

BANGLADESH ELECTIONS 2026: HARMFUL DIGITAL NARRATIVES & BEHAVIORS

Snapshot Report | 1 – 15 February 2026

This report is the fifth in a series of social media analysis reports that explores digital narratives and behaviors around the 2026 Bangladesh elections. Other reports in this series are available [here](#). This report was authored by Nabila Ferdous with support from Allan Cheboi and Megan Grazier from Build Up. For questions or to request support, please contact team@howtobuildup.org. This material has been funded by the UK International Development from the UK government; however, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.

Introduction

This snapshot report examines emerging digital narratives and behaviors in the lead-up to Bangladesh's general elections and referendum, focusing on the period from 1 to 15 February 2026. The elections were held on 12 February alongside the referendum, drawing a reported turnout of 59.44%, as reported by the Election Commission, and were largely peaceful, with a few instances of violence outside Dhaka. Relying on data from three social media platforms - Facebook, TikTok, and X - the analysis tracks the harmful digital narratives and behaviors, alongside constructive narratives related to de-escalation, democratic norms, and social cohesion. Three key insights emerged from this period:

- 1. Increase in mis/disinformation and speculative posts leading up to the election** - An observable surge in mis/disinformation and speculative claims shaped the pre-election information environment, contributing to uncertainty and heightened political tension across digital platforms.
- 2. Popular election-related topics focused on turnout and credibility;** discussions dominated digital platforms during this reporting period, with conversations largely focused on voting procedures, turnout, campaign activities, and assessments of the electoral process's credibility and peacefulness.
- 3. Narratives around India's role in Bangladesh's politics persisted** - Narratives alleging foreign influence, particularly India's, in Bangladesh's domestic politics remained consistently present and resurfaced at key electoral moments.

For this reporting period, a total of 224k content was collected from Facebook, TikTok, and X, out of which 108k was 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

The period between 1 - 15 February marked a pivotal moment, as the elections were held on 12 February. During this time, Bangladesh's political and digital environment was shaped by intense electoral contestation, last-minute campaigning, and heightened online political engagement. Compared to the previous two elections, this election was widely regarded as credible, with no major violent incidents reported either in the lead-up to or on election day. The parliamentary election resulted in a decisive victory for the BNP, which secured a [dominant share of seats](#) (212), while the Jamaat-NCP-led alliance emerged as the main opposition with 77 seats, significantly reshaping the national political landscape. On election day, although voting remained largely peaceful, there were isolated reports of clashes between rival activists, and disputes over electoral legitimacy began to surface as polling concluded and results emerged.

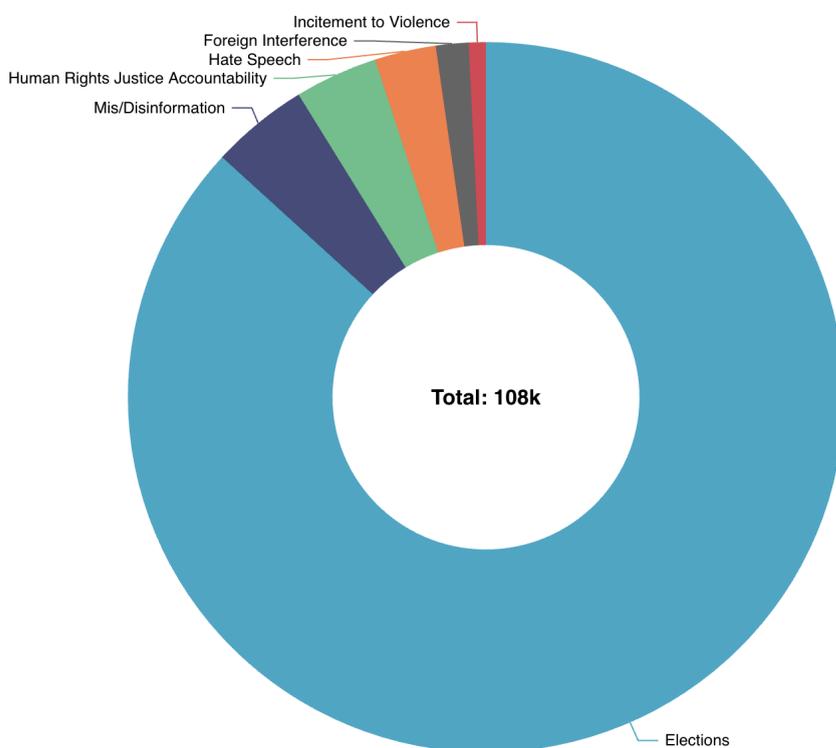
On the digital front, the narratives and sentiments being shaped were largely different from what ultimately happened in reality. Leading up to the elections, previous reports had already noted increased levels of hate speech, mis/disinformation, and narratives that contributed to a highly polarized environment. Even as the election progressed and results began to emerge, there were diverging views on who was winning and how public sentiment was shaping up. The reality was markedly different from what social media sentiments suggested. This aligns with the consistent presence of hate speech, mis/disinformation, and speculative narratives we observed, which appeared aimed at persuading public opinion or manufacturing perceptions to favor certain groups. Unofficially, Jamaat seemed to be portrayed as the most popular party, with expectations circulating that it would either win or secure a large number of parliamentary seats.

However, in reality, this was not the case, as the BNP ultimately won by the popular vote. This leaves room for reflection on who used social media most to create perceptions that diverged from reality, and on how effective they ultimately were. This divergence underscores the extent to which social media was used to shape perceptions that diverged from electoral reality, while also demonstrating the limits of these narratives.

Key Findings

KEY FINDING 1 | Increase in mis/disinformation posts leading up to the election

The elections were held on 12 February, with the results announced early in the morning on 13 February. The period from 1-15 February largely covered pre-election and election day itself. Naturally, the data collected is consistent with even more content related to elections. This time around, Mis/disinformation (4.78k) emerged as the second most prominent topic, followed by Human Rights, Justice, and Accountability (4.05k) and Hate Speech (3k).



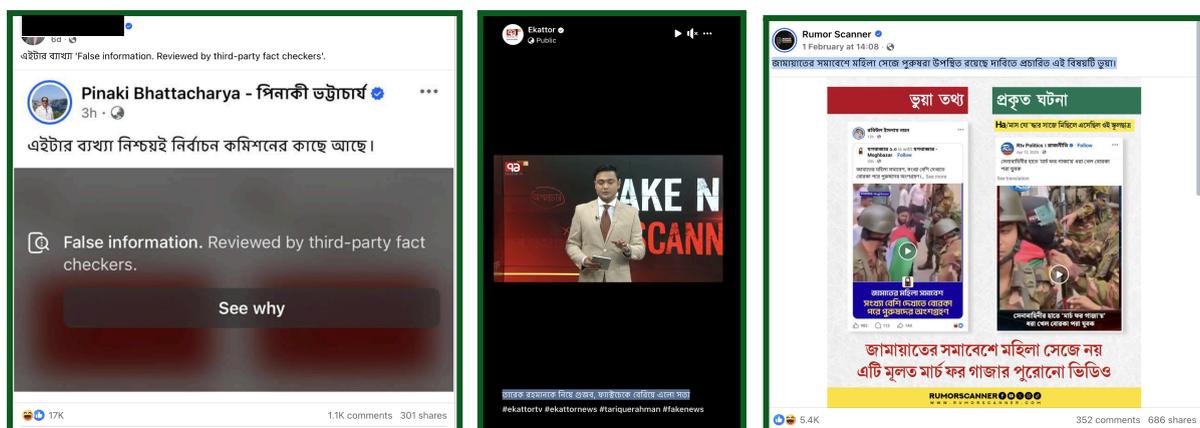
This trend has been persistent since the beginning of the reporting period in [August 2025](#).

| Popular Narratives - Engagement | |
|--|-----------------|
| post_class | Number of Posts |
| Narrative: Posts claiming the spread of Mis/Disinformation by others | 2.11k |
| Narrative: Posts claiming acts of violence, killings and massacres | 1.39k |
| Narrative: Posts claiming delegitimization of interim government | 1.24k |
| Narrative: Posts that are de-escalating violent rhetoric and calling for peace | 1.21k |
| Narrative: Posts discussing election rules and candidates | 1.17k |
| Narrative: Posts claiming that the July revolution and the political transition was propaganda | 981 |

This is also reflected in the narratives, with posts claiming the spread of mis/disinformation by others (2.69k) being the most popular, suggesting an increase in speculation. The prevalence of mis/disinformation and increased speculation suggests an information landscape that is volatile, confusing, and less trustworthy.

This reflects a broader indication of how volatile and susceptible Bangladesh's social media environment is to the spread of false information. Verified media influencers with large followings are often seen sharing unverified information as fact, or amplifying rumors and misleading claims without adequate verification. This becomes particularly concerning in cases involving half-truths, where selective or partially accurate information is presented in a way that distorts the full context. Such content is often more difficult to challenge, as it appears credible on the surface, making it more effective in shaping perceptions, reinforcing biases, and contributing to the normalization of mis/disinformation online.

In democracies in transition, particularly during electoral periods, this creates heightened vulnerabilities. Moments of political uncertainty and institutional change already place greater pressure on public trust, and the rapid spread of misleading or partially accurate information can further erode confidence in electoral processes and democratic institutions. In such contexts, social media becomes a powerful tool not only for political communication but also for narrative manipulation, making it critical to closely monitor how information is produced, amplified, and consumed.



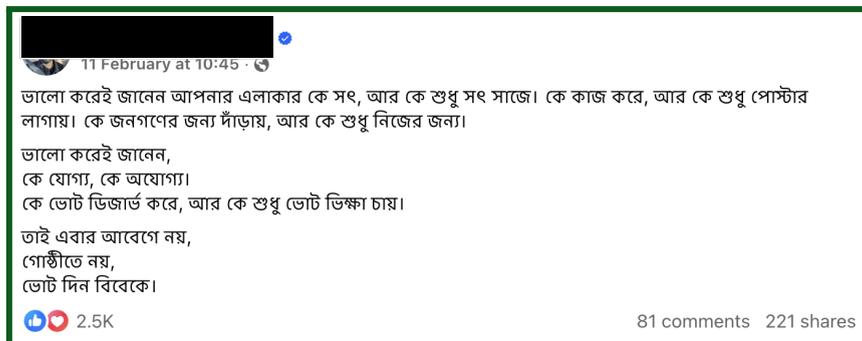
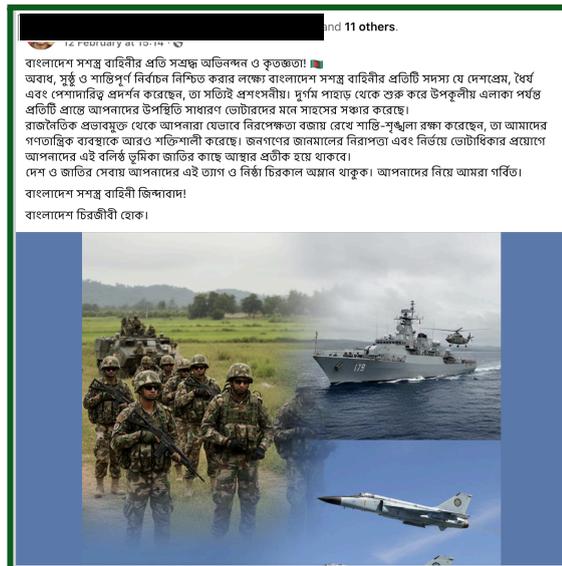
The first post on the [left](#) was posted by a verified account. The post was subsequently debunked by third-party fact checkers. Another post, which claimed that men were dressed as women at a Jamaat rally, was also [confirmed](#) to be false. This post dispels a rumor about the BNP chairperson, Tarique Rahman. Looking at the trends and the collected posts, it can be inferred that there were many attempts to spread misinformation during the electoral period, but there was also an effort to counter such fake news and rumours.

The trends and collected posts indicate that the electoral period saw a significant volume of attempts to spread mis/disinformation. Concurrently, there was also a notable effort to counter the false content amplified on social media.

KEY FINDING 2 | Increase in posts discussing election related issues

The election period, particularly covering election day, was dominated by two primary narratives; Posts discussing election rules and candidates (1.77k) and Posts claiming peaceful and fair elections (1.7k). Interestingly, posts discussing rules and claiming peaceful elections were more frequent than those concerning election-related violence. Unlike historical trends in Bangladesh, which typically see electoral violence before or after contested results, this election was notably peaceful. Citizens participated freely, contributing to what many regard as one of Bangladesh's most transparent and credible elections in recent history. Consequently, the online sentiment, reflected by media outlets and the public, echoed this perception of a credible and peaceful process.

However, a noticeable increase in Posts claiming acts of violence, killings, and massacres (1.57k) was observed across platforms in the lead-up to and on election day. Despite the overall peaceful assessment, [isolated incidents](#) of violence did occur in various districts across Bangladesh. This dichotomy is reflected in online discourse, where both narratives of peace and violence coexist.



The [post](#) on the top left is from a news media page with the caption saying “Domestic and foreign forces are trying to disrupt fair elections: Prince.” The [post](#) at the top right thanks the Bangladesh army for helping to conduct a free and fair election. The [post](#) at the bottom is urging people to vote with their conscience.

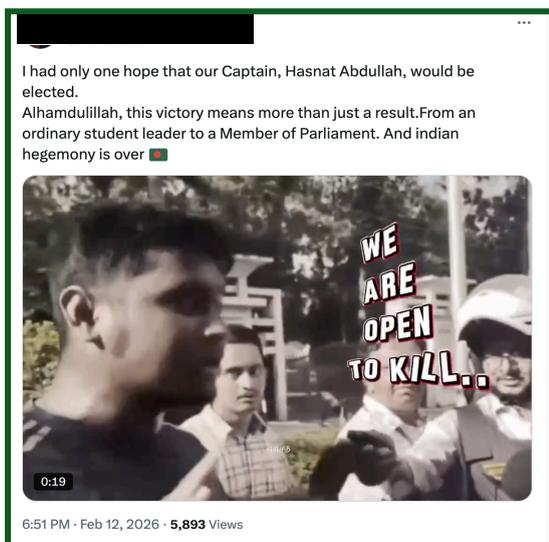
KEY FINDING 3 | Narratives around India’s role in Bangladesh’s politics persisted

| Harmful Narratives - Engagement | |
|--|-----------------|
| post_class | Number of Posts |
| Narrative: Posts containing anti-India sentiments | 3.94k |
| Narrative: Posts accusing "foreign agents" | 1.88k |
| Narrative: Posts claiming delegitimization of interim government | 1.28k |
| Narrative: Posts claiming that the July revolution and the political transition was propaganda | 1.2k |
| Narrative: Posts with high level of misogyny and tech-facilitated gendered abuse | 1.14k |

Narratives referencing India’s role in Bangladesh’s domestic politics continued to circulate during this reporting period. While not always dominant, these narratives remained consistent and resurfaced at key electoral moments, particularly as politicians used rhetoric about an independent Bangladesh free from any influence. Posts ranged from allegations of political favoritism and strategic interference to broader claims that framed the elections as part of a regional geopolitical contest.

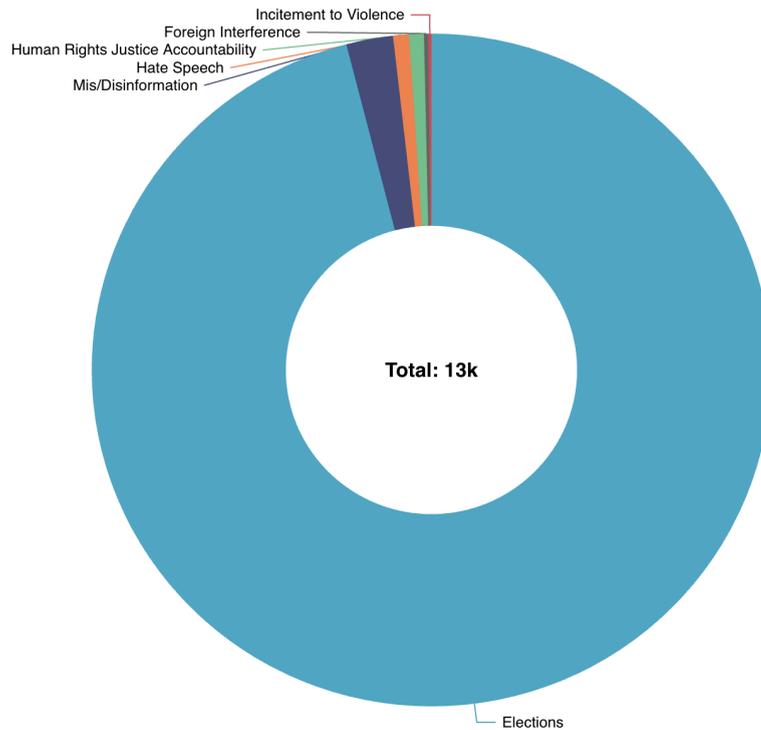
These narratives frequently drew on historical grievances, cross-border political dynamics, and long-standing perceptions of foreign influence. In several instances, India was portrayed as backing specific political parties or as having a vested interest in shaping Bangladesh’s electoral outcomes. As a result, posts containing anti-India sentiments remained high (3.94k), followed by posts accusing “foreign agents” (1.88k).

Most of these claims lacked verifiable evidence but gained traction through repetition and alignment with existing political biases. A significant driver of this discourse appears to be India’s decision to grant continued asylum to former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, which has reinforced perceptions of political alignment and fueled suspicion about external influence in Bangladesh’s political trajectory. The [posts below](#), taken from x, are examples of such narrative.



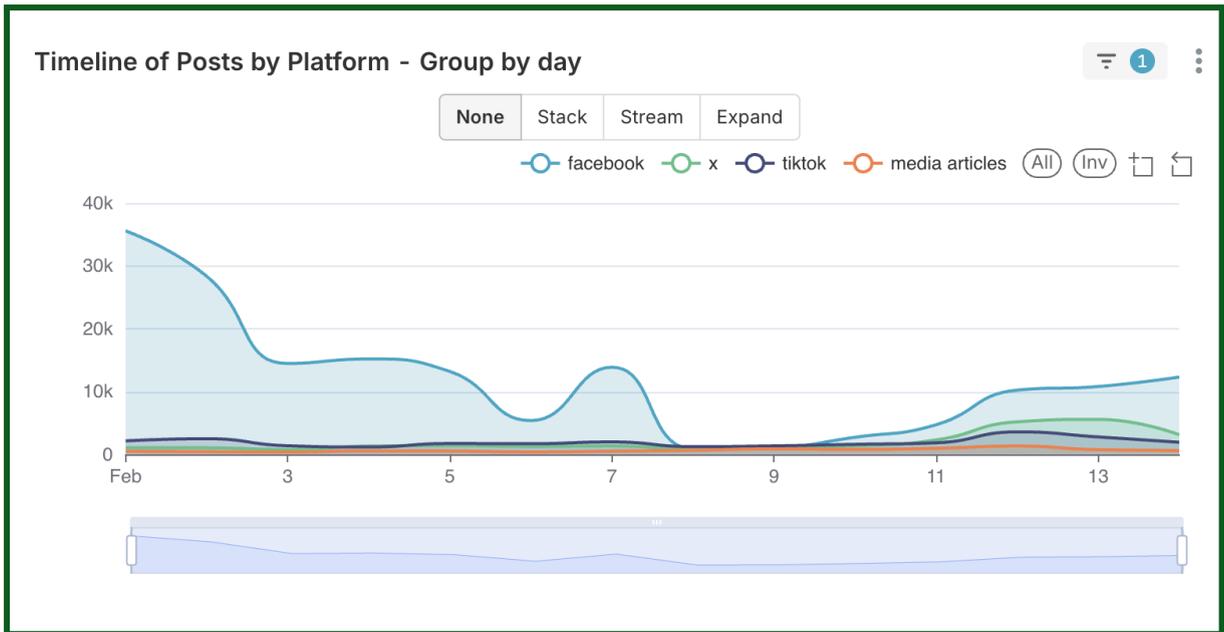
A Closer Look At Election Day

On 12 February, social media conversations were overwhelmingly centered on the elections themselves. Given that Elections (12.5k) constituted the largest thematic category for the day, the discourse was largely procedural and informational, with a neutral tone, followed by instances of misinformation (290) and hate speech (99).



| Popular Narratives - Engagement | |
|--|-----------------|
| post_class | Number of Posts |
| Narrative: Posts claiming peaceful and fair elections | 358 |
| Narrative: Posts claiming vote count irregularities | 257 |
| Narrative: Posts discussing election rules and candidates | 175 |
| Narrative: Posts claiming the spread of Mis/Disinformation by others | 120 |
| Narratives: Posts claiming parties involved in election conspiracy | 53 |
| Narrative: Posts claiming acts of violence, killings and massacres | 49 |

The dominant narratives focused on voter turnout, polling procedures, and assessments of whether the elections were free and peaceful. Posts highlighting orderly queues, citizen participation, and compliance with electoral rules were widely circulated, contributing to a perception of procedural normalcy.



Of the 19k posts collected on 12 February alone, 13k were classified for analysis. Compared to other days within the 1-15 February reporting window, overall content volume on election day appeared lower. A noticeable dip was also observed around 9-10 February. This possibly indicated:

1. **End of formal campaigning:** Campaign activities concluded around 10 February. The decline in content may reflect reduced digital campaigning and coordinated political messaging once the official campaign period ended.
2. **Platform moderation:** Social media platforms may have intensified content moderation during the final pre-election and election-day period, resulting in the removal or suppression of certain types of political content. Social media platforms place certain measures during election time to ensure election integrity and manage risk. Both [Meta](#) and [TikTok](#) had engagements and had taken some steps to curb harmful information.

While isolated references to clashes and allegations of irregularities were present, they did not dominate the online space. Instead, narratives portraying the elections as peaceful and credible were more prevalent. This contrasts with earlier pre-election speculation and polarized rhetoric observed in previous reporting periods.

The divergence between the heightened pre-election digital tensions and the relatively procedural tone observed on election day suggests that while online narratives can amplify anticipation, fear, or perceived instability, they do not always translate into offline escalation. At the same time, the persistence of mis/disinformation, even in a largely peaceful environment, underscores the need for sustained monitoring beyond moments of crisis.

Online-Offline Divergence

Across reporting periods since August 2025, a consistent pattern has emerged: heightened polarization, speculation, and narrative manipulation online have not translated into equivalent levels of offline disruption. In the lead-up to the 12 February elections, social media was rife with intense identity-based rhetoric and claims of irregularities, yet voting day remained largely peaceful and procedurally orderly. This divergence underscores how digital ecosystems amplify perceptions of instability that may exceed on-the-ground realities. It also raises important questions about the role of platform interventions. Content moderation may have reduced the visibility of harmful narratives during the final pre-election phase, but assessing whether these measures effectively mitigated harm while preserving legitimate political expression requires further analysis. This online-offline gap warrants deeper examination.

Conclusion

The 1-15 February reporting period captures a critical juncture in Bangladesh's political trajectory: the culmination of an election cycle marked by heightened online polarization, yet relatively peaceful offline conduct. While mis/disinformation, speculative claims, hate speech, and foreign influence narratives persisted at notable levels, the elections themselves proceeded without large-scale disruption. Furthermore, while online discourse suggested a tightly contested race, the final results showed a clear popular vote victory for one party. This indicates that voters ultimately exercised their choice independently, rather than fully mirroring the polarized narratives that dominated digital space.

This divergence between online intensity and offline outcomes is significant. It demonstrates both the power and the limits of online narrative construction. Social media ecosystems can amplify perceptions of crisis, popularity, or manipulation, yet these perceptions do not automatically determine offline behavior.

At the same time, the persistence of harmful narratives, even within a largely peaceful electoral context, underscores the need for sustained attention to information integrity beyond election day. The continued circulation of mis/disinformation, hate speech, and incitement to violence reflects underlying societal grievances and political discontent that remain present beneath the surface. Without proactive monitoring, institutional response, and coordinated intervention, these dynamics risk deepening over time and contributing to more entrenched political and societal polarization.



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