

# Democracy and Authoritarianism: Understanding Three Decades of Bangladesh Politics

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## Abstract:

Bangladesh is at a crossroads in its march towards democratic order. Though it started its political journey with a parliamentary system after independence, it failed to sustain it; slowly but steadily the parliamentary government degenerated into an authoritarian system. Bangladesh has completed about forty-five years of independence and it has also completed about eighteen years of direct and indirect military rule dominated by the military. Actually, Bangladesh politics is a combination of democracy and authoritarianism. From the very beginning of its independence, the hopes and aspirations for parliamentary democracy of the majority Bangladeshi people were turned into authoritarian form of government. This study primarily focuses on the concept of democracy and authoritarianism. It scrutinizes the existence of democracy and authoritarianism in Bangladesh politics from the early period of its independence of the first three decades from December 16, 1971 to December 16, 2001. The main aim of this paper is to find out the existence of democracy and authoritarianism in different regimes in Bangladesh from 1972 to 1975 the era of populist authoritarianism, 1975 to 1981 and 1981 to 1991 the era of military dominated rule and from 1991 to 2001 the era of parliamentary democracy.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Authoritarianism, Parliamentary Democracy, BAKSAL, Military Interference, Constitutional Amendment, Caretaker Government, Power Politics, Politics of Exclusion

## Introduction:

One of the traumatic events of 1971 was the disintegration of Pakistan and the emergence of the new nation state, Bangladesh.<sup>1</sup> The political history of Bangladesh's thirty years can be broadly divided into three eras: the era of populist authoritarianism (1972-1975), the era of military dominated rule (1975-1990), and the era of representative democracy (1991- 2001). All of these eras have adopted both democratic and authoritarian trends. During these periods, Bangladesh has undergone a variety of systems of government from a west minister-style parliamentary government to one-party presidential rule to a multi-party presidential system and again in parliamentary system. The country has returned to the parliamentary system of government in 1991. Not only has the country experienced various systems that are practiced elsewhere, it has also invented a unique system of its own called the caretaker government and also the interim-government. The country gradually turned into what Fareed Zakaria has termed as an "illiberal democracy."<sup>2</sup> Although the first regime begun its tenure under the parliamentary system, it soon introduced the presidential form of government that without check and balance suited authoritarian rule. Bangladesh military rulers enjoyed the benefit of the presidential system and tried to be democratic but failed to overcome from their authoritarian trends. With the beginning of the new democratic era the parliamentary democratic system has been restored but till present it has not sustained because of existence of different authoritarian tendencies.

## Methodology

This research is based on the secondary data. A number of books, journals, newspapers and articles have been used to carry out this study. Relevant literature has also collected through internet browsing. This study is based on the concept that Bangladesh politics is a combination of democracy and authoritarianism. Here, from December 16, 1971 to December 16, 2001 is our sample and the unit of analysis is the democracy and authoritarianism from 1972 to 1975, the era of populist authoritarianism, from 1975 to 1990, the era of military dominated rule and from 1990 to 2001, the era of representative democracy.

## Democracy: Conceptual Analysis

The term democracy is derived from the Greek word demos and kratos, the former meaning 'the people' and the later 'power'. Democracy thus means 'power of the people'. Thus, literally, democracy means rule by the people. From time to time democracy has been defined by different scholar's like-

\*According to the Greeks, Democracy is the government in which people rule over themselves. People are the sovereign here having their right to rule over themselves.

\*According to Aristotle, Democracy is a perverted form of government.<sup>3</sup> It includes different loopholes that make government critical interest oriented.

\*According to Austin Ranney, Democracy is a form of government organized in accordance with the principle of popular sovereignty, political equality, popular consultation and majority rule.<sup>4</sup>

\*According to former American President Abraham Lincoln, Democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people.<sup>5</sup>

In brief, we can say that democracy is that form of government in which the sovereign power of the state is in the hands of the people and people are the source of the state power and the people take part in the government directly or through their representatives. Lastly, we can say that democracy is the government of the majority and the majority safeguards the interests of the people. In this form of government, the interests of minorities are not ignored.

### **Authoritarianism: Conceptual Analysis.**

Authoritarianism is a form of government characterized by strong central power and limited political freedoms. On the other hand, authoritarianism means the relating to or favoring of a concentration of power in a leader or elite not constitutionally responsible to the people.

\*Theodore M. Vesta says that authoritarianism is characterized by highly concentrated and centralized power maintained by political repression and the exclusion of potential challengers. It uses political parties and mass organizations to mobilize people around the goals of the regime.<sup>6</sup>

\*Adam Przeworski has theorized authoritarianism as "authoritarian equilibrium rests mainly on lies, fear and economic prosperity."<sup>7</sup>

\*According to P. C. Sondrol, Authoritarianism tends to embrace the informal and unregulated exercise of political power, a leadership that is "self-appointed and even if elected cannot be displaced by citizens' free choice among competitors," the arbitrary deprivation of civil liberties, and little tolerance for meaningful opposition

\*John Duckitt suggests a link between authoritarianism and collectivism, asserting that both stand in opposition to individualism. Authoritarianism and collectivism submerge individual rights and goals to group goals, expectations and conformities.<sup>8</sup>

In brief, we can assert that authoritarianism means highly concentrated, centralized, informal and unregulated political power that undermines individual's rights, expectations, desires, goals and performances. It also includes limited political pluralism; that is, such regimes place constraints on political institutions and groups like legislatures, political parties and interest groups. It is also a basis for legitimacy based on emotion, especially the identification of the regime as a necessary evil to combat "easily recognizable societal problems" such as underdevelopment or insurgency and minimal.

### **Democracy and Authoritarianism: Understanding Three Decades of Bangladesh Politics.**

The political history of Bangladesh's thirty years can be broadly divided into three eras: the era of populist authoritarianism (1972-1975), the era of military dominated rule (1975-1990), and the era of representative democracy (1991- 2001). All of these eras have adopted both democratic and authoritarian trends.

#### **1. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Regime: 1972-1975**

Like many other new states, Bangladesh at its birth faced the formidable problem of simultaneously building an input and an output sector both a state apparatus and a political community.<sup>9</sup> After independence, Bangladesh adopted democratization process but failed to continue. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the heroic leader of Bangladesh wanted to fulfill the hope and aspiration of Bengali people toward parliamentary democracy in spite of the Awami League regime had a shaky start. But the reality was different. The Awami League regime tried to establish democratic government in Bangladesh but it was turned into authoritarian government.

##### **1.1 Political Institution Building:**

On January 08, Mujib was released and flown to London where in a press conference he showed an immediate grasp of the political realities in Bangladesh in spite of a nine-month-long solitary confinement in Pakistani prison.<sup>10</sup> He returned to Bangladesh on January 10, with a short stopover in Delhi. Upon arrival in Dhaka, Mujib was given a hero's welcome, and in the same day in a public speech he laid down the major principles of his regime.<sup>11</sup> He reiterated that collaborators and prisoners of war guilty of crimes would be tried, and proclaimed that the policies of his regime would be based on the principles of nationalism, secularism, democracy and socialism. The day after his arrival in Dhaka, Mujib, as the president of the republic, issued a Provisional Constitutional Order which stipulated a unitary parliamentary government of Bangladesh. The Provincial and National Assemblies were amalgamated into one body called the Constituent Assembly. Freedom of press and speech and other fundamental rights were allowed subject to certain qualifications, i.e., a ban on right wing parties which had collaborated with the Pakistani army. The day after the announcement of the Constitutional Order, Sheikh Mujib stepped down as President, become Prime Minister, swore in an extended cabinet, and thus,

within forty-eight hours of his return, become the effective had of government ruling out all possibilities of playing a Gandhi-type role. At a press conference on January 14, Mujib promised early drafting of a constitution and a socialist economy for Bangladesh.<sup>12</sup> On January 30, as a show of Mujib's on strength vis-à-vis the different factions of the Mukti Bahini some 50000 arms were surrendered by the Mukti Bahini who came to Dhaka from all the districts. Finally, on March 12, all Indian troops were withdrawn from Bangladesh.<sup>13</sup>

### 1.2 Constitution Formulation:

One of the great achievements of the Awami League regime in its first twelve months in power was the successful completion of the task of constitution making. On March 23, the Constitution Assembly Order was promulgated. On April 10, the Constituent Assembly met for two days and created a thirty-four-member special committee headed by Law Minister Dr. Kamal Hossain and entrusted with the task of drafting a constitution. The constitution was drafted within six months and it was passed by the Constituent Assembly where the Awami League had an overwhelming majority in record time.

#### Constitution Formulation:

Date	Events
On October 12, 1972	The constitution bill was presented in the parliament.
On November 04, 1972	The constitution bill was passed in the parliament.
On December 15, 1972	The constitution of Bangladesh was effective.

The Constituent Assembly met on October 12, and it passed the Constitution bill on November 04, 1972. The Constitution became effective on December 15 exactly a year after the liberation of Bangladesh.<sup>14</sup> The constitution incorporates a number of provisions with an eye to ensure the stability of the system.

### 1.3 Party Building:

Following liberation, the Awami League formed a party government and from the beginning put priority on party-building task. Within a month after Mujib's release in mid-February, the Awami League working committee met in Dhaka and decided to separate the party organization from the parliamentary party. This meant that ministers were barred from holding any party office,<sup>15</sup> but the factional fights within the Awami League compelled Mujib to continue as party President. Consequently, in early April, the Awami League Council reversed its earlier decision and officially requested Sheikh Mujib to continue in his office as well as to nominate the other office bearers of the party. Mujib chose a compromise candidate Zillur Rahman as the new General Secretary of the party. The organizational side of the party was left to the young member, especially to the two former student leaders Tofael Ahmed and Abdul Razzak.

### 1.4 Mujibbad: Nationalism, Democracy, Socialism and Secularism

Simply stated, Mujibbad stood for the four principles of nationalism, democracy, socialism and secularism which Mujib claimed to be his ideals. The term Mujibbad was first coined by the Awami League's Student League and it came to prominence in May when the Student League split into two factions—one (Siddiqi-Makhan faction) supporting Mujibbad and the other (Rab-Siraj faction) supporting scientific socialism. From the Student League the slogan of Mujibbad was picked up by the young leaders of the Awami League and later by the party hierarchy. Mujibbad was proclaimed as the new "ism" which sought to correct the deficiencies of capitalism and communism. The Bangladesh Constitution incorporated the term.

### 1.5 Parliamentary Democracy:

The Awami League's commitment to parliamentary democracy started from the foundation of the party in 1949. The key demand of the party was parliamentary democracy. As the ruling elite in Pakistan showed its preference for a "vice regal" system,<sup>16</sup> the Awami League parliamentary democracy as a major political platform to establish itself as a distinct, democratic opposition to the ruling elite. The Awami League would establish parliamentary democracy as against the other more radical faction of the Mukti Bahini whose political belief were unknown, if not suspect—these were strong arguments repeatedly used in 1971 to mobilize support for the Awami League and the Bangladesh movement.<sup>17</sup> Sheikh Mujib came out personal rule and in favor of a parliamentary democracy and ironically enough, the faction which demanded revolutionary government under Mujib.<sup>18</sup> Thus, within the Awami League, the older party leadership had some ideological commitments to parliamentary democracy, but a faction of the militant youth leaders, were ideologically opposed to it.

### 1.6 Formation of Government on the Basis of the Election of 1970:

The victory in the nine-month long war against the Pakistani army in December 1971 and the return of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, from a Pakistani prison in January 1972 constituted a euphoric beginning for the nation. The Awami League, having secured victory in the last general election in Pakistan in 1970 and formed a government-in-exile (April 1971-December 1971) assumed state power in post-independence Bangladesh. The promise of an

inclusive democracy marked the beginning of the regime of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman but that was really the beginning barrier toward democracy.

### 1.7 Centralization of Power and Manipulation of the Constitution:

The regime drifted toward coercive measures rather than making effort to co-opt the opposition and combat the underlying reasons for the crises. In addition, the ruling party utilized its overwhelming majority in parliament to manipulate the constitution. Parliament became a tool for legitimizing the coercive action of the government instead of being a forum of discussion and debate. The establishment of a Para-militia force named the Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini with enormous power, and recourse to the military to solve law and order problems were the early and concrete indications of this shift towards authoritarianism.

### 1.8 Intimidation of Political Opponents using Government Power:

The first general election was held in March 1973, was marred by intimidation of political opponents, and abuse of government power to sway the votes in favor of the AL. The disunity among opposition political parties and their failure to present any pragmatic alternative program to that of the AL weakened the opposition's appeal to the voters. The ruling party utilized the state-controlled mass media, including radio and television, as a virtual "party-spokesman," despite having a unique asset: Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

### 1.9 Vote Rigging and Violence:

Allegations abound that the ruling party resorted to rigging and violence leading up to and during the election. The exact magnitude of the electoral manipulation is difficult to determine and the opposition parties, in some cases, exaggerated the facts while the ruling party completely rejected any such charges. Chowdhury and Barman point to the far-reaching impact of the AL's actions during the election: "the Awami League strategy of applying maximum pressure to win every parliamentary seat (and) wipe out the opposition parties...had a dysfunctional impact on the fledgling parliamentary system."<sup>19</sup>

#### Result of the First General Election held in Bangladesh on March 07, 1973:

Name of the Party	Number of Seats Contested	Number of Seats Won	Percentage
Awami League	300	292	73.17
National Awami Party (Pro-Mosco)	223	-	8.59
Jatio Samajtantrik Dal (National Socialist Party)	236	1	6.48
National Awami Party (Bhashani)	169	-	5.42
Independents and Others	150	6	6.34
Total	1078	299	100 <sup>20</sup>

But it was less democratic than it appeared at first sight; because, alongside these provisions there remained others that could enable the government to "legitimately" act to the country.<sup>21</sup>

### 1.10 Parliamentary form of Government turned into Presidential form of Government:

By late-1974, the regime officially resorted to emergency rule. The proclamation of the emergency, on December 28, 1974, essentially brought an end to parliamentary rule and the constitutional state. The fourth amendment of the constitution was passed on January 25, 1975 that made sweeping changes. The country entered into a new constitutional arrangement that introduced a presidential form of government where only one political party could exist. On the one hand, authoritarianism was bow enshrined in the constituent, while the newly organized party BAKSAL established as a last-ditch effort to don the populist garb, on the other.

## 2. General Ziaur Rahman Regime: 1975-1981

As has been emphasized by Henry Bienen, "military regime" is a misnomer as all "military regimes" have large civilian components.<sup>22</sup> This development is occurred primarily for two reasons. First, the military leaders want to give a degree of civilian color to the new regime. Secondly, although in some of the recent literature on the subject the military is depicted as highly modern force able to transfer its organizational and technical skills to the art of government.<sup>23</sup> On November 7, 1975 when Major General Ziaur Rahman emerged as the strong man of the regime few observers were hopeful about the survival of the regime. The process of "civilianization" generally involves two steps, first, holding of a national election which gives the regime the image of winning a popular mandate to rule, and second, formation of a national party which helps the regime recruit political support. The military regime of Ziaur Rahman in Bangladesh also followed the same rout of "civilianization" of its rule. He promised to restore democracy in the near future. Ziaur Rahman said that he was a soldier and not a politician that the regime was interim, non-partisan and non-political and its aim was to restore democracy to the

people through free and fair elections.<sup>24</sup> But in practical sense, in the name of democracy this regime was authoritarian.

### 2.1 Party Building:

Ziaur Rahman was slowly turning himself from a soldier to a politician building his own political party. Zia's strategy was two folds: to spilt the faction prone political parties into various groups and to pick up the support of some of the breakaway factions. To ensure support of a wide variety of groups, Zia's initial tactics was to avoid being identified with any particular political party. He announced his decision to launch a political front, and urged all political parties and groups to join the proposed front. To bring greater unity among his supporters, Ziaur Rahman, again shelved the notion of the front, and again launched a political party, this time headed by him. Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) was formed in September 1978, with President Ziaur Rahman as its Chairman. The BNP consisted of JAGODAL, and factions of the parties belonging to the JF, i.e. NAP (B), UPP, and the Muslim League. The BNP's ideology statist; faith in Bangladeshi nationalism was the major party platform.

### 2.2 The Referendum in 1977:

Ziaur Rahman issued a broad-based election manifesto, the Nineteen Points program to seek a centrist majority support in the referendum. In brief, the Nineteen Point of the people. It also promised special policy measures to meet the needs of particular groups, i.e. women, youth, workers and government employees. Its program pledged to provide the basic needs of life i.e. food, clothing, shelter, literacy, health and medical care and others. On May 30, 1977, a national referendum was held and Ziaur Rahman won a massive vote of confidence. However, the regimes claim of the massive vote was a bit too massive. It claimed 87percent voter turnout and 99 percent vote in Zia's favor. Since in all previous elections of the country voter turnout never exceeded 60 percent, the referendum result appeared to be two massive to be true.<sup>25</sup>

### 2.3 Presidential Election in 1978:

Zia contested the presidential election as a nominee of Jatiotabadi Front (JF), and electoral alliance of both leftist and rightist parties. It consisted of JAGODAL, the Muslim League (ML), the United People's Party (UPP), NAP (Bhasani), Bangladesh Labour Party, and Bangladesh Scheduled Castes Federation. His major opponent was General Retired M.A.G Osmani, a nominee of Gonotantik Oikyo Jot (GOJ), and electoral alliance of the Awami League, NAP (Muzzaffar), People's League, Jatiya Jonota Party, Krishok Sromik Party and Jatiya League. Zia did not emphasize the issue of form of government; he campaigned mostly on the theme of the good days of Zia vs. the misrule of Awami Baksalites.

#### *Results of the Presidential Election in 1978:*

Candidate	Party	Votes	%
Ziaur Rahman	Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Front	15,733,807	76.6
M. A. G. Osmani	Ganatantrik Oikkya Jote	4,455,200	21.7
Eight other candidates	-	342,554	1.7
Invalid/blank votes	-	354,010	-
Total	-	20,885,571	100

In June 3, 1978, Presidential Election, 53 percent of the eligible voters cast their ballots and Zia won 76 percent of the votes.

### 2.4 Parliamentary Election in 1979:

The victory in the presidential election set the stage for the parliamentary election. To facilitate nomination of his candidates for parliament Zia dissolved the Jatiotabadi Front (JF) in September 1978 and launched a new political party named Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) headed by president Zia himself. In November, Zia announced that parliamentary election would be held on January 27, 1979 that the parliament would be sovereign and that martial law would be lifted after the election. Zia also resigned from the post of Army Chief of Staff. Finally, however, all the parties agreed to participate in the election. It announced its decision to contest the election on January 9, 1979, barely a month before the parliamentary election which was finally scheduled for February 18, 1979.

### Results of the Second National Parliamentary Election, 1979:

Political Party	Percentage (%) of Votes	Seats
BNP	41.16	207
AL	24.55	39
AL (Mizan)	2.78	2
Bangladesh Muslim League & Islamic Democratic League (Rahim)	10.8	20
JSD	4.48	8
NAP (Muzaffar)	2.25	1
Bangladesh Gono Front	0.6	2
Bangladesh Somajbadi Dal	0.39	1
Bangladesh Jatiya League	0.36	2
Jatiya Akota Party, Somajbadi Dal	0.23	1
Bangladesh Ganatantrik Andolon	0.17	1
Independents	10.10	16
Total	-	300 <sup>26</sup>

In all thirty-one political parties contested the election only five parties were major: the BNP, the AL (Malek), AL (Mizan), JSD and the ML-IDL alliance. The number of candidates contesting for 300 general seats in parliament was 2125. There were 41 million eligible voters but only about 50 percent of them voted.

#### 2.5 Coups and Counter Coups & Killing and Counter Killings:

The brutal coup of August 15 was followed by eighty-four days of chaos and confusion, coups and counters coups, killing and counters killings, conspiracy and uprising paving the way for the rise of Ziaur Rahman as the strong man. Zia's success was due to his pre-eminent stature in the military elite, until the decisive final stages of the power struggle in which he was, of course, a key participant he remained without firm ideological or personal commitments<sup>27</sup> just like an authoritarian.

#### 2.6 Killing of the Four National Leaders:

Events on the ground included the killing of the four national leaders inside the jail on November 4, 1975, and of a number of army officials by their comrades. Also important was that the killers of Mujib and his family and associates were provided with indemnity;<sup>28</sup> that the bureaucrats who had been associated with the Pakistan administration in different capacities and marginalized after independence were back in policy-making positions; and that the organizers of the August coup were given safe passage outside the country.<sup>29</sup>

#### 2.7 De-facto Ruling System:

Although Ziaur Rahman did not assume the presidency until 1979, he emerged as the de facto ruler of the country from November 7, 1975. Until 1978 the regime faced periodic rebellion within the army organized either by a radical left political party the Jatiyo Somajtantrik Dal (JSD) which was at the forefront of the uprising brought Zia to power and later was betrayed by him. These rebellions were dealt with by large scale summary executions. According to one account at least 1100 military personnel were executed after and an abortive coup.<sup>30</sup>

#### 2.8 Amendment of the Fundamental Principles of the Constitution:

To gain political legitimacy, Ziaur Rahman amended the fundamental principles of the constitution and chartered a new course in the country through the Fifth Amendment. This included redefining the state principles, and identifying the citizens as Bangladeshi as opposed to Bangalee (Bengali), secularism was substituted with absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah and socialism was substituted with social and economic justice. The word 'Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim' was inserted above the preamble. The most important element of these changes was Islamization of the constitution and the polity

#### 2.9 Blatantly Rigged Election:

Along with the process of ideological legitimating, concrete steps to gain constitutional legitimacy were initiated by the Zia regime. A referendum on his presidency in 1977, a presidential election in 1978 and the organization of a political party in 1978 were intended to provide the regime with a semblance of legitimacy. But the elections were blatantly rigged, to say the least and thus did not bolster the image of the regime.

#### 2.10 Incorporation of Islamization:

The newly founded political party-the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-brought together and an array of anti-AL political forces ranging from radical leftists to defectors from other parties who opposed the war of liberation

and others who had close connections with religious organizations. Nevertheless, the Fifth Amendment passed by parliament in 1979 provided constitutional legitimacy to the regime and incorporated the Islamization provisions in the constitution. However, Zia was assassinated in 1981 in an abortive military coup.

### 3. Hossain Muhammad Ershad Regime: 1982-1990

In March 24, 1982, the political sky of Bangladesh again become darkened when general Ershad lost his seething patience in not playing the top role in the administration of the country. The military coup by General Ershad in March 1982 led to the creation of an authoritarian military bureaucratic state. Hossain Muhammad Ershad tried to legitimize his regime by civilianizing and democratizing his rule. As power continued to remain concentrated in his hands, the multiple institutions Ershad created as part of his grand design of democratization. The process of civilianization generally involves two steps; first, holding a national election which gives the regime the image of winning a popular mandate to rule, and second, formation of a national party which helps the regime recruit political support. But in practical sense, in the name of democracy this regime was authoritarian.

#### 3.1 Party Building:

Ershad, the second military ruler (1982-1990) followed the path of his predecessor, Zia. Initially he remained in the background with a civilian president, Justice AFM Ahsanuddin Chowdhury as the front man and used the latter for meeting with politicians and floating state sponsored political alliances and parties.

Date	Events
On November 1983	A new party titled the Jono Dal was formed with President Justice Ahsanuddin Chowdhury.
On December 1983,	Ahsanuddin Chowdhury relinquished and Ershad assumed the office of the president.
In 1985	Ershad floated another party called the Jatiya Front with the Jan.al
On October 1985	The ban on political activities was partially lifted.

Finally, in January 1986, a new political party called the Jatiya Party (JP) was launched with Ershad as the party Chairman. The JP consisted of the Janodal, break away factions and individuals from the BNP and the UPP, factions from the ML and the Gonotabrik Dal.

#### 3.2 Referendum in 1985:

A referendum on military rule was held in Bangladesh on March 21, 1985 in order to confirm the military rule of Hossain Muhammad Ershad. The referendum asked voters "Do you support the policy of President Ershad, and do you want him to continue to run his administration until a civilian government is formed through elections?" The result show 94.5 percent vote in favor with a turnout of 72.2 percent.

##### Result of Referendum in 1985:

Choice	Votes	%
For	32,661,237	94.5
Against	1,911,281	5.5
Invalid/Blank Vote	0	-
Total	34572514	100
Registered Voters/ Turnout	47910964	72.2 <sup>31</sup>

#### 3.3 The Parliamentary Election 1986:

The Third National Parliamentary Election 1986 was held in Bangladesh on May 07, 1986. A total of 1,527 candidates contested the election. The result was the victory of Jatiya Party, which won 153 of the 300 seats. Voter turnout was 61.1 percent. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party, the winner of the previous elections, boycotted the election.

### Results of the Third National Parliamentary Election in 1986:

Political Party	Percentage (%) of votes	Seats
JP	42.34	153
AL	26.16	76
JI	4.61	10
JSD (Rab)	2.54	4
Bangladesh Muslim League	1.45	4
NAP	1.29	5
CPB	0.91	5
JSD (Siraj)	0.87	3
NAP (Muzaffar)	0.71	2
BAKSAL	0.67	3
Bangladesh Workers' Party	0.53	3
Independents	16.19	32
Total	-	300

### 3.4 Presidential Election 1986:

The Presidential Election of 1986 was held in Bangladesh on October 15, 1986. The result was a victory for Hossain Muhammad Ershad, who won 84.1 percent of the vote. Turnout was 54.9 percent. Both the BNP and the Awami League boycotted the Presidential Election.

#### Results of the Presidential Election in 1986:

Candidate	Party	Votes	%
H. M. Ershad	Jatiya Party	21795337	84.1
Mauluna Mohammadullah	Independent	1510456	5.8
Syed Faruque Rahman	Bangladesh Freedom Party	1202303	4.6
Nine Other Candidates	-	1408195	5.4
Invalid/ Blank Votes	-	380745	-
Total	-	26297337	100

### 3.5 Party Building through State Patronage:

The military rule was marked by the emergence of state sponsored sarkari (government) party built on patronage system. Ershad as a military dictator establish his own political party the JP. This party was built using state machinery and state patronage.

### 3.6 Party Fragmentation:

Since the party-building strategy of Ershad to break existing parties to pick up support of factional groups and individuals, the party was constantly influx. Most of the splits occurred in the party which formed the foundation of this state-sponsored party. The JP was established with factions from these parties as well as break away groups from the BNP.

### 3.7 Dynastic Leadership:

To prevent fragmentation, political party turned to dynastic leader to hold the various factional groups together. In the regime of Ershad women leaders emerged during this period. Since the early 80's Ershad had succeeded asserting his control over various factional groups and had held his respective party together emerging as the unchallenged leader of his respective parties.

### 3.8 Political Rhetoric:

The Rhetoric of political parties changed during the military period. During the fifteen years of military rule, the major slogans were nationalism, development and democracy. Instead the ruling party adapted the slogan of development and the opposition parties campaigned on the slogan of restoration of democracy. The Islam in public life and in politics is one of the most conspicuous tendencies of that period.

### 3.9 Street Politics:

Side by side with military rule and sarkari parties, this period also witnessed the growing strength of opposition parties' who used various forms of mass mobilization to build popular support against military rule. Street demonstrations and hartal were the two key instruments of movement politics during this period. Both the BNP and the AL were constantly engaged in street mobilization to topple the military rule Ershad.

### 3.10 Amendment of the Constitution for Legitimacy:

The Third Parliament, elected in 1986 passed the Sixth Amendment of the constitution approving the actions of the regime since its takeover and therefore made the regime legal authority from the constitutional point of view but public discontent continued to grow and the repressive measures of the regime further alienated the ruling party.

### 4. Begum Khaleda Zia Regime: 1991-1996

The country was repeatedly shut down by continuous hartals. Finally, Ershad resigned on December 04, 1990. A non-party caretaker government (NCG) with Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmad as its head took over on December 6, 1990 and parliamentary elections were organized within three months. This election, organized by the NCG on February, 1991, was regarded as the first free and fair election in the country. Both the BNP and the AL won 31 percent of popular vote. But the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system gave the BNP a clear seat advantage. It won 140 seats as opposed to the AL's 88 seats.

**Results of the Fifth National Parliamentary Election in 1991:**

Political Party	Percentage (%) of Votes	Seats
BNP	30.8	140
AL	30.1	88
JP	11.9	35
JI	12.1	18
BAKSAL	1.8	5
CPB	1.2	5
NAP (Muzzafar)	0.8	1
Bangladesh Workers' Party	0.2	1
JSD (Siraj)	0.2	1
Ganatantri Party	0.4	1
Islamimi Oikyo Jote	0.8	1
National Democratic Party	0.4	1
Independents	4.4	3
Total	-	300 <sup>32</sup>

Begum Khaleda Zia the leader of the BNP parliamentary party then took oath as Prime Minister and formed the government in Bangladesh. Awami League's president Sheikh Hasina was elected the leader of the opposition.

**4.1** Although until the constitution was amended, some month later formally the President would have remained head of the government. Acting President Justice Shahbuddin Admed asked Begum Khaleda Zia to preside over cabinet meetings. He himself reverted to a ceremonial role. Moreover, Justice Shahbuddin was pressing hard to let him go back to his original position of Chief Justice in accordance with the precondition he had stipulated before taking the responsibility of the acting President.

**4.2** In the Parliament, although there was some bickering between BNP and AL, the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the constitution were passed by the parliament unanimously. The 11<sup>th</sup> amendment of the constitution to clear the way for Justice Shahbuddin Ahmed's return to the post of Chief Justice and the 12<sup>th</sup> amendment which brought back the parliamentary form of government were passed on August 6, 1991. On October 8, the Jatiya Sangsad elected a new president of the country by following the new rules. Mr. Abdur Rahman Biswas, the presidential nominee of the ruling BNP, beat former Chief Justice Mr. Badrul Hyder Chowdhury in this election.

**4.3** In 1991, Khaleda Zia paid an official visit to Saudi Arabia and to China on June when she signed accords on economic and technical operation. Khaleda Zia took over as chair of the South Asian association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Summit held in Dhaka on March, 1993. The summit endorsed the South Asia Preferential Trade Arrangement (SAPTA) framework for promoting tariff reductions in order to advance trade among the SAARC Nations. She also visited India on May 1992, for talks with Indian Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao, when the two sides agreed to evolve a comprehensive and permanent plan for the sharing of water resources.

**4.4** On August 1992, charges were brought against Ershad, the imprisoned President, alleging misappropriation of some US\$ 6000000, involving in an Asian Developing Bank founded project. A special tribunal sentences Ershad ten years' rigorous imprisonment on charges of illegally processing fire arms but on appeal before the High Court he was acquitted of those charges on June 1995. Golam Azam opposed secession of East Pakistan as supported the Pakistani Army's bloody crackdown in 1971. When he fled the country at the time of the Pakistani

Army's surrender, the new government of Bangladesh rebuked his citizenship. A Nirmul Committee was formed in 1971 to hold a public trial of Golam Azam before a people's court, which sentenced him to death on March 26, 1992 just after the government had arrested Golam Azam in an attempt to come the situation.

**4.5** In 1994, the BNP and the AL engaged in a power struggle so that the AL later boycotted the parliament in March. It was an ominous sign for the BNP when it lost the important mayoral elections in Dhaka and Chittagong held in January which was won by the AL. However, the BNP won the mayoral election in Khulna and Rajshahi. The winning of the Magura parliamentary bi-election by the ruling party BNP held on March 20 proved the signal of their oncoming defeat in the next general election. The AL alleged that the questionable winning of the Magura bi-election was a face-saving exercise for the BNP as their mayoral election losses in Dhaka and Chittagong.

**4.6** On November 24, 1995 President Abdur Rahman Biswas dissolved the Parliament and asked Khaleda Zia to continue in an interim capacity pending and early general election. The decision came in response to the refusal by opposition parties to take part in bi-elections, schedule for December 15, as part of their campaign to increase pressure on the government to hold an early general election under a neutral caretaker government.

**4.7** The year 1996 opened with public disorder when without solving the issue of a neutral caretaker government, the BNP government went ahead in holding the general election on February 15 which was boycotted by the opposition parties. It was no surprise to anyone when the BNP won embarrassingly large number 212 seats in the parliament to form government. The widespread ballot rigging took place in the election and the BNP faced the stark question of legitimacy to remain in office.

**4.8** A nonstop co-operation movement backed by strikes launched on March 9, 1996 undermined Khaleda Zia's attempts to retain office as Prime Minister in the wake of February's controversial general elections. On March 11, the business community led by the Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI) put pressure upon the President. The members of all professions like lawyers, doctors, journalists, writers and teachers joined together demanding resignation of the government and holding fresh election.

**4.9** On March 26 the National Assembly unanimously passed the constitution 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment Bill, 1996, which gave the President the authority to create an 11-member non-party caretaker government headed by a Chief Adviser to govern for up to three months between the dissolution of parliament and fresh elections. President Biswas gave his ascent to the bill on March 28. On March 30, 1996 Khaleda Zia resigned in the face of widespread strikes by the civil servant. It was visible that the bureaucracy directly supported the AL struggle. President Biswas dissolved the parliament and on March 30, appointed Justice Mohammad Habibur Rahman, heading a care taker government of advisers. It palpably implies the absence of a healthy political system in the country.<sup>33</sup>

## **5. Sheikh Hasina Regime: 1996-2001**

In June 1996, fresh election was held under the caretaker government headed by the immediate past Chief Justice Mohammad Habibur Rahman. The Awami League emerged as the largest single party in the Seventh Parliament, although they were short of the majority required to form the government. The unconditional support of the Jatiya Party of General Ershad ensured the return of the AL to power after twenty-one years. Sheikh Hasina became the Prime Minister. But, just as the AL refused to accept it defeat in the 1991 election, the BNP refused to accept defeat in 1996.<sup>34</sup>

### **Results of the Seventh National Parliamentary Elections on June, 1996:**

<b>Political Party</b>	<b>Percentage (%) of Votes</b>	<b>Number of Seats</b>
AL	37.44	146
BNP	33.60	116
JP	16.40	32
JJ	8.61	3
Islami Oikya Jote	1.09	1
JSD (Rab)	0.23	1
Independents	1.06	1
Total	-	300

**5.1** In November 1996, indemnity Act was repealed, paving the way to bring the killers of Bongu Bondhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to justice. Both the BNP and Jamaat MPs abstained during the vote on hat legislation.

The trials actually begun in November 1998 when the accused were sentenced to death and four were acquitted by the court. The defendants appealed to the High Court which upheld the death sentenced of the accused. A further Appellate Division of the Supreme Court was not heard for a very long time.

**5.2** In December 1996, an agreement on water-sharing was reached with India which was to be effective from January of the following year. The Bangladesh India Friendship treaty was allowed to lapse after twenty-five years of its term in March 1997 when a direct Bus Service between Dhaka and Calcutta was opened.

**5.3** The government signed a peace treaty with separatist rebels from the Chittagong Hill Tracts on December 2, 1997, thereby bringing to an end twenty-two years of insurgency in CHT. The conflict with the tribal people claimed more than 10000 lives since it had begun in 1975. The Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina witnessed the signing between the government and the Parbartya Chattrogram Jonosonghoti Samiti (PCJSS), the political wing of the Santi Bahini.

**5.4** The seven-party opposition alliance led by the BNP organized a nationwide general strike on December 7 as a protest against the peace agreement. The year 1998 began with the refusal of the BNP to return to parliament unless the CHT peace accord was declared void. The BNP and the Jamaat maintained that the accord post a threat to the nations sovereignty like the BNP, boycotted the parliament. The Jatiya Party attended the parliament but announced that it might call for amendment to the accord.

**5.5** There were bomb explosions at cultural functions in several places killing some and maiming Ahmadiya Jamaat, a set that claimed themselves Muslims but were tuned non-Muslim by the religious right. There were also bomb explosions at a public meeting convened by the Communist Party in Dhaka.

**5.6** The government passed the controversial public safety act (PSA) in the parliament in the absence of the opposition members on January 30, 2000 (received Presidential assent on February 14), which provide for the detention without trial of terrorists and enemies of the state for up to ninety days. A similar law had lapsed in 1994. The opposition complained that special powers under the Act were used to harass the political opponents by detaining them without formal charges.<sup>35</sup>

**5.7** A caretaker government came in office on July 15, 2001 headed by Chief Justice Latifur Rahman. Under the constitution, the function of the caretaker government consisting of a chief adviser and a council of ten advisers is to hold a free, fair and impartial election within the stipulated time of ninety days. The elections held on October first 2001 and the four-party alliance of the BNP, Jamaat-i-Islami, Bangladesh Jatiya Party and a faction of the Islami Oikya Jote on two-third seats in the parliament and Begum Khaleda Zia formed the government on October 10, 2001.

**Results of the Eight National Parliamentary Elections in 2001:**

Political Party	Percentage (%) of Votes	Seats
BNP	41.4	193
AL	40.02	62
JP (Ershad including Islami Jatija Oiko Front)	7.22	14
JI	4.28	17
Independents	4.06	6
Bangladesh Jatiya Party (N-F)	0.94	4
Islami Oikya Jote	0.56	2
Krishak Sramik Jonota League	0.47	1
JP (Monju)	0.44	1
Total	-	300 <sup>36</sup>

The drastic reshuffle in the administration from top to bottom was supported by the BNP but strongly criticized by the AL. The AL again charged that the polls had been crudely, rigged, and acquiring the President, CTG and the EC of mismanagement and partisanship. And the Election Commission had manipulated the results in favor of the four-party combined. The acrimonious relationship has worsened over the following years.<sup>37</sup>

**Evaluation:**

Bangladesh has been emerged as an independent and sovereign country on December 16, 1971. The political history of Bangladesh can be divided into three basic eras: the era of populist authoritarianism (1972-1975), the era of military dominated rule (1975-1990), and the era of representative democracy (1991- 2001). Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, father of the nation took responsibility to ensure parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh that

was the hope and aspiration of the Bengali people. In his regime, he adopted different initiatives to restore parliamentary democracy including political institution building, surrender of arms, constitution formulation, party building, and mujibbad: nationalism, democracy, socialism and secularism, mutual cooperation with different countries of the world and restoration of broken economy, all of these initiatives promoted parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh. On the other hand, formation of government on the basis of the election of 1970, centralization of power and manipulation of the constitution, intimidation of political opponents using government power, vote rigging and violence and parliamentary form of government turned into presidential form of government, all of these promoted authoritarianism in Bangladesh. In the military dominated rule democracy and authoritarianism both were existed. The first military ruler Ziaur Rahman adopted different initiatives to have his regime democratic including- party building, holding referendum in 1977, presidential election in 1978, and parliamentary election in 1979. On the other hand, coups and counter coups, killing and counter killings, killing of the four national leaders, de-facto ruling system, amendment of the fundamental principles of the constitution, blatantly rigged election and incorporation of Islamization, all of these turned his regime authoritarian. Like Zia, Ershad took some initiatives to be democratic like-party building, holding referendum in 1985, parliamentary election 1986, presidential election 1986 and local government elections. But party building through state patronage, party fragmentation, dynastic leadership, political rhetoric, street politics and amendment of the constitution for legitimacy made his regime authoritarian.

**Result of Different Elections in Bangladesh from 1973-1996:**

Year	Type	Percent Officially Reported	Features
1973	Parliamentary	97.6% of seats	B/C
1977	Referendum	98.9% of votes	D E
1978	Presidential	76.0% of votes	D
1979	Parliamentary	69.6% of seats	D
1981	Presidential	65.5% of votes	D
1985	Referendum	94.0% of votes	D E
1986	Parliamentary	51.05% of seats	D E
1986	Presidential	84.0% of votes	D E
1987	Parliamentary	83.7% of seats	D E
1991	Parliamentary	*	A
1996	(Feb) Parliamentary	84.3% of seats	D E
1996	(June) Parliamentary	*	A
2001	Parliamentary	*	A <sup>38</sup>

Here,

A= Fair, B= Moderately Fair, C= Sporadic Rigging, D= Extensively Rigged

E= Boycotted by one or more important political parties

\*= Held under caretaker administration, on ruling party existed.

The defining features of Bangladeshi politics since the new democratic era begun in 1991 has included the reintroduction of the parliamentary system, holding elections at regular intervals, institutionalization of the caretaker government, the incessant squabbling between the two major political parties (AL and BNP) with ever increasing belligerent posturing on both sides and the rise of Islamist militancy as a serious threat to the press and order and the democratic future of the country. The first women Prime Minister Khaleda Zia adopted different initiatives to restore democracy including- Shahbuddin Ahmed's return to the post of Chief Justice and the 12<sup>th</sup> amendment which brought back the parliamentary form of government, good relationship with Saudi Arabia and China, water sharing issue with India, trial of Ershad and Golam Azam but some issues made her regime authoritarian like- the Magura bi-election vote rigging, President Abdur Rahman Biswas's dissolution of the parliament and holding election without the major parties. And the second women Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina adopted different initiatives to restore democracy like- paving the way to bring the killers of Bongu Bondhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to justice 1996, effectiveness of an agreement on water-sharing with India, signing of a peace treaty with separatist rebels from the Chittagong Hill Tracts on December 2, 1997 but all of its success was mourned because of some authoritarian trends including- passing of the controversial public safety act (PSA) in the parliament in the absence of the opposition members on January 30, 2000, violence to the opposition parties and establishing parliamentary dictatorship, the drastic reshuffle in the administration from top to bottom was supported by the BNP but strongly criticized by the AL. The AL again charged that the polls had been crudely, rigged, and acquiring the President, CTG and the EC of mismanagement and partisanship.

From the above discussion, it has become transparent to us that Bangladesh politics is a combination of democracy and authoritarianism.

## Conclusion

The political history of Bangladesh's thirty years can be broadly divided into three eras: the era of populist authoritarianism (1972-1975), the era of military dominated rule (1975-1990), and the era of representative democracy (1991- 2001). During these periods, Bangladesh has undergone a variety of system of government from a west minister-style parliamentary government to one-party presidential rule to a multi-party presidential system and again in parliamentary system. The country returned to the parliamentary system of government in 1991 after waltzing with the presidential system for the preceding fifteen years. Not only has the country experienced various systems that are practiced elsewhere, it has also invented a unique system of its own called the caretaker government and also the interim-government. All of these eras have adopted both democratic and authoritarian trends for which Bangladesh politics is a combination of democracy and authoritarianism.

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