

FPTP VS. PR: REASSESSING BANGLADESH'S ELECTORAL SYSTEM FOR INCREASED REPRESENTATION, STABILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material that has been accepted or submitted for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.



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List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Form
FPTP	First-Past-the-Post
PR	Proportional Representation
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
NCP	National Citizens' Party
AL	Awami League
JIB	Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh
IJOFF	Islami Jatiya Oikya Front
JP	Jatiyo Party

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1 Executive Summary

This policy memo assesses the performance and viability of Bangladesh's First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) electoral system in light of recent political changes, including the ousting of the Awami League (AL) government in August 2024 and subsequent reform agenda of the interim government under Professor Muhammad Yunus. It evaluates potential transitions to Proportional Representation (PR) or mixed electoral models, particularly within the proposed bicameral legislature from the Electoral Reform Commission of Bangladesh. Drawing on comparative experiences from South Asia, including Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan and India, the memo weighs the trade-offs between representation, accountability and stability. The memo ultimately recommends implementing a bicameral parliament, with a lower house elected through FPTP and an upper house through PR. It further advocates for adopting the Saint-Laguë seat allocation method, instituting a 3% vote threshold for party eligibility in the upper house, and establishing mechanisms to prevent the entry of extremist parties. In addition, this memo proposes reforms to enhance the representation of women and minorities, as well as to strengthen institutional checks and balances, thereby ensuring the sustainability of democratic governance in Bangladesh.

2 Introduction

Bangladesh stands at a critical juncture in its democratic journey, confronting long-standing electoral distortions entrenched by its First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) electoral system. While FPTP systems are traditionally lauded for simplicity and government stability, they have also been criticized for amplifying disproportionality, encouraging political exclusion, and fostering authoritarian tendencies in burgeoning democracies with weak institutions (ACE, n.d.; International IDEA, 2005). Moreover, Duverger's (1959) seminal work on electoral systems also shows that the FPTP system gives rise to a two-party dominant system. Bangladesh's political landscape, shaped by a deeply adversarial two-party dynamic between the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) for several decades, provides fertile ground for these critiques. As the political pendulum oscillated between these two parties post-1991, FPTP allowed marginal vote differentials to yield massive parliamentary majorities, most notably in 2014 and 2018, where the AL secured over [78% of the seats](#) amidst electoral irregularities (Riaz, 2019; Riaz, 2020).

The structural features of FPTP have produced not only disproportionate outcomes but also a zero-sum "winner takes all" political culture, wherein losing equates to near-total exclusion from legislative power. In essence, the stakes of losing become intolerable for the opposition party, with the winner having the ability to exercise total control over state apparatuses, including the legislature, judiciary and police and civil administrations. This dynamic has incentivized electoral violence, vote rigging, and widespread boycotts, as parties perceive elections not as mechanisms of representation but as existential battles for survival (Islam, 2015). Additionally, the system has marginalized smaller parties and underrepresented groups, particularly women and ethnic minorities (Jahan, 2014). Even though quotas exist for women MPs, they often appear tokenistic, with the winning party selecting, instead of electing, party loyalists rather than seasoned legislators who will effectively represent the people (Ahmad & Siddika, 2025). Despite a growing multiplicity of political actors in the current post-AL era, electoral representation remains bottlenecked through a system that fails to reflect Bangladesh's socio-political diversity.

Calls for electoral reform have grown louder since the ousting of the AL in August 2024, with the BNP, National Citizens' Party (NCP), and Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh (JIB) advocating for a more inclusive, proportional model of representation. The Constitution Reform Commission's (2025) proposal to introduce a bicameral legislature, with a 400-member FPTP-based lower house and a 105-member PR-based upper house, has reopened debates about representation, stability, and accountability. Advocates of mixed models argue that such a hybrid design could temper the worst excesses of FPTP while retaining its local representational strength (Akter, 2021; Sayem, 2024). Yet the proposal also raises concerns about potential instability, elite entrenchment, and extremist entry, especially given the 1% threshold suggested for upper house eligibility.

The electoral framework of Bangladesh, coupled with weak state institutions such as the Bangladesh Election Commission and judiciary, has repeatedly failed to deliver representative, peaceful, and credible elections. As political pluralism re-emerges in the post-2024 environment, there is a pressing need to reform the electoral system in a manner that facilitates fair representation and institutionalizes safeguards against extremism and elite capture, thus potentially leading to a post-revolution democratic consolidation.

As Bangladesh reimagines its electoral system amidst a fragile democratic revival, it must balance three factors: proportional representation of its diverse polity, institutional stability, and robust accountability mechanisms. This policy paper investigates whether the current FPTP model remains viable, or whether a PR or mixed model alternative offers a more just and effective path forward.

3 Problem Statement

Small differences in vote share have translated into disproportionate parliamentary majorities, easing the pathway towards political exclusion, authoritarian consolidation, and electoral violence. The AL's monopolization of parliamentary authority post-2011 exemplifies how dominance of one party with unchecked balances on their activity can contribute to executive encroachment into the legislative and judicial wings to an irreversible extent. The abolition of the caretaker government via the Fifteenth Amendment delegitimized electoral outcomes by removing a key mechanism for impartial oversight (Riaz, 2014), resulting in landslide victories for the ruling AL party in subsequent elections, as seen in [Table 4.4.1](#). As a result, the elections in 2014, 2018 and 2024 had the AL enjoying supermajorities in parliament, where it had free rein over state apparatuses without plausible scope for the BNP being reelected (Transparency International, 2024). This was only possible as the AL achieved a resounding 230-seat victory in the 2008 election, with the BNP only getting 30 seats, despite only an overall 15% difference in total votes (Vote BD, 2018), transforming Bangladesh from an electoral democracy to an authoritarian regime, which led to the AL's fifteen-year hold on power.

These dynamics have coalesced into a democratic crisis. Parliamentary legitimacy has eroded, and citizens increasingly view elections as manipulated rituals rather than genuine exercises in self-governance. Reserved seats for women and minorities, while symbolically important, have not translated into substantive inclusion, as these representatives are typically selected by party elites rather than directly elected by voters (Jahan, 2014; Ahmad & Siddika, 2025). The current political transition offers a rare opportunity to redress these institutional pathologies. Yet any electoral reform must consider not only normative ideals of representation and fairness but also the structural and political realities of Bangladesh. The rise of newly registered parties, including those with extremist leanings, raises concerns about the use of PR to legitimize illiberal actors

(MOPA, 2025). At the same time, a return to AL–BNP dominance would risk entrenching the very political duopoly that eroded democratic norms in the first place (Jahan & Amundsen, 2012). Thus, the central challenge is to design an electoral system that ensures inclusivity without sacrificing stability, increases representation without enabling fragmentation, and re-establishes institutional credibility without replicating past failures.

4 Background and Comparative Context

The First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) and Proportional Representation (PR) electoral systems have differences in terms of seat allocation, local representation, wasted votes & fairness, inclusiveness, government stability and complexity for voters. Below are some key differences.

Table 4.1 Different features of the FPTP and PR systems

Feature	FPTP (Plurality)	PR (Proportional)
Seat Allocation	Each single-member constituency elects one winner; the candidate with the most votes wins (“winner-takes-all”). This often creates a gap between a party’s national vote share and its seats won in the legislature.	Seats in the legislature are allocated in proportion to each party’s share of the total vote. This generally aligns seats with overall voter support, minimizing distortions between votes and seats.
Local Representation	Strong geographical link: each elected MP directly represents a defined local constituency. Voters thus choose individual candidates, fostering accountability to local communities.	Weaker geographic linkage: representatives often come from party lists or large multi-member districts rather than single-member constituencies. There is no direct constituency representative under pure PR, which can dilute local accountability.
Wasted Votes & Fairness	Many votes are “wasted” (cast for losing candidates or beyond what the winner needed) and do not translate into representation. Small parties can win substantial vote shares yet gain few or no seats under FPTP.	Far fewer votes are wasted, since even smaller parties can gain seats if they earn a modest share of votes. PR faithfully translates votes into seats , giving minor parties and diverse groups a foothold in the legislature.
Inclusiveness	Tends to underrepresent smaller parties and minority groups. The dominance of major parties means minor voices get marginalized in the legislature, resulting in less descriptive representation of society’s diversity.	Promotes inclusion of a broader range of political groups. Even parties representing minority interests can secure seats in line with their vote share. This often yields a legislature that more accurately mirrors the electorate’s diverse preferences.

Government Stability	Often produces single-party majority governments, allowing decisive governance without coalition compromises. Such governments are viewed as stable and capable of quick decision-making.	Frequently leads to coalition governments, since no single party typically wins an outright majority of votes. Coalitions can help in inclusive decision-making but may be less stable and slower to form, especially in highly fragmented parliaments.
Complexity for Voters	Very simple for voters and officials. Ballots are straightforward (choose one candidate), and the winner is the top vote-getter. The counting process is easy to understand, which can encourage voter participation.	Can be more complex, depending on the PR method. Voters might vote for party lists or rank candidates, and seat allocation formulas can be technical. This complexity often requires more voter education and may confuse some voters compared to FPTP.

Source: Gallagher and Mitchell (2005), Jadhav (2021), Duverger (1959)

Below are some practical examples of different forms of electoral systems from countries with socioeconomic similarities to Bangladesh, with some cases summarized from “Electoral Governance in South Asia” by M. Sakhawat Hussain (2021).

4.1 India

India has a bicameral legislature that primarily employs the First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) electoral system for elections to its *Lok Sabha* (lower house of Parliament) and State Legislative Assemblies (*Raja Sabha* or upper house) (Hussain, 2021). In this system, the candidate with the most votes in each single-member constituency wins the seat. Proponents argue that FPTP develops strong, stable governments by often producing clear parliamentary majorities, which is crucial for governance in a large, diverse country such as India.

However, the FPTP system in India is frequently criticized for its disproportionality. It can lead to a significant mismatch between a political party's national vote share and its eventual seat share in the legislature, often resulting in false majorities where parties secure a high percentage of seats with a comparatively lower percentage of the popular vote (Jadhav, 2021). This outcome means that a large number of votes cast for losing candidates are effectively "wasted," potentially diminishing voter efficacy and trust in the system. Moreover, it concentrates power in the hands of parties that have comparatively low vote shares. Critics also contend that FPTP can exacerbate political polarization and marginalize smaller parties or diverse ideological viewpoints, thereby underrepresenting the full spectrum of societal preferences in the legislature.

4.2 Nepal

Nepal utilizes a Mixed-Member Electoral System for its federal parliament and provincial assemblies, combining elements of both First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) and Proportional Representation (PR) (Hussain, 2021). Specifically, a portion of members are elected via FPTP from single-member constituencies, while the remaining seats are allocated through a List PR system, aiming to reflect the national vote share of parties. This hybrid approach was adopted post-conflict to promote inclusivity and ensure representation for historically marginalized groups,

including women, Dalits, and various ethnic communities. The PR component has been instrumental in increasing the descriptive representation of diverse segments of society in the legislature, fostering a more inclusive political landscape.

Despite its gains in inclusivity, Nepal's mixed system faces challenges related to governmental stability and complexity. The PR component can lead to a more fragmented legislature, often resulting in coalition governments that may be prone to instability and frequent changes, potentially hindering policy consistency and effective governance. Moreover, the mixed nature of the system can be more complex for the electorate to fully understand compared to a pure FPTP system, which might affect informed voter participation. While providing both local accountability through FPTP and national proportionality through PR, the system requires strong party discipline and a consensus-oriented political culture to function optimally and avoid internal friction among different types of representatives.

4.3 Pakistan

Pakistan operates a mixed electoral system for its National Assembly, comprising general seats elected through First-Past-the-Post (FPTP), alongside reserved seats for women and non-Muslim minorities allocated through a form of Proportional Representation (PR) (Hussain, 2021). The FPTP component aims to provide direct constituency representation and the potential for stable, single-party governments. The system for reserved seats ensures the presence of women and minorities in the legislature, contributing to a more descriptively representative parliament than FPTP alone might achieve. This design is intended to encourage broader inclusion of historically underrepresented groups in the political process.

However, the efficacy of Pakistan's mixed system is frequently debated. The FPTP component continues to generate disproportionate outcomes, where seat allocation often does not accurately reflect parties' national vote shares, leading to "wasted votes" and potential voter disenfranchisement. A significant critique of the reserved seats system is that, despite improving descriptive representation, the selection process for these seats can be controlled by party leadership. This often results in party loyalists, rather than independent grassroots leaders, filling these positions, potentially undermining the substantive representation and genuine advocacy for the communities they are meant to serve. This mechanism may limit the effectiveness of reserved seats in truly empowering marginalized voices or leading to deeper democratic accountability beyond party lines.

4.4 Bangladesh's Electoral Crisis

Even though the "winner takes all" FPTP system is not the sole cause of Bangladesh's descent into authoritarianism, it laid the groundwork for parliamentary capture, which exacerbates the process of democratic backsliding by allowing disproportional representation of voters' choices. For example, in the 2001 election, the BNP secured just **0.84%** more votes than the AL (**40.97% vs 40.13%**) but ended up with **more than triple** the number of seats (**193 vs 62**). In 2008, the **AL won 48.04%** of the vote but captured a supermajority with **230 out of 300 seats**, while the BNP, with **32.50%**, managed **only 30 seats** (See Table 4.4.1).

Table 4.4.1 Breakdown of Seat and Vote Share Difference in Bangladeshi Elections 1991-2024

Year	Winning Party			Opposition			Seat-Vote Differentials	
	Party	Seats	% of Votes	Party	Seats	% of Votes	Seat Difference	Vote Difference
1991	BNP	140	30.81%	AL	88	30.08%	52	0.73%
1996	AL	146	37.44%	BNP	116	33.6%	30	3.84%
2001	BNP	193	40.97%	AL	62	40.13%	131	0.84%
2008	AL	230	48.04%	BNP	30	32.50%	200	15.54%
2014	AL	234	72.14%	JP	34	7%	200	65.14%
2018	AL	258	76.86%	JP	22	5.38%	236	71.48%
2024	AL	224 ¹	65.12% ²	JP	11	4.15%	213 ³	60.97%

Source: Vote BD (2018), European Union Election Expert Mission to Bangladesh (2024) and BEC (2024)

Under this system, ruling parties have consistently secured inflated parliamentary majorities disproportionate to their vote shares. Table 4.4.1 also showcases the Awami League’s near-total dominance in the 2014 and 2018 elections (Riaz, 2014; Riaz, 2019), particularly in 2014, when the BNP boycotted the elections due to fear of tampering and vote rigging under the AL government.

4.5 Lessons from Above

India’s experience shows that pure FPTP can deliver decisive governments but at the cost of vote–seat disproportionality and “wasted” ballots. Bangladesh’s own 2001 and 2008 elections mirror this mismatch, suggesting that any FPTP component should be paired with mechanisms to curb extreme majorities.

Nepal’s mixed system has brought historically excluded groups such as women, Dalits and ethnic minorities into the legislature, yet it has also produced fragile coalitions and frequent government changes. For Bangladesh, this underscores the need for clear rules on seat allocation and post-election coalition building to safeguard stability.

¹ 62 additional candidates who were elected were independent but largely affiliated with the AL—considered “dummy” candidates (Mashal & Hasnat, 2024)

² Derived from BEC (2024)

³ Difference is 277 if 62 AL-leaning candidates are counted as part of the AL seats

Pakistan’s reserved-seat design ensures descriptive representation but its selection process remains tightly controlled by party elites, limiting substantive advocacy. To avoid tokenism, Bangladesh should consider criteria for candidate nomination that empower genuine community leaders rather than patronage networks.

Taken together, these cases imply several priorities. First, any shift toward mixed or proportional representation must align with voter literacy and administrative capacity. Second, political consensus and comprehensive civic education will be essential to building legitimacy. Third, threshold settings matter: a low 1% cutoff risks fragmenting the party system, whereas thresholds in the 3-5% range, common in Germany, New Zealand, Turkey and other PR systems, balance inclusivity with coherent governance (ACE, n.d.). Finally, reserved seats for women and minorities should be paired with transparent nomination procedures and capacity-building programs to ensure that symbolic gains translate into real influence (Ahmad & Siddika, 2025). Overall, there are several options that need to be carefully weighed to ensure Bangladesh’s democratic survival.

5 Policy Options

Three electoral reform options are considered for Bangladesh’s parliament:

- (1) **Unicameral FPTP + Reforms** – retaining the current unicameral First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) system with procedural reforms
- (2) **Unicameral Full PR** – transitioning to a unicameral party-list Proportional Representation system
- (3) **Hybrid Bicameral** – adopting a bicameral legislature with an FPTP-elected lower house and a PR-elected upper house.

Each option is evaluated against three criteria essential to electoral system performance: **Increased Representation**, **Political Stability**, and **Accountability**.

Table 5.1 summarizes the qualitative assessment using descriptors *Low*, *Moderate*, or *High* for each criterion, with brief justifications drawn from comparative evidence and Bangladesh’s context.

Table 5.1. Qualitative Decision Matrix for Electoral Reform Options

Criteria	Option 1: Unicameral FPTP + Reforms	Option 2: Unicameral Full PR-Open List	Option 3: Hybrid Bicameral
Increased Representation	Low – FPTP skews seat share, often excluding smaller parties and minorities Minor procedural tweaks yield only marginal improvements.	High – Seats are allocated in proportion to votes, amplifying fairness and inclusion, reducing “wasted” votes.	Moderate – PR-elected upper house improves inclusivity, while the FPTP lower house still favors larger parties. Overall representation is broadened but not as fully proportional as under pure PR.

Political Stability	Moderate – Can produce single-party majority governments, avoiding fragile coalitions. FPTP’s seat “bonus” for the leading party often yields a stable governing majority. This will lead to BNP dominance.	Low – Likely to fragment the parliament among many parties and individual candidates, necessitating coalition governments. Full PR (especially with a low vote threshold) risks empowering small or extremist factions. Transitioning to full PR also entails significant structural and technical challenges. Dominant parties such as the BNP will oppose it.	Moderate – FPTP lower house elected yields a clear governing majority, providing continuity, while the PR upper house is designed with limited powers to avoid deadlock. This balance maintains government stability (laws and budgets depend mainly on the lower house) but introduces a check through the upper chamber’s review role for constitutional amendments.
Accountability	Moderate – Strong voter-MP linkage. Theoretically, voters can reward or punish their local MP at election time, and MPs are beholden to defined geographic communities. However, in BD’s context, voters rarely hold individual MPs accountable and are more interested in voting for parties.	Low – MPs would be elected from party lists rather than specific constituencies, weakening the direct voter–MP connection. In a patronage-driven political culture, list PR could increase accountability to party bosses rather than to the public. Complex PR ballots might also reduce transparency for voters and lower turnout.	Moderate – Lower house MPs accountable to local constituents. Upper house members owe their seats to party vote shares and party lists, reducing personal voter accountability. But the upper chamber can enhance <i>government</i> accountability by scrutinizing legislation and requiring broader consensus for amendments.

5.1 Option 1: Retain Unicameral FPTP with Procedural Reforms

This option maintains the current First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) system in a unicameral parliament but introduces procedural reforms such as greater Election Commission (EC) independence, transparent candidate vetting, and improved election monitoring mechanisms. Proponents argue that FPTP provides clear constituency representation, creates accountability through direct MP-voter linkages, and often leads to stable single-party governments (ACE, n.d.; Duverger, 1959). These benefits are critical in volatile democracies where coalition governments may be vulnerable to collapse. Moreover, the FPTP system ensures extremist parties are not represented in legislation.

Nevertheless, the system’s structural flaws are well documented. Studies in both India and Bangladesh show that **FPTP routinely produces vote-seat disproportionality**, where parties winning a minority of votes may **claim an overwhelming parliamentary majority** (Jadhav, 2021; Riaz, 2019). Such disparities can heighten political tensions and disillusionment among voters whose preferences are not reflected in legislative outcomes. Moreover, Islam (2015) demonstrates that the zero-sum nature of FPTP raises the stakes of closely contested races, often leading to electoral violence and coercion. **Marginalized communities, women, and ideological minorities** lacking concentrated geographic bases are systematically **excluded**. While procedurally easier to implement than structural reforms, even modest improvements under this

option, such as EC reform, would require constitutional amendments and rare bipartisan cooperation, making the likelihood of success limited in Bangladesh's adversarial political climate. On top of that, since the BNP has the advantage of a pre-existing grassroots network, and the AL may not be able to compete in the upcoming elections, there is a chance for the BNP to take home a landslide victory. Under the existing system, BNP may easily take advantage of a house majority and face no friction in pushing controversial legislation, as the AL has done for years.

5.2 Option 2: Transition to Full Closed-List PR in a Unicameral Parliament

An alternative is to replace the FPTP system entirely with a list proportional representation (PR) model in a unicameral legislature. Under this system, **voters would cast their ballots for parties rather than individual candidates**, with seats distributed in proportion to each party's share of the national or regional vote. PR is often lauded for enhancing representational fairness and for increasing the diversity of voices in parliament, particularly in pluralistic societies like Bangladesh (IDEA, 2005).

The BNP has questioned the need for any upper house (Dhaka Tribune, 2025), most likely because its strong grassroots networks and FPTP track record make this particular reform unnecessary for the party. With the AL's legitimacy weakened, BNP's main rival is sidelined and temporarily out of the electoral game, but the AL retains both rural and urban backing with its historic advantage. Under pure PR, AL could recover influence by **targeting dense constituencies**, especially strongholds such as Gopalganj, without facing accountability for past abuses, **undermining reform goals** and undoing the sentiments of the July revolution. Simultaneously, parties without grassroots mobilization power and low concentrations of voters per constituency, such as the NCP and JIB, could benefit from this option.

However, a low threshold, as suggested by the Constitution Reform Commission (2025) would enable extremist parties. A 1% cutoff is too low; best practice recommends at least 3% to preserve coherence (Awal, 2024). Adopting full PR would require sweeping constitutional changes, major upgrades to EC capacity, and comprehensive voter education, making it technically and politically arduous in the short term.

5.3 Option 3: Bicameral Parliament with FPTP in Lower House and Indirect PR Upper House (Hybrid)

This hybrid model introduces a bicameral legislature, retaining FPTP for the lower house but adopting a closed-list PR for the upper house. The Constitution Reform Commission's model suggests 300 general and 100 women-specific FPTP constituencies for the lower house, and a 105-member upper house elected through PR with a minimal threshold, of which 100 will be selected proportionally by the parties and five will be selected by the President, designed to ensure broader inclusion of minority groups, women, and professional constituencies. This dual-track approach allows the strengths of both systems to counterbalance their weaknesses. The lower house would remain accountable to constituencies, while the upper house would serve as a chamber of sober second thought, providing oversight and a platform for underrepresented voices. Politically, this model initially garnered support from the BNP, but has since backtracked. Even JIB and NCP support PR in the upper chamber due to their dispersed voter bases. The potential re-entry of the AL further necessitates institutional safeguards to

prevent a reversion to two-party dominance, a problem deeply rooted in Bangladesh's political history.

Despite its advantages, this hybrid model is not without challenges. The proposed **1% eligibility threshold for upper house representation** risks enabling extremist or anti-democratic actors to gain legislative footholds. Raising the threshold to 3%, calculated using the total valid national vote cast as the denominator and a party's national vote share as the numerator, would align with global standards and promote responsible pluralism (Constitution Society, 2024). Legislative **inefficiencies and bureaucratic expansion** associated with bicameral systems are additional concerns, though these can be mitigated by clearly delineating the roles and powers of each chamber through constitutional design. **Higher administrative costs are justified** by the long-term gains in democratic consolidation and representational equity. Implementation of this model is moderately complex but feasible, especially if it is phased in over multiple electoral cycles. Civic education and institutional capacity-building will be critical to success, particularly in managing party list submissions, allocating reserved seats, and training EC officials to administer a more intricate electoral process.

6 Recommendation: Bicameral Parliament with Hybrid Model

Based on this analysis, the most fitting reform for Bangladesh is a bicameral legislature with a **mixed** system: **FPTP for the lower house and PR for the upper house**. This directly addresses the distortions of FPTP, including executive overreach, vote–seat mismatch and exclusionary majoritarianism (Riaz, 2019; Akter, 2021) while avoiding the risks of full PR or preserving the status quo.

FPTP remains in the lower chamber to preserve the link between MPs and their constituencies, but it cannot alone deliver greater inclusion for smaller parties and capable civil society actors (Jahan, 2014; Jadhav, 2021). Electing an upper house by PR would ideally require parties to present **diverse candidate lists, build consensus and broaden their appeal beyond patronage networks**. Parties would publish their upper-house lists before lower-house voting, so voters know how their ballots translate into seats and to prevent the appointment of unqualified loyalists. This comes with the assumption that by the time elections roll around, voters will understand the new electoral system.

To balance inclusion with stability, only parties with **at least 3% of valid national votes** would qualify for upper-house seats, reflecting best practices that guard against fragmentation and extremist entry while preserving pluralism (Constitution Society, 2024; International IDEA, 2005). Seat allocation by the Saint-Laguë method, using divisors of 1, 3, 5 and so on, limits large-party dominance and allows smaller but legitimate parties proportional representation (ACE, n.d.).

Table 6.1 shows that at a 3% threshold, four parties would have entered the upper chamber in 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2008. That number strikes a workable balance between representing diverse voices and ensuring efficient decision-making. The combination of **Saint-Laguë and a 3% cutoff produces a stable, inclusive upper house without entrenching any one party**.

Table 6.1 Vote % in each election before the abolition of the caretaker government by the AL in 2011 (parties receiving above 1% of the vote)

Vote % in each election before abolition of caretaker government by AL in 2011 (above 1%)				
Parties	1991	1996	2001	2008
BNP	30.81%	33.60%	40.97%	32.50%
AL	30.08%	37.44%	40.13%	48.04%
Bangladesh Jatiyo Party	11.92%	16.4%	1.12%	7.04%
Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami	12.13%	8.61%	4.28%	4.70%
Islami Jatiya Oikya Front	-	1.09%	7.25%	-
Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League	1.81%	-	-	-
Zaker Party	1.22%	-	-	-
Communist Party of Bangladesh	1.19%	-	-	-

Source: Collected from Vote BD (2018) and Bangladesh Election Commission (2001)

Table 6.2 Simulation of seat allocation of 2001 elections in the upper chamber using the Saint-Laguë method and 3% threshold (total votes divided by 100 for convenience), assuming a total of 12 seats in the upper chamber

	BNP	AL	JIB	Islami Jatiya Oikya Front (IJOF)	Running total
Round 1	228,339	223,655	23,853	40,384	1 BNP
Round 2	76,113	223,655	23,853	40,384	1 AL
Round 3	76,113	74,552	23,853	40,384	2 BNP
Round 4	45,668	74,552	23,853	40,384	2 AL
Round 5	45,668	44,731	23,853	40,384	3 BNP
Round 6	32,620	44,731	23,853	40,384	3 AL

Round 7	32,620	31,951	23,853	40,384	1 IJOF
Round 8	32,620	31,951	23,853	13,461	4 BNP
Round 9	25,371	31,951	23,853	13,461	4 AL
Round 10	25,371	24,850	23,853	13,461	5 BNP
Round 11	20,758	24,850	23,853	13,461	5 AL
Round 12	20,758	20,332	23,853	13,461	1 JIB
Elected seats	5	5	1	1	

Source: Data collected from BEC (2001)

Table 6.2 demonstrates that with a 3% threshold, AL and BNP each win **5 of the 12 upper-house** seats, while JIB and IJOF each claim 1 seat. No party holds a majority, preventing dominance. If the threshold were reduced to 1%, the Jatiyo Party (JP), which got around 1% of the total valid votes, would be included in the calculations above. On the other hand, **raising the threshold to 5% would exclude IJOF**, reducing contestation to three parties and boosting BNP to 6 seats. That outcome undermines fairness, given that BNP and AL differ by just **0.84% in votes** yet would see a seat-share gap. This is more concerning given there was already a **131-seat gap** between the two in the lower house. The **upper chamber should counterbalance lower-house distortions** and align BNP and AL more closely.

A 3% cutoff thus yields the most representative and stable result and is **simpler than a unitary method**, which in a 100-seat house would leave eight seats vacant to be redistributed, which would have to be absorbed by the 4 parties and could again catalyze majorities. Using the Saint-Laguë method above, smaller parties are favored and have a chance of winning significant seats in a 100-member upper house and prevents the conundrum of a direct unitary method.

The point of the PR upper house is to encourage compromise among parties, including the party that forms the government, the opposition, and smaller parties. Without having a simple majority, larger parties are forced to cooperate with smaller parties, and the majority party of the lower house is forced to take into account the opposition's point of view. Non-majority parties will have a tangible stake in parliament and thus ensure that the majority party is not unilaterally passing legislation without other parties' input. Moreover, since Bangladesh's governments frequently sideline the opposition and smaller parties from law-making, this system would meaningfully halt that practice, as bills from the lower house would have to go through the upper house before passing. Subsequently, all parties will have involvement in lawmaking, and this will lower the likelihood of street violence and parliamentary boycott imposed by the opposition on account of exclusion from parliament. This system essentially lowers the stakes of losing an election by allowing opposition members a tangible stake in parliament and offsetting the winner-takes-all practice of the lower house.

This hybrid model also meets evolving political demands: JIB and newcomers like NCP back a PR upper house, and it allows for AL's eventual reintegration through coalitions or legal reform. Mandatory quotas for women and marginalized groups modeled on Nepal may be enforced via public disclosure of selection criteria to avoid tokenism.

In sum, this model avoids the weaknesses of full-scale PR in a unicameral parliament (which can dilute accountability) and those of FPTP-only models (which create overconcentration of power). The recommended hybrid system is context-sensitive, grounded in comparative research, and tailored to address Bangladesh's democratic deficits. It offers a roadmap for democratic renewal that is both feasible and normatively robust.

7 Implementation Plan

Implementing the bicameral FPTP–PR system will require a **phased, multi-stage approach** to ensure legal foundations, institutional capacity, and public awareness are in place.

Table 7.1: *Phased implementation roadmap from legal reform to electoral rollout for the hybrid bicameral system*

Action Step	Timeline	Responsible Parties	Key Risks & Mitigations
1. Legal & Constitutional Reforms – Amend the Constitution or at least have a people's referendum to establish a bicameral legislature and authorize PR elections for the upper house. Enact enabling laws (e.g. <i>Election Commission Act</i>) to strengthen the Election Commission (EC) and formalize the new system's rules. Achieve a cross-party consensus via dialogue.	Immediate (Months 0–2) <i>Foundational phase before next election cycle.</i>	Interim Government & all major parties; Constitutional Reform Commission; Ministry of Law, the judiciary	Political resistance from status quo elites who benefit from FPTP. <i>Mitigation:</i> Inclusive consultations and confidence-building measures to secure broad support; involve neutral facilitators if needed. Legal hurdles if a timely constitutional amendment fails. <i>Mitigation:</i> Utilize interim legislative authority or ordinances to kick-start reforms, backed by public advocacy for change.

2. Institutional Setup – Establish a National Constitutional Council (NCC) to oversee impartial appointments to bodies like the EC and judiciary. Form an independent Delimitation Commission to redraw constituency boundaries (for 300 existing seats and 100 new women-reserved seats). Develop party-list nomination regulations, including mandatory quotas (e.g. 20% women and minorities on party lists) and transparency in candidate selection.	Short Term (Months 3–4) – <i>Immediately after legal changes.</i>	Interim Government; Election Commission; NCC (composed of government, opposition, judiciary reps); Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs.	Capacity constraints in new bodies (NCC, Delimitation Commission). <i>Mitigation:</i> Include technical experts and seek support from International IDEA/UNDP for technical guidance. Gerrymandering or bias in drawing new boundaries. <i>Mitigation:</i> Impose clear, non-partisan criteria in law (population equality, community representation) and ensure transparency (publish draft maps for feedback). Party non-compliance with list quotas or opaque nominations. <i>Mitigation:</i> EC to strictly enforce list submission rules, with penalties for parties that violate quota or transparency requirements.
3. Infrastructure & Capacity Building – Upgrade Election Commission infrastructure and staff capacity to manage the new voting and counting procedures. Train election officials on PR vote tallying and seat allocation formulas (e.g. Saint-Laguë method).	Medium Term (Months 5–7) – <i>Well before election preparations.</i>	Election Commission (with technical support from international electoral assistance experts); IT teams for ballot system development.	Administrative errors due to unfamiliarity with PR counting. <i>Mitigation:</i> Extensive training simulations for EC staff; phased introduction (e.g. mock elections or by-elections as trial runs).
4. Voter Education & Outreach – Launch nationwide civic education campaigns about the new bicameral system and voting process. Use simple messaging via radio, television, social media, and community workshops to explain how the FPTP vote for the lower house and the PR party vote for the upper house will work. Emphasize the importance of participation and how votes translate into seats to build public trust in the new system.	Medium Term (Months 6–12, and ongoing until Election Day)	Election Commission (Voter Education Wing); Ministry of Information, Civil society organizations and media partners.	Public confusion or low awareness about the new system (risking invalid votes or low turnout). <i>Mitigation:</i> Multi-language, infographic-based education materials; engage local community leaders to disseminate information; set up hotlines/online portals for voter queries. Disinformation campaigns by opponents of reform. <i>Mitigation:</i> Rapid response fact-checking by EC and independent media; endorsements of the new system by respected public figures to build credibility.

Ensuring Success: Throughout implementation, continuous **monitoring and risk mitigation** are crucial. Transparency measures (public progress reports, inclusive oversight committees) and support from neutral institutions (media, academia, international partners) should accompany

each phase. This phased strategy will help ensure the new bicameral system is not only legally enacted but also **socially embedded, institutionally credible, and sustainable**, ultimately delivering an electoral framework that improves representation while safeguarding political stability.

Limitation: The timeline (roughly one year from legal reform to election rollout) is very ambitious for a reform of this magnitude. Achieving a constitutional amendment or successful referendum in just 2 months (even under an interim government) might be unrealistic in Bangladesh's contentious political environment. The election timeline has to be stretched out in a practical sense, but political consensus for further delays is difficult to generate.

8 Conclusion

Bangladesh's democratic renewal hinges on bold institutional reforms that broaden representation while safeguarding political stability and accountability mechanisms. Adopting a bicameral parliament with a mixed electoral system—retaining FPTP in the lower house and introducing PR in the upper house offers a context-sensitive path to achieve these objectives. By deliberately designing the system with appropriate guardrails (such as a reasonable vote threshold of 3% to filter out anti-democratic fringes, inclusive candidate nomination practices, and constitutional checks like an empowered upper chamber), Bangladesh can avoid a relapse into the winner-takes-all politics that fueled past authoritarian backsliding. Implemented thoughtfully, this hybrid model would reconcile the country's need for inclusive governance with its equally critical need for effective, accountable government. In doing so, Bangladesh can chart a sustainable democratic trajectory – one where political power is more equitably shared, minority voices are protected, and no single party can monopolize the state to the detriment of the nation's hard-won democratic gains.

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10 Appendix

10.1 Annotated Bibliography

1. **Akter, N. (2021) 'Proportional Representation System: Whether Significance for Bangladesh—An Analysis', *Journal of Social and Political Sciences*, 4(3), pp. 81–93. DOI: 10.31014/aior.1991.04.03.305**

Akter offers the most Bangladesh-specific case for moving from FPTP to PR. After tracing Bangladesh's post-1971 electoral history, she argues that winner-takes-all contests have entrenched a “fading two-party system” distorted further by coalition politics and patronage. Using qualitative evidence (election reports, turnout figures, gender-representation data), she shows how large vote blocs remain unrepresented, minorities are sidelined and female MPs depend on reserved seats rather than direct contests. Akter contends that PR could restore legitimacy by aligning seat shares with vote shares, lowering the violence premium attached to marginal seats and incentivising parties to court broader constituencies. While the analysis is descriptive rather than statistical, its emphasis on normative goals such as stability, inclusivity, and democratic consolidation makes it an ideal background for my “relevance” section. Limitations include a brief treatment of coalition instability and scant attention to administrative feasibility, issues I can address in the policy note.

2. **Jadhav, V. (2021). Dual problem of FPTP electoral systems: Evidence from the Indian states. *Indian Public Policy Review*, 2(5), 34–60. <https://doi.org/10.55763/ippr.2021.02.05.002>**

This article investigates the representational inefficiencies of the First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) system by analyzing electoral data from Indian states using three disproportionality indices: Gallagher Index, Gini Coefficient, and Generalized Entropy Measure. Jadhav demonstrates how FPTP leads to two structural problems, vote-seat disproportionality and single-party dominance even in multi-party contexts like India. The paper is methodologically rigorous, translating raw electoral outcomes into quantifiable metrics to reveal the mismatch between vote shares and legislative power. Jadhav's approach is valuable for comparative research and provides a methodological framework that can be applied to Bangladeshi data. Additionally, the paper accounts for factors like regional diversity and reserved-seat mechanisms (e.g., for women and marginalized communities), which are particularly relevant given Bangladesh's demographic and political composition. While it does not advocate directly for Proportional Representation (PR), the findings implicitly critique the fairness and equity of FPTP systems. Its empirical focus on subnational elections in a federal system necessitates caution when applying its conclusions to Bangladesh's unitary structure. Nonetheless, the work presents strong comparative insights for evaluating electoral reform proposals.

3. Islam, M. M. (2015). Electoral violence in Bangladesh: Does a confrontational bipolar political system matter? *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 53(4), 359–380. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2015.1089001>

This article explores the causes and patterns of electoral violence in Bangladesh, arguing that the confrontational nature of its two-party system, underpinned by FPTP's zero-sum logic, is a central driver. Drawing on empirical data from electoral cycles between 1991 and 2014, including district-level incident reports and elite interviews, Islam shows that even marginal changes in vote share can lead to disproportionately high stakes, incentivizing violence, vote rigging and voter intimidation. The paper further outlines how the winner-takes-all design of FPTP exacerbates these tensions by raising the perceived costs of losing and discouraging inter-party cooperation. Islam applies theoretical models of electoral competition and bipolarity, aligning with Duvergerian predictions, to explain how institutional design can fuel instability. While offering compelling correlations between violence and systemic features, the paper also identifies limitations in the robustness of incident data, much of it gathered from media sources prone to underreporting. Importantly, the paper does not delve deeply into institutional alternatives like PR, but it provides a strong justification for my research hypothesis that structural electoral reform could mitigate political violence and reinforce democratic resilience.

4. Riaz, A. (2019). Election results: A victory too big to believe? In A. Riaz (Ed.), *Voting in a Hybrid Regime: Explaining the 2018 Bangladeshi Election* (pp. 83–92). Singapore: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-7956-7_8

In this chapter, Ali Riaz dissects the 2018 general election in Bangladesh, where the ruling Awami League (AL) won an overwhelming 96% of parliamentary seats. Riaz critically evaluates how such an improbable outcome occurred in a system ostensibly designed for competitive elections. He points to FPTP's inherent seat bonus effect where small differences in vote share translate into massive seat majorities. This is one institutional factor that amplified alleged electoral fraud. Using constituency-level data, turnout anomalies and findings from local and international observers, Riaz argues that the election lacked both procedural and substantive legitimacy. He situates the case within the broader framework of hybrid regimes, where formal democratic processes exist alongside authoritarian practices. This underscores how electoral institutions can be manipulated without dismantling them entirely. Riaz anticipates counterarguments that blame only electoral fraud and responds by showing how FPTP exacerbates its effects, making this a vital piece of evidence for linking institutional design to autocratic outcomes. Though focused on a single election cycle, the chapter lays the groundwork for broader longitudinal assessments of electoral credibility. While I do not have the bandwidth to get into that in a policy note, it would be important to discuss this issue further in a separate paper.

5. Adjei, J. K. (2013). A comparative analysis of Ghana's First-Past-the-Post electoral system and the Proportional Representation system. *Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective*, 8(1), Article 2. <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/jgi/vol8/iss1/2/>

Adjei's article compares Ghana's FPTP electoral system with simulated outcomes under a Proportional Representation model. Using past election data, the study quantifies the extent to which FPTP distorts vote-seat congruence, marginalizes smaller parties like the Convention People's Party (CPP), and reinforces regional polarization. Adjei integrates electoral simulations with historical analysis to illustrate how PR could yield a more equitable distribution of power while potentially enhancing legislative inclusivity. Though focused on Ghana, a fellow postcolonial democracy with a Westminster legacy, the paper's insights are transferable to Bangladesh. Both countries share majoritarian tendencies, weak third-party viability and concerns about electoral legitimacy. Importantly, the study discusses coalition implications under PR and the possible risk of fragmentation, issues that are also salient in Bangladeshi political discourse. While the presidential-executive system in Ghana differs from Bangladesh's parliamentary structure, the core argument about electoral fairness remains highly relevant.

6. Duverger, M. (1959). *Political parties: Their organization and activity in the modern state* (2nd ed.). London: Methuen.

Maurice Duverger's foundational text on party systems introduces the now-canonical "Duverger's Law," which posits that plurality voting systems (like FPTP) tend to produce two-party systems due to both mechanical and psychological effects. Mechanically, FPTP rewards the largest party disproportionately; psychologically, it discourages voters from supporting smaller parties due to the fear of wasted votes. Chapter 8, in particular, outlines these dual mechanisms, providing a theoretical framework that remains central to contemporary political science. Although Duverger's insights were based on European cases, they are readily applicable to Bangladesh, where AL–BNP dominance has persisted for decades while smaller parties fail to gain traction. The theory helps explain the lack of political diversity, high levels of electoral polarization and declining voter faith in meaningful representation. Duverger's work remains theoretically robust but has been critiqued for empirical exceptions (e.g., India's multiparty system under FPTP).

7. Jahan, R. (2014). *The Parliament of Bangladesh: Representation and Accountability*. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*. DOI: [10.1080/13572334.2014.975470](https://doi.org/10.1080/13572334.2014.975470)

This article by Rounaq Jahan provides a multidimensional analysis of how the Parliament of Bangladesh performs its representative and accountability functions. It explores three critical dimensions of representation: political legitimacy (via fair elections and space for opposition), social diversity (gender, religion, ethnicity, and class), and constituency representation (MP responsiveness to local needs). Jahan critiques the erosion of electoral integrity post-2011, particularly following the abolition of the caretaker government (NCG) system, which had previously allowed for four credible elections. She also highlights how the FPTP system disproportionately benefits majority parties, distorts vote-seat parity and marginalizes the opposition. Social diversity is undermined by the low direct election of women, underrepresentation of religious minorities and dominance of wealthy businessmen in parliament. MPs' involvement in constituency development work often blurs the lines between representation and patronage, leading to corruption and conflict with local governance bodies.

The article underscores the absence of formal accountability mechanisms such as a code of parliamentary conduct. Jahan concludes that the toxic bipartisanship between the Awami League and BNP, alongside the "winner-takes-all" political culture, impedes parliamentary reform and erodes democratic functioning. The study is grounded in both primary field data and secondary analysis, making it a robust critique.

8. Jahan, R. (2015). *Political Parties in Bangladesh: Challenges of Democratization*. Dhaka: Prothoma Prokashan.

In this seminal work, Rounaq Jahan dissects the internal structures, functions and dysfunctions of Bangladesh's two dominant parties, Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), to assess how their organizational behavior has shaped democratic consolidation. She critiques the absence of internal democracy, the dominance of dynastic leadership, weak institutionalization and the reliance on informal patronage networks. The book argues that the authoritarian style of leadership within parties where power is concentrated in the hands of a few has created a broader culture of intolerance and personalism in national politics. Jahan highlights that party reform is not just an internal matter but foundational to democratic renewal in Bangladesh. The study is based on extensive interviews and party documents, offering empirical weight. It is essential for understanding the political stalemate and repeated breakdowns in electoral consensus. This book underpins arguments for systemic reform, especially those focusing on the electoral framework's failure to ensure accountability and inclusivity.

9. Jahan, R., & Amundsen, I. (2012). *The Parliament of Bangladesh: Representation and Accountability*. CPD–CMI Working Paper Series 2.
<https://cpd.org.bd/publication/parliament-of-bangladesh-representation-accountability-rounaq-jahan-cpd/>

This working paper assesses the Bangladeshi parliament's effectiveness in delivering its representative and oversight roles. The authors examine three key dimensions: political representation through fair elections and space for opposition; social representation regarding gender, class and minority inclusion; and responsiveness to constituency concerns. It finds that parliamentary practice is hampered by structural flaws in the electoral system, opposition boycotts and majoritarianism under First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) dynamics. The paper details how patron-client relations dominate constituency work, fueling corruption and marginalizing local government. It also discusses the near-total absence of mechanisms to hold Members of Parliament (MPs) accountable, such as codes of conduct or asset disclosures. The findings are grounded in both field research and interviews, making the paper a robust source for empirical validation of electoral and institutional dysfunctions in Bangladesh. It is particularly relevant for analyzing the consequences of politicized parliamentary behavior and systemic imbalances.

10. Jahan, R. (2014). *Political Parties in Bangladesh*. CPD–CMI Working Paper Series 8.
<https://www.cmi.no/publications/5229-political-parties-in-bangladesh>

This paper revisits the role of political parties in Bangladesh through the lens of their organizational culture, leadership dynamics and contribution to democratic decline. Jahan emphasizes that the lack of internal democracy, combined with an adversarial political culture, has stunted institutional maturity. Party structures are characterized by centralization, factionalism and a lack of policy deliberation. Elections are largely determined by money and muscle power, sidelining ideological coherence. The paper draws attention to the party nomination process, which is driven more by loyalty and financial capacity than by merit or grassroots support. It critiques the parties' tendency to undermine public institutions such as the judiciary and Election Commission to gain political advantage. This working paper complements her broader 2015 book and provides specific insights relevant to discussions of electoral reform and democratic dysfunction.

- 11. Hassan, M. (2013). *Political Settlement Dynamics in a Limited-Access Order: The Case of Bangladesh*. ESID Working Paper No. 23. Manchester: Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre.**

https://www.effective-states.org/wp-content/uploads/working_papers/final-pdfs/esid_wp_23_hassan.pdf

This paper introduces the concept of political settlements to analyze the evolution of governance and elite bargains in Bangladesh. Hassan argues that Bangladesh has transitioned from a competitive clientelist settlement to a dominant-party settlement under the Awami League. Drawing on North et al.'s theory of limited-access orders, he explains how ruling elites manage inclusion and exclusion to stabilize power while stifling institutional checks. The paper examines how formal democratic institutions are subverted by informal coalitions of power-holders, resulting in a hybrid regime that mimics democracy without enabling accountability. The implications for electoral reform are significant, as the current political arrangement relies heavily on patronage and the suppression of dissent. Hassan's analysis is both theoretically grounded and empirically supported, making it highly relevant for understanding why structural reforms such as changes in the electoral system must contend with entrenched elite interests. It provides a macro-political economy perspective that complements institution-focused analyses.

- 12. Riaz, A. (2020). *Bangladesh: The Making of an Electoral Autocracy*. In T. Carothers & A. R. Youngs (Eds.), *How Autocrats Rise: Sequences of Democratic Backsliding*. Palgrave Macmillan. [Springer Professional](#)**

In this book chapter, Ali Riaz traces the trajectory by which Bangladesh evolved into an electoral autocracy, focusing on the structural and strategic actions taken by the ruling Awami League (AL) since the late 2000s. The transformation, according to Riaz, was not abrupt but sequential and systematic: beginning with the abolition of the caretaker government system through the 15th constitutional amendment in 2011, then manipulating election mechanisms, stifling civil society, undermining the media and using state institutions, especially law enforcement and the judiciary to suppress dissent. The author identifies how these changes hollowed out the formal institutions of democracy while maintaining the facade of electoral participation. He emphasizes that this

process, while domestically driven, was tolerated and even indirectly facilitated by the international community's preference for stability over democratic integrity. This chapter is particularly useful for studying the anatomy of democratic erosion through legal-rational frameworks and the institutional engineering of autocracies. It directly supports research into how electoral processes are manipulated to legitimize authoritarian control without overt military or extralegal takeovers, making it relevant for my justification for wanting to explore alternatives to the current electoral system.

13. **Riaz, A. (2014). Bangladesh's Failed Election. *Journal of Democracy*, 25(2), 119–130.**
DOI: [10.1353/jod.2014.0034](https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2014.0034)

This article provides an analysis of the deeply flawed 2014 parliamentary elections in Bangladesh, which marked a turning point in the country's democratic trajectory. Riaz contextualizes the crisis within the ruling AL's controversial decision to scrap the caretaker government system, a reform that had previously enabled free and fair elections. With the main opposition BNP boycotting the polls in protest, the election resulted in a no-contest scenario where over half of the seats were uncontested, effectively ensuring an AL victory. Riaz highlights the erosion of electoral competitiveness, the collapse of public trust in democratic institutions and the consolidation of executive dominance. He also emphasizes the increasing use of the state's coercive apparatus to silence opposition and control dissent. The article critically assesses the international community's muted response and considers the long-term implications for democratic consolidation. This source offers a grounded case study of how institutional manipulation and opposition exclusion can produce formally democratic but substantively authoritarian regimes. It directly supports my analysis of the FPTP system's vulnerability to executive capture and the disintegration of competitive pluralism in electoral politics.

14. **Riaz, A. (2021). The Pathway of Democratic Backsliding in Bangladesh. *Democratization*, 28(1), 190–208.** DOI: [10.1080/13510347.2020.1818069](https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1818069)

Riaz builds a nuanced conceptual and empirical narrative of Bangladesh's democratic decline, offering one of the most detailed frameworks to date on its backsliding. Rather than portraying democratic erosion as a singular event, he outlines a sequenced process involving legislative changes, increasing executive control over institutions, and the delegitimization of opposition politics. Riaz situates Bangladesh within broader theoretical literature on competitive authoritarianism and electoral autocracy, identifying how institutional mechanisms such as the judiciary, security forces, and election commission were gradually co-opted. He highlights pivotal moments: the elimination of the caretaker government (2011), the violent suppression of the Shahbagh and Hefazat movements, and the 2014 and 2018 elections, all of which exemplify the hollowing out of democratic checks. Importantly, he distinguishes between direct suppression and subtler forms of control, such as media censorship, judicial harassment and legislative gerrymandering. This article is crucial, as it provides a scholarly foundation for understanding the sequential logic of backsliding and relates directly to institutional degradation under FPTP. It

helps conceptualize how electoral systems can be embedded in a broader autocratic project even while retaining formal democratic practices.

15. MOPA, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. (2025). Chapter 2: Electoral Reforms Commission. Summary Report of 6 Major Commissions, 36-72.

This summary from the Electoral Reform Commission (ERC) offers a proposal for reforming Bangladesh's electoral framework since the adoption of the FPTP system. Key among its proposals is the drafting of an Election Commission Act, intended to ensure transparent, consensus-driven appointments of Commissioners and institutionalize accountability mechanisms via a multi-party parliamentary committee. It proposes a significant empowerment of the Commission, granting it authority to cancel elections, supervise executive behavior during election periods, and seek judicial opinion from the Appellate Division to delay elections that threaten constitutional principles.

The report also recommends the establishment of a bicameral parliament, with a 100-member Upper House elected through proportional representation. Half of these members would come from party open lists and half from civil society, with gender and education quotas built in. The report calls for a delimitation commission and an eventual independent boundary authority to prevent gerrymandering.

16. Pepall, J. (2016). *First-past-the-post: Empowered voters, accountable government*. In L. Miljan (Ed.), *Counting votes: Essays on electoral reform*. Fraser Institute.
<https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/first-past-the-post-empowered-voters-accountable-government.pdf>

Pepall argues FPTP yields stable single-party rule and strong voter accountability. He calls FPTP's chief virtue the ease with which voters can replace unsatisfactory governments ("throw the bums out"). Pepall even deems FPTP "the most democratic" system since it directly links government formation to voter choice, whereas PR lets party elites decide coalition governments without public input. However, his perspective is a "*transparently conservative polemic*" that prioritizes strong governance over broad inclusion. This bias and Canada-centric focus limit relevance to Bangladesh, where different dynamics may call for more inclusive representation.

17. Pilon, D. (2018). Review essay: Democratic leviathan – defending first-past-the-post in Canada. *Canadian Political Science Review*, 12(1), 24–49.
https://www.academia.edu/37553274/Review_Essay_Democratic_Leviathan_Defending_First_Past_the_Post_in_Canada

Pilon's review examines defenses of FPTP that emphasize stability and accountability. Advocates laud a "democratic leviathan" — a stable one-party majority rule — as the highest goal, and praise FPTP for making governments directly answerable to voters (who can vote them out). However,

Pilon argues these claims ignore FPTP's representational deficits (minority rule, wasted votes) and are ideologically driven. He concludes that partisan, Canadian-centric arguments offer limited guidance for Bangladesh's electoral challenges, but his article sheds light on why FPTP holds value.

Grey Literature/Newspapers

1. **International IDEA. (2005). *Electoral System Design: The New International IDEA Handbook*. Stockholm: International IDEA. ([International IDEA](#))**

This handbook is the definitive practitioner guide for choosing and implementing electoral systems. It catalogues every major formula, explains design trade-offs (simplicity vs. proportionality, voter-MP linkages, coalition stability), and supplies 18 case studies including post-conflict transitions and incremental reforms. Particularly helpful are its checklists for assessing contextual factors (social diversity, administrative capacity, boundary delimitation) and its discussion of mixed-member systems, which might be a middle ground for Bangladesh. The handbook also outlines implementation timelines, cost considerations and voter-education strategies, materials that can help me check the feasibility of policy options.

2. **ACE Electoral Knowledge Network (n.d.) 'First Past the Post (FPTP)'. Available at: <https://aceproject.org>.**

The ACE module offers a concise, step-by-step explanation of FPTP mechanics, advantages (simplicity, clear constituency link) and disadvantages (disproportionality, wasted votes, regional fiefdoms). It also provides comparative tables of countries using FPTP and links to reform case studies (e.g., New Zealand's 1996 shift to MMP). Because ACE is written for election administrators, it highlights operational aspects such as ballot design, counting procedures and boundary delimitation that academic articles often overlook. These details can enrich the discussion on reform feasibility and transitional costs. As grey literature, it lacks peer-review but is widely cited by UNDP and IFES, lending practical credibility.

3. **Rabbany, S. H. (2024). Proportional Representation in Bangladesh. *Dhaka Tribune* https://www.dhakatribune.com/opinion/op-ed/361268/proportional-representation-in-bangladesh?utm_source=chatgpt.com**

Rabbany's op-ed captures the domestic public discourse on electoral reform after the 2024 upheavals. It summarises citizen frustrations with FPTP (vote-seat distortion, rural vote dilution) and argues that PR could "channel dissent into the legislature instead of the streets". Though not an academic study, its journalistic insights reveal political will, elite reservations and public misconceptions. The article's proposed model (a national PR tier atop constituencies) could serve as a starting point for my own reform design. Being opinion journalism, its evidence base is thin; so I need to triangulate claims with empirical literature.

4. **Awal, K. H. (2024) 'Can a Proportional Representation System Ensure Better Democracy?', The Daily Star.**

https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/can-proportional-representation-system-ensure-better-democracy-3677476?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Written by Bangladesh's Chief Election Commissioner, this piece is invaluable for understanding institutional perspectives. Awal outlines potential statutory changes such as candidate affidavits, expense monitoring, security-deposit thresholds that would accompany a PR shift. He warns of list-vote manipulation and coalition gridlock but affirms PR's capacity to "match seats to societal complexity". The article thus provides balanced, practitioner-level arguments in addressing implementation hurdles. Because it comes from the election authority's head, its recommendations carry policy weight, yet need to critically assess possible institutional self-interests like expanding the commission's powers without accountability checks.

5. **The Financial Express. (2025, January 9). *Electoral reforms: Commission proposes referendum and representative recall system*. The Financial Express.**

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/national/electoral-reforms-commission-proposes-referendum-and-representative-recall-system>(The Financial Express)

This article reports on the Electoral Reform Commission's (ERC) proposal to introduce a referendum system and a representative recall mechanism in Bangladesh. The referendum system aims to gauge public opinion on critical state decisions, enhancing direct democracy. The representative recall mechanism would allow voters to remove elected officials before the end of their term if they fail to perform satisfactorily.

The ERC's recommendations are part of broader efforts to reform Bangladesh's electoral system to make it more participatory and accountable. The article highlights the commission's intent to empower citizens and strengthen democratic institutions. However, it also notes potential challenges such as the need for constitutional amendments and the risk of political misuse of these mechanisms.

6. **Sayem, S. M. (2025, March 3). *Beyond first-past-the-post: Can proportional representation transform Bangladesh's electoral landscape?* The Geopolitics.**

<https://thegeopolitics.com/beyond-first-past-the-post-can-proportional-representation-transform-bangladeshs-electoral-landscape/>

In this article, Sayem explores the potential for Bangladesh to transition from its current first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system to a proportional representation (PR) model. The author highlights the limitations of FPTP in the Bangladeshi context, noting that it often leads to disproportionate outcomes where a party can secure a significant majority in parliament without a corresponding majority in the popular vote. This system has been criticized for marginalizing smaller parties and contributing to political polarization.

Sayem discusses how a PR system could address these issues by ensuring that parliamentary representation more accurately reflects the electorate's preferences. The article examines international examples where PR has been implemented successfully and considers the applicability of such models to Bangladesh. It also acknowledges the challenges of implementing PR, including the need for constitutional amendments and potential resistance from established political entities benefiting from the current system.

Overall, this article provides a concise overview of the debates surrounding FPTP and PR in Bangladesh. It serves as a starting point for further investigation into how electoral systems impact democratic representation and political stability.

7. **Transparency International Bangladesh (2024). *Tracking Report on the 12th National Parliament Election Process*. Transparency International Bangladesh.**
<https://ti-bangladesh.org/articles/6896>

This comprehensive report by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) presents a systematic evaluation of the 12th National Parliamentary Election process held in 2024. It offers both pre-election and post-election analyses based on media monitoring, field-level data collection, stakeholder interviews and expert surveys. TIB highlights several critical issues, including an absence of competitive electoral conditions, widespread allegations of voter intimidation, politicization of the Election Commission, and systemic misuse of state machinery. The report also discusses barriers to opposition participation, media bias and voter disenfranchisement. It calls for substantive reforms including the restoration of a non-partisan election-time government, structural electoral system changes, and a stronger legal framework to ensure accountability. The findings are especially relevant for understanding how the FPTP system interacts with partisan governance and undermines electoral integrity. For a researcher investigating institutional credibility, systemic bias, or electoral legitimacy in Bangladesh, this report provides empirical depth and policy-oriented recommendations grounded in fieldwork.

8. **The Daily Star. (2025, April). *EC's accountability is key to Bangladesh's electoral reform*. The Daily Star.**
<https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/ecs-accountability-key-bangladeshs-electoral-reform-3868296>

This opinion editorial from *The Daily Star* argues that any meaningful electoral reform in Bangladesh must prioritize the independence and accountability of the Election Commission (EC). The article points out that public trust in the EC has eroded due to its perceived partisanship and failure to act decisively against electoral violations. It references recent controversies surrounding the 2024 general election and critiques the current framework, which allows the executive significant influence in EC appointments and operations. The piece supports the creation of an appointment process rooted in transparency, inclusion of civil society, and cross-party consensus. The article's central thesis, that institutional credibility is the cornerstone of electoral reform aligns with scholarly calls for depoliticized electoral oversight. Although it is

not an academic source, the editorial provides insight into elite and public discourse on the issue and serves as evidence of widespread political dissatisfaction. This article reinforces the argument that democratic backsliding is not only a structural concern but also a matter of institutional trust.

9. **International IDEA. (2024, January). *Overcoming Bangladesh's Electoral Integrity Deficit: Time for Political Compromise and Dialogue.***

<https://www.idea.int/news/overcoming-bangladeshs-electoral-integrity-deficit-time-political-compromise-and-dialogue>

This policy brief by International IDEA addresses the growing deficit in electoral integrity in Bangladesh, especially in the aftermath of the 2024 general election. It frames the crisis within the context of chronic electoral violence, boycotts by major opposition parties and the centralization of power. The brief advocates for political compromise and multi-stakeholder dialogue as preconditions for restoring trust in the electoral process. Specific reform recommendations include strengthening the independence of the Election Commission, creating legal safeguards against abuse of state resources and reassessing the FPTP system to promote fairer representation. The brief is grounded in IDEA's global expertise and draws on comparative lessons from other democracies experiencing similar institutional erosion. It serves as a valuable piece of grey literature that complements academic texts by offering actionable reform pathways. This brief contributes a comparative democratic governance lens and reinforces the argument that institutional reform, especially of electoral infrastructure is central to reversing Bangladesh's trajectory of democratic backsliding.

10. **Constitution Society. (2024, July). *PR vs FPTP: Practical and ethical trade-offs.***

<https://consoc.org.uk/prvftp-practical-ethical-tradeoffs/>

This article from the UK-based Constitution Society examines the normative and functional trade-offs between PR and FPTP electoral systems. While acknowledging that FPTP often produces decisive outcomes and stable governments, the article critiques its tendency to distort the relationship between votes and seats, marginalize smaller parties and disincentivize voter participation. In contrast, PR is praised for enhancing representational fairness and aligning legislative composition with the electorate's preferences, though it may result in coalition instability and diluted accountability. The article frames these contrasts not only in terms of political consequences but also in ethical terms, emphasizing equity, inclusivity, and democratic responsiveness. Although the piece focuses primarily on the UK context, its comparative analysis offers valuable parallels for countries like Bangladesh, where FPTP has reinforced political monopolies and eroded competitive pluralism. The article is particularly useful for me as it gives me an idea on how to situate Bangladesh's electoral reform debates within broader global discussions and ethical dilemmas about how best to structure democratic representation.

10.2 Research Proposal

Introduction and Background

Free, fair, and credible elections are the cornerstone of any functional democracy. However, in Bangladesh, these ideals have increasingly come under question. Over the past 16 years under Sheikh Hasina's regime, the country has experienced three controversial national elections (2014, 2018, and 2024), each criticized by international observers and domestic actors for being unfair, marred by irregularities, and characterized by the suppression of opposition voices (Akter, 2021). At the center of this electoral debate lies Bangladesh's First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) electoral system, which, while widely used globally, has produced outcomes that have contributed to political and institutional challenges unique to the country.

The FPTP system is straightforward: the candidate who receives the most votes in a constituency wins, even if they secure less than a majority. While efficient and simple, this method can lead to outcomes that disproportionately favor larger, well-organized parties. Small differences in the popular vote can translate into significant disparities in parliamentary representation (Jadhav, 2021). This system fosters a two-party system (Duverger, 1959), with the Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) alternating power for decades in Bangladesh.

However, under Sheikh Hasina's leadership and the post-2011 removal of the caretaker government system, the balance has shifted dramatically. The AL has entrenched itself as a one-party dominant regime, while the BNP's influence has waned due to political crackdowns, corruption allegations, and internal weaknesses. The FPTP system's winner-takes-all outcomes have exacerbated this dynamic, concentrating power in the ruling party and sidelining smaller political actors.

FPTP tends to award a larger share of parliamentary seats to the leading party, regardless of how narrow its margin of victory is. For instance, in the 1991 general election, the BNP won 30.8% of the vote, while the AL received 30.1%. Despite this slim difference, the BNP secured 140 seats, compared to the AL's 88, which is a 52-seat disparity that did not reflect the nearly equal popular support (Jahan, 2014). Moreover, as winning control of Parliament translates to control over state institutions, the stakes of each election under FPTP are extraordinarily high. This incentivizes undemocratic practices, including vote rigging, ballot stuffing, and political violence (Islam, 2015). The system creates a zero-sum environment where parties resort to extreme measures to secure victory, as even a narrow 1% margin in popular votes could result in losing the parliamentary seat to the opposition (Riaz, 2019). Furthermore, Bangladesh's electoral framework struggles with issues such as limited independence of the Election Commission, partisan interference in the judiciary and police, and bureaucratic manipulation. Under the FPTP system, these problems allow ruling parties to entrench their power and marginalize opposition voices.

Relevance of the policy issue to contemporary challenges

Bangladesh has witnessed elections under both neutral caretaker governments and ruling parties, and in both scenarios, the two leading political parties (AL and BNP) behaved violently and undermined the democratic process at every opportunity under the FPTP system. As such, Bangladeshis have yet to experience a peaceful transfer of power between parties. This begs the question of why parties behave in this manner even with a neutral election organizer such as the caretaker government.

Since the stakes of each election are extremely high for both the winner and the loser, a more equitable outcome may emerge from lowering the benefits of winning and repercussions of losing by creating a more diverse, equitable, and representative parliament and introducing the concept of checks and balances on ruling governments. In contrast to FPTP, the PR system allocates seats in Parliament based on the percentage of votes each party receives. This approach aims to ensure that smaller parties and minority groups are represented, encouraging a more inclusive and equitable political environment.

Thus, this paper seeks to review the FPTP system, its efficacy, and its potential role in creating the winner-takes-all system in Bangladesh, while also considering the possibility of alternatives such as the Proportional Representation (PR) system in contributing to better voter representation, checks and balances on the government, and overall improved voter satisfaction. Since the electoral system lays the groundwork for democratic elections, it is important to investigate the efficacy of the electoral system in Bangladesh to assess whether the issues stem from the FPTP system itself or other variables. If it is indeed the FPTP system that is the issue, then this policy note will explore the possibility of implementing the PR system. However, if the FPTP system is not to blame, then the policy recommendations would include ways to strengthen the existing system to yield the desired results within the reform capacity of the interim government. In doing so, this research would fill a highly contentious and important gap in the research, while also serving as a point of departure for further research that can go more in-depth on why FPTP may or may not be effective for Bangladesh.

Moreover, since this research is being conducted at a time when the previous government has been ousted through a people's revolution and an interim government has been established, the recommendations outlined here may be useful to policymakers, political parties and academics in redesigning a freer, fairer and more democratic Bangladesh.

Clear articulation of the problem, objectives, and proposed approach

The primary objective of this policy note would be to assess the efficacy of the current First-Past-the-Post electoral system in Bangladesh by identifying its pros and cons, analyzing if any intervening variables lead to its success or failure and exploring possible alternatives in the form of the Proportional Representation (PR) system.

For Bangladesh, adopting a PR system could address several challenges posed by FPTP such as allowing smaller and newer parties and underrepresented groups to have a voice in Parliament by breaking the dominance of a single party; lowering the stakes of individual constituency

victories, thus mitigating incentives for violent or coercive election tactics; and even reducing opportunities for corruption for the ruling party as Parliament will have more oversight. However, despite its potential benefits, PR is not without challenges. It often leads to coalition governments, which, while inclusive, can be unstable and slow to act.

Therefore, the purpose of the study is to explore the long-term viability of keeping the status quo electoral system and to suggest ways to improve Bangladesh's democratic trajectory in the face of increasing democratic backsliding, whether it be through strengthening the existing FPTP system or redesigning it entirely by implementing the PR system. The study is also open to other alternatives.

Moreover, the study will carefully operationalize terms such as 'democracy', 'winner-takes-all system' and 'checks and balances' in the Bangladeshi context and outline the criteria required to achieve this form of democracy through a stronger electoral system.

Research Objectives

This study seeks to:

1. Analyze the historical performance of the FPTP system in Bangladesh and its role in shaping the country's current political landscape.
2. Assess the viability of PR as an alternative system, considering its potential to promote fairer representation, reduce political violence, and strengthen democratic institutions.

Research Question

First-Past-the-Post VS Proportional Representation: Which electoral system would work best for Bangladesh?

Sub questions:

1. *What are the pros and cons of FPTP in Bangladesh?*
 - a. *What are the underlying state structures that result in the FPTP system being effective or ineffective in Bangladesh?*
2. *How has the FPTP system performed in other countries?*
3. *How has the PR system performed in other countries?*
4. *What advantages does PR offer that FPTP cannot deliver in Bangladesh, and vice versa?*

The countries will be selected based on their socio-economic similarities with Bangladesh and may be mostly from South Asia. The purpose of assessing the situation in other countries is to draw out the conditions necessary for the FPTP and PR system to flourish or fail in organizing free and fair elections. Cross-checking the political, economic and social conditions in each country with the situation in Bangladesh will help this study isolate underlying factors that may have

helped or hindered the FPTP system and check whether PR is a more effective option for Bangladesh's new politics.

Proposed Methodology

The methodology for this study includes a comprehensive literature review of journals, policy papers, white papers, and reports to address questions 1-3 and build a conceptual understanding of FPTP (First Past the Post) and PR (Proportional Representation) systems, as well as the Bangladeshi electoral framework. Primary data collection will involve analyzing political literature, manifestos, publicly available data, and proposals from major Bangladeshi parties to explore differing preferences for FPTP or PR, supplemented by semi-structured interviews (if necessary) with former election commissioners and party representatives advocating for either system, including BNP and AL.

Feasibility of addressing the issue within the time frame and credit hours

Since the sub-questions for this research can be answered through a thorough literature review and collection of publicly available documents, gathering the information and analyzing it should be feasible within the time frame and credit hours. If there is a necessity for interviews, data collection and analysis may take more time. However, if this need arises, I will make sure to reach out to potential interviewees in advance and get the interviews done as early as possible. I plan to finish the research within one semester (Spring 2025) but it may bleed into Summer 2025 if the viva is scheduled for later in the year.

WBS NUMBER	TASK TITLE	DUE DATE	Dec 2024				Jan 2025				Feb 2025				Mar 2025				Apr 2025			
			WEEK 1				WEEK 2				WEEK 3				WEEK 4				WEEK 5			
			1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1	Proposal Development	4/1/25																				
1.1	Zero Draft	13/12/24																				
1.2	First Draft	25/12/24																				
1.3	Discussion with supervisor	27/12/24																				
1.4	Final Draft Submission	4/1/25																				
2	Annotated Bibliography	7/2/25																				
2.1	Find and select sources (>25)	19/1/25																				
2.2	Write summaries (70%)	30/1/25																				
2.3	Touch base with supervisor	1/2/25																				
2.4	Write summaries (100%) + Submit	7/2/25																				
2.5	Discuss with supervisor	8/2/25																				
3	Policy Note	11/4/25																				
3.1	Introduction	14/2/25																				
3.2	Problem statement	18/2/25																				
3.3	Check in with supervisor	21/2/25																				
3.4	Background	6/3/25																				
3.5	Check in with supervisor	7/3/25																				
3.6	Policy options	20/3/25																				
3.7	Recommendations	26/3/25																				
3.8	Check in with supervisor	28/3/25																				
3.9	Conclusion	6/4/25																				
3.10	Final touches and submission	11/4/25																				
4	VIVA	TBD																				
4.1	Powerpoint																					
4.2	Interview																					

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