BANGLADESH ELECTIONS 2026: HARMFUL DIGITAL NARRATIVES & BEHAVIORS

Snapshot Report | 1 – 15 January 2026

Introduction

This snapshot report examines emerging digital narratives and behaviors in the lead-up to Bangladesh's general elections, focusing on the period from 1 to 15 January 2026. Building on the two preceding analyses covering the period August to December 2025, it captures shifts in political discourse and civic integrity as the electoral timeline enters a more sensitive phase. Drawing on data from three social media platforms - Facebook, TikTok, and X - the analysis tracks the evolution of harmful digital narratives and behaviors, including mis- and disinformation, hate speech, and incitement to violence, alongside constructive narratives related to de-escalation, democratic norms, and social cohesion. Four key insights emerged from this period:

1. **Hate speech emerged as the most prevalent form of digital harm -** The November-December period was dominated by reaction to political shocks and contested events. In contrast, the first half of January shows a re-ordering of digital harms with hate speech as the most prominent category.

2. **Scrutiny around the electoral process became a key narrative focus -** This marks a transition from debating how the political transition happened to questioning whether the electoral process can be trusted.

3. **Harmful narratives have consolidated around election legitimacy and foreign interference -** This indicated a move away from reactive narrative spikes toward more entrenched, identity-based polarization.

4. **Hate speech targeting the Hindu community has become prominent -** An escalating and distinct narrative of hate speech, specifically aimed at Hindus, has emerged as the campaign commences and election day nears.

For this reporting period, a total of 571k content was collected from Facebook, TikTok and X, out of which 110k were classified for the purposes of analysis. For a comprehensive understanding of the methodology, kindly refer to the [previous analysis report](#).

Current Political and Digital Environment

Between 1 and 15 January, following the submission of MP candidate nominations, the Election Commission (EC) initiated the process of scrutinizing and finalizing applications, with candidates also filing appeals against unfavorable decisions. This phase intensified public attention on the neutrality, consistency, and credibility of electoral institutions, with debates around inclusion, exclusion, and rule enforcement gaining prominence. During this period, AI-generated content and the volume of mis- and disinformation increased at a pace that exceeded the capacity of fact-checking efforts. At the same time, heightened scrutiny from political parties, independent candidates, and activists focused on the EC's nomination review process and proposed updates to the Representation of the People Order (RPO) 1972 - the legislation governing electoral procedures - contributing to growing public questioning of the Commission's transparency in the lead-up to the elections.

Key Findings

KEY FINDING 1 | Hate speech emerged as the most prevalent form of digital harm in this reporting period
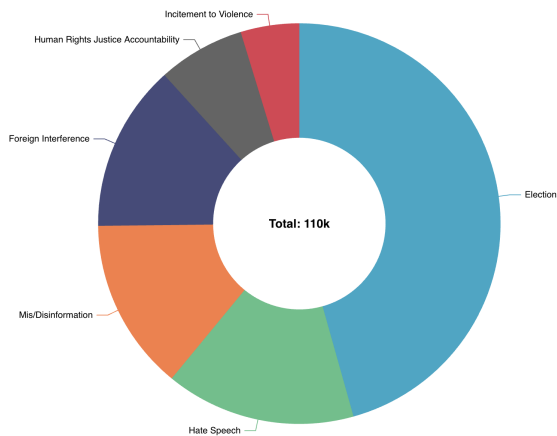
As our analysis is election focused, by default, election-related content continued to be the largest volume we collected during this period. This due to the keywords search used for data collection, which was heavily focused on elections and election-related terms .

Hate speech (16.9k) emerged as the second largest category of posts, overtaking mis/disinformation (15.4k), which now followed closely behind. Topics related to foreign interference (14.9k), human rights and justice accountability (7.76k), and incitement to violence (5.21k) remained present though accounted for a smaller share of overall content compared to earlier months. This indicates a change in the relative prominence of harmful and contentious topics as the electoral context evolved during this time.

571k pieces of content was collected from Facebook, Tiktok and X, of which 110k were classified for analysis

Based on these findings, the analysis indicates that the harms identified in this study are analytically defined based on their potential to manipulate public perceptions, which often fall outside the scope of platform community guidelines. Additionally, they also expose significant

gaps in the effective enforcement of existing content moderation systems. Such content appears to be used by different actors to mobilize support and advance campaign strategies. A further concern is that platform moderation systems are being circumvented, with harmful content often going undetected or inadequately addressed in a proactive and comprehensive manner. This gap in enforcement carries broader implications for civic integrity and public trust in the context of Bangladesh's general elections.

KEY FINDING 2 | Scrutiny around the electoral process became a key narrative focus

Popular Narratives - Engagement

post_class	Number of Posts
Narrative: Posts claiming that the July revolution and the political transition was propaganda	10.6k
Narrative: Posts claiming acts of violence, killings and massacres	8.62k
Narrative: Posts discussing election rules and candidates	4.6k
Narrative: Posts that are de-escalating violent rhetoric and calling for peace	4.57k
Narrative: Posts claiming the spread of Mis/Disinformation by others	4.18k
Narrative: Posts discussing Osman Hadi's death and India and AL's influence	2.34k
Narrative: Posts containing hate speech towards Hindus	1.51k
Narrative: Posts claiming delegitimization of interim government	972

During this reporting period, narratives framing the July revolution and political transition as propaganda remained prominent, reflecting the fact that the current reform and electoral process was triggered by the July protests. What emerged more clearly, however, were posts focused on the electoral process itself, corresponding with offline developments as the Election Commission began reviewing candidate nomination applications. These discussions centered on election rules, candidate eligibility, and nomination procedures, indicating heightened public scrutiny of electoral administration.

Calls for de-escalation and peace continued to attract significant attention amid political uncertainty. At the same time, narratives accusing the spread of mis- and disinformation

remained strong, while discussions related to Osman Hadi's death and foreign influence persisted but were less dominant than in the previous period, pointing to a gradual shift from past event-driven narratives toward more election-focused and governance-related concerns as the electoral timeline advances.

KEY FINDING 3 | Harmful narratives have consolidated around election legitimacy and foreign interference as the electoral process advances

Harmful Narratives - Engagement	
post_class ⇕	Number of Posts ⇕
Narrative: Posts claiming foreign interference in July protests and regime change	16.3k
Narrative: Posts claiming that the July revolution and the political transition was propaganda	13k
Narrative: Posts containing anti‑India sentiments	9.77k
Narrative: Posts claiming delegitimization of interim government	7.02k
Narrative: Posts containing hate speech towards Hindus	2.92k
Narrative: Posts accusing "foreign agents"	2.91k

The period from January 1 to 15 shows a shift in harmful narratives compared to the November to December reporting cycle. While the earlier period was characterized by reactions to specific political events and shocks, the current period reflects a consolidation and reorientation of these narratives within an increasingly election-focused environment.

Since the last reporting period, the most prominent harmful narrative that has re-emerged is the claim of foreign interference in the July protests and the subsequent regime change (16.3k). This suggests a renewed focus on external blame as the electoral process progresses. Narratives that frame the July revolution and political transition as mere propaganda (13k) also remained highly visible, continuing to undermine confidence in the transition's legitimacy.

Furthermore, a notable aspect of this period is the sustained prevalence of anti-India sentiment (9.77k) and posts alleging foreign agent interference (2.91k) in the current political environment. This narrative points to heightened geopolitical tensions between Bangladesh and India, which has contributed to increased xenophobia that has manifested as communal tensions.

KEY FINDING 4 | Hate speech targeting members of the Hindu community has emerged as a distinct and escalating narrative.

A new development this time around is the emergence of hate speech narratives against Hindus (2.92k). This reflects growing communal tensions and offline dynamics that are increasingly manifesting in the digital space. This trend highlights early risks of polarization and scapegoating as the election timeline draws closer.

Posts within this narrative include instances of hate speech explicitly directed at Hindus, as well as commentary and discussions challenging the existence and prevalence of such hate speech against members of the Hindu community.

The hashtag #TMD is frequently used. The acronym stands for "Total Maulan Death," in which "Maulan," is a derogatory term employed against members of the Hindu Community.

This finding is supported by a [recent publication](#) by DismisLab, which documented a surge in religiously motivated hate speech and incitement to violence targeting Hindus.
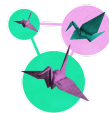
Implications for the upcoming elections

The analysis of the January 1 to 15 period indicates several critical risks and challenges that could impact the integrity and environment of the upcoming elections:

- **Erosion of Institutional Trust and Transparency** | As procedural decisions are increasingly contested and reframed through mis- and disinformation, there is a growing risk that public confidence in the fairness and credibility of the electoral process may be gradually weakened. Over time, this erosion of trust could complicate efforts to sustain broad public confidence in electoral institutions as key milestones in the election timeline approach.

- **Escalating Communal Polarization and Violence Risk** | The emergence of hate speech specifically targeting the Hindu community, alongside sustained anti-India and xenophobic sentiment, indicates that online discourse is increasingly shaping and reinforcing offline communal tensions. This trend suggests an increased risk of polarization, scapegoating, and potential for election-related violence as the political timeline advances with broader implications on the Bangladesh-India relations.

- **Degradation of the Information Environment** | The noted increase in AI-generated content and the sheer volume of mis/disinformation, exceeding the capacity of fact-checking efforts threaten civic integrity. Furthermore, the inference that platform moderation systems are being circumvented allows harmful content to manipulate public perception and mobilize campaign support, potentially skewing voter behavior and overall democratic discourse.

Recommendations

1. **Intensify real-time public communication and clarification efforts** | In the final weeks leading up to the elections, the Election Commission should prioritize frequent, clear, and accessible public updates on procedural decisions, nomination outcomes, and rule enforcement to reduce speculation and limit the spread of misleading narratives during this critical period.

2. **Enhance platform responsiveness to election-related harms** | Social media companies should significantly strengthen real-time monitoring, enforcement, and transparency around election-related mis- and disinformation, AI-generated content, hate speech, and coordinated manipulation. The continued circulation of harmful content, even those that violate community guidelines, suggests that existing moderation efforts remain insufficient, underscoring the need for clearer accountability, faster response mechanisms, and enforcement actions rooted in accountability.

3. **Address emerging communal and identity-based risks** | Civil society, media, and regulators should prioritize monitoring and rapid response to hate speech and scapegoating narratives that shape and reinforce offline communal tensions. Coordinated attacks and targeted harassment of minority communities should be systematically documented and escalated to platforms and relevant authorities for timely content moderation, legal action where applicable, and strengthened protections for affected communities, recognizing that these risks extend beyond the electoral period and have broader implications for social cohesion and public safety.

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