

**RESEARCH PAPER****Comparative Analysis of Electoral Trends in Pakistan and Bangladesh in the General Elections 2024****<sup>1</sup>Dr. Yawar Hayat Shah\* and <sup>2</sup>Dr. Maryam Azam**

1. Deputy Controller of Examinations, Lahore College for Women University, LCWU, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, Lahore College for Women University, LCWU, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

**Corresponding Author**[yawarhayatshah@yahoo.com](mailto:yawarhayatshah@yahoo.com)**ABSTRACT**

Electoral politics is a crucial aspect of a democratic society. Pakistan and Bangladesh, two significant states in the South Asian region, have both faced challenges in establishing a viable democratic system. The aim of the research is to examine the electoral trends and issue of electoral integrity in Pakistan and Bangladesh in General Elections. The 2024 General Elections in Bangladesh were marred by violent protests, leading to the opposition to question the legality of the elections. Similarly, the 2024 General Elections in Pakistan were met with questions about the fairness and transparency of the election results. Both countries have struggled with issues such as civil-military dissent, military rule, and weak democratic institutions, which have compromised the integrity of the electoral process. This study identified the main electoral trends in Pakistan and Bangladesh particularly in the General Elections 2024 to compare the state of democracy, role of opposition, civil-military relations, and youth participation in the electoral process.

**Keywords:** Electoral politics, Pakistan, Bangladesh, General Elections 2024, Democracy**Introduction**

Democracy in South Asia presents a complex and unusual blend of vibrant electoral participation on one hand, and growing authoritarianism, populism, and institutional weaknesses on the other. The region is home to more than a quarter of the world's population, making its democratic culture critical both locally and globally. The global context of south Asia signifies the tendency of centralization and authoritarianism as in 2024 only 45% of the world's population live in democracies, while 39% under authoritarian rule, and 15% in hybrid regimes (Democratic Index 2024, 2024). Democratic culture in South Asia is both deeply rooted and contested. While the region boasts some of the highest voter turnouts in the world and strong traditions of political mobilization, it also grapples with institutional fragility, elite dominance, identity-based politics, and restricted civic freedoms. In this framework, this study has analyzed the 2024 General Elections of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Democracy in the contemporary south Asian context can be analyzed through multiple framework. Firstly, a gradual shift is observed from democracy to autocracy mainly due to polarization of the society in the political, economic and social realm, dissent between state, institutes, and forces, along with unfair means of elections and control of media (From Democracy to Autocracy: A Rising Trend of Autocratization in South Asia, 2025). In this framework, Pakistan and Bangladesh both signifies the existence of weak institutional framework, imbalance civil-military relations, and centralization as main elements that hinders democratic development. This complex interplay highlights the inherent challenges in reconciling ideal policy prescriptions with pragmatic political considerations, particularly within the context of developing democracies.

## **Literature Review**

Shehabuddin, (2001) explains that weak insitutionalism has been a major challenges to democracy in Bangladesh. Weak political institutions in terms of distributing power, and resources has been a major feature of politics in Bangaldesh. Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) dominates the electoral politics in the region. They both represents two different national identities. The writer examines the culturalist and structurlist debate within the national identity framework of Bangladesh. One is embedded in the slogan of Bengali Nationalism mainly developed during 1947-1971 as people became more counsicous about their distinct Bengali identity. On the other hand, a discourse between the secualism based nationalism of Shiekh Mujib and Islam based nationalism of Zia-ur-Rehman remained two important idelogies in Bagladesh political landscape.

Chowdhury, (2024) examines the crucial role of military in the politics of Bangladesh from 1975 onwards. It is considered as the most powerful entity of the state. The instutionaliztion of military have somehow given them an upper hand against the civilian institues who have been unable to develop and functional properly. The lack of institutional approach in their politco-economic framework has given more leverage to military to expand their power and control in the affairs of the state.

European Union: Election Expert Mission to Bangladesh, (2024) in their report on the General Elections of Bangladesh in 2024 identified restricted role of opposition parties, mass arrests, judicial proceedings against opponents, and compromised freedom of speech, association, civil and political rights as some major features observed during the elections. Awami League was the only political party that organise massive rallies because they were deliberately given the political space and resources for the campaign. In aadition, the Cyber Security Act 2023, was used to regulate, control, and restrict media and legitimate online speech. Therefore, international standards of democratic norms lacked in the pre and post election phase in Bangladesh. Moroever, women representation and participation also faced challenges during election.

Islam, (2024) examines the role of social media in political participation in Bangladesh in reshaping the political discourse in the General Elections of 2024. In this context, FaceBook is one such social media platform that was extensively used to disseminate political content, develop connectivity, and integrate strategies to shape and reshape public opinion. Therefore, political communication and public opinion formation remianed a vital element in the election campaign of 2024 General Elections. The author studied a sample of aged 18-50 in five consitueincies in Bangladesh. The regression analysis findings identified the socio-political context that influences the formulation of public opinion (FPO). A strong influence of Information Seeking (IS) was observed among the slected group particularly when individuals actively engage with information, they are more likely to form informed opinions on political and social issues. This is crucial for democratic participation and decision-making. Similarly, Social Interaction (SI) underscores the importance of social networks. Conversations and group discussions often shape individuals' opinions, influencing voting behavior and policy support. The Entertainment Factor (ENF) demonstrates that entertainment media, including television, films, and online content, can significantly alter perceptions of political figures or issues, often contributing to public discourse. In addition, the use of FaceBook was by Parliamentary candiadtes to connect with the population was highly visble. The comment section also provided a feedback to the candidate to understand the aspirations of their voters. Spinelli, (2024) is of the view that electoral integrity significantly started to decline in Bangladesh since 2014 mainly due to the issues of transparency, electoral irregularities, allegations of widespread fraud during elections, low levels of voter turnout, media restrictions, and a deep political polarization in the society. In addition, within the Global State of Democracy, Bangladesh secured low score in three main categories including the rule of law, rights, and representation that signifies democratic culture in the system.

The existing literature of the electoral dynamics of Pakistan multiple dimensions including civil-military relations, party politics, voter behavior, institutional design, clientelism, and authoritarian tendencies. In this context, Taylor, (1992) examines how Pakistan's political parties and electoral system interact to shape the quality and resilience of its democracy. Written following the restoration of civilian rule in 2007–08, the article probes whether Pakistan's political institutions are transitioning beyond merely procedural democracy toward a more substantive one. He underscores the dominance of dynastic elites, patronage networks, and regional identities. These modes of competition often overshadow ideology and limit democratic deepening. Though the judiciary and Election Commission showed signs of becoming institutional constraints on military and executive interference, their long-term autonomy remained fragile. Political institutions demonstrated resilience, but also displayed inconsistency and susceptibility to intervention during crises. Moosvi, (2021) is of the view that the legal system of Pakistan have several structural and procedural gaps that gives space to political parties to manoeuvre it. He further explains the electoral shortcomings in three major domains, i.e., legal frameworks, party behavior, and technical innovations. For example, Electoral laws, including the Election Act 2017, was ambiguous, facilitating manipulation at various points including candidate rights, ballot secrecy, campaign limits, vote counting, and boundary delimitation. Moreover, dynastic politics is yet another significant electoral trend in Pakistan where parties rely on powerful local figures, known as electables with vote-bank control.

Azhar, (2020) explores how electoral dynamics in Pakistan have influenced the broader process of political development and governance. It analyzes patterns in voter behavior, party competition, and institutional evolution, linking these trends to the quality of governance delivered. He further argued that the role of political parties often prioritize short-term electoral gains over policy coherence and long-term development goals. It turns develop an elite capture and hinders the democratic development.

Shukla, (2024) explains that the political contestation between PTI, PML-N, and PPP in the General Elections of 2024 in Pakistan had a symbolic value as it generated a debate of electoral legality, government formation, and realities of power politics. The authors highlighted that elections are becoming hollow rituals, orchestrated by the deep state and driven by ceaseless institutional manipulation in Pakistan. The legitimacy of democratic processes is eroding, replaced by managed democracy with declining public trust as happened in the General Elections of 2024.

## **Material and Methods**

This study is based on exploratory and analytical type of research. The exploratory aspect of this study seeks to investigate new developments, emerging patterns, and underlying dynamics of the electoral processes in both countries. The analytical component involves a systematic examination and comparison of the electoral data and associated documents from both countries. In addition, Document analysis has been employed as a qualitative research method to systematically review and interpret relevant documents related to the 2024 General Elections in Pakistan and Bangladesh. This method supports the study's comparative nature and helps uncover patterns, themes, and insights from textual sources.

## **Results and Discussion**

In order to understand the interplay of democracy, electoral integrity, and state institutions, Andreas Schedler's conceptual framework of Electoral authoritarianism has been applied. Electoral authoritarian regimes practice authoritarianism behind the institutional cover-ups of representative democracy. Schedler investigates how electoral authoritarian regimes governments that hold elections but violate democratic standards—use uncertainty strategically to maintain control. These regimes are neither fully democratic

nor outright dictatorships. He further argues that rather than suppressing all unpredictability, authoritarian leaders manipulate and manage uncertainty to their advantage, using elections as tools of both legitimacy and control. Rather than eliminating unpredictability, authoritarian leaders tolerate or manufacture certain types of uncertainty to manage elites, co-opt opposition, and legitimize their rule (Schedler, 2015). They hold multiparty elections at the national level, yet violate liberal-democratic minimum standards in systematic and profound ways. This is how hybrid arrangements relied on electoral and constitutional consolidation. In addition, (Miller, 2009) explains that authoritarian rulers develop a close connection centralization of power, electoral authoritarianism, and democracy where mostly issues of class conflict, resource redistribution, and probability of revolt against the system exist. In this way, the authoritarian ruler is able to get an insight of the public aspiration which may not be the case in autocracy. Therefore, in order to operate a hybrid system, elections, legislative and judicial measures are used to take a legal cover as observed in the case of Pakistan and Bangladesh. One of the most distinguishing feature of electoral authoritarianism is that they partially allow the people to show their opposition to the system in order to reduce the uncertainty about contextualizing the preferences of the people. This is how they can manipulate the citizens by providing a cosmetic democratic effect to the political system.

### Main Features of Electoral Authoritarianism (EA)

The existence of elections is often seen as a hallmark of democracy but elections alone do not guarantee a democratic system. In South Asia, while elections are regularly held in most countries, their freedom, fairness, and inclusiveness vary widely. The lack of electoral integrity refers to the manipulation of electoral process to favor certain political actors, undermining the legitimacy of both the outcome and democratic governance itself. The following table illustrates the main features of Electoral Authoritarianism (EA).

**Table 1**  
**Main Features of Electoral Authoritarianism (EA)**

Key Themes	Mechanisms	Intended Objectives
Strategic Use of Uncertainty	Through limited electoral competition	Regimes monitor dissent, test loyalty, and adjust strategies
Double-Edged Nature of Elections	Aimed regime stability but also pose risks of subversion	trigger mass mobilization if control is not properly managed
Tools of Control	Use of legal, institutional, and informal methods (e.g., censorship, vote rigging, patronage, coercion) to manage competition	Judiciary, electoral commissions, and security services are often co-opted for maximum electoral gain in elections

### General Elections of Pakistan, 2024

The 2024 General Elections in Pakistan were held on February 8, 2024, marking a significant chapter in the nation's political landscape. These elections, initially scheduled for 2023, were delayed due to political unrest following the ousting of former Prime Minister Imran Khan in 2022. Khan's subsequent legal challenges, including corruption convictions and a five-year political ban, led to his absence from the electoral process. The pre-election scenario was marked by significant political instability and chaos. For example, the decision of Supreme Court (SC) to strip the party symbol of PTI was a major setback as candidate had to run as independent candidates. (Muzaffar, et. al., 2020). Election symbols are of immense importance when it comes to election campaign and voting. In addition, a party without a symbol cannot claim reserve seats for minorities and women. Therefore, this decision significantly reduced the electoral visibility of PTI during the election day and even their seat ratio was compromised in the parliament (Afzal, 2024).

The electoral process was marred by allegations of military interference, with critics accusing the military establishment of manipulating the outcome to favor PML-N and

prevent PTI's participation (Fareed, et. al., 2019) International observers, including entities from the United States, United Kingdom, and the European Union, expressed concerns over the fairness of the elections. Pakistan's asymmetric social and political power relations and the entrenchment of the military are constant features regardless of regime type and the political affiliations of elected governments. With 47.8 percent of voting turn out, GE 2024 were characterized by allegations of electoral manipulation, military interference, and a fragmented political landscape. The electoral environment was shaped by several factors including the disqualification and arrest of Khan in 2023, the persisting question of legality on Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), rising public dissatisfaction over the system, economic issues, along with delayed elections. The elections recorded the highest-ever voter turnout in Pakistan's history, with over 61.28 million voters casting their ballots.

The post-election scenario took a complex shape in Pakistan accompanied with the question of electoral legality, polarized opposition, issues of governance, and acceptance of new government on the international front (Malik, et. al., 2023). The power distribution in the new parliament reflects diversity and a coalition government, with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) securing 75 seats on the government benches and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) obtaining 54 seats. However, the Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), supported by independents, won 93 seats out of 266 on the opposition benches (Rizvi, 2024). Despite all odds, a significant number of seats gained by the opposition was considered as a vote against status quo. Khan who once enjoyed complete support of military accused military meddling in his dismissal. The transformation in the civil-military relationship had a massive impact on the political profile of Pakistan as well as on societal polarization of political lines. The military dominance in Pakistan is not a new phenomenon. Since independence, the military has played an outsized role in shaping politics, either directly through coups or indirectly through manipulation of civilian governments. This entrenched dominance creates a persistent state of political uncertainty for civilian actors. Instead of forming robust democratic institutions or alliances, many politicians have historically sought military backing to gain or retain power. This mirrors Schedler's argument that authoritarian regimes (or hybrid systems) often function through alliances of convenience, where civilian elites trade autonomy for survival. In Schedler's terms, uncertainty becomes a strategic condition rather than a failure of the system

### **General Elections of Bangladesh, 2024**

The ruling Bangladesh Awami League (AL) secured a fourth consecutive term in a one-sided election, which the opposition and its allies boycotted. However, the new government was short-lived. Starting in July 2024, a student-led uprising, supported by hundreds of thousands of citizens, stood up to state repression and the authoritarianism of the Sheikh Hasina government. The escalating unrest led to anarchy, resulting in her resignation and departure from the country on August 5th, 2024. This major shift in the political landscape of Bangladesh was accompanied with factors of identity, economy, and society. Bangladesh's political landscape is heavily influenced by the traditional rivalry between two major political parties, the socialist-secular Awami League (AL) and the conservative-nationalist Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). This rivalry is not only based on ideological differences, but also has personal roots in the historical grievances between Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, who are commonly known as the 'Battling Begums.' This competition between the AL and BNP often escalates into violence, both during and outside of election periods. This includes frequent attacks on political opponents, street clashes between the parties, violent anti-government demonstrations, and state repression of protests. The student, youth, and labor wings of these parties are often involved in such violent incidents (The Violent Politics of Bangladesh's 2024 Elections, 2024). The General Elections in Bangladesh, held on January 7, 2024, resulted in a significant victory for the Awami League (AL), led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The AL secured 224 out of 300 seats in the Jatiya Sangsad (National Parliament), while independent candidates, many

backed by the AL, won 62 seats (Ng, 2024). The main opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), boycotted the elections, citing concerns over electoral fairness and the absence of a neutral caretaker government. Voter turnout was notably low, with reports indicating participation around 40%. This election was marred by allegations of electoral fraud, including vote-rigging and voter intimidation. International observers, including the United States and the United Kingdom, criticized the elections as neither free nor fair. In the ensuing months, widespread protests erupted, particularly led by students demanding democratic reforms and the resignation of Sheikh Hasina. These protests were met with significant violence, resulting in numerous casualties. Amidst escalating unrest, Sheikh Hasina fled to India on August 5, 2024, marking the end of her 15-year tenure. Subsequently, an interim government was established under Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, with plans to hold new elections by December 2025.

**Table 2**  
**Main features of electoral trends in both the countries**

Electoral Trends	Pakistan	Bangladesh
The State of Democracy	Voter turnout fell to 48%, down from 52% in 2018 (www.ecp.gov.pk, 2024)	Voter turnout was a low 41.8%, sharply down from ~80% in 2018 (www.reuters.com, 2024)
Credibility Concerns & Institutional Bias	Internet shutdown on election day, delays in tallying results, and discrepancies between paper and official count	The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its allies boycotted the polls. Numerous reports of ballot stuffing, vote manipulation, and fake candidacies run by AL supporters disguised as independent
The Role of Military	Military establishment operated as a shadow force, shaping outcomes. Alleged involvement in media censorship and political crackdowns	Reportedly involved in pre-election intelligence surveillance and repression of opposition
Youth participation in the electoral process	Youth voter turnout is 11% higher than 2018 and 22% higher than 2013 (Gallup, 2024) but has been underutilized due to structural, cultural, and institutional barriers.	74% of youth survey respondents expressed willingness to vote but they were unable to vote due to structural constraints (www.dhakatribune.com, 2025)
The Type of Regime	Competitive Electoral Authoritarianism- there was competition but with an uneven playing field. The outcome was shaped by state intervention	Hegemonic Electoral Authoritarianism- Dominant ruling party with no real electoral competition
Institutional overplay	In January 2024, the courts ruled that the PTI had not held valid internal elections, and so were unable to stand as a party during the elections	High Court's decision on reinstating job quota. This system reserved 30% of government jobs for the descendants of freedom fighters
Authoritarian Controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crackdown on PTI</li> <li>• Media control</li> <li>• Military backing for PDM</li> </ul>	Political violence AND ARREST OF opposition Control over judiciary and media.

### Post-Election Situational Analysis

In Bangladesh, The High Court ordered the reinstatement of the controversial quota system for civil service jobs, a policy that had been abolished in 2018 following widespread protests. The court ruled that the 30% quota for descendants of freedom fighters, along with other reserved quotas, must be reinstated. However, in July 2024, the Supreme Court's Appellate Division overturned the High Court ruling. The Supreme Court decided that 93% of civil service positions should be filled based on merit, with only 5% reserved for freedom fighter descendants, 1% for ethnic minorities, and 1% for persons with disabilities and third gender individuals. In reality, the anti-quota protests gained their strength from a deep-seated economic and political condition simmering in Bangladesh for the last few years. Sheikh Hasina significantly miscalculated. The student leaders demanded an apology for the state-sanctioned violence and also called for the dismissal of certain ministers and officials but she adopted more confrontational politics. The military brokered a deal that led to the

formation of an interim government. Therefore, institutional support of military also became a significant factor in the political transition

In Pakistan, vote rigging, late result announcements, mobile network shutdowns on election day, and media censorship cast a shadow over electoral fairness. The fragmented mandate resulted in a weak federal government. In addition, the 2024 elections reinforced perceptions that Pakistan's military continues to influence civilian politics, particularly in shaping coalitions and determining acceptable candidates. The role of youth, media, and people's participation in elections has altogether transformed the political realities and narrative in Pakistan. the overall political landscape of Pakistan in post-election phase moved towards stability mainly due to concordance that existed between the sitting government and military establishment. In addition, government took certain economic reforms to come out of default crisis. Moreover, the geopolitical shifts in the south Asian region also facilitated the government to develop strong footing at the domestic level.

### **Conclusion**

In Pakistan the election had real stakes, but the field was rigged. Moreover, the institutional support of military has been the most important factor that facilitated the new system to consolidate power. Pakistan faced allegations of electoral manipulation but the government has been able to consolidate power with the support of state institutions. On the other hand, in Bangladesh, there was no meaningful opposition, and the election merely served to legitimize continued rule. Therefore, Bangladesh experienced a political collapse leading to a military-led interim government. The resilience of people, tactical advantage taken by opposition, and military's drift in supporting Shiekh Hasina's government was pivotal in the political transition. In both cases, elections were less about transferring power and more about reinforcing control.

### **Recommendations**

- Both Pakistan and Bangladesh should prioritize strengthening the independence and capacity of their election commissions to ensure transparent and impartial elections.
- Political parties in both countries should be encouraged to practice internal democracy, transparency in candidate selection, and financial accountability.
- Civil society organizations must be empowered to conduct voter education campaigns, counter misinformation, and monitor electoral conduct.
- Balance in the civil-military relationship along with apolitical role of military is pivotal for democracy

## References

- ACLED (2024). *The Violent Politics of Bangladesh's 2024 Elections*. ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data).
- Afzal, M. (2024). *Pakistan's surprising and marred 2024 election, and what comes next*. Brookings Institute
- Azhar, M. (2020). Electoral Trends and Political Development. In G. Ali, *Perspectives on Contemporary Pakistan*. Routledge
- Chowdhury, A. (2024). Bangladesh: 53 Years of Solitude. *Asian Affairs*, 55, 383-399. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2024.2411609>
- Democratic Index 2024*. (2024). <https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2024/>
- Dhaka Tribune* (2025, July 1). [www.dhakatribune.com](http://www.dhakatribune.com)
- European Union, (2024). *European Union: Election Expert Mission to Bangladesh*. European Union.
- (2025). *From Democracy to Autocracy: A Rising Trend of Autocratization in South Asia*. International Political Science Association (IPSA).
- Islam, M. F. (2024). Formation of Public Opinion Through Facebook: A Study on the 2024 General Election Campaign. *Portuguese Journal of Political Science*(23), 77-99. doi: 10.59071/2795-4765.RPCP2024.22
- Javier Cerrato, e. c. (2018). Gender Inequality in Household Chores and Work-Family Conflict. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11.
- Miller, M. K. (2009). Electoral Authoritarianism and Democracy: A Formal Model of Regime Transitions. *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 25(2), 1-39
- Moosvi, A. (2021). *Electoral Politics in Pakistan: Law, Parties, and the Need for Innovation*. Islamabad: Pakistan Institute of Development Economics.
- Muzaffar, M., Yaseen, Z. & Safdar, S. (2020). Role of Social Media in Political Campaigns in Pakistan: A Case of Study of 2018 Elections, *Journal of Political Studies*, 27 (2), 141-151
- Ng, E. A. (2024, January 8). Bangladesh election: PM Sheikh Hasina wins fourth term in controversial vote. *BBC*
- Rizvi, W. (2024). *Pakistan's Post-Election Crossroads: Navigating Democracy's Challenges and Opportunities*. Friedrich Naumann Foundation.
- Shehabuddin, S. T. (2001). Bangladeshi Politics Since Independence. *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Bangladesh*
- Shukla, A. B. (2024). Making Sense of Elections in Pakistan: Challenges Galore. *Strategic Analysis*, V 48, 131-144.
- Spinelli, A. (2024). *Overcoming Bangladesh's electoral integrity deficit: time for political compromise and dialogue*. IDEA.
- Taylor, D. (1992). Parties, Elections, and Democracy in Pakistan. *The Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 30, 95-115