



The 2026 Bangladeshi National Election: Dominant Center, Islamist Surge

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THE 2026 BANGLADESHI NATIONAL ELECTION: DOMINANT CENTER, ISLAMIST SURGE

This analysis assesses Bangladesh's national election and constitutional referendum on February 12, 2026, as a culmination of the country's post-2024 political transition. The two-thirds parliamentary majority of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) provides political stability and a genuine opportunity to institutionalize competitive politics. However, the poor electoral showing of the 2024 July Revolution's youth movement and the emergence of Islamists as the main opposition hints at potentially dire consequences for the country's secular nature should this experiment fail its future tests. As for external stakeholders, the election presents India with an opportunity to reset deteriorating relations, Dhaka's pragmatic outreach to China and Pakistan is likely to endure, and Europe can expect a relatively competent government to preserve newfound stability and cooperate in keeping transcontinental migration within lawful and orderly channels.

1. WHY THE ELECTION MATTERS

With a population of over 176 million and geopolitically sandwiched between neighboring India and nearby China—but not making international headlines with news about terrorism or nuclear weapons like Pakistan—Bangladesh is one of the world's least watched giants. For European audiences, however, the country warrants attention. It is one of the European Union's largest suppliers of ready-made garments,¹ directly embedded in millions of Europeans' lived experience of consumer prices. It is also a major exporter of labor and students going abroad, meaning that political instability, economic downturns, and religious radicalization in Bangladesh can directly translate into migration

1 Trading Economics, "European Union Imports from Bangladesh," accessed March 2, 2026, <https://tradingeconomics.com/european-union/imports/bangladesh>.

flows toward Western countries, both directly and via secondary routes.² Its demographic weight within the Muslim world also makes it a highly consequential case study for how democratic transition and Islamic politics interact. Finally, a key target of both Indian and Chinese influence-building in the region, its geopolitical positioning affects the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific—a crucial maritime region of European trade.³

Against this backdrop, the Bangladeshi national election and constitutional referendum on February 12, 2026, the country’s first genuine competitive race in over a decade, delivered on its main promise: it completed the post-2024 democratic transition with the formation of a government that has both solid popular legitimacy and a potent majority in legislation. The secular, conservative-liberal Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) secured a two-thirds majority, meaning that newly appointed Prime Minister Tarique Rahman is in a strong position to tackle the country’s challenges—including reviving a sluggish economy and restoring law and order.⁴ Therefore, some optimism about the transition’s achievements hardening into durable rules is justified.

The note on which the transitory period ended, however, was not quite climactic. Voter turnout was higher than most of the “fixed” elections of the past decade—but far below the normal range of earlier competitive elections. The Awami League of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, ousted by the 2024 “July Revolution,” was barred from the contest—in its place, previously marginalized Islamists emerged as the main opposition force in an awkward alliance with the July Revolution’s supposedly anti-Islamist youth leaders. The “July National Charter,” a politically (albeit not legally) binding set of reforms for constitutional proposals, passed with around 65 percent support—a clear, but not exactly overwhelming, majority.⁵

This analysis treats the 2026 election in Bangladesh as a test of whether the country’s post-uprising settlement can sustain institutionalized political

2 Zsolt Trembeczki, “Aspirációk és képességek: Dél-Ázsia helye a globális és az európai migrációs térképén” [South Asian Migration Worldwide and to Europe: An Aspirations and Capabilities Account], *Külgügyi Szemle* 24, no. 3 (2025): 204–231, <https://hiia.hu/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/KSZ-25-3-12-Trembeczki-Zsolt.pdf>.

3 European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, “The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, September 16, 2021, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf.

4 Saqlain Rizve, “BNP Wins Election, Tarique Rahman to Take Oath as Bangladesh’s Next Prime Minister,” *The Diplomat*, February 13, 2026, <https://thediplomat.com/2026/02/bnp-wins-election-tarique-rahman-to-take-oath-as-bangladeshs-next-prime-minister/>.

5 Rizve, “BNP Wins Election.”

competition, rather than fall into a new dominant-party cycle, and examines what the outcomes imply for both the country's domestic politics, including the balance between secular and Islamist forces, and regional alignments. It also situates the election in the context of the upcoming national vote in Nepal—another South Asian country where a youth-led rebellion tried to overthrow the ossified traditional party system.

2. FROM HASINA'S OUSTER TO YUNUS' TRANSITION AND THE REFERENDUM AGENDA

The chain of events leading to the 2026 vote began with nationwide student-led protests in mid-2024, just months after that year's general elections,⁶ which were widely seen as marred by irregularities. The protests were primarily aimed against public service quota policies limiting upward mobility for the country's sizeable young population.⁷ The heavy-handed response from security forces resulted in over 1,400 deaths,⁸ and in August Sheikh Hasina left the country on board a helicopter bound for neighboring India, a key external supporter of her government. An interim administration was sworn in on August 8, 2024, with Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus as its chief adviser, the title of the head of a caretaker government under Bangladesh's constitution.

The interim government's mandate was twofold: restoring normalcy in everyday life and redesigning the constitutional architecture so that another prolonged period of executive dominance would be averted. This resulted in the "Implementation Order of the July National Charter (Constitutional Reform), 2025," which proposed term limits and stronger oversight bodies, including a move toward a bicameral legislature.⁹ The February 12 referendum bundled these proposals into a single national vote, a high-risk, high-reward design

6 Carole Dieterich, "Bangladesh's Prime Minister Has Plunged Her Country into Authoritarianism," *Le Monde*, December 18, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/12/18/bangladesh-s-prime-minister-has-plunged-her-country-into-authoritarianism_6355434_4.html; Agence France-Presse (AFP), "Bangladesh Election Draws Mixed Reactions Internationally," *Le Monde*, January 8, 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/01/08/bangladesh-election-draws-mixed-reactions-internationally_6414247_4.html.

7 "Youths Account for 28pc of Population," *The Daily Star*, April 10, 2023, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/youths-account-28pc-population-3293161>.

8 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Human Rights Violations and Abuses Related to the Protests of July and August 2024 in Bangladesh* (United Nations, 2025), iii, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/bangladesh/ohchr-fftb-hr-violations-bd.pdf>.

9 Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, "Implementation Order of the July National Charter (Constitutional Reform), 2025," November 13, 2025, <https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2025-11/Bangladesh%20Implementation%20Order%20of%20the%20July%20National%20Charter%202025%20%28English%20translation%29.pdf>.

choice intended to lend the process solid democratic credibility but risking the possibility of it getting entangled in pre-election partisanship¹⁰ and setting a precedent for circumventing constitutional norms in time of political crisis.¹¹

Crucially, the interim authorities restricted the Awami League’s political activity under the Anti-Terrorism Act,¹² and Sheikh Hasina was sentenced to death in absentia for her role in mass killings during the July Revolution.¹³ This had significant consequences both at home and abroad. First, the removal of one of the two historically dominant political poles fundamentally restructured the political palette, forcing national and local power brokers, and eventually voters, to realign.

Second, it further embittered relations with India,¹⁴ a historically close partner to Bangladesh, which now hosts the former prime minister.¹⁵ The Indian government¹⁶ and press¹⁷ focus great attention on allegedly growing violence against Bangladesh’s Hindu minority,¹⁸ while the Yunus government warmed up to Pakistan, from which Bangladesh broke away in 1971 with Indian help and with which it has had strained relations ever since.¹⁹ While chiefly a geopolitical

10 Saqlain Rizve, “Bangladesh’s Big Election Gamble,” *The Diplomat*, November 25, 2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/11/bangladeshs-big-election-gamble/>; Sangita F. Gazi and Arafat Hosen Khan, “Why Bangladesh’s Referendum Is a Gamble,” *The Diplomat*, February 9, 2026, <https://thediplomat.com/2026/02/why-bangladeshs-referendum-is-a-gamble/>.

11 Arafat Hosen Khan and Sangita F. Gazi, “Plebiscite or Refounding? The Constitutional Limits of the Referendum in Bangladesh,” *The Diplomat*, February 6, 2026, <https://thediplomat.com/2026/02/plebiscite-or-refounding-the-constitutional-limits-of-the-referendum-in-bangladesh/>.

12 Reuters, “Ousted Bangladesh PM Hasina’s Party Barred from Election; Party Registration Suspended,” May 13, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/ousted-bangladesh-pm-hasinas-party-barred-election-party-registration-suspended-2025-05-13/>.

13 Shariful Islam and Sirajul Islam Rubel, “Sheikh Hasina Sentenced to Death for Crimes against Humanity,” *The Daily Star*, November 17, 2025, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/sheikh-hasina-sentenced-death-crimes-against-humanity-4036886>.

14 International Crisis Group, *After the “Golden Era”: Getting Bangladesh-India Ties Back on Track*, Asia Report no. 353, December 23, 2025, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/rpt/asia-pacific/bangladesh-india/353-after-golden-era-getting-bangladesh-india-ties-back-track>.

15 Rudabeh Shahid et al., “Experts React: Sheikh Hasina Has Been Sentenced to Death in Absentia. What Does This Mean for Bangladesh’s Future?,” Atlantic Council, November 17, 2025, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/experts-react/experts-react-sheikh-hasina-has-been-sentenced-to-death-in-absentia-what-does-this-mean-for-bangladeshs-future/>.

16 Ministry of External Affairs of India, “Question No. 694: Harassment of Hindus in Bangladesh,” February 7, 2025, <https://www.mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/38994/QUESTION+NO+694+HARASSMENT+OF+HINDUS+IN+BANGLADESH>.

17 “Act Now: Global Body Flags Rise in Violence against Hindus in Bangladesh ahead of Polls,” *NDTV*, February 10, 2026, <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/act-now-global-body-flags-rise-in-violence-against-hindus-in-bangladesh-ahead-of-polls-10979091>.

18 BBC News, “‘Dragged Out and Set on Fire’—the Bangladesh Mob Killing That Shocked the World,” February 16, 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj3vve6v17xo>.

19 Saqlain Rizve, “Growing Pakistan-Bangladesh Relations Are Changing Regional Geopolitics,” *The Diplomat*, September 2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/09/growing-pakistan-bangladesh-relations-are-changing-regional-geopolitics/>.

balancing act aimed at demonstrating Bangladesh’s strategic autonomy under growing Indian pressure, this move also served to appease Islamic domestic constituencies that traditionally favor closer ties with Pakistan and that, with the Awami League banned, have become a major pole in the new party structure.

3. PARTIES, ALLIANCES, AND THE RESHAPED POLITICAL FIELD

Indeed, the Awami League’s absence has massively reshaped the political field as electoral competition shifted from a polarized two-party system to a contest between the long-established, dynasty-based and the upcoming, “insurgent” segments of the Hasina era’s opposition. The Bangladesh National Party, the left-wing nationalist Awami League’s traditional center-right opposition, soon became the only actor with nationwide organizational depth. BNP has historically combined secular nationalism, liberal economics, and moderate conservative (in the Bangladeshi context, liberal) social policies and after the 2024 July Revolution aligned itself with the July Charter’s institutional reform plan. Its 2026 platform included a skills- and technology-based, export-oriented economy that pays fair wages, monthly provisions of essentials for low-income families, boosting public spending on healthcare, and—possibly a concession both to religious Muslims and the Hindu minority—“training-based welfare programs for religious leaders of all faiths at places of worship.”²⁰

Commonplace for South Asian countries’ historical parties, BNP is also a family business. Tarique Rahman, its 2026 candidate for prime minister, is the son of former President Ziaur Rahman and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and since 2008 has been living in exile to avoid imprisonment or worse. He framed his return to Bangladeshi politics, however, as the return of normal competitive politics instead of a return to dynastic politics.²¹

In the Awami League’s stead, BNP had two high-profile challengers—albeit one still a distant second and one a distant third. To the right, after years of marginalization under Hasina, Jamaat-e-Islami and the broader Islamist camp around it re-emerged as a structured, disciplined political force capable

20 Reuters, “Key Priorities for BNP Winner in Bangladesh Election,” February 13, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/key-priorities-bnp-winner-bangladesh-election-2026-02-13/>.

21 Shahadat Shadhin, “An Interview with Tarique Rahman, Likely Bangladesh’s Next Prime Minister,” *The Diplomat*, February 4, 2026, <https://thediplomat.com/2026/02/an-interview-with-tarique-rahman-likely-bangladeshs-next-prime-minister/>.

of converting its local networks into parliamentary representation.²² While committed to introducing Islamic law, in 2026 it ran on a relatively moderate platform.²³ To the center, the National Citizen Party (NCP) emerged from the July Revolution’s youth movement, demanding a place for Generation Z and an end to corrupt, dynastic stagnation in Bangladeshi politics.²⁴ In December 2025, the NCP joined the Jamaat-led bloc, forming the “Eleven Party Alliance”—an internally highly contentious move the party justified with the pragmatic need for one powerful anti-hegemony coalition in the country’s first-past-the-post electoral system.²⁵ Smaller parties, like socialist and communist organizations, struggled to attract national attention.²⁶

Opinion polls in the final months for the most part projected BNP as the clear frontrunner, trailed by the Jamaat–NCP alliance.²⁷ An early February poll suggested that almost half of former Awami League voters would this time shift to the BNP.²⁸ Information warfare heavily shaped the final months leading up to the election. Social media, long used by political parties to get messages across, now teemed with bot-generated comments and emojis and AI-generated deepfakes. Disinformation from abroad also had a growing wave, especially coming from Indian outlets and India’s preferred Bangladeshi partner, the ousted Awami League.²⁹

22 “Decoding the Revival of Jamaat-e-Islami: The Who, What, Why ahead of 2026 Bangladesh Polls,” *Hindustan Times*, February 8, 2026, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/decoding-the-revival-of-jamaat-e-islami-the-who-what-why-ahead-of-2026-bangladesh-polls-101770523485117.html>.

23 Anupreeta Das and Saif Hasnat, “Bangladesh Election: Students and Islam,” *The New York Times*, February 15, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/15/world/asia/bangladesh-election-students-islam.html>.

24 Shamsad Mortuza, “National Citizen Party: The New Kids on the Political Block,” *The Daily Star*, March 1, 2025, <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/national-citizen-party-the-new-kids-the-political-block-3836396>.

25 The Daily Star, “Not an Ideological Alliance,” December 28, 2025, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/politics/news/not-ideological-alliance-4067916>.

26 Saqlain Rizve, “Bangladesh’s Left Returns to the Ballot: Can It Escape Political Irrelevance?,” *The Diplomat*, February 2026, <https://thediplomat.com/2026/02/bangladeshs-left-returns-to-the-ballot-can-it-escape-political-irrelevance/>.

27 Sumit Kumar, “Who Is Gonna Win the Bangladesh Elections 2026? Surveys Predict Close BNP vs Jamaat Contest as Nation Prepares for Historic Vote,” *The Sunday Guardian*, February 11, 2026, <https://sundayguardianlive.com/world/who-is-gonna-win-the-bangladesh-elections-2026-surveys-predict-close-bnp-vs-jamaat-contest-as-nation-prepares-for-historic-vote-169793/>.

28 The Business Standard, “48% of AL Voters Shifting to BNP: Survey,” February 4, 2026, <https://www.tbs-news.net/bangladesh-election-2026/voter-interest-above-90-nearly-half-al-voters-shifting-bnp-survey-1351951>.

29 Nazam Laila, “Bangladesh Election Reveals a Transformed Political Landscape,” Chatham House, February 10, 2026, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2026/02/bangladesh-election-reveals-transformed-political-landscape>.

4. RESULTS: CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM, BNP SWEEP, ISLAMIST BREAKTHROUGH

By February 13, 2026, reports confirmed a landslide BNP victory, with over two-thirds of parliamentary seats secured by gaining almost half of the popular vote.³⁰ Jamaat-e-Islami and NCP gained 68 and 6 seats with 31.97 and 3.07 percent of the popular vote share, respectively. Another eleven seats went to smaller parties and independents. Turnout was 59.44 percent—a significant improvement from 2024’s 41.8 percent but far below 2008’s peak at 87.13 percent.³¹ The July Charter referendum passed with 68.59 percent in favor and 31.41 percent against.³²

The scale of BNP’s victory reflects three main structural factors: the redistribution of Awami League voters, its superior organizational depth compared to new actors, and voters’ preference for predictability after years of volatility. Jamaat-e-Islami also achieved a parliamentary breakthrough by becoming the largest opposition force. Expectations of a close result were, however, overoptimistic, and for the time being they will face coalition-building constraints when national governance requires cross-ideological appeal. In the longer term, it remains crucial to watch whether NCP’s 2025–2026 alignment with the Islamist bloc will translate into a wider breach in the quarantine around political Islam. As for NCP, its alliance with Islamists has cost reformist and youth votes, and the party’s disappointing 2026 showing signifies the limits of movement-based generational politics even in relatively young societies in democratic transition should it fail building up truly robust constituency-level infrastructure.³³

30 Ruma Paul et al., “Son of Bangladesh’s Former Rulers Poised for Power as BNP Sweeps Poll,” *Reuters*, February 13, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/bangladeshs-bnp-wins-two-thirds-majority-land-mark-election-2026-02-13/>; The Daily Star, “National Election 2026,” accessed March 2, 2026, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/national-election-2026>.

31 The Daily Star, “Turnout in National Election and Referendum 59.44% Says EC,” February 13, 2026, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/national-election-2026/news/turnout-national-election-and-referendum-5944-says-ec-4105146>.

32 Reuters, “Why Is Bangladesh Holding a National Referendum alongside Its General Election?,” February 11, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/why-is-bangladesh-holding-national-referendum-alongside-its-general-election-2026-02-11>.

33 Das and Hasnat, “Bangladesh Election”; Zia Chowdhury et al., “After Gen Z Uprising, Bangladesh Vote Shows Limits of Youth Power,” *Reuters*, February 13, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/after-gen-z-uprising-bangladesh-vote-shows-limits-youth-power-2026-02-13/>.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

The 2026 Bangladeshi election's administrative credibility was crucial not only for normative reasons but because investors, foreign governments, and trade partners required assurance that the transitory period after the July Revolution would result in sustainable institutionalization. Whatever government is formed, these actors want assurance that it will be capable of maintaining order on the streets, restarting the economy, and preventing protracted instability, political crackdowns, and religious strife, as well as the potential resulting waves of population outflux.

BNP's showing justifies some optimism. With its relatively strong popular vote share and parliamentary supermajority, there is reason to expect Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's government to combine effective governance with popular legitimacy once it takes office on February 17. More worryingly, however, the main electoral alternative, which is supposed to prevent the return of a new dominant-party arrangement, is an Islamist coalition that envisions a Bangladesh ruled under religious law—a proposition horrifying to the country's sizeable religious minorities and which even the majority clearly rejects—at least for the time being.

Bangladesh's geopolitical repositioning, which intensified during the transition, can be expected to continue under a BNP government. For New Delhi, the election presents an opportunity for a de-escalation and the re-normalization of its relations with post-revolution Bangladesh. The Awami League and Sheikh Hasina's return is not exactly out of the cards: nearby Pakistan, for instance, presents an example for erstwhile convicted and exiled politicians returning to leading roles as political arrangements shift. Still, New Delhi's continued hostility to the new government in Dhaka would run the risk of pushing it even closer to the China–Pakistan axis, giving the People's Republic a Bangladesh-shaped opening for further increasing its footprint in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region.

A possible rapprochement with India notwithstanding, pragmatic engagement with Pakistan is likely to continue, and China's deeply embedded influence in Bangladesh's port, transport, and energy infrastructure and investment patterns are not going away either.³⁴ Beijing reportedly reached

34 Imran Ahmed and Mriganika Singh Tanwar, "Structural Ties, Political Change: Bangladesh, China and the Next Government," National University of Singapore Institute of South Asian Studies, February 11, 2026, <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/structural-ties-political-change-bangladesh-china-and-the-next-government/>.

out both to BNP and Jamaat leaders during the campaign season, “transition-proofing” its relations with Bangladesh—a country key for China for the Belt and Road Initiative’s geographic connectivity, as an outlet for Chinese industrial exports and cheap labor seeking foreign investment and as a political asset in South Asia, a region where India has traditionally held influence. For Bangladesh, regardless of who reigns in Dhaka, neither overtly antagonizing India nor failing to hedge against overreliance on a towering neighbor would be prudent. This, at the same time, also means that the country’s joining of the ostensibly emerging Pakistan–Turkey–Saudi Arabia alliance is unlikely, unless India’s antagonism remains a permanent fixture.

Democratic legitimacy is also instrumentally linked to Bangladesh’s relations with Western powers. A government perceived as electorally credible is better positioned to negotiate trade arrangements with the second Trump administration, which is currently tariffing the country at 19 percent,³⁵ and the European Union, which recently revoked Bangladesh’s preferential access to its markets on account of the country’s graduation from the “least-developed country” category.³⁶ In both relationships, this means worse conditions than the main competitor of the Bangladeshi textile industry, India, will soon enjoy.³⁷ A stable government in Dhaka is also prerequisite for containing internal unrest, cooperating with foreign governments on enforcing migration rules, and in general preventing migration surges and the spillover of radicalization.

6. GEOPOLITICS, TRADE PRESSURES, AND EUROPEAN ECONOMIC EXPOSURE

External economic pressures compound these geopolitical calculations. Under the second Trump administration’s renewed tariff activism, Bangladeshi exports—especially exports of garments—have faced heightened uncertainty in the U.S. market, increasing Dhaka’s reliance on European demand. Simultaneously, the EU–India Free Trade Agreement, if fully implemented, would enhance preferential access for Indian textiles in European markets,

35 The White House, “Joint Statement on Framework for United States–Bangladesh Agreement on Reciprocal Trade,” February 9, 2026, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2026/02/joint-statement-on-framework-for-united-states-bangladesh-agreement-on-reciprocal-trade/>.

36 Refayet Ullah Mirdha, “Govt Angling for Free Trade with EU,” *The Daily Star*, September 17, 2025, <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/govt-angling-free-trade-eu-3988656>.

37 Zsolt Trembeczki and Jad Marcell Harb, “The EU–India Free Trade Agreement: Economics Unlocked by Geopolitics,” Hungarian Institute of International Affairs, February 9, 2026, <https://hiia.hu/en/the-eu-india-free-trade-agreement-economics-unlocked-by-geopolitics/>.

intensifying competitive pressure on Bangladeshi producers. Given that the EU absorbs the largest share of Bangladesh's garment exports, shifts in European trade policy directly affect employment and macroeconomic stability in Dhaka.³⁸

7. CONCLUSION

Overall, the 2026 Bangladeshi election and referendum have made promising steps toward consolidating the country's post-2024 democratic transition into a sustainable political order centered on a moderate BNP-led government with both democratic legitimacy and a workable parliamentary majority, albeit operating under constitutional constraints. The structural shift in the country's party system, however, has increased the stakes: should this arrangement fail to deliver on economic progress and political stabilization, there is increased risk of either a drift back to the dominant-party structure or an Islamist coalition being the next to take up the mantle of government. The Awami League's eventual return from the wilderness may prove a necessary step to prevent Jamaat from being the only realistic electoral alternative.

Together with the upcoming election in Nepal, another South Asian country currently undergoing political transition, the 2026 Bangladeshi election may also help understand the politics of transition in low- and middle-income countries with ossified party systems and large young population bulge. From this perspective, the youth protest movement's disappointing electoral performance in Bangladesh and its local build-up in Nepal³⁹ underlines the importance of movement-based parties' transition to local organization and constituency-level appeal.

The election's result will not fundamentally alter the country's geopolitical position, but, for India, it presents an opportunity to correct its antagonistic post-revolution policies and thus mitigate Bangladesh's drift toward China and Pakistan. The latter two, meanwhile, can expect the country's cautious hedging to continue on a pragmatic basis and leverage it against New Delhi's ambitions for dominance in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region. For Europe, the significance of Bangladesh's transition and the 2026 election is

38 Refayet Ullah Mirdha, "EU's GSP+: The Lifeline Bangladesh Must Win before 2029," *The Daily Star*, December 5, 2025, <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/eus-gsp-lifeline-bangladesh-must-win-2029-4051411>; "Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+)," European Commission, accessed March 2, 2026, <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/en/content/generalised-scheme-preferences-plus-gsp>.

39 "Nepal's Political Crossroads: An Election Guide," *The Japan Times*, February 17, 2026, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2026/02/17/asia-pacific/politics/nepal-election-guide/>.

indirect but not inconsequential. Trade exposure, migration management, and Indo-Pacific geopolitics are all affected by whether a competent and stable government sits in Dhaka or the country of 176 million falls into ungovernability or political Islamization. If the BNP succeeds or eventually gets replaced by other moderate and competent forces, Bangladesh may preserve its competitive political environment, continue recent decades' low-basis but relatively rapid developmental trajectories, and remain a reliable multi-vectoral partner for a diverse set of external powers—including trade-hungry and migration-wary Europe. If it fails, the consequences will be felt along supply chains, migration routes, and diplomatic alignments well beyond South Asia.



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