

The Unsettled Transition: Bangladesh's Road to the 2026 Election

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In the run-up to the February 2026 vote, Bangladesh's politics have been reshaped by two major developments. First, the International Crimes Tribunal and special courts have issued a series of convictions against ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina, including a late-2025 ICT [verdict](#) on the 2024 protest crackdown and a separate 21-year [sentence](#) in corruption cases linked to the Purbachal project. The rulings were swiftly politicised and prompted Dhaka to renew its extradition request to New Delhi, which India says it is [examining](#).

Second, the interim government under Muhammad Yunus has [accelerated](#) both the election schedule and a referendum on the July Charter – an institutional reform package now set to be held alongside the parliamentary polls. The Election Commission has moved to [enfranchise](#) non-resident Bangladeshis through remote registration and app-based postal voting.

Meanwhile, India's Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in West Bengal has prompted increased cross-border [returns](#) of Bangladeshis, triggering Dhaka's complaints over "push-ins," turning population movements into a fresh bilateral irritant during Bangladesh's pre-election phase.

Taken together, these shifts have created an electoral landscape is fluid, fragmented, and sensitive to timing. The removal of the Awami League's top leadership through judicial means, the interim government's compressed and politically contested transition timetable, and the sudden empowerment of new voting blocs—particularly diaspora and youth—have all converged to weaken familiar political anchors. This convergence of internal realignment and external pressure sets the stage for understanding why the coming election carries consequences far beyond a routine transfer of power.

Interim government report card

The interim government assumed power with a three-part public mandate: first, to purge Awami League (AL) loyalists from the state apparatus; second, to initiate institutional reforms (the "July Charter"); and third, to manage a credible transition to elected civilian rule. On the first point the interim government has been markedly [assertive](#) – security clearances, administrative reshuffles and prosecutions have removed or sidelined numerous officials seen as closely tied to the AL.

On the reforms agenda, however, results are mixed. The July Charter [articulates](#) ambitious institutional changes – strengthened judicial independence, measures to widen opposition participation, limits on PM's tenure and a proposed bicameral legislature – but concrete delivery remains thin. Many of the reform proposals require lengthy legislative work, capacity building and cross-party buy-in. The interim government has issued the framework and legal instruments, yet implementation timelines remain uncertain and, in several

cases, contested inside the political class.

Finally, on elections, the interim authority has oscillated. For months Yunus [resisted pressure](#) to lock a date, citing the need for reforms first; that delay satisfied neither the [military](#) (which has urged a rapid handover so troops can return to barracks) nor several parties (including NCP and JeI), which want more time to organize.

Churn in electoral dynamics

With the Awami League's leadership in exile and senior figures convicted, the party is effectively out of the race, making voter behaviour decisive. [BYLC polling](#) shows 56 per cent may abstain, while those who will vote lean toward the BNP (20 per cent) and Jamaat-e-Islami (18 per cent). The surprising drift of some former AL supporters toward Jamaat is explained in local commentary by two factors: [punitive treatment](#) of ex-AL cadres by BNP activists, and BNP's weak appeal among youth and Gen-Z, who are gravitating toward groups seen as more aligned with the July Charter's reformist spirit.

Importantly, Jamaat-aligned student formations have made [conspicuous gains](#) in campus polls – most visibly in Dhaka University's student union and similar contests – signaling that Islamist-aligned platforms have recovered organizational traction among parts of Gen-Z. This does not automatically translate into nationwide support, but it shows a generational opening that could affect turnout and local races.

Diaspora enfranchisement is materially significant. The Election Commission and government [estimates](#) place the number of expatriate Bangladeshis at roughly 15 million – more than 10 per cent of the total electorate. Diaspora voting can be a force multiplier, especially because expatriates were [politically active](#) during the July uprising (remittance flows sharply declined during the protests in July 2024 and then recovered), and the overseas community's preferences

appear divergent from domestic older cohorts. Historically, BNP has built established diaspora committees abroad; that organizational presence gives it an edge in outreach to postal voters, particularly among Gulf-based workers and professional communities.

The West Bengal election factor

The simultaneity of Indian and Bangladeshi electoral developments creates a volatile cross-border dynamic. India's SIR exercise in West Bengal, intended to update rolls before state polls, has provoked [mass movement](#) of at least 1500 Bangladeshi nationals at certain frontier posts. Dhaka in the past has registered strong complaints about "[push-ins](#)" and forcible repatriations. Those border movements can have immediate electoral salience.

The Bangladesh' army's demand for a prompt electoral timetable increases the pressure to resolve border frictions quickly; but that very rush reduces the political space to negotiate sensitive, time-consuming bilateral fixes, raising the risk of confrontation.

A BNP-led transition remains the most straightforward analytical baseline if BNP manages to consolidate anti-AL voters and to capitalise on diaspora mobilisation and NCP and JeI's organisational disarray. Even so, a BNP victory would not remove the India factor from domestic politics; India is likely to remain an easy rhetorical target for rival parties and populist forces that want to mobilise nationalist sentiment. Secondly, a fragmented parliament without a clear single-party majority is possible, producing coalition bargaining where smaller parties (including Jamaat and new NCP elements) can play kingmaker and extract policy concessions.

For now, Bangladesh's campaign narrative has unfolded without placing India at its centre. Maintaining this distance will be important for keeping bilateral stability through February. At

the same time, even as Dhaka has submitted extradition requests for Sheikh Hasina, there is little real appetite within Bangladesh's interim leadership for her physical return. Her presence could reignite strong emotions within an electorate where, as recent BYLC polling shows, the Awami League's grassroots support remains intact despite the leadership vacuum. Keeping Hasina outside the country allows the interim government to manage the transition without triggering another cycle of polarisation.