



BANGLADESH

LOCAL GOVERNMENT:

STRUCTURE & WHAT VOTERS SHOULD KNOW



1. AT A GLANCE

Bangladesh uses a layered local government system so governance can reach communities across the country. The system has rural and urban structures, with elected representatives meant to connect citizens to local decision-making, services, and development.



RURAL



URBAN



Union Parishad (1st tier)

- Lowest local unit
- 9 wards
- Chairperson + elected members
- Reserved seats for women



Upazila Parishad (2nd tier)

- Sub-district council
- Elected chairperson + 2 vice-chairpersons
- At least 1 vice-chair seat reserved for women
- Coordinates services, funds and administration
- Works with the UNO



Zila Parishad (3rd tier)

- District council
- Coordinates district-wide development and larger infrastructure
- Often weaker in practice because elections have been delayed



Pourashava / Municipality (1st tier)

- For smaller towns
- Mayor + ward councillors



City Corporation (1st tier)

- For larger cities
- Mayor + ward councillors
- 1 reserved woman councillor for every 3 wards
- Voters typically cast 3 votes: mayor, ward councillor, reserved woman councillor



Upazila Parishad (2nd tier)

- Sub-district council
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SPECIAL CASE: CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS (CHT)



Separate governance arrangement for Rangamati, Khagrachhari and Bandarban



Hill District Councils (HDCs)



CHT Regional Council coordinates across the 3 hill districts



Traditional institutions also matter: chiefs, headmen and karbaris

2. WHY THIS MATTERS FOR CIVIC EDUCATION

1



Know who does what

Voters should know which body handles roads, sanitation, birth registration, water, markets, local welfare, and community development.

2



Know how representation works

Understanding wards, chairs, mayors, councillors, vice-chairpersons, and reserved women's seats helps voters make informed choices.

3



Know how to engage

Civic education should teach citizens how to vote, attend local meetings, raise complaints, ask questions, and demand accountability from local representatives.

4



Know inclusion and rights

Women, persons with disabilities, minorities, youth, and rural voters need accessible civic information so participation is meaningful, not symbolic.

3. KEY ANALYSIS: STRENGTHS, GAPS, AND VOTER EDUCATION PRIORITIES



STRENGTHS ON PAPER

- Brings governance closer to communities
- Creates elected local representation
- Allows local issues to enter public decision-making
- Includes reserved seats for women



MAIN GAPS IN PRACTICE

- Power remains highly centralised
- Some tiers are weak or irregularly elected
- Officials often have more authority than elected bodies
- Citizens may not clearly understand which institution serves them



CIVIC EDUCATION PRIORITIES

- Explain the structure simply
- Teach issue-to-institution mapping
- Promote local election participation
- Build accountability habits beyond election day
- Use accessible, multilingual, and disability-inclusive materials



BOTTOM LINE: Strong local democracy depends not only on institutions, but on informed citizens who know where to vote, whom to approach, and how to hold local authorities accountable.

