



Elections in Bangladesh

February 27, 2026

Overview

On February 12, 2025, Bangladesh, a Muslim-majority South Asian country of 174 million, held parliamentary elections and a concurrent referendum. Sixty-nine percent of voters [endorsed](#) the [July National Charter](#), which proposed [changes](#) to “reconstruct the state on the foundation of democracy and human dignity.” At the same time, voters gave one of the country’s two historically dominant political parties, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), a parliamentary supermajority. The party’s leader, [Tarique Rahman](#), was sworn in as Prime Minister on February 17. The elections follow a period of turbulence; in August 2024, student-led protests led to the ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League (AL). After Hasina fled to India, an interim government headed by [Muhammad Yunus](#), a Nobel Peace Prize-winning economist, assumed power and initiated a reform process. Although the interim government enjoyed general [support](#), Yunus’s administration encountered ongoing challenges that the new government now faces, including [crime](#), [inflation](#), human rights [concerns](#), and the rise of [Islamist groups](#). Rahman has [committed](#) to bolstering democracy in Bangladesh, but some observers have [questioned](#) the extent to which his party may implement the July Charter.

Background

Since Bangladesh’s 1971 independence from Pakistan, the country’s politics have been dominated by two parties, the AL and the BNP, both of which have faced [accusations](#) from some human rights organizations and foreign governments of repression and corruption when in power. According to [Human Rights Watch](#), for example, after returning to power in 2009, the AL “gradually consolidated power by silencing critics, harassing activists, and arbitrarily arresting, forcibly disappearing, and killing members of the opposition or civil society who spoke out against [Hasina].” Hasina secured a fourth consecutive term in office in January 2024 elections that were boycotted by major opposition parties and [described](#) by the U.S. Department of State as “not free or fair.”

In July 2024, student-led protests over access to government jobs expanded into widespread unrest, [fueled](#) in part by the Hasina government’s violent response to the demonstrations. A United Nations [report](#) concluded that Bangladeshi authorities “systematically engaged in serious human rights violations” during the protests, and estimated the death toll at up to 1,400. After the army refused to enforce a nation-

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wide curfew declared by the government, Hasina fled to India. Yunus, a longtime Hasina critic, was sworn in as the country's interim leader on August 8. In May 2025, the interim government banned all political activities by the AL, and the party's registration was suspended. Some Members of Congress urged Yunus to revisit this decision in the interest of holding free and fair elections.

Results and Outlook

Voter turnout, reported to be 60%, was higher than in 2024, when some critics questioned the government's reported 42% figure as inflated, but lower than in the 2018 elections, when 80% of eligible voters reportedly participated. In Bangladesh's 350-member unicameral legislature, 300 deputies are elected directly, while the constitution reserves 50 seats for women elected by members of parliament through proportional representation. The BNP secured 208 of the 300 elected seats. The Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) won 68 seats, an unprecedentedly strong showing for that party, and comprises the bulk of the 77-seat opposition. The National Citizen Party (NCP), a new formation that grew out of the student protest movement, secured 6 seats as part of a JI-led 11-party alliance. Hasina denounced the elections as "deception and farce."

Despite political violence in the leadup to the elections, international observers described election day as generally peaceful and orderly. The International Republican Institute's election observation mission concluded that "election administration was technically sound" but "the broader political environment remains fragile." The European Union's election observation mission described the vote as "credible and competently managed," noting that it was "genuinely competitive" despite "sporadic localized political violence." Some analysts have questioned whether an election without AL participation can be considered fully credible.

Some analysts foresee "political hesitation" in implementing the July Charter, which would, among other reforms, curb the prime minister's powers. The BNP objected to some provisions and BNP deputies have so far refused to join the Constitution Reform Council, the body responsible for instituting the proposed reforms. Some observers suggest the BNP's supermajority is potentially detrimental to democratic institutions. Rahman, who returned from self-imposed exile in London in December 2025, is the son of BNP founder Ziaur Rahman and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, and some have questioned whether his victory heralds true change.

JI's emergence as the main opposition force after years of political marginalization marks a shift in parliamentary dynamics and represents a potential challenge to any BNP policies at odds with JI's Islamist conservatism. Whether and how the AL will resume political activity remains unclear.

Some observers have predicted a pragmatic and multipolar foreign policy under Rahman, arguing that he will seek constructive engagement with the United States, China, and India. Some analysts have asserted that India will seek to reset ties with Bangladesh after Hasina's ouster and perceptions of India as pro-AL gave rise to tensions in the bilateral relationship; others have forecasted improved relations with Pakistan under the new BNP government, continuing a trend that began under Yunus.

Issues for Congress

Bangladesh's interim government concluded a trade deal with the United States on February 9, 2026, that included a 19% "reciprocal" tariff on most imports from Bangladesh. The Rahman government is reviewing that agreement in light of the U.S. Supreme Court's February 2026 decision concerning tariffs President Trump had imposed under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA). Congress could consider potential legislative action related to tariffs on Bangladesh.

Some Members of Congress have expressed [concern](#) about [violence](#) targeting [Hindus](#) and other [religious minorities](#) in Bangladesh during unrest leading up to and following Hasina's 2024 ouster. Bangladesh hosts over one million [Rohingya refugees](#) from Burma, and the United States historically supported the humanitarian response in Bangladesh. Like the AL, the BNP supports [repatriating](#) Rohingya to Burma. The Burma GAP Act (H.R. 4140) would call on the Secretary of State to provide support for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

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