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ELECTION WATCH REPORT

Bangladesh heads toward a landmark election amid rising political violence

Partisan violence leading up to the poll is common for Bangladesh, but high levels of vigilantism and other violence may present deeper challenges.

5 February 2026 • 5-minute read



Supporters of Bangladesh's largest Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami gathered at the Shahbag intersection in Dhaka for a mass rally demanding an overhaul of the electoral system on 19 July 2025. Photo by Sazzad Hossain, SOPA Images and LightRocket via Getty Images.

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ACLED audio

Bangladesh heads toward a landmark election amid rising political violence



7 min

Key takeaways

- Violence among political parties has escalated ahead of the election.
- Disagreements over constitutional reforms, combined with eroding trust in state institutions, may trigger post-poll unrest.
- Political reconciliation with the Awami League may prove challenging.

On 12 February, Bangladesh will hold one of the most consequential elections in its history — marking a return to democratic rule. Alongside the parliamentary polls, the election also includes a referendum on a host of constitutional reforms, including term limits for the prime minister and the establishment of a bicameral legislature. Since the 2024 [popular uprising](#), which has come to be known as the “Monsoon Revolution,” toppled long-serving premier Sheikh Hasina, an interim administration led by Muhammad Yunus has governed the country.

After successive [compromised elections under Hasina](#), expectations are high for what many hope will be the first genuinely competitive polls in more than a decade. The contest is primarily between the center-right Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami, or Jamaat. The BNP, which is the other dominant party besides Hasina’s now-banned Awami League, is the front-runner. It is, however, facing a closer contest than expected from the Jamaat, which was banned for much of the Awami League’s rule.

Leading an alliance that includes the student revolutionaries’ National Citizen Party (NCP) and other Islamist parties, the Jamaat is running on an anti-corruption platform, positioning itself as an alternative to the BNP, whose leaders have often faced extortion allegations.¹

Has there been violence around the election campaign in [Bangladesh](#) so far?

Bangladesh's elections have [historically been marred by high levels of partisan violence](#), and this election is no different.

Since the poll schedule was announced on 11 December, ACLED data show that at least 18 people have been killed in around 80 acts of violence among groups affiliated with political parties. One week still remains till polling day, but this is already more people killed than during the pre-electoral period in 2024.²

Notably, firearms were used in at least nine instances of political party-related violence. In a country where political violence typically takes the form of street clashes involving crude weapons, this is a relatively novel phenomenon. The increased use of firearms is likely a spillover from rioting during the Monsoon Revolution, when many weapons were looted from police armories — a third of which are still to be recovered.³

With the Awami League barred and its supporters engaging in minimal levels of violence, inter-party violence has mainly involved the BNP and the Jamaat-NCP alliance (*see graph below*). Nearly 20% of the violence stemmed from factional disputes, as different BNP groups vie for candidature, party appointments, and the powers and perks that would follow a likely win at the polls.

Violence between political parties in Bangladesh

11 December 2025 — 30 January 2026



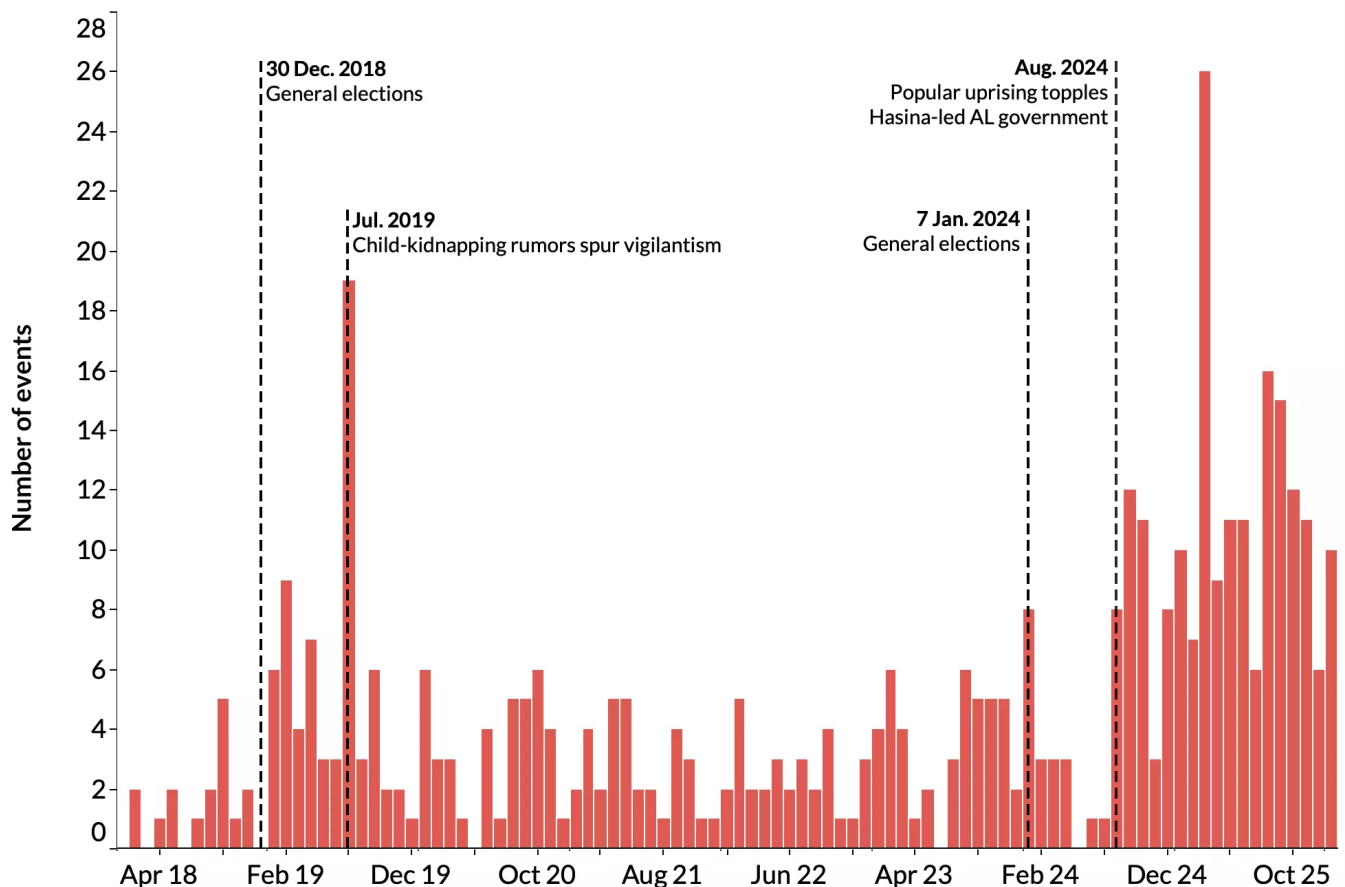
What could challenge a smooth democratic transition?

The interim government has struggled to restore stability in the year and a half since the Monsoon Revolution, with violence remaining at consistently heightened levels throughout the transition period. Any incoming government will have to manage increased violence against religious and sectarian minorities and a broader rise in political violence, while addressing political reconciliation with the Awami League.

Worryingly, this period has seen a particular increase in vigilante violence that suggests a lingering lack of trust in regular law enforcement processes, which were compromised under Hasina's rule (*see graph below*). Such conditions will not be resolved by the elections and do not portend well for a smooth democratic transition, as restoring public confidence in the state is likely to be a gradual process.

Monthly vigilante violence in Bangladesh

January 2018 - January 2026*



*ACLED data as of 30 Jan. 2026

The post-election period will also expose several potential triggers for further unrest. One such potential trigger is political division over the proposed constitutional reforms. The BNP submitted

formal notes of dissent for several of the provisions, in particular objecting to the process of constituting the upper house.⁴ The NCP has repeatedly expressed concerns over the lack of legally binding guarantees for the implementation of the reforms.⁵ Their execution will ultimately fall on the new government, and it is unclear how the BNP's objections will be accommodated should the referendum pass with a BNP parliamentary victory. If people are disgruntled about the pace of reform, they could take to the streets again. Having once gained political victory through popular protests, the NCP in particular may be tempted to lead another such movement.

On the other hand, if power once again eludes the BNP, which has acted as the government-in-waiting for over a decade, it clearly has the muscle to imperil a smooth transition. The BNP notably organized nationwide blockades ahead of the 2024 election to build support for a boycott of the vote. Any contestation of the verdict by the BNP, with its large grassroots base, could trigger a wider political crisis.

Another big unknown is the role that the Awami League might play. A senior leader called for voters to boycott the election,⁶ while Hasina's son and political heir, Sajeeb Wazed, warned that the party's sidelining risked provoking a violent backlash from its supporters.⁷ A glimpse of this was seen in December: Youth leader Sharif Osman Hadi was killed in an act of "political vengeance" by an individual associated with the Awami League, according to police.⁸

The party's supporters have not played a very visible role ahead of the election. It remains to be seen, however, whether the Awami League's base, which is still [sizable and active](#), will quietly accept their party's exclusion from the electoral process, and, by extension, from the country's politics which it dominated for so long.

*Visuals produced by **Ana Marco** and **Ciro Murillo**.*



Footnotes

- 1 [The Daily Star, “Won’t indulge in graft, nor allow it, says Jamaat ameer,” 23 January 2026](#)
- 2 The pre-election period refers to the time between the announcement of the election schedule and polling day.
- 3 [The Business Standard, “Army chief says 3,619 weapons looted during July Uprising, 62.4% recovered,” 21 January 2026](#)
- 4 [The Daily Star, “National polls, referendum on same day: Chief Adviser Yunus,” 13 November 2025](#)
- 5 [Asif Howladar, “Campaigning for ‘yes’ without signing July Charter: what is NCP’s position?” Prothom Alo, 13 January 2026](#)
- 6 [The Times of India, “Awami League Escalates Bangladesh Crisis With ‘No Boat No Vote’ Boycott Call Against Yunus Polls,” 24 January 2026](#)
- 7 [Al Jazeera, “Does the Awami League have a future in Bangladesh?” 21 January 2026](#)
- 8 [The Daily Star, “‘Hadi killed out of political vengeance,’” 6 January 2026](#)

KEYWORD

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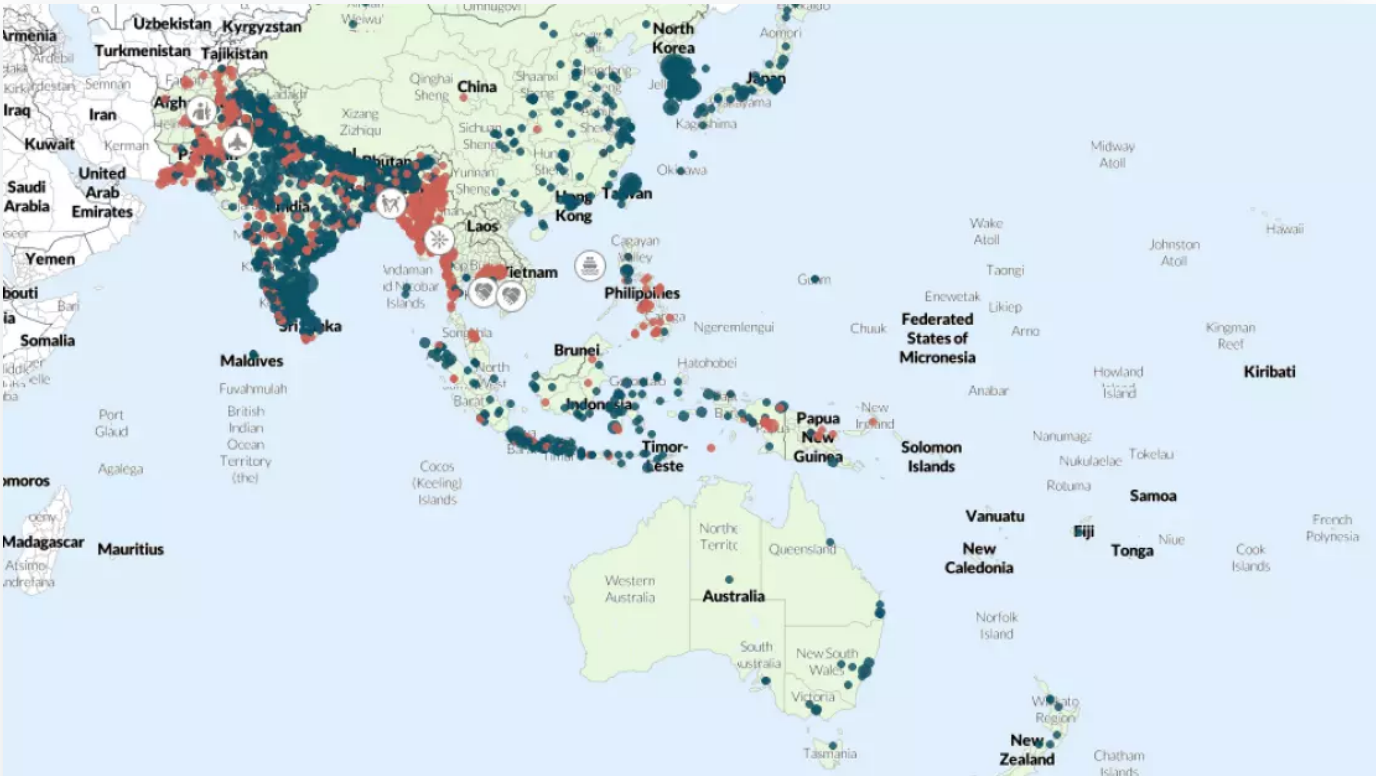
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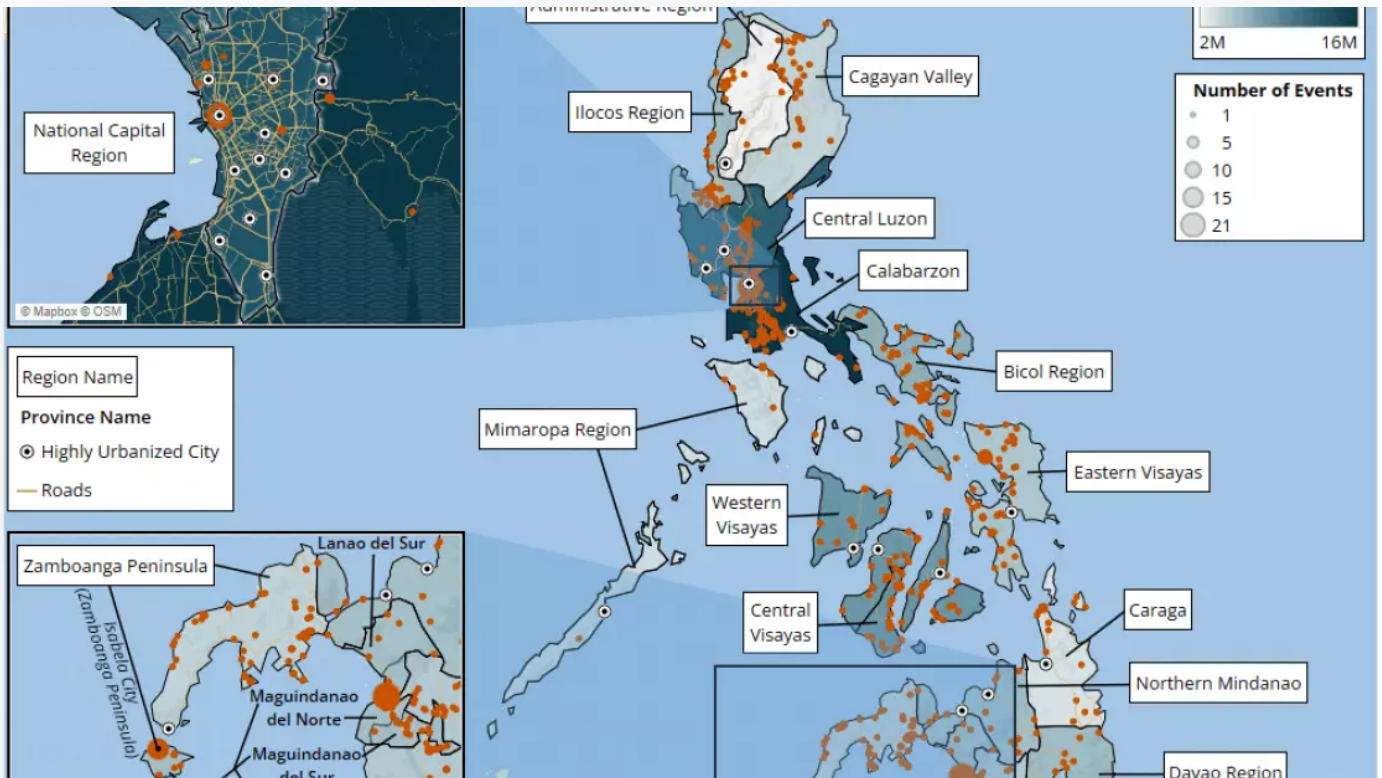
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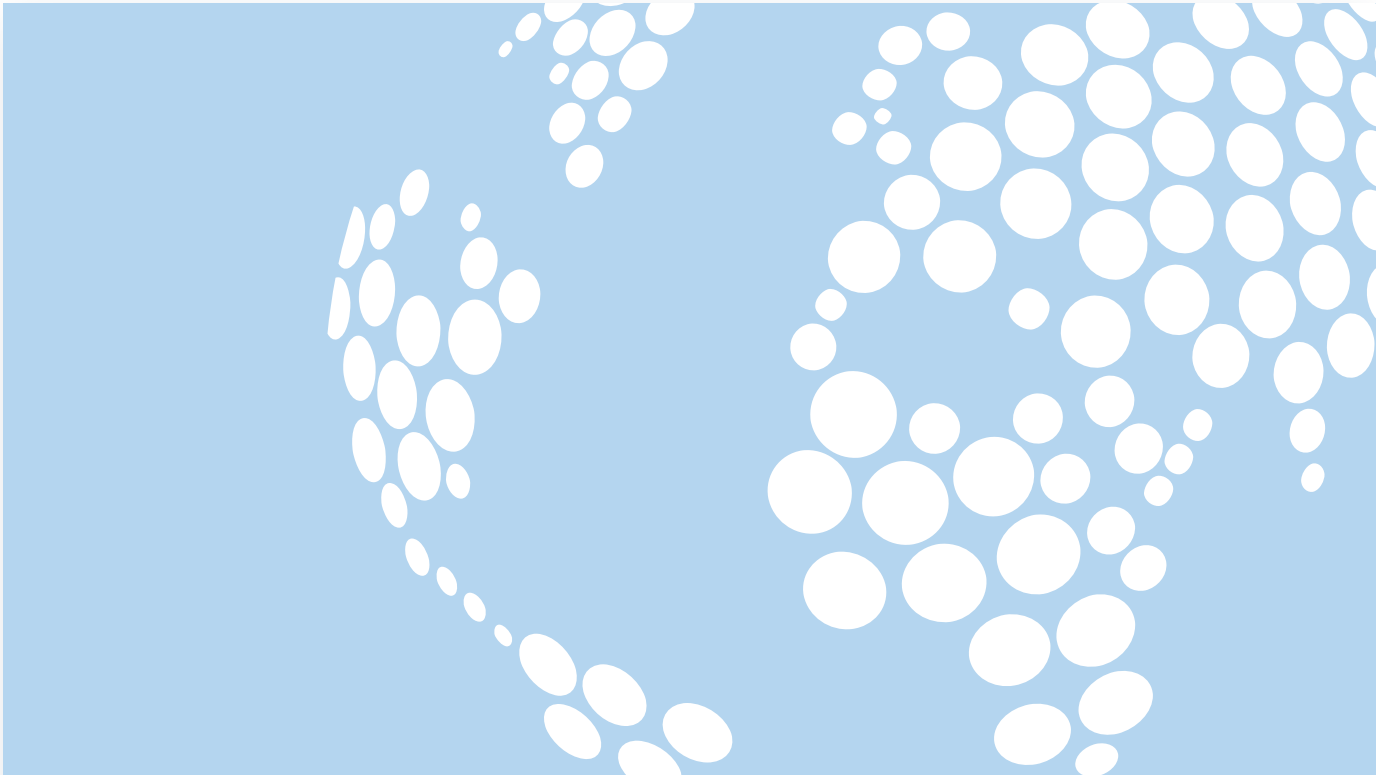
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