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ISLAMIST POLITICS AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION IN BANGLADESHI NEWSPAPERS

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the representation of an Islamist political party— Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB)— during their political campaign in the context of the 2023 Barishal City Corporation (BCC) in three Bangladeshi mainstream newspapers— the *Daily Star* (DS), the *Daily Janakantha* (DJ) and the *New Age* (NA). Examining the news articles, photographs and editorials, this study argues that these newspapers sidelined, ignored, and in some cases favored the Islamist party. It also argues that the party IAB uses myth— if you vote for hand-fan (electoral symbol of IAB), Allah and Rasool (prophet Muhammad) will have the votes; and makes voters sewer placing hands on the holy Quran—were unchallenged by the three newspapers. Though the IAB could not win the election, it was expected that mass media as social institutions would come forward with accurate information so that social members would not be misguided. The *DS* and *DJ* are found with the propensity to sideline and ignore the IAB and its electioneering. On the contrary, the *NA* provided balanced news coverage compared to the

other dailies. Nonetheless, none of them have challenged the myth that the IAB's uses of myth that misguided the voters.

Key Words:

Islamist Politics, Agenda, Newspapers, Bangladesh, Election Campaign

1. Introduction

Contemporary elections are dominated by mass media and candidates aiming to enjoy the voters' support prefer to use mass media not only for voting campaigns but also for their popular attention (Norris, 2002; Kabir, 2018). Many documents suggest that voters prefer election information from mass media to prepare their opinion (Millar, 1991; Paterson, 1980; McAllister, 1992: 176)— who to vote and why, for example. In addition, not all media work similarly during an election campaign (McAllister, 1992) and the candidate, thus, selects suitable media so that their message would be served prominently that would favor the goal (Millar, 1991; Ward, 1993). The voters too prefer that mass media serve their opinion in a way so that the voters can make decisions about who to vote for and we see election and associated information through traditional and new media (Kleinnijenhuis, van Hoof & van Atteveldt, 2019). In addition, mass media can be recognized as the conveyer and recipient of election information that disseminates information for social consumption; and media provide invaluable information to the citizens that they would not be able to receive otherwise. Therefore, good media-information depends on the objective nature of a particular media but mass media are 'politically polarized' and cannot or do not serve information in many cases to serve a particular agenda (Owen, 2020), which could be a case for a local government election in Bangladesh. There are allegations that Bangladeshi mass media serves the elite agenda (Kabir & Alkaff, 2018; Kabir, 2023) that sidelines and overshadows the information important for society Therefore, this study aims to understand how Bangladeshi newspapers represent Islamist politics in their coverage in the context of a local government election— the 2023 Barishal City Corporation (BCC) election.

This study will examine the coverage of three Bangladeshi mainstream newspapers— the *Daily Star* (DS), the *New Age* (NA), and the *Daily Janakantha* (DJ). The *DS* is the highest circulated English daily, the *NA* in many cases is critical to the government and the *DJ* is a pro-government media outlet. In the 2023 BCC election, the Islamist political party— Islami

Andolan Bangladesh (IAB)— joined for the first time. There are two mainstream political parties— Bangladesh Awami League, and Bangladesh Nationalist Party, in Bangladesh. Besides, some other political parties including Islamist political parties regularly take part in the elections. The Islamist political parties are remarkably operating politics with the acceptance of Muslim voters. Above 91 percent of people here are Muslim (Population and Housing Census-2022). The signature of rearing Islam up is seen in their ways of life. As a matter of whole, from personal to international, cultural to social, openly or covertly, the popularity for Islam is visible in every sphere. Politics is also not out of this sphere. During the British Indian reign, different Islamist parties were founded. Till today, a large number of Islamist parties including Islami Andolan Bangladesh, Khilafat Andolan, Bangladesh Khilafat Andolan, Bangladesh Muslim League, Bangladesh Khilafat Majlish, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, Islamic Front Bangladesh, and many others are practicing politics and also taking part in the polls.

Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB), led by Naib Ameer mufti Muhammad Faizul Karim, took part in the BCC polls on 12 June 2023, which was the center of curiosity and a much-discussed issue in Bangladesh. IAB's participation, candidate declaration, election campaign, manifesto, result refusal, and blaming the ruling Awami League were focused on prominently. In their election campaign, the IAB candidate, leaders and activists falsified and produced myths that misinformed people. For example, *if you vote for hand-fan (electoral symbol of IAB), Allah and his messenger (S.) will have the votes*. Therefore, it is important to understand the perception and how these newspapers constructed IAB in the 2023 BCC election.

2. Conceptual Grounding

2.1. Religion and Politics

Despite many debates among religious scholars, it is set to be a major force in Bangladesh. In some cases, religions seem to be encountering experiential, ideological, ritualistic, intellectual, and consequential; but in other cases, it seems to be that involved in supernatural, mythological aspects (Glock & Stark, 1970). It looks like many preachers of religion depend on myths— for example, 'favor me', 'support me', and 'you can get to heaven by obeying my words'— to promote their interest through capturing people's attention. Though most of the people entirely do not exercise religion in their way of life, they cannot put up with the deeds that go against their religion. Any action, statement that hurts their religious sentiment,

they instantly and tremendously protest. That is why no one generally shows valor doing something that hurts any religious feeling. Leaders absurdly try to prove their religion best trifling the religion of minorities. Their level of devotion to leaders remains so deep. The follower group prepares itself to execute the plan or action that their leader imposes on them. The opportunity of profound devotion to leaders is taken in different ways. The political elite whips up religious fanaticism for its own vested interest (Mohsin, 2004). Some instances can be presented, six million Jews were murdered between 1933 and 1945, (Erin Blakemore, National Geographic, 2023). At least 1000 people died in 1969 at the Ahmedabad riot between Hindu and Muslim. Sikh riot in 1984, Merrut riot in 1984, Mumbai riot in 1992, Gujarat riot in 2002 (Hindustan Times, November 09, 2011). Bangladesh also is not free from communal riots. Seven died after violence erupted during the Hindu festival (Durga Puja) in Bangladesh (The Guardian, October 16, 2022).

Though the main purpose of politics is serving the countrymen but it is rarely followed by political leaders. At first, they take the instance in favor of their own religious (major) community. They then desire to gain moral sympathy expressing love and support through different political activities. Secondly, they take some heinous ways like spreading abhorrence to minorities of the state, which can be conceptualized through the name of various political parties in many nations. For example, a large number of political party's names directly are taken after religion— Pakistan Muslim League (Pakistan), Christian Party (UK), Islamic Iran Participation Front (Iran), Christian Democratic Union (Germany), Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (Cambodia), Islamic Centrist Party (Jordan), Jewish National Front (Israel), Bangladesh Islami Front (Bangladesh), Islami Andolan Bangladesh (Bangladesh), Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (Bangladesh), Central Sikh League (India), Hindu Prajatantrik Party- (Nepal), Jewish Party (Czechoslovakia), Christian Democratic Party (Argentina). Some political parties are not directly named after religion, but they aim to establish the ideology of specific religious people or center on religion. For example, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India is the largest religion based political party in the world (The Hindustan Times, March 30, 2015). It is a pro-Hindu political party of post-independence India, which aims to preach and establish Hindutva ideology. Ceire Cion is another political party in Latvia which is called the Zionist Party and “it's one of the goals was to create a Jewish state in Palestine” (Dribins, Gutmanis & Vestermanis, 2001). Fianna Fáil (Soldiers of Destiny) is a conservative and Christian-democratic political party of the

Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Lebanese Force is a Lebanese Christian-based political party in Lebanon.

After seeing the name Pakistan Muslim League, the Muslim community of British India quickly supported this party. The support is partly due to the long suppression of Hindu elites and parties due to their backward position in jobs, education and religious practices. For example, most zamindar or the landlords were Hindu and they captured all important positions in politics, social status, job sectors and educational elites were mostly Hindus. No one came to extend their hand to educate Muslims in British India. Further, the people of Bangla were doing well and maintained a good relationship until M. Gandhi and J. Nehru came to the political stage in this religion. For example, S. Bose was a leader from Bangla; and both Hindus and Muslims prefer him as their leader. There was no communal riot during his time. However, perhaps observing this Gandhi and Nehru brought a religious agenda in politics. Gandhi rejected the leadership of Bose and flourished the political ambition of Nehru. Again, a similar political game was seen against M. Ali Jinnah. Jinnah wanted a share of power in Congress but he was denied by Gandhi and Nehru. Gradually, Jinnah found out the platform of religion. This sad story or history produced many religion-based political platforms in both Hindu and Muslim communities in British India. For example, Congress was supported by the Hindu community; and Muslims identified their platform Muslim League. In the post-colonial era, religion has emerged as a powerful political force in South Asia.

2.2. The Emergence of Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB)

Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB) is one of the Islamist political parties in Bangladesh. Late Maulana Mufti Syed Muhammad Fazlul Karim, *Pir of Charmanai*, founded the Islami Shashontantra Andolan on 13 March 1987. In the period of the Caretaker Government, led by current pir and Ameer mufti Syed Rezaul Karim, party's name has been changed to Islami Andolan Bangladesh (Bibortonpath, December 28, 2021). Syed Rezaul Karim's sibling Mufti Syed Faizul Karim is the Naib-e-Ameer of this party.

Like other parties, it has both student and youth wings. The student wing is recognized as Islami Chhatra Andolan Bangladesh and the youth wing is recognized as Islami Juba Andolan Bangladesh. It also has another wing named Islami Shromik Andolan. "Motto of freedom, Islamic Constitutionalism" is its slogan. Hand-fan (locally known as *hatpakha*) is the electoral symbol of this party.

The party was established with the purpose of securing Islamism in the country. From the inception of their journey, they prompt in doing action in favor of Islam. Party's Ameer Mr. Karim delivers a speech condemning the atrocities against the Rohingya community in the Rakhine state of Myanmar (Bangla Tribune, September 21, 2017). He also submits a memorandum to the United Nations demanding an end to the massacre. The party demanding the arrest of atheist bloggers, who insulted Islam, the party decides to lay siege to the PM's Office on 25 April 2017 and urges to pass a law for punishing those who also insulted Islam in the parliament" (The Daily Star, March 29, 2013). The party demanded punishment of Abdul Latif Siddique, a lawmaker from the constituency of Tangail-04 and who served as the Jute and Textiles Minister, for his comments criticizing the pilgrim and Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (S).

Currently, IAB has two councilors in two Dhaka city corporations, and one each in Jhenidah, Kuakata, Faridpur Sadar, and Nilphamari Sadar municipalities. The party also has 13 union parishad chairmen (The Daily Star, June 14, 2023). Lastly, it took part in the polls of Barishal and Khulna city corporation election on 12 June 2023. Party's leader Naib Ameer mufti Syed Faizul Karim himself contested as mayor candidate in Barishal city corporation but none of them won the election. They refuse both results arguing that vote was manipulated (The Business Standard, June 12, 2023). However, in the 11th parliamentary election in 2018, the party has bagged the third highest number of votes. It along with other participatory parties claim that the election was not free and fair; the election commission worked to meet ruling party's interest and boycotted results over vote rigging.

2.3. The 2023 Barishal City Corporation Election

The city corporation election is called the highest-tier election among the local governments of Bangladesh. There are twelve city corporations in Bangladesh. Barishal City Corporation is one of them. It comprises 30 wards (Banglapedia, National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh, June 18, 2018). A total of seven mayoral candidates with 119 general councilor candidates and 42 reserved councilor candidates contested the polls (The Daily Observer, June 12, 2023). From the 26th of May, the parties officially start campaigning across its electoral area.

After the day-long polls, 276,298 voters cast their votes in 894 rooms of 126 polling stations (Daily Star, June 12, 2023). The race for Barishal City Corporation recorded 51.46% voter turnout (The Business Standard, June 12, 2023). Abul Khair Abdullah received 87,808

(67.9%) voters while his nearest contender Islami Andolan Bangladesh's candidate Syed Faizul Karim received 33,828 (23.9%) votes (The Dhaka Tribune, June 12, 2023). Among other candidates, Jatiya Party's mayor candidate Engineer Iqbal Hossain Taposh (Plough) got 6665 votes, independent mayor candidate Kamrul Ahasan (Table Clock) bagged 7995 votes. Zaker Party candidate (Rose) Mijanur Rahman Bachchu got 2546 votes (The Daily Observer, June 12, 2023).

2.4. News Media and Election Campaign

Media may provoke voters either to vote or not vote for a particular candidate (Kabir, 2018). On the other hand, they (general people) also receive suggestions from mass media about who is to be *rejected* and who to vote for (Katz, 1957; Gunther, 1998). That's why political parties during the polls approach all kinds of media. In the modern world, digital media has emerged as a game changer (Al-Zaman, 20). Through the use of different types of media, the political parties intend to circulate their positive acts which help them bag votes. Media men also play their professional duty. During the BCC polls, news media coverage amidst the polls was apex. All branches of media like television channels, printing and news portals, radio cover the update. From the first class of news media to lowest class media publish reports with greater importance. The nation's eye was to Barishal that what is going there (The New Age, June 12, 2023). The Daily Sun on 12 June published as lead news titling "Khulna, Barishal cities go to polls today". The New Age on the front page publishes a report as "All eyes on Barishal as voting today". "All eyes on Barishal, Khulna paid less attention" The Kalbela publishes. Television channels broadcast live news. Portals and online versions of printing media regularly publish reports of the polls. Every single event including the date of notification, deadline for submission of nomination paper, date for scrutiny of nominations, appeal against the nomination paper scrutiny, appeal resolve, last date for withdrawal of candidatures, symbols distribution, date of polls & counting is reported with much importance.

2.5. Disputed Statements: Complains of Using Religion in Political Interest

In order to acquire votes, candidates make manifestos where different types of welfare and development activities are included. Candidates, however, especially from Islamist political parties want to acquire votes by means of divine rewards. Tunisia's Islamist party- Ennahdha's president Rached Ghannouchi during the electoral campaign in 2011 said, "when you go into the polls, God's presence will be there with you, God wants you to vote for the party that will protect

your faith” (Grewal, Jamal, Masoud & Nugent, 2019). Bangladesh is not free from the disputed statements in the election campaign. Islami Andolan Bangladesh’s (IAB) Amir Mufti Syed Muhammad Faizul Karim stated in the BCC election campaign: “If you vote on hand fan (electoral symbol), the vote will get Allah and prophet Hazrat Muhammad (S)”. It indicates, if he is voted for, Allah and prophet Hazrat Muhammad (S) will get the vote and will win. Md. Asaduzzaman, an independent mayoral candidate of the 2023 BCC polls, filed a written complaint to Barisal City Election Returning Officer Md. Humayun Kabir accusing him of hurting religious sentiments (Bargunar Alo, June 03, 2023). Another written complaint accusing of hurting religious sentiments was filed to the returning officer by an AL candidate (Prothom Alo, June 12, 2023). On 11 June, a video went viral where the women activists of this party are seen to swear to vote by touching the Quran Sharif (Kalbela, June 11, 2023). The accusations against the party are nothing new. The leaders of the party often delivered this type of speech. Fulton peace in this world and freedom in the hereafter, vote for Masum Billah (IAB candidate) (Bangla News24.com, January 01, 2022). Besides, the talks have been heard that the party’s leader announced paradise in the hereafter by means of the vote for hand-fan.

3. Literature Review

This paper has found some studies which are relevant to this study “Islamist politics and the local government election in Bangladeshi newspapers”. Election and election campaigns, Islam and Islamist Politics, news media and newspapers and their influences are vehemently connected to my research title. The studies have been conducted which represent the importance of media coverage and also their impact on a certain issue.

“Setting The Agenda in A Distant Nation: The 2016 US Presidential Election in a New Zealand Newspaper” by Kabir, S. N. (2019) is one of them. This study examines the coverage of the 2016 US presidential election by the highest circulating New Zealand newspaper- The New Zealand Herald (NZH). It puts argument that the NZH sets an agenda against Donald Trump (The Republican Candidate). The findings evidence that the coverage of Trump and Clinton (Democrat Party Candidate) was transparently imbalanced. In that newspaper, Trump is given huge space to build an agenda against him and to inform readers that Trump is not the right person to be the president. Another work of Kabir (2015) suggests that due to the opposite ideology, New Zealand newspapers opposed Hamas in Palestinian election in 2008.

Anggi Rizky Firdhani, Lia Maulia Indrayani and Ypsi Soeria Soemantri in 2019 conduct research on “How Islam is represented in The United States Newspapers Published in COCA.” COCA means Corpus of Contemporary American. It is the only large and balanced corpus of American English which contains 560+ millions of words. The words are collected from various texts published in US magazines, newspapers, academic texts, fiction or speech texts. Researcher’s objectives were to analyze what are the adjectives used in US newspapers while describing Islam and Muslims. The finding shows that the adjectives ‘radical’, ‘militant’, ‘fundamentalist’, ‘political’, and ‘holy’ are used with the word Islam and the authors assume American citizens appear to be so suspicious of Islam. The Americans’ thought Islam is an awful religion. It is also seen the journalists were intentionally picking negative descriptive words to represent Islam in the media.

To explore the reflection of ideological differences in Australian newspapers, Muhammad Junaid Ghauri & Dr. Zahid Yousaf in 2018 conducted research titled “Exploring the Political Parallelism discourse on Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Australian Press”. The coverage of Islam and Muslims from January 1, 2016 to March 31, 2017 is observed. The study analyzed editorials from two leading Australian newspapers— the *Age* and the *Australian* to determine ‘political parallelism’ discourse in Muslims’ representation. Using the lenses of ‘lexicalization’ and ‘ideological square’, the editorial contents were analyzed to identify ‘violence’, ‘female underrepresentation’, and ‘collectivism’ themes related to Islam and Muslims. The findings have evidenced that the impact of right–left ideological lines are visible in the Australian press wherein the rightist newspaper reflected the right-wing and conservative political ideology and portrayed Islam and Muslims negatively. On the contrary, the newspaper-leaning to leftist backed left-wing and progressive ideology and depicted the Islam and Muslims in a positive manner.

Md. Sayeed Al-Zaman & Manir Uddin Sikder (2020) conduct research on “Impact of Digital Media on Electoral Campaign: The Case of the 11th Parliamentary Election of Bangladesh” which investigates and analyzes how different political actors like public, political parties participated in the Jatiya Sangsad (parliamentary) election of Bangladesh through digital media. And it has seen that the digital media has widely been used by the new digital public to actively participate in electoral campaigns and exert influence on voters. It also predicts digital media might lead the political environment of Bangladesh in near future.

James Forrest, Garry N. Marks, (1991) in their research “The Mass Media, Election Campaigning and Voter Response: The Australian Experience” analyzes the impact of media coverage on voter behavior in the 1991 federal election. They focus on the ‘capital-intensive politics’ election campaign advertising in both ‘paid’ and ‘unpaid’ media. It results that media coverage makes a relatively small but generally significant contribution to voter behavior.

With the purpose of examining the role of mass media at the electoral process, Stanely Kelly, Jr. (1962) conducted a study titled “Elections and The Mass Media”. Throughout the study, some things like specifying the character of media, to find the outline, something to guess, to observe its outcomes and potentialities are seen. Some consequences are found. These are (1) The media transmit campaign propaganda to a large number of people (2) The media transmit propaganda selectively (3) The media transmit propaganda in certain formats (4) The media themselves promote campaign propaganda originating in the context of materials. (Claes H. de Vreese and Hajo Boomgaarden, 2006) operate research on “News, Political Knowledge and Participation: The Differential Effects of News Media Exposure on Political Knowledge and Participation”. To explore the relationship between the exposure of media content and political knowledge and participation in politics, this research is conducted. It is seen that media exposure affects knowledge and political participation positively. This study also evidences that the relationships between news watching and knowledge and participation are rather more positive than negative and it has an impact on votes.

4. Methodology

Krippendorff (2004) argues for critical evaluation, which is critically important for any research work. However, to analyze content, one needs to understand the context of a nation, of a culture, of a group of people or a community (Donald & Pirro, 1990) and this is why it demands an in-depth understanding of data. This is the way one can understand society through analyzing content (Krippendorff, 2004; Donald & Pirro, 1990). This research will mainly use qualitative data analysis methods— news framing for example. However, it will also employ quantitative data to understand the background better.

Qualitative data is interpretation and descriptive based. In many cases, quantitative analysis does not and cannot answer the question (Bryman, 2008). In this case, mode in-depth, more descriptions are needed and qualitative methods of analysis can help (Mack *et al.*, 2005).

This kind of analysis can easily explain questions such as why and how— for example, why does a particular newspaper overlook an event or why did some political leaders prefer to use myths in their speeches? It can provide the answer directly about why a particular candidate is involved in promoting a certain type of speech when others are not (Hammersley, 2013). Therefore, this study emphasizes words or sentences rather than statistical analysis (Bryman, 2008: 366). It is important to understand why some people behave in a particular way, and in fact, it tries to unearth and interpret the actual world to understand their experience (Sandelowski, 2004: 893). This study considers all news that appeared in the front and back pages and all editorials from the selected three newspapers— *DS*, *DJ* and *NA*.

5. Statistical Findings

The time frame of the study starts from the 26th of May (the day of distributing electoral symbols) to the 15th of June in 2023 (after three days of the polls).

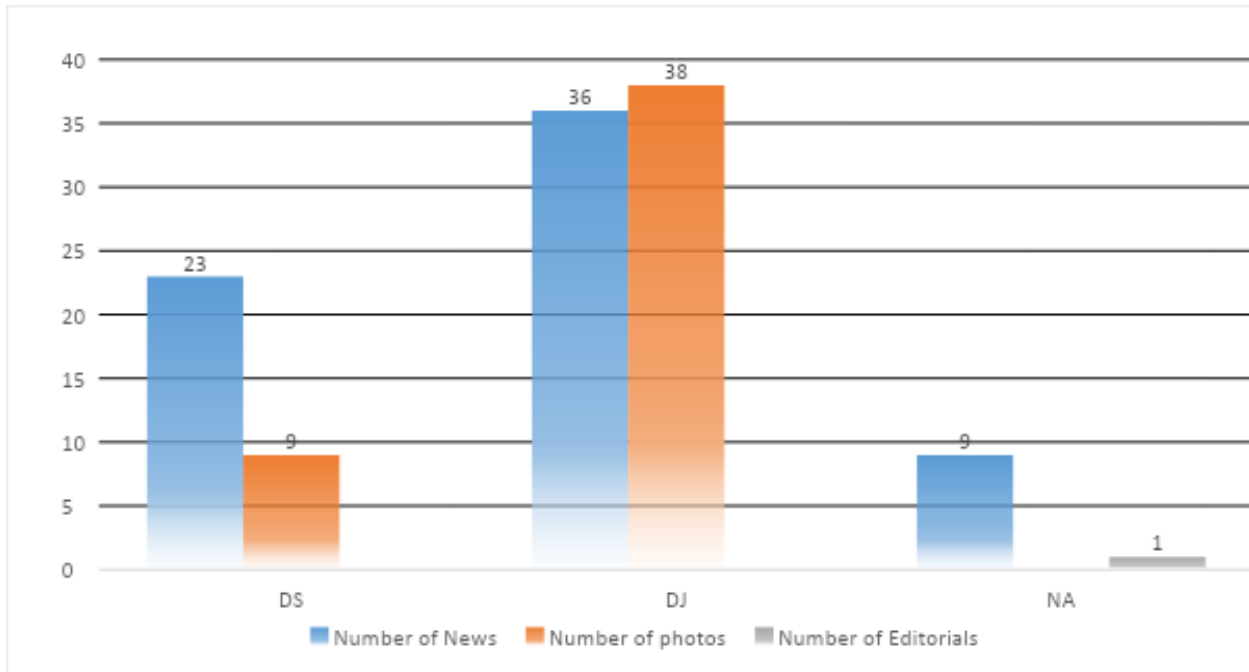
The study uses the abbreviation of the parties. *AL* means Awami League, *IAB* means Islami Andolan Bangladesh, *JaPa* means Jatiya Party and *Ind* means *Independent* party or candidates.

Table 5.1: *Total Number of News Articles, Photographs and Editorials*

Name of The Newspapers	Number of The News	Number of The Photos	Number of The Editorials
DS	23	9	0
DJ	36	38	0
NA	9	0	1

(Source: based on the findings of this study)

Figure 5.1: *Total Number of News Articles, Photographs and Editorials*



(Source: based on the findings of this study)

The DJ publishes a maximum of 36 news articles with 38 photos. The DS publishes 23 news articles including 9 photographs. On the other hand, The NA publishes only 9 news articles, 1 editorial and 0 photograph.

6. Explanation and Analysis of Findings

In this chapter, the explanation and analysis of the findings will be individually elaborated.

6.1. The Daily Star

Among 23 news, 12 (52%) news reports are headlined directly about the different issues of AL. The IAB is provided only 2 (9%) news- 1 news articles and 1 'Photo Story'. In the news of neutral headlines, the AL and Ind consecutively are given 31% while narrating the news reports. The party IAB is given 23% in its news narration.

The information appeared from the above, evidence that the daily DS paid more news value to the ruling AL. Among 23 news, 12 are about directly AL. Moreover, in neutral news, AL jointly is given first place. That means a total of 16 news articles are written about AL. On the other hand, IAB is given only 3 news with a 0 number of headlines. In the news of AL, IAB's place is short. For instance, on Election Day, the lead news was headlined as "all eyes on

Barishal, Khulna out of focus '. Across the news, a total of 27 paragraphs are written about the different incidents of AL, IAB, JaPa and Independent candidates, only two paragraphs are written for IAB. Other instances of ignoring the IAB can be given. On 27 May, the DS reported on the internal conflict of AL. In that news, in the last-middle part, a paragraph following the AL is written. On 31 May, half of a sentence in the last paragraph following JaPa's mayoral candidate Iqbal Hossain Taposh was written about IAB's electoral campaign. On 7 June, Anisur Rahman Sharif, a loyalist of AL mayoral candidate Abul Khair Abdullah and an incumbent member of ward-14, claimed that Sadiq Abdullah and his father Abul Hasanat Abdullah gave TK 3 crore to IAB and 5 crores to BNP for campaigning at the city polls. IAB instantly denounced this and denied receiving any money. IAB also talks about the plan to file a written complaint against Sharif. This incident is relevantly added in the last part. In the news of the 8th of June, two pieces of information- the second highest tax-paid party this year and it filed a case against Anisur Rahman Sharif under the Digital Security Act (DSA) are included in a small part of that news. On 10 June, two news articles were published about the internal conflict between uncle-nephews and preparation for door-knocking polls. No incident of IAB has been published on that day. One day before the polls, three news articles are published. On the first news, a flurry of pledges is seen from the candidates where IAB is placed following AL. The second news was decorated with three photos where the first photo (AL) is given a bigger space than the two. The other two small photos are for the IAB and KCC polls. The next day of the election, DS publishes five news articles which include two photos. The headline of one news article was "AL's Khair prevails over own clan" where the story of their Serniabat family is placed again. After that, the rejection of the result by IAB over vote rigging and different incidents like attacking Faizul and his supporters, scuffling between AL and IAB candidates, and entering polling stations illegally by AL men were placed. In the first photo, the scenario of attacking an IAB candidate was shown. In the second photo, the results of the two closest contenders AL and IAB of BCC and KCC are shown. The fourth news is on the pledges of development that Khair said in his electoral manifesto. The last one, writes on the internal conflict and 'not casting vote' of Sadiq Abdullah in the BCC polls. On 14 June, two news articles were printed. One news article is written once again about the internal conflict. Due to the conflict, the win failed to bring joy among AL men. The second news is about IAB where it said that the party is seeking to form an alliance with like-minded Islamist parties.

The conflict between uncle and nephew adds an extra dimension to the city polls. The incidents of Uncle Abul Khair Abdullah Serniabat who has been nominated as mayoral candidate from Awami League and his nephew Sadiq Abdullah Serniabat, the previous mayor of BCC and also the mayor aspirant, seem to be prioritized on The Daily Star. From 26th May to 7th June, among seven news reports, six news reports are directly about the AL and uncle-nephew's internal conflict. After the election, two news were reported too about the conflict. IAB was a small part or less important of these news.

6.2. The Daily Janakantha

This daily writes 65% neutral news headlines and 35% headlines slanted to AL. And, in this newspaper, IAB is found with 0 news headlines. In the case of neutral news headlines, AL stands first by occupying most 33%. The party IAB jointly stands second having 30% news narration while covering the election. One thing to clarify is that there is some news where collage photos are used. In those collage photos, AL+ JaPa and AL+ IAB are taken in this manner. As a result, the study didn't count them as neutral or sided to any party.

This study notices that the daily DJ uses most photos in its news coverage. A total of 38 photos have been used. Among them, AL has a maximum of 18 (47%) photos where the quantity of IAB is only 6 (21%).

The data of the above description is the clear articulation of monopoly priority to ruling political party AL in the election. The newspaper conducted a one-sided reporting for the ruling Awami League candidate. It prints 7 headlines about the party. No headline is available about the other parties. In the case of neutral news, AL is given the one-third news narration, the rest of the part was distributed among the parties. As a result, It cleanly can be said that this newspaper has prioritized the boat candidate Abul Khair Abdullah (Khokon Serniabat) and his different electioneering.

Almost every report maintains a sequence like the news or narrative of Awami League will be placed firstly, Jatiya Party secondly and Islami Andolan Bangladesh thirdly or lastly. For example, on 27 May, the DJ publishes a report as "Candidates conduct campaign in Barishal after gaining symbol" where it keeps two parties AL and JaPa's story. In the news, an AL story is presented hinting "extended meeting of the central team of AL". Another story of an independent candidate is presented hinting "Rupan's trust on Jayeda's symbol". Here, Jayeda is the winner of previously held Gazipur City Corporation (GCC) polls who participated independently. No story

or incident of IAB does not take place on that day. On 28 May, the report “Candidates start campaigning in a festive mood” is published presenting the electoral campaign of AL, JaPa and IAB. The stories of AL and JaPa are included consecutively underlining “Urge to win boat” and “Have to go forward facing conspiracy”. There is only one story about the campaign of IAB. On 29 May, “Posters across the city, electioneering goes in a festive mood” is published where the story of IAB takes place but after AL and JaPa. Three stories of AL, one story of JaPa and IAB. On 30 May, “Campaign at peak on Facebook in Barishal ” where two stories of AL and JaPa are presented. The story is “electoral office opened by Sharbojonin Nagorik Oikya Parishad ” to support boat. Another is for JaPa” IT cell will be formed”. But there is one line allocated for IAB before underlining the two points. Some of the news is totally AL centric. These are following- on 1 June, “AL on field to make win boat in Barishal”, on 6 June, “Khokon wants to return the lost pride of eastern Venice”, on 7 June, “Different strategies in mass communication, campaign with digital technology” on 9 June, “Khokon wants to build smart and humanitarian city”, on 10 June, “Khokon wants to build Barishal as labor friendly city”.

In the DJ, there noticed a propensity to avoid the internal conflict between uncle and nephew compared to the DS. Only three times, this incident has been included in three different news reports. The claim over vote rigging on polls day by IAB is ignored. Besides, the incident of scuffle between AL and IAB men, attacking IAB candidate Faizul Karim was paid less attention. It publishes a headline “Vote by EVM in a peaceful environment in Barishal” where the presence of physically disabled persons and women voters are placed with extra importance.

6.3. The New Age

NA publishes fewer news reports compared to the DS and DJ. It publishes only 10 news articles including an editorial and 0 photos. The NA publishes maximum 5 neutral news which in percentage is 50%. It also provides only two headlines to AL and its percentage is 10. The most headlines it provided to IAB is 3 news which occupies 30%. From the perspective of publishing news and priority, the NA is found totally opposite compared to the DS and DJ. NA paid more amount of news value to the IAB and its candidate providing a better coverage. Because it publishes 3 headlines about the IAB whereas the number of headlines about AL is 2. In the neutral news, the AL and IAB get the same coverage having 4 news.

The NA emphasized the allegations made by IAB of vote rigging, attacks on IAB candidates, and scuffle between AL and IAB activists. In addition, the rejection of the polling

result by IAB has been paid more news value in the NA than the DS and DJ. After the day of awarding electoral symbols to candidates, it publishes one news “Mayor Aspirants awarded symbols”. After that, prior to voting day on 11 June, it published a news “Most Centers ‘risky’” where it is informed that 106 of 124 centers in the BCC election were found risky. After the immediate day of voting day, NA’s lead news was, “Attacks, rigging, low turnout mark city polls' ". In that news, the allegations of attacking IAB candidate Syed Muhammad Faizul, vote rigging and low turnout are expressed. It also expresses the irresponsible statement of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Kazi Habibul Awal on the issue of the attack on IAB candidate Faizul Karim. The CEC said over the question of the attack on Faizul Karim that “Has he died? No, how much is he...What we saw, we didn’t see him bleed. As far as I heard, someone punched him from behind. I have also heard his statement- he also said voting is not being obstructed...”. The matter of ‘not voting’ of outgoing mayor Sadiq Abdullah came on the page of NA on the 13th of June. The IAB announced to boycott the result of city polls over vote rigging, it came to NA on 13 June. The condemnation over the attack on Faizul Karim from different political parties like Rastra Sanskar Andolan and Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islam is expressed on the second page of 13 June. Police arrested one suspect on 13 June over an attack on Faizul Karim. This incident was reported on 14 June. On 14 June, an editorial was written condemning the attack and the statement of CEC Kazi Habibul Awal.

7. Results

Through the coverage of three newspapers, the scenario of the election has been depicted to readers across the country and the globe.

The newspapers Daily Star and Daily Janakantha sideline the Islamist party as they decline to uphold the different allegations made by IAB, providing very few places in the news articles and photographs.

The allegations include the attack on IAB candidate Mr. Faizul Karim, scuffle between AL and IAB activists, vote rigging and illegal entry to polling stations by ruling party’s men. The issues of rejection of the polls result by IAB, irresponsible statement of CEC Kazi Habibul Awal on attacking the IAB candidate are also ignored in the Daily Star and Daily Janakantha. But these incidents are covered in other Bangladeshi newspapers.

The dailies decorate their news maintaining a definite sequence. While narrating the news reports, most of the time, the DS first mentions the story of AL. Then, it mentions IAB and lastly mentions the story of Independent candidate and JaPa candidate. Like this way, the DJ follows the sequence AL-JaPa- IAB in its news narration.

In the DS, IAB is given only two headlines- 1 news and 1 'Photo Story' which is only 9% of the total news headlines. Where 52% of news reports are headlined about the phenomenon of AL, and among the rest 39% neutral headlines, IAB occupies 23% including 3 news narrations.

The DJ does not publish a single news headline about the Islamist party where 35% news directly are slanted to AL. Among the rest 65% of neutral news, 30% news are given to IAB. In the case of photographs, the Islamist party is given only 21% photographs, the third largest, whereas 47% photographs were given to AL.

The NA does not pay much attention to the Election but raises its finger to authority as some inconvenience takes place. It upholds the different allegations by their short number of coverages. It also publishes more news headlines about IAB than other parties. Where the DS and DJ respectively publish 23 and 38 news and 38 and 9 photos, it published only 9 news and 0 photos.

8. Discussion

The Daily Star, Daily Janakantha and New Age are the mainstream, quality and leading newspapers in Bangladesh. They have both credibility and popularity among the readers. Their printed news articles, photographs, editorials and so on undoubtedly bear significance, and they obviously do not publish anything without news value.

After analyzing the findings, some phenomena seem to be placed in the newspapers. The phenomena are following-

8.1. Myth

These newspapers did not question or challenge the myth by the candidate of IAB. According to section 18 (A)- "During the elections, one cannot make any speech degrading a personal character or make any kind of bitter or provocative or defamatory speech or any speech that hurts gender, *communal* or *religious* sentiments." Thus, the newspapers would want accountability to the leader for this provocative speech what hurt communal or religious sentiments.

8.2. Swear

IAB makes voters swear asking to vote for hand-fan placing the Holy Quran. This also is the clear inclusion of infringing of section 18 (A) of City Corporation (Conduct of Election) Rules, 2016.

8.3. Complain

The independent mayoral candidate Md. Asaduzzaman of the polls filed a written complaint to Barisal City Election Returning Officer Md. Humayun Kabir accusing him IAB candidate of hurting religious sentiments (v).

These three newspapers collectively omitted the issues despite having news value. But due to their omissions, the party IAB silently was supported.

8.4. Election Campaign

Despite generating much more news value and receiving the second highest vote, the Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB) does not get much coverage in the newspapers. The party's participation in the 2023 BCC polls makes the election much more exciting. Bangladeshi social media and mass media are found attentive with the context of BCC polls. This party is considered the main competitor of the influential ruling party Awami League. There is an expectation of a tough battle between these two parties. There are numerous occurrences relating to IAB that meet news value. As a result, the newspapers could give more access to this party in both headlines and news. Its election campaign should have got more coverage. And, like NA, the DS and DJ would present the incidents and the allegations and should have criticized the role and comment of CEC.

The New Age does not publish much news but presents some facts that DJ and DS overlooked.

Newspapers play a significant role in informing the electorate (Druckman, 2005). The newspapers help voters be influenced by their political ideology. The three newspapers unexpectedly omitted the above presented incidents together. By their omission, it can be assumed that the Islamist party indirectly is supported. Because, by upholding the incidents in their newspapers, IAB's image could be degraded which might have led to a more negative impact to vote for the hand fan.

9. Conclusion

Mass media is the mirror of society and there is evidence that many people depend on information produced by mass media. Therefore, the expectations of the readers would be and should be to receive the information they need; and they would expect that mass media provide them the information that is accurate, objective, and detailed. In this case, the functions of a particular newspaper would be to promote factual information and mass media would criticize the power elite in need and for the well-being of society. The newspapers in question, however, in many cases could not or did not follow the normative expectation as they in many cases violated the norms of mass media. As discussed, in many cases these newspapers suppressed information. As this study identifies that these newspapers are biased in representing the Islamist party Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB) — none of them challenged the party. The *DS* and *DJ* have provided very little space to the IAB compared to the other political party and their candidates, which can be conceptualized through their coverage of news and photographs, and editorials. The *DS* and *DJ* provide a biased priority in electoral campaigns. Various allegations are raised on Election Day but they ignored. The allegations are of vote rigging, illegal entrance to the polling centers, attacking on IAB candidate, scuffle between two party's men. The *NA* is different in this case and it tends to provide more importance to IAB. It takes the party importantly that the rest of the dailies sidelined. The *NA* also maintains an imbalance representation towards AL. The *NA* ignored to publish the news on the allegations of influencing voters while queuing to vote and creating chaos and attacking the men of AL. Besides, these three newspapers together silently supported the party by not publishing the cases of stating the myth, delivering a provocative speech and violating section 18 (A) of City Corporation (Conduct of Election) Rules, 2016 by IAB.

At this stage, this study would prefer to inform that this is not an extensive and comprehensive study of the issue and therefore, there are scopes to enrich future studies. For example, this study only considers three Bangladeshi newspapers and does not include more newspapers available in Bangladesh. In addition, it does not include any other news feeds such as online portals, radio, television channels. In these cases, the results would be different. Therefore, there is a scope for future researchers to provide their attention in these areas.

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