election results.

Election campaigns in Bangladesh vary significantly between the local and national levels. Local elections take a community focused approach, tackling pressing issues including infrastructure, healthcare, and education. They are frequently focused around union councils and municipal corporations. This level of campaigning depends on neighborhood events, door-to-door canvassing, and grassroots mobilization. On the other hand, to reach a wider audience, national-level campaigns use broad mass media outreach, such as radio, television, and social media. Political parties now stage massive demonstrations, heated debates, and high-profile endorsements to showcase their vision for the country as a whole.

The outcomes of this research offer significant perspectives for researchers, political strategists, and policymakers as Bangladesh continues to develop into a thriving democracy.

Several recommendations have been derived from the extensive experiences of the key informants, who have discussed various challenges encountered during the election campaign.

#### **4.1 Shorten the duration of the campaign**

A candidate is allotted a maximum of three weeks to conduct their election campaign. A union parishad chairman expressed the opinion that a period of 3 weeks is quite lengthy for conducting an election campaign, particularly at the local level. It should be reduced to a duration of 10-15 days. It will significantly and automatically reduce election expenses. To mitigate wasteful

expenditures and illegal financial transactions, it can prove to be a highly effective remedy.

#### **4.2 Aware people about digital media rumors**

The influence of digital media on election campaigns is significant. By accelerating the pace of the campaign, both the candidates and voters can save time. However, digital media has a few drawbacks. It has an ability to transmit rumors rapidly. Most of the time, rumors have been used to spread about the opposition's fame to prejudice voters. Digital media should be fair and reliable. It should publish real news about all individuals or parties involved. An independent and free media is the only one that could do this.

#### **4.3 Placing banners in specific spaces, not everywhere**

The upazila election officer suggested that banners should be positioned in a designated area during campaigns. The election office will decide where the candidates' banners will be displayed, and voters will be notified of this location. This method guarantees a focused and regulated presentation, reducing visual pollution and fostering a more efficient and organized campaign environment.

#### **4.4 Formulating effective laws and strictly apply them**

Even though the Bangladeshi election commission adopted laws pertaining to campaigns, there is still a loophole that candidates are taking advantage of. To ensure that all parties are on a level playing field. The law needs to be made clear and strictly followed, with any legal holes being closed.

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