

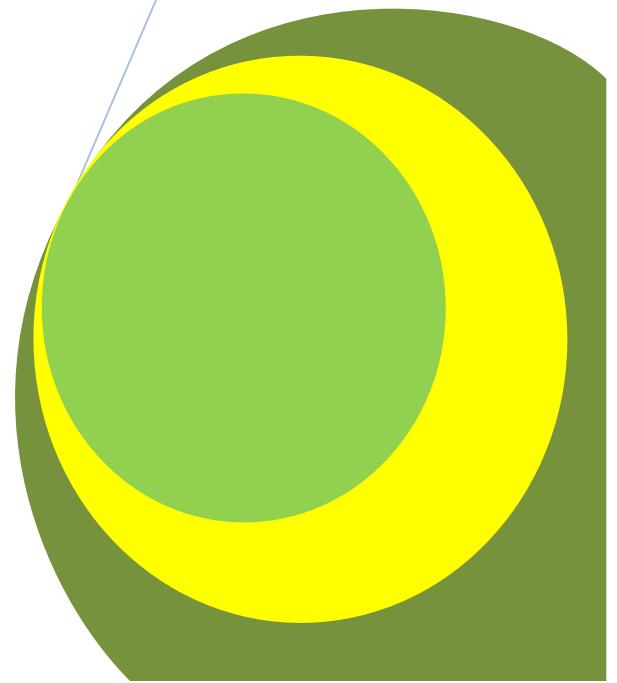


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By

**Anwara Begum
Mohammad Nashir Uddin
Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Hossienie
Mohammad Hamiduzzaman**



Research Article

Choice of Leadership at Urban Local Government in Bangladesh: A Study of *Pourasabha* (Municipality) Election 2011

¹Anwara Begum, ²Mohammad Nashir Uddin,
³Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Hossienie, ^{*4}Mohammad Hamiduzzaman

¹Associate Professor & Head, Department of Public Administration Shahjalal University of Science & Technology, Sylhet, Bangladesh.

^{2,3,4}Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration Shahjalal University of Science & Technology, Sylhet, Bangladesh.

Email: ¹anwara_begum@yahoo.com, Cell: 01715357406

Email: ²nashir.pad@gmail.com, Cell:01757535009

Email: ³hossienie@yahoo.com, Cell: 01718376074

*Corresponding Author's Email: hamiduzzaman-pad@sust.edu, Cell: 01712814724

ABSTRACT

Better segments of mass people in developing countries are still unable to elect their representatives due to deficient political commitment of leaders and political unawareness. The present study aspires to explore political dynamics influencing leadership choice, and political instruments in influencing electorates in relation to activities of local political elites. National commitment to provide minimum democratic rights to secure their mandate has not yet been reflected in successive government's activities during election period. One decisive determinant of local election is the accessibility of choosing prospective leaders and barriers to manipulation of mandate that may develop because of location, monetary necessities, bureaucratic practices, use of various modes and technologies to attract voters, socio-economic distances between people & political parties and the gender biasness. The article argues that to enhance accessibility in selecting local statesmanship, fundamental changes are required not only in people's consciousness but also in the structure of election procedure.

Keywords: Local Statesmanship, Urban Local Government, Local Election, Publicity Tools and Mechanism.

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Bangladesh is a country of unitary-parliamentary form of government having ten city corporations (Dhaka North, Dhaka South, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal, Sylhet, Rangpur, Comilla and Narayanganj) and 309 Pourasabhas covering urban local-self administration where more than sixty five million people live (UNESCAP, 2009). The politico administrative structure of the country is largely inherited from the British. They introduced local democracy in Indian sub-continent by constituting municipal councils and the municipal corporations in the last quarter of the nineteenth century (Ali & Shawkat, 1986). They also provided a federal structure to the country with the Government of India Act, 1935 with three grades: municipal corporations, municipal councils for towns smaller than this population limit and wards for villages in transition to becoming towns (Ali, 1983). These bodies are elected on a universal suffrage basis, with all citizens above the age of eighteen years having a right to vote. Strengthening local government body is the long cherished desire of people. The demand for good governance in local government has always been moved in tandem. The representatives of a local body based on democratic ideas can promote the interest of people. It is imperative to establish local government bodies at each level of administration with elected representatives. Article 9, 11, 59 & 60 of the constitution of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh has outlined local government system with elected representatives for facilitating effective participation of the people at each unit of administration (GOB, 2011). In compliance with the constitutional spirit, promotion and protection of institutionalized democratic values and aspirations in all walks of life is obligatory to ensure the operation of effective local government organizations.

The urban local bodies have lack of resources and do not have participative management of both male and female representatives for the maintenance of such assets. In addition, the urban bodies are more or less "One Man Show" institution where people have no potential participation due to lack of their consciousness. At present, representatives are largely responsible for urban development such as housing, local self-government, town and country planning, slum improvement, public health engineering and capital projects (GOB, 1990). Many

functions are now being performed by municipalities within undemocratic mode which is threatened to the on-going democratic process. As state is committed to democracy, the civil society and the present government place emphasizes on promoting democratic elections as platform of social security and stability. However, it is therefore, crucial that the outcome of the elections be regarded as legitimate. Electoral outcomes usually depend on the actual process of the elections, which must be seen as free, fair, credible and transparent, in order to confer any semblance of legitimacy on the winner of local elections. It is of crucial importance that domestic and international election observation takes place during the electoral period (pre-election, particularly election day, and post-election) to imbue the process with neutrality, fairness, transparency, and ultimately, legitimacy.

However, the last few decades' electoral process has received much academic attention. Now democracy is in retreat which impedes to create new-fangled leadership at urban local areas. Furthermore, the Election Commission is not so stronger to conduct free and fair elections without political attachment because commission is largely dependent on government for their financial and human resources. The election without first setting it against the larger background of democracy, democratization, rule of law, good governance, electoral assistance, human rights, gender rights, etc failed to nurture future strong political leadership from both male and female (Jahan, 1997) which indicates the fact that democracy has continuously been threatened. The range of relevant and related areas of policy are now being extremely numerous and growing. The overall process of election of selected municipalities (Sunamgonj & Maulvibazar Poursabhas) did not adequately reflect principles necessary for a healthy democratic practice. The election process failed to meet important commitments concerning treatment of candidates by the media and lacked equal opportunities for all candidates and exchange of monetary was available at pre-election stage.

Urban local governance is now a vital issue for local government, bases of which are two-fold categorization of decentralization- deconcentration and devolution (Shamsur, 1991). Poursabhas are fully a platform of elected representatives who are practically supposed to render their services alongside government officials. Moreover, local people have no participation at all in decision-making process or development initiatives of urban areas. Following so, gaps arise between the two parties in different sectoral affairs and coordination process. Here lies the rationale of the proposed study to specify strengthening institutional capacity through effective and democratic election process in urban local government institutions.

1.1 Rationale of the Study

Local democracy may operate only when there would be democratic political atmosphere at the national as well as local levels for its sustenance. For strong and stable democratic governance in the urban areas, visionary leadership, free and fair election, voting behavior etc. are the core areas to be understood (Khan, 1993). This study is significant for the mass people (stakeholders), politicians, bureaucrats, academicians, donors, NGOs, national leaders and civil society since the issue now deserves brain storming and rethinking in making decisions to nurture these institutions within democratic values. Multifaceted factors are responsible for an undemocratic mode of election procedure at urban areas including exchange of black money, uneducated and dishonest leadership, muscle politics, kinship and clan based politics, political interference of central authority, lack of financial resources, improper policy formulation and implementation, apathy of the people and lack of commitment of the government. On the other hand, women's leadership is now in vulnerable position around the society. They have no active participation and representation no matter it is family or institutions. The present study is significant because it has addressed different dimensions of participation in urban governance system. This study also met the academic demands as well as greater benefit of the society is expected to be touched. Furthermore, it also would be useful for policy makers for their future policy issues.

With the dawn of the innovative administrative reforms, the issue of urban governance has received greater attention of the whole world. Bangladesh, as committed to democracy, has not yet been prepared enough to cope with the challenges of bringing about new-fangled leadership and democratic mode of participation and representation at urban local government institutions. Considering this reality, the study would be a reliable one to the parliament members, cabinet, academicians and civil society for conducting further research or reshape the existing thoughts.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study was to observe the election including different elements regarding candidature for mayor and councilors, and voting behavior and dynamics affecting electorates in electing candidate in two phases, i.e. pre-election and post-election situation. With this end in view, the study set some specific objectives:

- a. To observe conformity of candidates to legal framework articulated by the election Commission;
- b. To know the dynamics and mechanism of campaign in order to attract the voters;
- c. To enquire about the perceptions and reaction of voters & wining candidates before and after election about the factors influencing for being won in election; and
- d. To make a critical analysis for selection of leadership and its effectiveness in ensuring good governance in urban areas.

2.0 METHODS AND MATERIALS

The study has used sample survey method to achieve calculative findings and in doing so, exploratory-descriptive research design was followed. It examined the challenges of local elections at urban areas for selection of people's representatives and thereby to boost up local good governance and enthusiastic leadership at work place. Inductive method was followed to get empirical findings based on collected data. In addition, methodological triangulation of mixed method was deployed (Survey method with Qualitative and Quantitative analysis) for analyzing data. Mixed method is necessary as per requirements of the study which has some specific logics; the study was conducted on the issue of observation of local elections at urban local areas which contains the qualitative aspect of the research side-by-side, quantitative measurement of the data. Purposive sampling was employed to collect from different qualities of population at the study area.

The variables were identified in terms of objectives of the study. The dependent variable of the study is democratic practices at urban local election procedures including following dimensions: leadership pattern; Campaign mechanism; Perception of voters and candidates; and Leadership selection criteria. Depending on the nature and objectives of the study as well as availability of resources, the study has collected data through most common methods of data collection techniques: face-to-face interviewing, focus group discussion, informal discussion and personal observation of the researchers etc. Here, the open and close-ended questions had been used for the study. A semi-structured and self-administered questionnaire (open-close) was used to collect empirical data from ninety four respondents (both Candidates and Respondents) through sample survey. Apart from this, relevant secondary sources including legal aspects, required information provided by candidates (in *Holofnama*) have been thoroughly reviewed and compared with the practical situation. In addition, relevant secondary sources of data comprised the documents and publications of government agencies, websites of Local Government Division (LGD) under the Ministry of Local Government, different NGOs, Archive, library, education and research institutions and internet browsing has continuously been done. The study intended to represent the comprehensive and comprehensible picture of election procedures and voting & campaigning behavior of voters and candidates. For the fulfillment of the research objectives, the study has been conducted in two areas, i.e. Sunamgonj Pourasabha under Sunamgonj District and Maulvibazar Pourasabha under Maulvibazar District. The two areas represent urban areas of greater Sylhet region in addition to Sylhet City Corporation. It increased the validity of study through empirical generalization. Variation between the two areas makes sure the reliability of the results. The two areas are adjacent to Sylhet city and cover the territorial and socio-cultural differences of Sylhet region. The mode of communication is convenient, comparatively less time consuming and more cost effective. The data was processed by editing in order to improve their quality and coded to convert them to the form of numerical codes representing attribute of variables. Upgraded Statistical Programme for Social Science (SPSS) software was used to get appropriate combination of data.

Like any sort of social science research work, present study has also found the constraints the following:

1. The most enormously complex area is the local elections in urban governance system and it was not easy to measure because many dissimilar areas are involved with that like as, psychological, economical, social, governmental area etc.
2. Information(Literature) about the research topic was rarely available,
3. It was harder for the study to conduct a worthy research work due to lack of respondent's experience, skills, and inadequate information.
4. The study has been conducted on the basis of limited samples; it may not fully support generalizations that affect the result of analysis.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study has been conducted to find out the challenges of choosing local leadership by people through local elections to boost up the democratic mode of urban local governance. In doing so, ninety four respondents were selected to get in-depth information regarding the issue of urban local election through ensuring meaningful participation of people where maximum respondents (34 percent) are female and a significant portion was (65 percent) male that indicates that women are a little bit lag behind male in case of election affairs. The age limit was 21-55 depending upon nature and participation mode of the respondents in election procedures at urban government institutions. Maximum numbers of respondents (around 26 percent) were from the age of 41 to 45 where another noteworthy portion (21 percent) was from the age of 51 to 55 years*. The data clearly show that more than 67 percent people belong to up to age level 45 who possess a different outlook compared to the older. The education level of the respondents was generally varied with their profession. In the study, it is evident that a considerable portion (30 percent) of the respondents has completed only higher secondary level. Besides, another considerable portion (22 percent) completed secondary level where as a significant fraction (10 percent) is illiterate*. The literacy data significantly indicate that three fourths of the population belongs to below Higher Secondary level education that definitely affects their choice of leadership. Here, the professional identity of the

respondents makes some curious notifications. Most of the respondents are belonging to service holder (29 percent) and housewife (19 percent). However, the important thing is that few female representatives are carrying out such identity*. The study reveals that most of the respondents (34 percent) and (23 percent) are belonging the range of income (BDT 0 to BDT 10000) and (BDT 20001 to BDT 30000) respectively*. Furthermore, most of the respondents (60 percent) of the study are Muslim where an ignorable portion (6 percent) is tribal residents*. As a country of Southeast Asia, it is commonly believed that religion is an exceptionally vital factor in leadership choosing but the scenario is now changing in Bangladesh.

Within the four dimensions of election scrutiny referred to conventions, rules and regulations of voting: perception of voters and candidates, campaign procedure. It is possible to differentiate a number of specific sub-types of representative's selection criteria. An overall evaluation was provided as to whether the legal framework governing the elections conforms to international standards. The electoral authority for local elections, the Election Commission (EC) of Bangladesh is fully responsible to conduct a free and fair election. Eventually fact is that the EC required informing central government for their budget and necessary instruments to conduct such election. The judiciary, as much as dispute adjudication, often involves the courts. Other regulatory and administrative agencies are also involved in certain aspects of the election. The present EC is concerned with fair election and they perform their role in a professional and impartial manner. Noteworthy violations of impartiality include instances where (one or more of) the electoral authorities are clearly under the control of (or pressure from) the incumbent government or some other agent (the police, BGB, administration etc). The present Commission has prepared different laws and made publicity regarding the issue of fair election. Major portion of the respondents (more than 72 percent) have consciousness about the rules and regulation framed by EC where only few (above 4 percent) have no specific ideas. Moreover, it is manifested in the study that a significant portion of the respondents (greater than 55 percent) assume that candidates were more or less obedient to comply with the rules and regulation of EC and government did not make any interference regarding the election whereas marginal level of respondents (above 6 percent) believe that articulated laws are violated*. The data show that around 85 percent people, more or less, know the electoral rules and regulations and more than 80 percent believed in compliance of these rules and regulations which is a good sign in the way of establishing democracy and selecting/choice of good leadership*.

Virtually all candidates apply the use of campaign activities in their own way, though the nature and extent varies considerably. This question is intended as a means of assessing the extent to which parties and candidates complied with the resource regulations in force in the state in question. The publicity process varies among the candidates though there was a common feature of them. Among the respondents, a noteworthy portion (nearly 86 percent) presumes that door-to-door communication process was followed to reach the voters for making publicity of their manifesto. Moreover, another important segment (almost 68 percent) of the respondents believe that *postering* and leaflet distribution also worked in that case whereas maximum respondents (more than 72 percent) agreed with using banners and placards. Most of the respondents (about 93 percent) suggest that the candidates should make sure door-to-door communication to get vote of mass people especially from women. The other important methods that admired people in effective publicity process were electronic and print media, *postering* and leaflet distribution etc*. We found that conduct of local elections are not yet ready to prepare up-to-date election publicity process but people are largely enthusiastic to adjust with new campaign resources. Regarding the issue of consequences of traditional publicity process, a good number of the respondents (more than 73 percent) felt worried about traditional *miking*, showdown and assembly etc. where only marginal portion (around 13 percent) felt great*. As a developing country, Bangladesh is still behind the expected rate of literacy. Most of the people are illiterate and just reached secondary level. It is difficult for the candidates to reach general people with same publicity policy. Eventually a big portion (above 54 percent) assume that same publicity process is enough to reach the voters but a unavoidable portion (nearly 32 percent) disagreed and opined that different policy may encourage both side*. Accepting the issue of different policy of publicity, maximum respondents (roughly 44 percent) agreed with different place for meeting and assemble*. Beside these, approximately 87 percent opined that local election generally held on clan and kinship based politics where different policies are not necessary*.

This variable captures the extent to which the electronic and print media provided balanced coverage of the electoral campaign. Media coverage is an important component of any fair election. Regarding the issue, considerable portion of the respondents (about 82 percent) agreed that electronic media might make effective and simple election publicity*. Blatant biases in campaign reporting represent a serious obstacle to the supply of effective voter information. Although fully equitable electronic media reporting is virtually unachievable, the available dissemination of information through electronic media is possible. More than 65 percent respondents opined to use mobile message to reach voters as it is a convenient means to almost all voters and candidates*.

Noteworthy violations include the abuse of state resources for partisan campaigning purposes, over-spending excess of a limit established by the law, fundraising from illegal sources, and failure to supply required information on use of resources/campaign finance are key factors in election procedures. Following so, a significant portion (nearly 48 percent) of the respondents strongly believes that the budget framed by the EC is adequate to complete election publicity but approximately a considerable portion (about 28 percent) strongly disagreed with it. It makes contradiction since voters and candidates look into this matter from their own perspectives. In order to make effective and efficient use of state resources and dismantle the misuse of fund, EC

can take the responsibilities to complete publicity on behalf of the candidates. A reasonable portion (roughly 48 percent) of respondents believe so and another portion (around 42 percent) supported to conduct such publicity jointly (Candidate and EC)*. However, women have no participation even in family or in maintaining local law and order situation but they have equal right to vote. The proportion of male and female voters is almost same in Bangladesh. Maximum respondents (more than 43 percent) opined that the candidates should emphasize on women development and empowerment in their manifesto where other important fraction (nearly 33 percent) assume that to encourage women voters the candidates should send women campaigner on their behalf*. That means that candidates have to show some what respect and importance to women voters. Free and fair voting should be unhindered and equal access should be ensured to all voters. Voters have rights to know about the background and future policy agenda of candidates for long term development in their cities. Regarding the fact of candidate selection, the election commission may arrange open discussion among the candidates on same platform. Most of the respondents (above 68 percent) assume that it would help them to be conscious and select quality leadership*. It is important for the voters because maximum voters (more than 54 percent) have no idea about the candidate's previous political and social history*.

Voter intimidation and/or obstruction are common feature in local elections of Bangladesh. However, the conscious level of people is now increasing due to pre-election campaign of some NGOs and EC. There are some distinct characteristics among the candidates for attracting voters to vote. Most of the respondents (nearly 97 percent) believe that honesty of candidates favor them in election. Apart from this, the respondents assume ideological affiliation and kinship/clan based politics are two important factors in voting. Unfortunately, there are few expected features like manifesto, political involvement, financial solvency etc. have not been noticed. Candidate intimidation and/or obstruction measures the extent to which candidates or party activists were reported as having been intimidated or coerced, or having their campaign activities unlawfully obstructed. Candidates and party activists were able to carry out lawful campaign activities unhindered by state authorities, by the representatives of other parties, or by other agents during the election period. The authority did not create any obstruction in campaigns including the unequal application of certain aspects of the law, authorization for campaign meetings and rallies. The EC tried its best to create level playing field for all candidates and take quick measure & denied if the meetings and rallies of one or more parties are systematically being authorization on spurious grounds. Regarding the issue of election manifesto, maximum respondents (roughly 69 percent) have no faith on election manifesto provided by the candidates because of their previous records whereas only marginal level of respondents (just above 12 percent) believes this information*. On the ground of leadership selection, an important portion (around 42 percent) of the respondents presuming that dishonesty of the candidates play key role to be defeated in the poll race. Moreover, there are some other negative aspects of character of the candidates such as muscle and money politics, financial corruption, relative's brutality play strong role in selection of leaders whereas educational background and manifesto, two vital things, do not have noticeable influence in election results*. The vote buying is a common picture in local election as well as in national election in Bangladesh. The extent and magnitude of this practice, as well as its impact on the outcome of the election can be seen after election period. Politics is now being undermined due to lack of ideology, muscle politics and financial corruption etc. But interesting enough that most of the respondents (more than 76 percent) directly denied muscle politics and financial solvency as factors in victory*. Following the previous features, a noteworthy portion (nearly 55 percent) of the respondents believes that only political ideology cannot elect a candidate at urban areas whereas another considerable portion (approximately 31 percent) disagreed.

Another common and alarming feature of local election of Bangladesh is low participation of women although they acquired a legitimate space at urban local self government institutions. Nevertheless, political institutions make marginalized representation, although they are regarded as a under privileged group (even constitutionally) (Siddqui, 2005). Merely having female representatives does not repeatedly denote that the interests of women in the society are correctly evaluated. Sustainable outcome in urban local governance system would not come without women's desires and welfare being taken into consideration, without equal and meaningful access to participate in and influence on decision-making process, development activities and planning. Having female representatives in the position of leadership is an identical step in changing the male dominated political agenda and social structures. Their disproportionate position in society gives them unequal right of entry to the educational, economic and other opportunities offered by the state and society. All these factors reinforce each other to keep women's political participation low. The 33% quota for women is definitely an impetus to women's participation in rural and urban local levels of Bangladesh. Under the existing legal basis, at least they have the rights to be there in the meetings, work together with officials and take part in important discussions. Women's satisfactory level of political participation is a prerequisite for bringing them in the mainstream of development process. In this regard, major portion of respondents (about 41 percent) believe that absence of economic freedom makes them inactive in representation. Otherwise, there are some other drawbacks such as lack of consciousness, lack of political affiliation, male dominance etc impede them in participation*. As a step towards empowerment, the elected reserved seats help to endorse sharing and access to the decision-making process numerically, though not practically ensured. Due to socio-political and religious bindings, elected women cannot execute their duties and responsibilities and thus people's aspiration and expectation to them were not met up (Islam, 2000). In addition, without women's access to and meaningful participation in decision-making process, the ability to influence decisions in favor of the women community suffer

much. The nature of women candidature failed to provide expressive participation. More than 40 percent of the respondents assumed that maximum women candidates were unqualified and uneducated. Other features include inexperienced in politics, tendency of using family status, lack of managerial and administrative capacity etc.*. After above discussion, major segment (above 52 percent) of the respondents claimed that democratic practices were rarely available at urban local election while at the same time another recognized portion (about 37 percent) disagreed with them. Moreover, maximum respondents (almost 83 percent) presumed that urban local government institutions are 'one man show' organization where 'Mayor' was the Boss/dictator and Councilor were sub-ordinate*. Following this feature, different reasons were working behind the scene to make these institutions autocratic were political power, male ego, direct connection with the centre, administrative authority, managerial and administrative capacity etc. Furthermore, another unavoidable feature prevailed in Bangladesh that where central government believes in parliamentary form of government, the local government is still belonging to presidential form that makes these institution complicated in action. Here, a significant portion (around 44 percent) believed that because of male ego responsible to make the institution become 'one man show' which also indicated the male dominant social orientation*. Moreover, this is the first time urban local elections experienced political party based nomination process. But more than half of the respondents thought that it would discourage the independent candidates while only marginal portion (just above 8 percent) opposed*.

4.0 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Electoral malpractice and management are the principal obstacles to successful democratization in states that have made preliminary shift from tyranny. The manipulation of elections is usually owned as a means of preserving the voice of authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes. Increasing our knowledge is thus imperative to our gratitude of the various factors that contribute to the excellence of democratic system. Elite decisions on whether to accept an approach of electoral manipulation involve a trade-off between authority and authenticity. Incumbent leaders have an enticement to manipulate elections so as to diminish the intrinsic uncertainty in the electoral procedure and to make certain their continued hold on supremacy. Under the right conditions, they may be expected to use all means at their discarding to achieve these split ends, including unashamed fraud. Chains of manipulated elections lowers the legitimacy of leaders, which can distress their capability to rule without using coercive means, can cost them legitimate electoral support, and can escort to local sanctions. For the purpose of analysis, unprofessional conduct can be understood as operating along three major dimensions: manipulation of the rules governing elections, manipulation of vote choice, and manipulation of voting. Yet there are restrictions to the extent to which the manipulation of rules alone can be counted on to make certain the preferred result. Even when organizations are intended so as to favor one outcome over another, the accessibility of true electoral contest constructs a risk of electoral defeat. Leaders of political parties of the world have become proficient at using elections as a means of maintaining and enhancing their hold on power and even their authority. Understanding the ins and outs of electoral misconduct is the initial stair to achieving momentous reform of electoral processes. This synopsis of electoral mismanagement has gone some way toward improving our thoughts of this phenomenon by illuminating numerous common patterns. Vote choice is a more common object of manipulation than the voting process, and incentives to vote for particular electoral options appear to be more prevalent than deterrents (Misra, 1984). The existing voting procedures facilitate the voters to get information of the candidates which help them to select their future leader. In conclusion, it can be said that national and local political leaders may come closer to craft consensus to provide information to the people and should oblige the EC to deliver a familiar practice of democracy during pre and post election phase. The government, the Election Commission and other concern authorities should take appropriate measures to create favorable environment for the voters and candidates as well to make the institutions work.

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