

Student Politics and Political Violence in Bangladesh

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While this report was made possible by the insights of the research staff involved, the authors are solely responsible for the content and the analysis offered in this report.

Executive summary

Student politics plays a formidable role in Bangladeshi politics. Politically aligned students are inextricably connected to party politics, contributing significantly to political violence in the country and at the same time are often in training for future political positions, linking violence with politics in a self-reinforcing cycle. In addition, university vice-chancellors are appointed by the chancellor, who is always the current Prime Minister of the republic. The Vice-Chancellor is also the president of the Dhaka University Central Student's Union (DUCSU) – often called Bangladesh's "second parliament". These factors mean that politics and academics in Bangladesh is combined in a unique and complicated way.

During the period 1991-2018, students played a part in over 25% of all political violence, and as high as 50-60% in certain cities like Rajshahi and Sylhet. Political violence tends to flare up at specific times: when there is a new ruling party consolidating its power, at tipping points when students feel their future opportunities may be compromised by changes in the law, and most notably during electoral periods. Most Bangladeshis (including many student activists) admit that

this violence is morally wrong, and yet it is so entrenched that it's seen as inevitable. Additionally, there is very little research available on the nature of student politics or the various factors that impact it. The few studies that do exist focus predominantly on Dhaka University, a critical epicentre of student politics, but do not consider the differing natures of student politics, local politics, and political violence in different parts of the country.

Research Question and Methodology

Research Question: To fill the gap in available research on Bangladeshi student politics, the Micro-Governance Research Initiative (MGR) of Dhaka University, in collaboration with the Belgium-based Conflict Research Group (CRG, Ghent University), with support from the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), has undertaken a study of student politics and political violence that explores and compares the nature of student politics at 7 key educational cities and or institutional settings across Bangladesh for the first time. The study aims to shed some light on how different factors impact student politics and political violence, and to provide a foundation for further research and

analysis in this complex, controversial and challenging research area.

Methodology: The research relies on both face-to-face interviews in selected regions, as well as a review of the few existing studies on political violence and student politics in Bangladesh. Research focused on seven locations: Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Sylhet, Khulna, Bogra and Kushtia. The first five locations are main educational centers, which makes them key places to better understand the role of student politics. The last two cases offer insights into more provincial and rural manifestations of student politics. Taken together the cases represent a diversity of settings, contributing and expanding existing knowledge about student politics beyond the few core urban centers that have been subject to studies to date.

In order to focus the study in a manageable way, case studies focused predominantly on universities (with only a peripheral look at colleges), which were selected from the largest key cities (future studies of tertiary cities would be interesting). In addition, the study relies on interviews during a specific point-in-time, during a time in which BCL student wings have dominated on campus for many years. To adjust for this, efforts were made to speak with students from all campus party wings.

In addition, the study considers historical insights, as well as quantitative data on political violence previously conducted by the researchers with support from the Fund for Scientific Research by the Research Foundation Flanders and others.

The various factors that were considered in each academic center include: the nature of student politics (including incentives to participate); the type and intensity of violence; the nature of local, district or national politics; familial and political ties of students; career and educational ambitions of students; intra-party factionalism, interest-based student movements; and the role of women.

This type of study is sensitive due to the complicated nature of Bangladeshi politics and the reliance by parties – and the government given the nature of Bangladesh’s party-state – on student wings. Also, since no such study has been conducted to date which could provide a basis for this comparative research, a wide net was cast in this study and further research and refinement is necessary. However, this ambitious project provides a fascinating and useful foundation for understanding this important subject.

Results Analysis & Initial Insights

The qualitative approach of this study resulted in a deeper and comparative understanding of the nature of student

politics and violence across Bangladesh, and yields some useful lessons and initial insights across the various factors that were considered as part of the interview process.

The Nature of Student Politics: Student party wings play a central role in the organization of parties in Bangladesh. The student wing of the ruling party has generally been able to consolidate power on campuses over the past years; and accordingly, the Awami League's (AL's) student wing, the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), currently dominates student politics across the country. However, the phenomenon is not unique to AL and was consistent under previous ruling party administrations.

Student dormitories, known in Bangladesh as student halls, are the main organizing unit in campus politics (with the exception of Chittagong University where this tends to take place on the shuttle cars, or *bogies*, that students use to commute to campus). In places where student politics have been banned, this structure does not disappear but rather moves to another location – such as Bogra University where a closure of student halls after excessive violence results in student politics moving to hostels and or boarding rooms, or in Khulna where a ban of student politics in the main public university has led to stronger college-level student politics. There is a rather structured process for moving up party hierarchies as students

advance in academic years until they reach political graduation.

Student political wings use strong incentives to encourage new students to join, and disincentives for non-participation. Incoming students are incentivized to join specific party wings through access to scarce on-campus accommodations and other student benefits which are denied to other students. First year students “earn” these benefits by participating in party-activities such as protests in which they are often required to initiate violence and/or by providing security to more senior student wing leaders. Incentives to participate in student politics extend beyond campus to access to jobs and networks with, or controlled by, influential local or national politicians (patronage and shelter). Intelligence branches of the police are also sometimes specifically tasked with preparing reports on different student leaders for the central party leadership.

Conversely, those who do not participate are often denied decent accommodations, access to on-campus resources, or protection from criminal activities of the dominating political student wing. At least in the first year of their studies, it is difficult for new students, especially males that are dependent on student halls, to avoid student politics even if they wanted to.

Dhaka University (DU) student politics are particularly important in that DU students hold the highest leadership roles in the national committees for each student wing, and many party leaders are (and historically have been) active in DU student wings. Student committees are officially elected, but informally selected, in each educational institute, and the DU committee, albeit not according to the official rules, outranks others (including district, city, other university committees). The hierarchical relationship between committees depends on local power structure and leadership as well as size and importance of the colleges and seniority of its students.

The way student politics is organized at DU has provided a model for other universities. However, it is important to note that the nature and intensity of student political violence in DU is not necessarily representative of student violence across the country and so case specific analysis is important.

The Type and Intensity of Violence: The number and intensity of violent incidents on campus versus off campus varies from place to place, with more lethal violence occurring off-campus. The intensity is measured by the number of deaths or injuries incurred during a violent incident. In places like Dhaka, Kushtia and to a lesser extent Bogra, lethal casualties are a lower percentage than might be expected given the number of violent

incidents. In other places like, Rajshahi and Sylhet, student violence accounts for a very large percentage of lethal casualties. Dhaka remains the single most violent location in Bangladesh when it comes to political violence, not surprisingly given its large population and its position as the center of national politics. While violent incidents in other cities occur with less frequency than in Dhaka, student violence in certain other cities – Rajshahi, Sylhet, Khustia – is often more intense/deadly than in Dhaka.

Khulna is a bit of an outlier because it has lower levels of violence and students in political wings prefer to go into business than politics; and some students go there specifically to avoid the levels of student politics and violence at other schools; it may be that having alternative incentives and career options than politics or government leads to less intense student politics and less violence. Student politics are banned on Khulna University campus (though have moved to colleges).

Just as violence locally is impacted by a strong local leader, nationally violence has declined overall in the 2014-2018 period under Hasina III when the BCL has consolidated power on campuses, marginalizing its two main rivals the Bangladesh Nationalist Party's Jatiyotabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and Jamaat-e-Islami's Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS).

In locations with strong local leadership, local mayors or party leaders appear to have been responsible for influencing lower levels of student political violence. And where there is a strong ICS presence, there appears to be a correlation between higher and more lethal violence with BCL and with police, possibly because police have been put in place to subdue ICS presence. These initial insights could be tested and validated against a greater number of case studies.

The Nature of Local, District or National Politics: DU student politics caters most closely to national political interests and players, while others have strong(er) local political interests. Outside of Dhaka the loyalties of students can be divided between home districts and local leaders changing the power dynamics on campus. This also sometimes contributes to factionalism, as in the case where student loyalties are divided between two (or more) strong local leaders.

Especially in Khulna and Bogra, students have political ties outside of the district which lead to patronage competitions and suspicion. In cases where a large number of students come from outside of the district, student committees often stipulate that the committee president and general secretary should be split – one local, one non-local. Though in practice this is not always the case as the stronger influence (local or non-local) will often jockey for both appointments, especially since these tend to “selection”

rather than election as they should be during “councils”. In Kushtia – where the university is on the border between two districts, loyalties are often split between Kushtia and Jhenaidah political allegiances, though currently Kushtia holds both leadership seats.

Changes in the level of violence correspond to changes in leadership (nationally in Dhaka and locally in other places that were studied), and therefore political leaders (nationally and especially locally when it comes to non-Dhaka universities and colleges) are a notable factor in the increase or decrease of student violence. Thus it is necessary to move beyond a campus-centric approach to understand and mitigate violence.

Familial and Political Connections: Family connections are very important as students who do well in student politics almost always also have family members who serve as patrons. In fact, family and patronage ties tend to have a stronger impact on political advancement than performance in student political wings, which frustrates many students who work hard within these structures but are still overlooked due to lack of contacts, or the relative value of certain districts or educational institutes to the political center.

Whether students study in their home district or away determine what role family

and patronage ties play, with student loyalty to local leaders an important aspect of student politics. Sometimes these non-local ties make it more difficult for local politicians to control student politics (and thus may lead to factional violence)

Students are also allocated to halls based on regional connections (most pronounced at Dhaka University). Hall presidents and general secretaries are often based on regional importance and connections (again most pronounced at Dhaka University).

Career and Educational Ambitions of Students: Employment opportunities can be scarce in Bangladesh and government positions and tenders are coveted. Since these are levied by the current ruling party, students are incentivized to demonstrate engagement in the same student party wing to gain access to these jobs and contracts.

Students who prefer to focus on careers and studies rather than politics may choose a school such as Khulna University, where student politics is banned or, if they can afford it, opt for private educational institutions. Khulna is also a business hub where options may extend beyond government and political tenders. Wealthier or local students who can afford their own housing, at any university, also have greater freedom to select the school of their choice without being forced into hall politics. However this is not always so cut and dried.

For example, students in medical colleges (in Bogra) who might seem to have non-government career options, are reliant on medical associations which are also politicized and dominated by the current ruling party. Thus these students are also career-motivated to join BCL events and student wings.

Intra-Party Factionalism: Factionalism is seen predominantly in BCL and JCD. While not new, infighting, and especially BCL factional violence is on the rise. It appears to be spurred by local political rivalries and power contests between influential AL leaders either within the same district/city, or between districts (when the student population is from different regions). In recent times this has become the most frequent student violence, albeit not the most lethal.

Intra-party fighting in other parties has historically weakened political groups in Bangladesh, and it will be interesting to see whether BCL intra-party factionalism has a similar impact. The high level of factionalism in Sylhet combined with the low performance of AL/BCL suggests this is possible.

The Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI)-affiliated ICS is one of the more disciplined student organizations, and is less likely to engage in intra-organizational violence. ICS has a stronger presence outside of Dhaka (and

especially in Kushtia Chittagong and Rajshahi), but it has been driven underground in most places. Despite being publicly marginalized by BCL however, many interviewees report it is still well organized and remains active. At the same time, violence with ICS involvement (as victims, but also as perpetrators) tends to be relatively more lethal.

Interest-Based Student Movements: Interest-based student movements are less common but have been popular and effective in the few cases when they occur. The election of two non-BCL candidates for the DU Central Student Union (DUCSU) – elections for which are mandated but had not occurred for almost three decades – is interesting and suggests there may be more support for non-party affiliated student representation on campus than party wings would like to admit. While BCL was able to influence the elections and secure all but 2 seats, it is notable that the highest position (vice president) went instead to the leader of the Quota Reform Movement (protesting quotas in government services) rather than a student party wing is a significant statement.

Other successful interest-based movements included 1999 student protests against sexual harassment by student party wings, the 2013 Shahbag movement over lenient sentences for war crimes for JeI leader Abdul Quader Mollah, and the 2018 Road Safety Protests. There is a tendency of party-

affiliated student organizations (particularly from the ruling party) to first coopt and if that is not possible, to repress such movements.

The Role of Women: Women participate in student politics to a lesser extent than men and tend to be less violent; they are also less likely to be incentivized or threatened into joining specific parties since the access to a place in a female dormitory tends to be less politicized and women's participation in violence is uncommon. Yet, in several locations (e.g., Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi) female party members are on the rise but appear more interested in issues than self-interest-based politics. An exception must be made for female student leaders that rose the party ranks due to strong political kinship ties (e.g., father MP or mayor). The DUCSU election at Dhaka University has shown that independent candidates also do better than ruling party student wing candidates in female halls.

As mentioned above, a few notable non-partisan student protests in recent years are another interesting phenomenon; their ability to influence public policy decisions demonstrates the power students have even independently of party wings and party politics, as well as the lack of student politics to control/co-opt all student movements. Yet, violence remains the primary – and in many cases the only – way to settle power struggles.

Possible Approaches for Violence Mitigation and Further Study

Based on insights gleaned in this study, the report identifies the following possible areas for mitigating student participation in political violence:

1. **Introduce an alternative incentive system.** Providing an alternative to the incentives of joining student wings (low-cost university accommodation and white-collar jobs or government tenders after graduation), could help to break the influence that student political organizations have on student political behavior. These are neither easy solutions, nor would they necessarily be supported by parties and/or government. A variety of stakeholders would need to be engaged in any solution-development exercise.
2. **Work with student bodies,** such as DUCSU, directly, and strive for the introduction of their equivalents in other campuses. While this will not be without its challenges – especially considering BCL hegemony and claim over the DU campus and their ability to influence student body council voting to win all but 2 seats – free and fair elections for student body representatives on a non-partisan council could over time strengthen more diverse political representation and

reduce manipulation of student politics by parties.

3. **Engage interest-based student movements, including women, in student politics.** In some of the places studied for this report, particularly in major universities in Dhaka, Rajshahi and Chittagong, female participation in student politics has increased quite significantly in the past years. While this has been used as a strategy by BCL to improve the image of the student organization, interviews showed that involvement in student political organizations has resulted in female students becoming more confident and serving the wider student-body. Politically engaged women are less violent and tend to be more independent from the prevailing party wing on campus. While women face a considerable amount of societal pressure that discourages them from joining student politics, creating an environment in which women are protected and encouraged to participate, through male allies and by building the capacity and confidence of female students to join politics (including in DUCSU and equivalent student bodies) might enable a new kind of politics.

Besides women, there are other students who choose not to become

engaged in student politics. Some of these students engage just enough to get a place at student halls and then choose to remain in *ganarooms* (large rooms where upwards of 40 students sleep on the floor), or if their financial situation allows live off campus, instead of moving up the ranks in political wings through violence. The Road Safety and Quota Reform movements are also examples of non-partisan student mobilization. AL/BCL have had trouble coopting these movements and they have been influential enough to influence policy. Looking in more depth at the factors which allow students to remain outside of student politics can provide some insight into how to reduce the hold of political parties on campus.

4. **Shift the perception of what a strong leader looks like.** Many BCL and JCD student leaders maintain a party ideology that is largely informed by a leadership cult paired with strong nationalism, and an image of leadership that is characterized by masculinity and strength. Citing political leaders such as Adolf Hitler as role models is common amongst student leaders. Painting a picture of strong leaders – from non-partisan student movements, as well as women and others – who have been able to exact change without violence, could help to shift the view that there is only one path to power. As most

interviewees, even those who engaged in violence themselves, articulated that this was morally wrong, there may be a receptive audience for such a campaign.

5. **Conduct further research at universities with lower levels of violence.** Some universities/colleges where students are less focused on political careers have had much less violence than others, such as Khulna and medical colleges. Also some rural universities have had less violence. These schools may have lessons for others and/or may be the best places to start to integrate non-partisan student body councils. More research is however needed to look into more exact causalities in these places
6. **Explore context specific strategies.** The research shows that while there are some commonalities in terms of hall politics and the ruling party student wing playing a dominant role on campus, the nature and incentives for student political violence differs from place to place. This means that the solutions for mitigating violence may also be location specific. Given the connection between local and national politics and student politics, there may also be charismatic leaders in different locations who could be champions for non-violence and have a significant impact in certain regions.

7. **Look at international comparative examples** when it comes to recruitment behaviour and cooptation of student groups by authoritarian regimes. However, there is a general deficit in this field of literature, which either focuses on revolutionary and reformist student activism that is directed *against* the government and/or ruling elites as well as on gangs who try to undermine the government's authority over the

monopoly of violence. Studies that focus on (student) groups recruited for the establishment, maintenance and perseverance of authoritarian regimes remains largely absent. Bangladesh as well as examples from regimes in Nicaragua or Russia may serve as useful entry points for future research and comparison.

List of Acronyms

AHC	Azizul Haque College
AL	Awami League
BCL	Bangladesh Chhatro League
BL	Brajlal (College)
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
BUET	Bangladesh University of Technology and Engineering
CU	Chittagong University
CUET	Chittagong University of Technology and Engineering
DU	Dhaka University
DUCSU	Dhaka University Central Student Union
HeI	Hefazat-e-Islam
ICS	Islami Chhatro Shibir
JCD	Bangladesh Jatyotabadi Chhatro Dal
JSD	Jatiya Samajtrantik Dal
JeI	Jamaat-e-Islami (Bangladesh)
MP	Member of Parliament
NAP	National Awami Party
NSF	National Students Federation
RCC	Rajshahi City Corporation
RU	Rajshahi University
RUET	Rajshahi University of Technology and Engineering
SUST	Shajlal University of Science and Technology
SST	Shah Sultan College

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1. Introduction to the Study

Student groups play an important role in Bangladesh. Not only have student groups often been at the vanguard of crucial struggles – like the Language Movement (1947-1952), the Independence movement (1969-71) and the pro-democracy movement (1989-91) – but many contemporary politicians also have roots in student organizations. Student organizations are highly politicized in Bangladesh and operated as important wings of the major parties. The contemporary role of student groups and student politics is often seen in a highly negative light, as part of a wider degeneration of political values, exemplified by a perceived increase in violence and corruption. While not wanting to trade such moralistic reasoning for a critical understanding of student politics in its current form, it is undeniable that student politics today is highly violent. Recent data indeed show the major role that student organizations play in political violence in the country.

In the last ten years (2008-2018) campus violence accounted for 13 per cent of political violence in the country. If all off-campus political violence in which one or more student groups participated is

included, this increases to over 27 percent, making them one of the most active groups engaging in political violence.

If we look at the prevalence of student violence in the twenty most violent districts in Bangladesh (see table 1), it becomes clear that student violence is most prevalent in the major urban centers, which also contain most public universities and colleges. Important to note is that in some urban areas (such as Rajshahi and Sylhet), student groups participate in around 50 per cent of all political violence. In locations with a high number of violent events, student groups are highly active in these events. As a result, understanding student politics can make important contributions to understanding Bangladesh's political system and political violence in the country. At the same time, non-violent roles of student groups remain important given that student organizations remain one of the single most important breeding grounds for future political leaders.

Given the importance of student politicians in organizing and participating in political violence, as well as student politics' formative role in the making of party politicians, it is surprising that we still have a limited understanding of how student

politics operates across Bangladesh. While a number of interesting studies have been written on student politics¹, they share a major shortcoming in that all are based solely on research in Dhaka and predominantly within Dhaka University (DU). Given that this university plays a particular role in Bangladesh history (see section 2), as well as dominates student politics in general (for instance by almost always supplying both the president and general secretary of the central committees of student organizations), a key hypothesis of the research project was that generalizing from the Dhaka case is not without difficulties.

This research project thus aimed to build on the work already done, but to radically expand our comparative understanding of student politics by looking beyond Dhaka.

Our research focused on five major cities which are also major centers of higher education – Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi, and Sylhet, the important district headquarters of Bogra and one rural university (the Islamic University in Kushtia). Interviews were conducted – with both ruling party and opposition student activists, general students and university or college staff – to gain insights in the profile of

student politicians, the organization of student politics in the specific locations, the relations between city politics and student politics, and factionalism and student violence.

TABLE 1: DISTRICT-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF CAMPUS AND STUDENT VIOLENCE IN MOST VIOLENT DISTRICTS (2008-2018)

	Campus violence	Student Violence
Dhaka	22,0%	32,7%
Chittagong	14,5%	44,4%
Narayanganj	16,2%	18,6%
Rajshahi	35,1%	49,3%
Noakhali	5,5%	22,1%
Barisal	14,6%	38,4%
Comilla	11,9%	27,6%
Pabna	7,8%	18,7%
Sirajganj	9,5%	23,2%
Sylhet	24,5%	56,2%
Feni	5,5%	32,1%
Khulna	16,6%	28,1%
Mymensingh	15,8%	29,6%
Jessore	6,2%	18,0%
Bogra	10,4%	22,0%
Gazipur	7,5%	23,6%
Kushtia	17,6%	30,1%
Lakshmipur	6,6%	23,0%
Jhenaidah	5,1%	15,1%
Munshiganj	3,3%	11,4%

The report will examine not only the general set-up of student politics in particular public university and college campuses but also how student politics is integrated into broader local and national networks. A focus

¹ Andersen, M.K. (2016) 'Time-Use, Activism and the Making of Future', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 39 (2), pp. 415-429. Andersen, M.K. (2013) *The politics of politics: Youth mobilization, aspirations and the threat of violence at Dhaka University* (Unpublished PhD dissertation). Copenhagen. Ruud, A.E. (2010) 'To Create a Crowd: Student Leaders in Dhaka.' In P. Price and A.E. Ruud (Eds.), *Power and Influence in India: Bosses, Lords and Captains*, New Delhi, pp. 70-95. Suykens, B. (2018) "'A Hundred Per Cent Good Man Cannot Do Politics': Violent Self-Sacrifice, Student Authority, and Party-State Integration in Bangladesh', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 52 (3), pp. 883-916.

on local political party networks is instructive as in most cases, student violence is not confined to the campus but affects city and district politics.

We find that the Dhaka scenario of student politics, although often perceived as a blueprint, does not manifest itself in the same way in the different localities.

Generally speaking, we would argue that the operation of student politics is to some extent integrated in the operation of the party-state. As argued by Bert Suykens², 'in party states the distinction between the party and the government becomes confused'. More crucial however for our discussion here is that party wings—in this cases student organizations—become crucial actors in controlling particular sectors or polities for the party in power. In Bangladesh, ruling party students are key actors in controlling campuses, but also in maintaining party-state control more in general by supplying party-political manpower. Dhaka University is a key case, as certainly since 1991 the ruling party's student wing always has been able to control its campus.

This picture however becomes much more complicated once we leave Dhaka. In most other cases, the interaction between national, regional and local political party

forces have been shaping student politics to a large degree. While in Dhaka, national politics is able to have a firm grip on student politics and the balance of power between different political student organizations, this is much less the case outside the capital. While almost always the impact of national politics can be felt, the presence of local political leaders—and certainly as they are of the national opposition—have a key impact both on the organization of student politics and on student violence. The presence of strong unitary leadership at the local level (mostly in the form of a Mayor) can reduce the levels of factional violence significantly, while local party-political factionalism is directly reflected in student-political factionalism. Given the importance of factional violence in overall levels of student violence this is highly significant, and often independent from national level political processes.

The most important example of the complication of party-state control is probably the influence of Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS), the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, in many of the campuses. While often they were under more pressure during Awami League (AL) rule at the center, they were able to have a clear-cut presence and sometimes control over many campuses in our sample. It is only in the last couple of years, with AL moving in the direction of a

² Suykens, B. (2017) 'The Bangladesh party-state: a diachronic comparative analysis of party-political regimes', *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, Vol. 55 (2), pp. 187-213.

more autocratic party-state, that ICS has been dislodged from all studied campuses.

To summarize: exactly because of its national appeal, DU does not allow us to understand well the integration of student politics in local city politics and the rationales for violence associated with this. This report as well as research conducted in Rajshahi by Julian Kuttig³ clearly shows the need to understand local party-political connections if we want to address student political violence beyond Dhaka.

For policy makers and development practitioners that means a need to rethink *one-size-fits-all* approaches; and consider local contexts when drawing up strategies.

1.1. Methodology

1.1.1 Case selection

As mentioned, research has focused on seven locations (Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Sylhet, Khulna, Bogra and Kushtia; see figure 1). The first five locations are main educational centers, with not only one or more public universities (see also table 2), but also colleges and private institutions of higher education. This makes them key places to better understand the role of

student politics. The last two cases offer insights into more provincial and rural manifestations of student politics. Taken together the cases represent a diversity of settings, extending existing research beyond the few core urban centers.

All cases also see high levels of political violence, and student violence registers a high share of overall violence in the districts in which the research sites are located (see table 1).

Dhaka, and DU in particular, is the central hub of student politics. DU was a key location in the historical development of not only student politics, but the country as a whole, with DU students taking the lead in many historical resistance movements (see section 2). It also forms a blueprint for the organization of student politics (see section 4.1). DU, however, caters more to national than local party politics as compared to the other cases. Interestingly, it is no longer the largest university when looking at student numbers (see table 2), although it has by far the most teaching staff.

The port city Chittagong, the major trading hub in Bangladesh, is considered the second most important city in Bangladesh. With

³ Kuttig, J. (forthcoming) "Another kind of beating": On the complexities of political violence in everyday student politics in Bangladesh', In J. Pfaff-Czernancka, A. Kölbel and S. Thieme (Eds.), *South Asian Students' Mobilities and Mobilisations: Global Challenges-Local Action*, Oxford University Press. Kuttig, J. and B. Suykens (online first). 'How to Be Visible in Student Politics: Performativity and the Digital Public Space in Bangladesh', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, pp. 1-32. doi:10.1017/S0021911819001839.

many colleges and universities, it is also a major center of education. One of the interesting features of the city is that while many colleges are located in town, Chittagong University, student-wise the third largest in the country, is based in Hathazari Upazila, outside the territorial vicinity of Chittagong city. This has had an important impact on the organization of student politics.

Rajshahi and Sylhet are both cities with very high levels of student violence (each being the location of more than 50% of all violence in their respective districts). But they are very different in their political setup. While Rajshahi is overall more violent, city politics shows relatively less signs of factionalism. Rajshahi University has now the largest number of students, although it trails DU by a large margin when it comes to teaching and other staff.

Sylhet is marked by its transnational connections to London and a relatively pronounced level of factionalism. Shajalal University of Science and Technology (SUST) is about a third in size compared to DU.

Khulna, of all the research locations, is the least violent. The ban on student politics at Khulna university (when it was founded by

Ershad) explains at least partly the relative absence of violence in this city and makes for a good case to understand the conditions necessary to prevent (violent) student politics in an otherwise extremely politicized environment. Khulna University is also by far the smallest University in our sample.

Bogra and Kushtia were selected not only because they see relatively high levels of violence, but because of their role in opposition politics. Bogra town is a traditional stronghold of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)⁴. The Bogra 6 (Bogra town) constituency is home to BNP chairperson and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, while her husband and founder of BNP, Ziaur Rahman, was born in the Bogra 7 constituency. Kushtia and the Islamic University experienced large-scale violence during the 2013 War Crimes Tribunals. The University differs from others due to its Islamic focus and rural location between two districts. It is also bigger than SUST, Sylhet and Khulna University.

1.1.2 Research design

The research results presented here are in one case (Rajshahi) based on the long-term fieldwork of Julian Kuttig (one of the authors). In the other locations a team of 6 researchers (one in each location; most of

⁴ Mirza Fakrul Islam Alamgir, the BNP secretary general, was elected as MP for Bogra town (Bogra-6 constituency) in the 2018 general elections, showing the symbolic importance of the Bogra town for BNP. Traditionally Khaleda Zia was elected from this constituency but she was in jail at the time of elections (and still at the time of writing). Alamgir however refused to take oath as a protest against the non-free election. In the ensuing by-election BNP's Golam Mohammad Siraj was elected to take the seat.

them local to the study sites), 5 local supervisors and one international expert (Julian Kuttig) conducted interviews with student activists and leaders (both from the ruling party and the opposition), university (professorial/faculty) staff and general students. Given time concerns, most of our research has focused on the main public university in each research location, with the exception of Bogra, which does not have a public university, and Khulna, where student politics is forbidden in its public university. In Rajshahi, given the much longer fieldwork period, both university and non-university student politics was researched.

Fieldwork was conducted for 4-5 weeks in each location. Researchers worked with a standardized, yet semi-structured research checklist. This enabled comparison among cases, but also a focus on locality-specific dynamics. Researchers were given a training, on the research topic and methodology, as well as on ethical considerations when researching sensitive subject matter.

Besides fieldwork this report also presents quantitative data on student politics. This data is based on a dataset on political violence in Bangladesh (1991-2018). Data was at all times collected from four different newspapers⁵. To be included in the dataset a coded event had to be 1) violent: resulting in at least one injured/death/raped/abducted/held hostage or in property destruction and 2) explicitly political: involving members of at least one clearly delineated political group: political party and all its allied organizations, Islamist organization, or rebel group⁶. This is a minimal definition. Given the fact that not every event of political violence is recorded in these (national) newspapers (as our dataset shows there is almost an oversupply of events) our estimates are conservative.

Data presented here is organized around three main elements: events, wounded and lethal casualties. Events refer to single instances of political violence in our database.

⁵ The most extensive data was collected from the combination Daily Star, Prothom Alo, Dainik Inqilab and Dainik Ittefaq. For the initial years also Bhorer Kagoj, Songbad and Ajker Kagoj were used when other papers were not available. The use of four newspaper simultaneously allows for the possibility that the same event is recorded multiple times. To deal with these duplicates a procedure (focusing on day, place and actors involved) was devised to eliminate duplicates. From a set of duplicates one event was randomly chosen to be included in the dataset used here. This reduced the dataset from 45941 coded events to 37544.

⁶ For the final period of study, violence between state security forces and 'criminals' as part of the war on drugs initiated by the AL-government starting in 2018 also has been included. This explains the sometimes high levels of criminal involvement in the 2008-2018 data.

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF STUDENTS, TEACHING AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF IN MAJOR UNIVERSITIES⁷

University	Students	Teaching Staff	Officer staff	3 rd and 4 th class staff
Dhaka University	33360	2268	1043	3040
Rajshahi University	37256	1202	735	1896
Chittagong University	28216	1303	386	1960
Islamic University Kushtia	13636	351	410	502
SUST, Sylhet	10113	500	236	497
Khulna University	7269	410	254	484

In many cases we have used multiple response sets as more than one actor is often involved in one event. Our data on the particular student groups should thus be read with care. Events data show the number of events a group participated in. The number or percentages of wounded and lethal casualties similarly show the number or percentages of wounded and lethal casualties arising from events in which a particular group participated. It does not mean to state that e.g. they were either responsible for killing that number of people, or that so many of their number were killed in these events. It rather reflects the intensity of violence.

Data on factional violence focuses on violence between student groups and other organisations within the same political family. So factional violence is both understood as violence within a particular student group, and as violence between members of the student group and members

of e.g. the youth group or party members of the same political party.

It must be stated here that the research is politically highly sensitive. Student organizations are a key wing for political parties and play a central role in the organization of party-states in Bangladesh. Particularly at this stage, with the Awami League (AL) in their third consecutive term, and its democratic legitimacy being challenged, the AL government does not welcome open criticism of the party and its wings.

We want to stress that the dynamics in student politics cannot be allocated to one specific party but are part of larger historical legacies and political trajectories of nation-state formation. This report is not a critique of any one party but a general overview of the functioning of student politics in contemporary Bangladesh. The behavior of the specific parties is given predominance

⁷ Based on: University Grants Commission, Bangladesh (2018) *Annual report: 2017*. Dhaka: UGC.

based instead on the current and historical influence they have/had in student politics. It is important to note that the predominance of different parties—giving support to their own student group—has varied at different points in time. While AL is dominant now, previously it was e.g. BNP-Jamaat-e-Islami—the latter the main Islamist party in Bangladesh—during their rule from 2001 to 2006.

1.1.3 Limitations of the study

For the field-work based study, it is clear that time constraints impact on the study. The relatively short fieldwork time in most locations can of course not compare to the in-depth ethnographic work in Rajshahi. This also made it necessary to focus the research in most cases on the main public university. It would of course be interesting to supplement this research with more work on colleges or even schools, where student political recruitment sometimes starts.

Also, while the selection of research locations was done consistently, more research on more rural or small-town student politics would allow to further complicate the picture here.

Finally, given the current dominance of BCL, and while a clear effort has been made to interview respondents across the party-political spectrum, our sample is skewed towards BCL. As the other student organizations simply have become less

active in and around campuses, and in some cases have moved to some extent underground, contacting them for interviews has been challenging. While we succeeded to do this, a larger sample of opposition student activists would have been interesting. Again, this would necessitate a longer emersion in the field to establish the necessary relations of trust.

The quantitative data have three main limitations, of which the first two are closely related. The first is the limited amount of newspapers that can be used in this type of study. Given the relatively limited overlap in the reporting of events between different newspapers, adding newspaper sources would probably also add new violent events to the dataset. The data presented are thus conservative estimates. Secondly, the newspapers used are all national newspapers and the inclusion of regional newspapers would again increase the coverage. The final limitation is maybe the most important. As with all newspaper data, the dataset is dependent on the quality of the reporting. While this has been good overall, the local pressure on journalists has been increasing, certainly, but not only, in the last couple of years. This makes newspaper data at the same time key to build extensive datasets on violent events, but also a precarious source certainly if authoritarian control increases.

The rest of the report will be organized as follows. First, we will introduce student politics, by showing its central role in the political development of Bangladesh. Secondly, we will provide a quantitative overview of the prevalence of student violence. Thirdly, we will provide an overview of the main research results,

providing general insights into the organization of student politics and violence, and giving details about case-specific findings. We will conclude by summing up the main research results and providing possible approaches to further the democratization of student politics in Bangladesh.

FIGURE 1: MAP OF BANGLADESH WITH RESEARCH LOCATIONS



2. History of student politics⁸

The history of student politics in Bangladesh is intimately tied to the development of the Bangladeshi nation, its movement for and war of independence, as well as pro-democracy struggles. The pre-1991 period is often equated with a heroic battle for political freedom, while post-1991 student politics was considered to be, at best, coopted by political party regimes or, at worst, as simply another form of criminal politics⁹.

While such an assessment is not unfounded, in this section, we will try both to introduce the (historical) importance of student politics, but at the same time try to demonstrate that this distinction between pre and post-1991 politics is not clear-cut and show how student politicians, also before 1991 were prone to (factional) infighting and violence, as well as have been coopted by the movements they are often said to have simply combatted.

2.1. The Language Movement (1947-1966)

The language movement of 1947-1952 is a key moment not only in the development of Bengali/Bangladeshi national consciousness but also in the making of students as a key political force.

After partition in 1948, Urdu became the sole national language of East and West Pakistan. However, only a minority of the population, in what is now Bangladesh, spoke Urdu, which quickly led to the emergence of protests. Students would become immediately affected as Urdu became the sole medium of higher education. Student leaders like Mohammad Toaha, Abdul Matin, but also future father of the nation Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would take the lead in organizing processions and blockades to protest Pakistan's Prime Ministers' statements about the status of Urdu and Bengali.

⁸ A more extensive overview can be found in Suykens, B. (2019) *What do we know about student politics in Bangladesh? Resistance, Accommodation, Cooptation and Sacrifice (1947-2019)*. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.12508.13448.

⁹ Kamol, E. (2010) 'The tragedy of student politics in Bangladesh'. Available online at: <http://archive.thedailystar.net/magazine/2010/02/02/cover.htm>.

The continued refusal of the Muslim League leadership to take students' concerns seriously had already led to an erosion of Muslim League support. An anti-Muslim League fraction left the All India Bengal Muslim Students League (founded in 1937 by Jinnah himself) and formed the East Pakistan Muslim Students League (the predecessor of the present-day Bangladesh Chhatra League) in January 1948, with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as its general secretary.

The DU Language Action Committee would take the lead in the nationwide protests. Of particular importance was the mass demonstration on 21 February 1952 in which police killed a number of student and youth demonstrators. This date is still celebrated as Language Martyrs' Day, with martyrs' memorials (Shaheed Minars) set up near or on University campuses to commemorate student sacrifices for the nation.

SHAHEED MINAR IN DHAKA¹⁰



Many students, including Toaha were arrested and remained in jail until the 1954 Provincial Assembly elections in which the Muslim League was all but wiped out by a student-supported joint front. In the end, Bengali would be adopted as a national language in 1956.

The Language Movement positioned students and student politicians as key actors in the formation of national culture and ideology. The students not only protested against the exclusion of Bengali as a state language, but also demonstrated the potential of student politics in East Pakistan as a platform of resistance and change. Some of the key student leaders of those times – including Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (one of the principal organizers of East Pakistan Muslim Students League in 1948), Syed Nazrul Islam (President of Salimullah Muslim Hall Students Union in the 1940s), and Tajuddin Ahmad (one of the founders of East Bengal Chhatra League in 1948) – would subsequently become central players in the national liberation struggle of Bangladesh, illustrating the potential of student politics to serve as the departure point for a political career.

During the Language Movement the links between student organizations and political parties were cemented. The Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) emerged as the

¹⁰ copyright: creative commons license BY-SA 3.0.

student wing of Awami League and the East Pakistan Student's Union (Chhatra Union), founded in 1952, became the student wing of the Leftist Parties and most importantly the National Awami Party (NAP) after it was founded 1957.

While students continued to launch agitations, the military leadership of Pakistan tried to gain more control over the student body, particularly in DU. The Ayub Khan regime, for example, removed DU Vice Chancellor Mahmood Hossain and installed the regime backed M.O. Ghani. While earlier Vice Chancellors operated fairly independently, the insertion of what amounted to a regime stooge, would form a precedent in independent Bangladesh, of Vice Chancellors protecting the interests of the ruling government, rather than that of the university. In a similar vein, the Pakistan military regime, tried to counter (largely unsuccessfully) the anti-Pakistan sentiment among the East-Pakistan student body by fielding a government sponsored student organization of its own: The National Students Federation (NSF). This would not only lead to substantial violence between rival political groups, it would also provide a template followed by future military rulers Ziaur Rahman and H. M. Ershad in post-1971 independent Bangladesh. The NSF also started to act as a representative of Islamist politics against the mostly secular agenda of both BCL and Chhatra Union.

2.2. The break-up of Pakistan and of the student front (1966-1975)

While party politicians took the lead in the Liberation War, students would play a crucial role in providing muscle power and ideological leadership in the struggle. Students would not only stress independence, but also socialist reforms. During a public rally on 3 March 1971 they proclaimed independence and declared Sheikh Mujibur Rahman "Father of the Nation" and Bangabandhu "friend of Bengal". Students were also the first to design and raise the flag of independent Bangladesh. Moreover, when the Pakistan government launched Operation Search Light on 12 March 1971, violently suppressing the independence movement, DU was specifically targeted. A large number of students and teaching staff were killed.

While members of the Jamaat-e-Islami's student wing Islami Chhatra Sangha – today known as Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) – formed the Al-Badr militia which collaborated with the Pakistani forces, other students and student organizations joined Mukti Bahini – freedom fighter – outfits led by Bengali military, paramilitary, and civilians. These groups formed the guerilla army that would fight against the Pakistan military forces deployed to East Pakistan. Splinters in the student movement, which would prove crucial after the war, began to

surface as student joined different guerilla outfits.

Under the leadership of Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni (the nephew of Mujib) and Sirajul Islam Khan, many BCL activists joined the 'Mujib Bahini', one of many Mukti Bahini outfits, which was directly loyal to Mujib. Meanwhile leftist students associated with the Student's Union, the National Awami Party, and the Communist Party formed the 'combined guerilla force' under commander Mohammad Farhad, a former Chhatra Union leader and organizer of the Central Committee of the underground Communist Party.

After independence in December 1971, the Mujib government tried to disarm the student forces, but largely failed to do so. Instead, the united student front broke up into factions as one of its main goals since 1947 had been reached. The revolutionary socialist wing of the BCL would be crucial in forming the Jatiya Samajtrantik Dal (JSD), one of the main party-political rivals of Awami League in the early years after independence. And the Chhatra Union, which was associated with the National Awami Party, became very prominent after winning the 1972 DU Central Student Union elections (DUCSU). DUCSU, also dubbed the second parliament of Bangladesh, represents DU students in the University's decision-making. Certainly, in the pre-1991 period its elections offered good insights in the

political mood on campus. Increasingly, however, Awami League and BCL student politics were not radical enough for many student activists in the immediate post-independence period.

The early years of independence saw many clashes between members of rival student groups. The historical record is still not settled on whether the failed post-war campaign by the government to disarm former freedom fighters led Chhatra Union- and JSD-affiliated students to start an armed campaign, or whether it was Mujib who allowed the AL wing of the BCL to be armed to expand their dominance on campuses across the country and DU more specifically. In any case the politicization of student groups along party lines can be traced to this period, when the student front, which fought first for the mother tongue and later independence, split to become associated with political parties.

2.3. Student Politics under military rule (1975-1990)

After the 1975 coup that killed Mujib, Ziaur Rahman emerged as the new leader. He started to reshuffle not only the party-political, but also the student-political balance of power. Not only did he clamp down on JSD student activists and other left-wing student groups, he also fielded his own student group, the Bangladesh Jatiyotabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), in 1979 as part of the formation of his own political party: the

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). JCD had to counter strong resistance from established (left-wing) student groups but got full support of the regime. This installed the tradition of armed control over campuses by the ruling party's student group. However, as the DUCSU election results from that time reveal, they were never able to fully dislodge their rivals from BCL and JSD.

The Ziaur Rahman regime also saw the resurgence of Islamist student groups, which had been banned under Mujibur Rahman. ICS quickly emerged as the student group of Jamaat-e-Islami. They came to represent a conservative Islamist agenda and engaged in armed clashes with both BCL and JCD.

While student groups had been important in the nascent resistance movement against the Zia regime, they took up their role fully after Zia was killed in a coup and General H.M. Ershad came to power. Ershad followed Zia's example and fielded a student group – Notun Bangla Chhatra Samaj; later Jatiyo Chhatra Samaj – quickly after he declared himself Chief Martial Law Administrator. Chhatra Samaj, however, was never able to establish itself despite full state support—which led to a proliferation of arms and money on the campus—and Ershad's recruitment of DUCSU General Secretary Ziauddin Ahmed Bablu.

Ershad would be somewhat successful in pursuing a divide and rule strategy, which led to clashes between BCL and JCD, and also to factional infighting. However, overall this period can be characterized as one big struggle against Ershad, with student organizations often acting as a front for their respective political parties, whose activities had been banned by Ershad. They were engaged in (banned) processions, organized *hartals* (general strikes) and sit-ins at the university and at government buildings. As a result, many student activists were killed in government crackdowns throughout the 1980s.

The 1987-1990 period saw almost continuous protest, with AL and BNP joining forces despite bitter personal rivalries. In the DUCSU election of 1989 a BCL-Chhatra Union alliance won, and in 1990 JCD won. These were the last DUCSU elections to be held until the 2019 DUCSU elections (see section 4.1.3.2).

The student opposition to Ershad and the resulting crackdown, as well as student and teacher strikes, made universities, DU in particular, close and suspend classes repeatedly throughout the 1980s. This came to be known as 'session jam' which led to some students needing eight years to finish their four-year programs.

In the end, Ershad resigned in December 1990.

2.4. Democratization and student-party state integration (1991-2019)

After the installation of democracy in Bangladesh in 1991, student politics was widely considered to have deteriorated, lost ideological focus and become nothing more than a front for political party activity. This is not without grounds. In earlier periods students had also been co-opted by parties and regimes to foster their agenda on campuses, but students associated with different political parties joined hands at times to accomplish a common objective, e.g. to oust Ershad. However, since 1991 there have been only limited instances of inter-party cooperation. Factional struggles within the student organizations have often been settled by violence. More than ever, political party patronage (often embodied by a specific local leader, MP or Minister) is crucial in making or breaking political careers.

Certainly, in DU, incumbent student groups have been central in controlling campuses, not only by occupying student halls but also by trying to keep the leadership of the opposition student groups off campus. Outside DU, this model has been emulated, with more or less success depending on the local context (see the case studies in section 4).

Notwithstanding the dominance of political-party affiliated student groups, which often

side-lined or ignored many of the demands of general students, activist or policy-oriented movements with the support of general students have continued to surface in the post 1991 period. Sometimes these movements were in direct opposition to the control of campuses by incumbent party student groups. In 1999 e.g. there were large-scale protests against sexual harassment by BCL activists which started at Jahangirnagar University, just outside Dhaka. The same year saw large anti-BCL protests at the Bangladesh University of Technology and Engineering (BUET) where a female student was killed in the crossfire between rival BCL groups.

Recent years saw a clear-cut resurgence of this more activist oriented form of student movements. These however do not replace the party-based student politics, but often has a rather uneasy relation to it. Movements which are generated outside of party politics are often viewed with suspicion and the party in power tries either to co-opt such movements or (violently) suppress them.

The Shahbag movement of 2013 saw many students protesting what they considered to be lenient sentences for war crimes for Jamaat-e-Islami leader Abdul Quader Mollah – who was later sentenced to death, at least partly because of the protests.

However, AL was able to co-opt the Shahbag movement also because its causes conformed to AL's pro-liberation and secular ideological identity.

Even more recently, the Quota Reform Movement of 2018 protested the quotas in government services (e.g., for freedom fighters and their children). This movement was key for university students as many vie for coveted government jobs after graduating. Processions were undertaken throughout Bangladesh's university cities. While the movement initially enjoyed widespread support amongst AL-affiliated BCL leaders, AL was not able to co-opt the movement. Fearing the movement would be used by the opposition to challenge AL rule, the party eventually used BCL cadres to attack the processions in an effort to violently suppress the movement.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina as well initially seemed to heed the call of the movement by proclaiming to abolish all quota in March 2018, which is a good indicator for how seriously student movements are still taken in politics in Bangladesh. However, following the initially "successful" crackdown by BCL she has since backtracked. A similar thing happened with the July-August 2018 Road Safety Protests.

While the quota reform movement did not reach its goals at the time, it has had tangible effects. The most important of which was the election of Quota Reform Movement leader Nurul Haq Nur as Vice President, the highest post, of DUCSU. The March 2019 DUCSU elections were important in itself as they were the first to be held since the 1990 elections.

It remains to be seen how AL will confront these policy-based student movements in the future. The Shahbag movement was fairly easily coopted, given joint interests between the protesters and AL. The Quota Reform Movement and the Road Safety Protest saw at the same time harsh repression—often meted out by BCL cadres—and (backtracked) statements of Sheikh Hasina which seemed to show at least a willingness to respond to the demands of the protesters. For some BCL respondents, the election of Nurul Haq Nur for DUCSU, showed the openness of AL and BCL to work together with their critics. Given the historical participation of students in policy and resistance movements, the AL leadership will have to devise strategies to work together or defuse student movements, if it wants to continue in power. Thereby following a common saying in Bangladesh: "To control the country one needs to control the students."¹¹

¹¹ Desh shaashon korte hoile chhatro der niyontron korte hobey.

3. Quantitative evidence of student violence

Before turning to the results of the qualitative research, we want to contextualize our findings by providing the longer-term political violence context. Student organizations have been involved in over a quarter of all political violence in the 1991-2018 period. If we look at the specific organizations involved (table 3), BCL was most involved in violence (17,9 per cent). JCD register a much lower share at just over 10 per cent. ICS only accounts for about 5 per cent. However, ICS is the most active of all the Islamist organizations. What also is clear is that violence by these organizations is relatively non-lethal, as they all register (much) lower shares for lethal casualties than you would expect when looking at their overall share in violent events.

TABLE 3: SHARE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE BY ORGANIZATION (1991-2018)

	Events	Wounded	Casualties
Awami League	30,2%	37,7%	22,3%
BNP	25,2%	34,3%	15,6%
Law enforcement agency	18,0%	30,6%	33,1%
BCL	17,9%	14,7%	10,0%
JCD	11,5%	10,5%	6,0%
Criminal	10,8%	2,3%	21,2%
BNP centred alliance of actors	9,7%	9,7%	5,3%
ICS	5,2%	5,8%	3,8%
Jubo League	4,9%	3,0%	7,1%
Awami League centred alliance of actors	3,4%	7,2%	2,7%
Jamaat-e-Islami centred alliance of actors	3,2%	2,8%	4,8%
Jamaat-e-Islami	2,1%	2,8%	2,0%
Insurgent Islamist group	0,8%	1,6%	4,7%

Figure 2 provides an overview of single events of student and campus violence in the 1991-2018 period. We can see that 2013 clearly formed a peak in student violence, with many Islamist student organizations involved. 2013 was the most violent year in Bangladesh since 1991. It was not only a pre-electoral year, but Jamaat-e-Islami also organized protests against the conviction of key members of its leadership in the War Crime Tribunals, and security forces cracked down on Jamaat-e-Islami in different parts of the country. Moreover, the year saw large-scale protests organized by the Islamist Hefazat-e-Islam (HeI), demanding the enactment of a blasphemy law, followed again by a crackdown by state security forces. The amendment of the constitution to abolish the caretaker government system also led to protests, although scuffles about the caretaker government system have been part of many elections. Electoral years thus in general (1996, 2001, 2006, 2013 and 2018) tend to see a rise in (violent) student activity.

Figure 2 also clearly shows that students are often much more active off than on campus. In election years the difference between campus violence and student violence more in general seems to be greatest.

While the initial post-Ershad period did not see very high levels of student violence, it was in this period by far the most important form of political violence, registering between 53 per cent and 61 per cent of all violence in the 1991-1994 period. The last few years see a reverse trend with both 2015 and 2016 registering the lowest percentages of student violence in the whole 1991-2018 period at around 13 per cent.

The drop in violence in 2007-8 (figure 2) was the direct result of the military-backed caretaker government ban on party-political activity. What this period shows is that political violence can be controlled, if there is a concerted effort at the centre to do so. Of course, in 2007-8 this was not done by a democratically elected government.

Table 4 and 5 respectively present the percentage of violent incidents in which each of the three most important student organizations BCL, JCD and ICS participated under each government.

Perhaps most interesting is the way in which the student organization of the ruling party reports higher shares than its rival(s) for all three indicators. This became more pronounced after the first, Khaleda I, government (1991-96).

What is also important is not only the overall decline of the percentage of student violence compared with other kinds of violence, but the increasing marginalization of opposition student groups, certainly under the last Hasina III government (2014-2018), where both JCD and ICS have been totally/completely marginalized.

As our research shows violence tends to be a good indicator for overall political activity by and potency of a particular group, which means that during times of democratic competition levels of inter-party violence tend to be higher than during periods of authoritarian resurgence. In short, political violence, including student violence, between parties is a sign for existing democratic competition in Bangladesh, while the decline of violent activities of the opposition is an indicator for an authoritarian bent.¹²

Finally, we take a look at the Upazila data for student violence (Table 6). This disaggregated data makes it possible to get a better understanding of the role student violence plays at the local level, and certainly in university cities as Upazila boundaries overlap with the city corporation boundaries.

¹² Suykens, B. and J. Kuttig (2018) 'Violent democracy in Bangladesh', *Political Violence at a Glance*. Available online at: <https://politicalviolenceataglance.org/2018/02/14/violent-democracy-in-bangladesh/>

FIGURE 2: YEARLY EVENTS OF STUDENT/CAMPUS/TOTAL VIOLENCE (1991-2018)

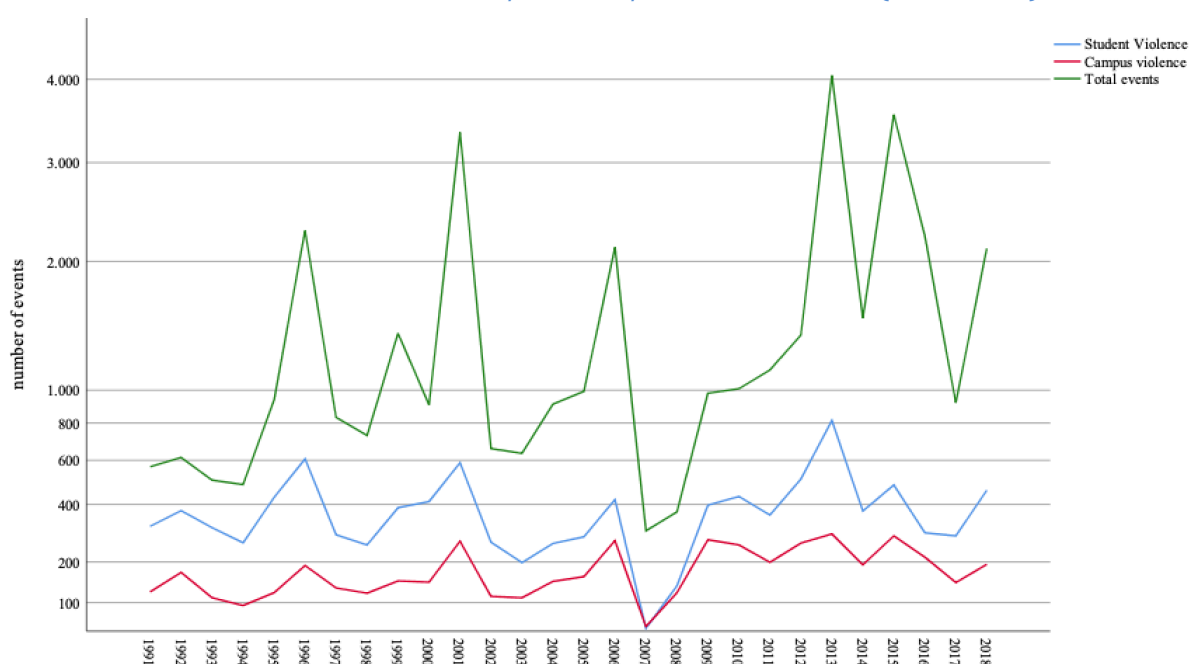


TABLE 4: SHARE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE BY PARTICULAR STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS AS OF TOTAL VIOLENCE UNDER DIFFERENT REGIMES (1991-2018)

	BNP government			AL government			Caretaker Government		
	BCL	JCD	ICS	BCL	JCD	ICS	BCL	JCD	ICS
Events	16,5%	24,1%	7,7%	19,1%	6,8%	4,6%	12,1%	10,1%	4,1%
Wounded	13,4%	19,8%	9,2%	16,7%	6,3%	4,9%	8,0%	7,1%	4,2%
Casualties	8,4%	13,2%	5,2%	10,4%	3,7%	3,6%	8,7%	6,0%	1,7%

TABLE 5: SHARE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE BY PARTICULAR STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS AS OF TOTAL VIOLENCE UNDER DIFFERENT GOVERNMENTS (1991-2018)

	Khaleda I			Hasina I			Khaleda II			Hasina II			Hasina III		
	BCL	JCD	ICS	BCL	JCD	ICS	BCL	JCD	ICS	BCL	JCD	ICS	BCL	JCD	ICS
Events	23,6%	27,4%	10,9%	26,2%	14,8%	4,9%	11,6%	21,8%	5,4%	20,0%	6,7%	7,2%	14,6%	2,6%	2,1%
Wounded	22,9%	25,4%	14,8%	20,6%	11,3%	5,5%	7,5%	16,3%	5,7%	14,8%	5,1%	6,0%	16,0%	2,8%	2,0%
Casualties	18,1%	24,2%	11,7%	23,4%	9,6%	4,9%	3,2%	7,4%	1,7%	8,2%	3,3%	5,7%	6,0%	1,4%	1,8%

As Table 6 shows, there is quite some variation in the role of student violence in particular towns. On one extreme we can find Rajshahi city, where almost 65 per cent of all violence includes student groups and almost half of all violence takes place on campuses. Hathazari is another extreme example, but this can be easily explained as this otherwise rural Upazila just north of Chittagong city is also the home of Chittagong University. A similar dynamic is playing out in Kushtia Upazila, the home of Khustia Islamic University, which saw large-scale violence, certainly in 2013. And again, this is also true for Savar on the outskirts of Dhaka, which has an industrial center, but is also home to Jahangirnagar University. In contrast to the city corporations where many other groups are engaged in political violence, in more rural locations like the ones mentioned above the universities really become the focal point of violence.

Chittagong city itself is also interesting, as almost half of all violence involved student groups, but here students mostly participated in violence off campus. In Sylhet, which in itself is not the most violent location, students also play a crucial role in the organization of local violence, with over sixty per cent of all violence involves student organizations.

(Public) Universities are a better indicator than colleges for high shares of student violence. Regional centers, like Bogra,

Gazipur or Narayanganj, which have important colleges, but no university see a lesser share of students in political violence. Khulna city to some extent shares this characteristic, as student politics is banned in Khulna University by the government (see section on Khulna) and student politics is organized around colleges.

TABLE 6: STUDENT/CAMPUS VIOLENCE IN UPAZILA/CITY CORPORATION (1991-2018)

	Campus violence	Student Violence
Dhaka city	20,7%	31,1%
Chittagong city	9,9%	44,4%
Rajshahi city	46,8%	64,0%
Narayanganj city	1,9%	18,8%
Sylhet city	27,7%	62,2%
Bogra sadar	11,6%	27,1%
Savar	48,4%	59,1%
Khulna city	16,3%	33,8%
Barisal city	23,5%	48,5%
Gazipur city	10,0%	27,3%
Sirajganj city	7,9%	26,8%
Kushtia sadar	31,2%	52,5%
Jessore sadar	9,1%	24,2%
Feni sadar	7,5%	33,1%
Lakshmipur sadar	8,2%	25,4%
Pabna sadar	10,5%	28,9%
Mymensingh sadar	32,9%	52,0%
Hathazari	58,8%	83,6%
Noakhali sadar	6,5%	29,2%
Munshiganj sadar	2,7%	12,1%

3.1. Student violence 2008-2018

Zooming in on the 2008-2018 period, we gain crucial insights into the latest developments in student violence. After the 2008 elections brought Awami League (AL) to power, AL has consolidated its position and has been able to win successive elections in 2014 and 2018. The period thus also saw

an unprecedented period of BCL dominance on campus, allowing it to extend this dominance even to JCD and ICS strongholds.

Figure 3 shows the number of events and wounded and lethal casualties for both student violence and overall political violence. It allows us to get a better sense of the general trends, also looking at the intensity of violence. 2008, which was still largely under the caretaker government saw less violence. 2013 was very violent for student groups. Also 2015 saw quite a lot of (lethal) student violence, as this year saw the struggle for consolidation of BCL rule. After this was achieved 2016 and 2017 saw markedly less events of political violence, before a slight resurgence in violence in the 2018 electoral year. Still, it was limited, certainly compared to other electoral years. In the case of Bangladesh violence is most intense when there are real, competitive elections.

The spatial distribution of violence (Table 7) confirms the overall trends we have discussed before, but the addition of data on wounded and lethal casualties allows us to get a better grip on the intensity of violence for the 2008-2018 period. While student violence has always been less lethal than other forms of violence, what the data shows is that there is an important spatial

dimension to this. In places like Dhaka, Savar, Kushtia and to a lesser extent Bogra, lethal casualties are markedly below expectations (when looking at the events data). In other places like Barisal, Rajshahi and Sylhet, student violence accounts for a very large percentage of lethal casualties. These percentages are however still lower than the percentage of the engagement of students in violent events in these localities.

What is also interesting in these latter cases is that when students engage in violence off campus, this leads to proportionally more lethal casualties. One factor that could explain this imbalance is that campuses are the site of more petty everyday inter- and intra-group violence – for example, over women, disrespectful behavior in front of a leader, or theft – while the city streets are more often the site of more impersonal large scale violent events occurring during *hartals* (general strike) or elections.

Table 8 allows us to understand the role that specific student groups play in violence in Upazila and university towns. It is clear that BCL is by far most active in violence and this in almost all locations. Particularly noteworthy are their dominance in Rajshahi, Sylhet, Savar, Hathazari and Kushtia.

FIGURE 3: EVENTS, WOUNDED AND LETHAL CASUALTIES OF STUDENT AND TOTAL POLITICAL VIOLENCE (2008-2018)

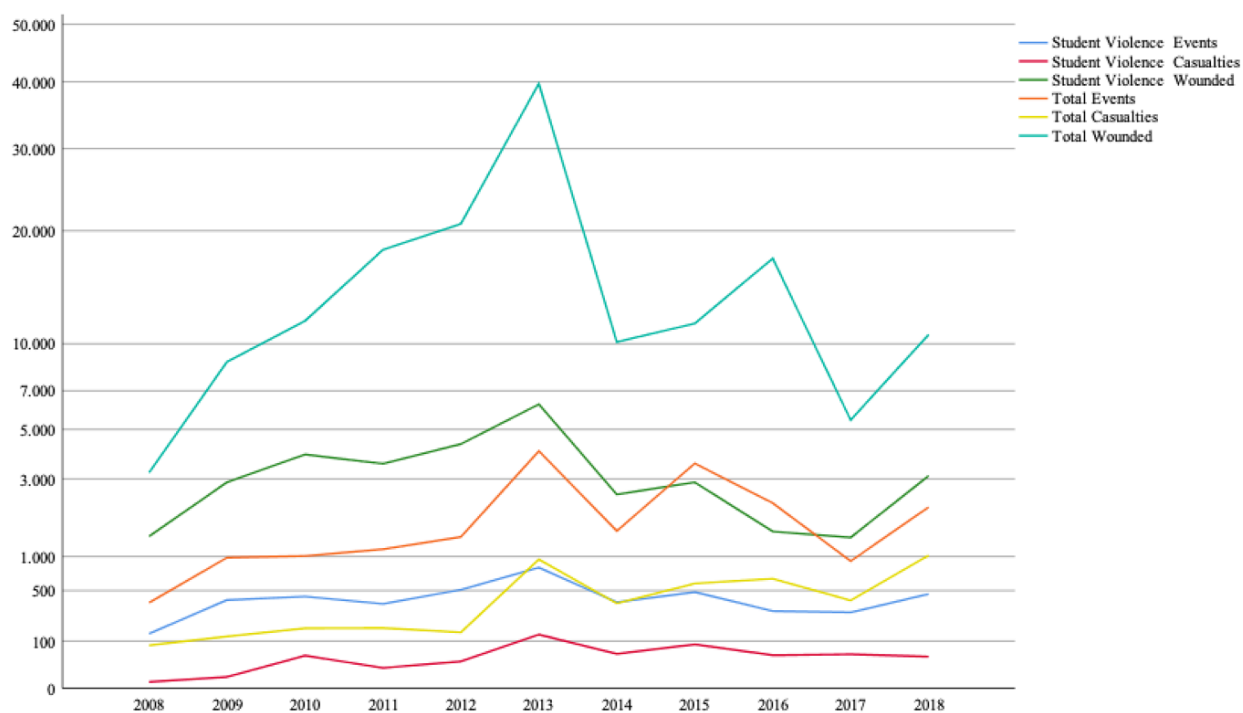


TABLE 7: SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENT/CAMPUS VIOLENCE (BY UPAZILA/CITY CORPORATION; 2008-2018)

	Campus violence			Student Violence		
	Events	Wounded	Casualties	Events	Wounded	Casualties
Dhaka	22,7%	23,3%	9,8%	35,1%	40,7%	15,2%
Rajshahi	49,7%	47,1%	24,6%	64,2%	65,2%	43,9%
Chittagong	11,0%	11,4%	3,4%	38,0%	41,0%	21,8%
Sylhet	29,9%	33,8%	16,9%	58,2%	58,4%	44,1%
Bogra	10,6%	16,5%	5,2%	18,2%	24,0%	6,5%
Savar	41,3%	43,4%	20,0%	53,1%	55,8%	8,6%
Narayanganj	2,2%	2,7%	0,0%	19,5%	15,8%	3,0%
Gazipur	8,2%	12,9%	4,3%	26,0%	42,4%	4,3%
Barisal	30,6%	29,9%	9,1%	47,7%	39,2%	45,5%
Lakshmipur	5,8%	4,8%	3,3%	19,9%	33,1%	13,0%
Jessore	7,4%	6,4%	3,3%	19,0%	33,4%	12,1%
Hathazari	56,2%	53,4%	32,1%	79,2%	72,6%	42,8%
Rupganj	55,4%	57,2%	34,8%	26,6%	30,9%	13,0%
Khulna	18,7%	29,0%	5,0%	41,5%	47,1%	25,0%
Noakhali	7,5%	6,1%	16,0%	20,1%	27,6%	20,0%
Kushtia	31,2%	41,3%	1,6%	49,7%	65,3%	4,8%

For the opposition JCD and ICS the picture is much more mixed. In Dhaka it is clear that opposition student groups are relatively weak, but in other places like Rajshahi or Khulna, opposition student groups continue to play a role. It is interesting that in many places the opposition group most engaged in violence is not JCD, but rather ICS, showing their importance on many university campuses.

In Kushtia, where the Islamic University is located, ICS records a surprisingly low share in violence, notwithstanding the 2013 violence about the war crime tribunals. This may partly be explained by ICS domination and the concurrent weakness of BCL's organizational capacity and lack of control on campus. ICS was only pushed out in 2017 by BCL with the help of the police.

Given the historical importance of ICS in Chittagong ICS's share in both Chittagong city corporation and Hathazari is also surprisingly low.

What is clear is that JCD seems to have very few true strongholds left, trailing BCL in all locations by a large margin and only making a mark in Khulna, Savar, Barisal and Sylhet.

The role of ICS becomes even more pronounced when we look at the role of factional violence. As is also true for their parent party JcI, ICS registers very low levels of factional violence (at less than 1 per cent of all its engagement in violence), while

violence within BCL and with other AL organizations accounts for more than a quarter of all their violent encounters and almost 15 per cent for JCD. This is even more pronounced in key university towns who all register higher shares of factional violence, with Dhaka, Chittagong (including Hathazari), and to a lesser extent Khulna seeing particularly higher shares of factional violence (Table 9).

TABLE 8: SHARE OF VIOLENCE (EVENTS) OF PARTICULAR STUDENT GROUP IN UPAZILA/CITY CORPORATION (2008-2018)

	BCL	JCD	ICS
Dhaka	25,6%	7,4%	4,4%
Rajshahi	47,4%	9,6%	20,9%
Chittagong	27,7%	3,1%	10,5%
Sylhet	42,6%	17,8%	11,6%
Bogra	13,9%	3,5%	5,6%
Savar	46,9%	14,2%	1,2%
Narayanganj	9,4%	3,2%	7,2%
Gazipur	18,8%	1,9%	8,2%
Barisal	38,3%	11,4%	3,6%
Lakshmipur	14,1%	5,8%	3,1%
Jessore	15,3%	2,6%	4,8%
Hathazari	75,8%	6,2%	12,4%
Rupganj	20,9%	5,6%	1,7%
Khulna	28,1%	11,1%	14,0%
Noakhali	7,5%	6,9%	7,5%
Kushtia	44,9%	11,5%	9,0%

TABLE 9: SHARE OF FACTIONAL VIOLENCE PER STUDENT GROUP IN UPAZILA/CITY CORPORATION (2008-2018)

	BCL	JCD
Dhaka	33,3%	12,7%
Rajshahi	21,5%	8,2%
Chittagong	38,7%	28,6%
Sylhet	21,5%	22,7%
Bogra	17,0%	0,0%
Savar	25,3%	10,4%
Narayanganj	30,8%	11,1%
Gazipur	23,1%	0,0%
Barisal	35,1%	9,1%
Lakshmipur	25,9%	9,1%
Jessore	17,2%	0,0%
Hathazari	31,1%	9,1%
Rupganj	35,1%	20,0%
Khulna	29,2%	5,3%
Noakhali	58,3%	18,2%
Kushtia	21,4%	5,6%

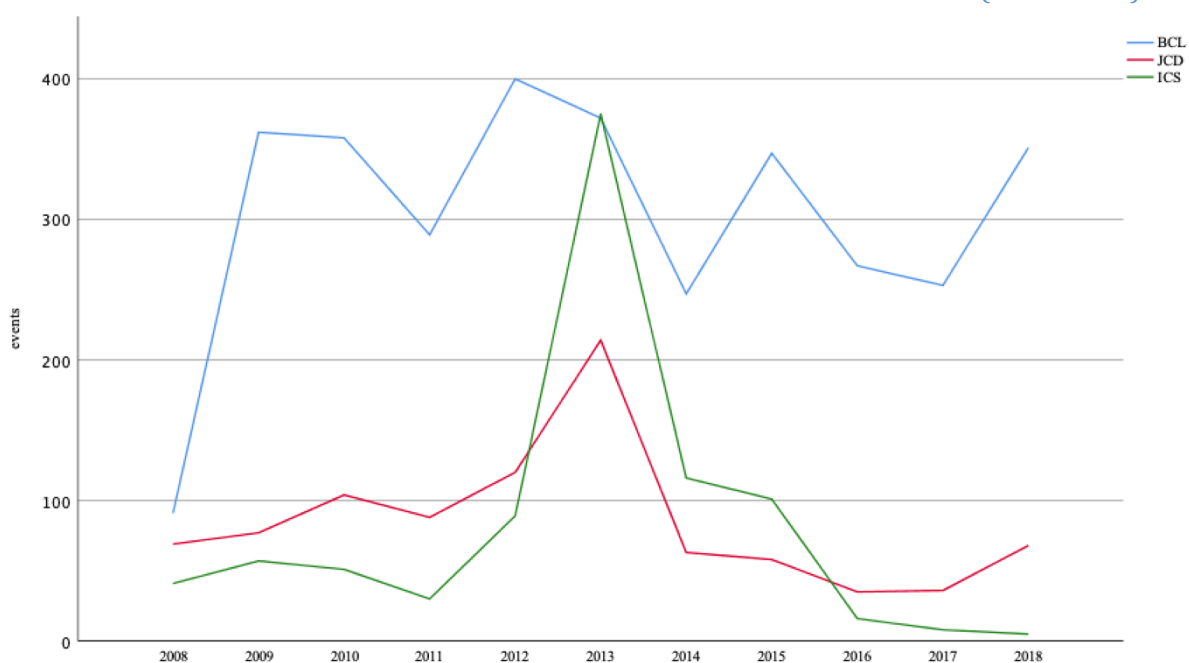
In some key university towns like Chittagong and Sylhet, JCD records a substantial share of

factional violence. This is surprising as they are in opposition and thus, normally less engaged in factional fighting. One would rather expect JCD to violently engage BCL and AL or state security forces.

If we take a look at the evolution of BCL, JCD and ICS violence throughout the 2008-2018 period (Figure 4), we can see that apart from a resurgence in 2013 both ICS and JCD have become gradually less engaged in violence, and thus marginalized. The peak in violence in 2013 is particularly pronounced for ICS. Afterwards ICS' share dropped to almost zero in 2008.

BCL violence has remained fairly constant throughout the period, with very few spikes in violence.

FIGURE 4: PARTICIPATION IN INSTANCES OF VIOLENCE BY STUDENT GROUP (2008-2018)



4. Case Studies

The case studies, which are primarily based on qualitative research – stemming from interview responses – shed light on the functioning of student politics in the different localities and the role of violence therein. While we stress the distinctions between each case, and the way that the local context is indeed important to understand the specific operation of student politics, there are a number of common features we want to stress before turning to the different cases.

A first important element is factionalism. This is particularly true for the student wing of the party in power, in this case BCL. While many student activists think of themselves in opposition to their rivals in JCD and ICS, in reality many of their everyday political struggles are with other BCL activist. This factionalism is present in student halls, on campuses, but also in relation to local or national political leaders.

Secondly, student halls are the main organizing unit in campus politics. Halls are the university dormitories. They form the main basis of recruitment and a major inducement – in the form of free lodging – for people to join student politics. The way students control seats in student halls (and common rooms) is considered a basic feature of all residential universities. Halls also give more senior student politicians

basic access to manpower, in the form of first-year students who are incentivized or forced to join protests, processions and other programs organized to show the individual capacity of student politicians to organize manpower

Thirdly, student politicians should not be considered as independent actors, but rather as

embedded into local, regional and national political networks. These networks often bring mutual

“City politicians always try to control the campus. [I]t is better to follow or take shelter from city politicians. I have worked many times [during] city elections. They always call on us for political functions. [B]oth are beneficiaries (BCL activist, SUST, Sylhet).”

benefits. Students receive patronage and shelter from city politicians and students work for them in elections, and when there is a need to organize processions. Some activists did not consider this influence beneficial, as city leaders would fight out their political quarrels by proxy, by inciting factional fights on campus.

Fourth, personal connections are very important. Many, if not most of the student activists interviewed of BCL and JCD have family members who were or are also active in (student) politics. This gives them not only “education” in politics, but also already direct access to political party patrons, through their family relations. Student activists without this political family background often face more difficulties in establishing a position for themselves.

Fifth, violence remains a dominant feature on university campuses, and the main tool to settle power-struggles. As mentioned before, many incidents are or start relatively small around petty issues. It is a central feature of factional struggles, but at least on some campus’, violence between BCL and ICS has been particularly vicious. Certainly after 2014, BCL made a push to eliminate ICS from campuses.

Party leaders are considered capable of ensuring peace on campus, or inciting student violence. In Khulna, for example, the mayor was seen as the key person to settle factional student disputes peacefully, although others saw this as maybe only a temporary stalemate.

Finally, the 2019 DUCSU elections have shown the gendered nature of student politics and violence. Not only are most student activist’s men, women are often only allowed to play a secondary role. Informal

norms seem to limit violence against women (politicians,)

and/but attacks on women during the Quota Reform movement were cited as a

“The boys who do politics, they become really aggressive sometimes. That’s why general students don’t like them. But females who do politics, they don’t become aggressive. That’s why girls are more popular (BCL activist, DU).”

disturbing departure from this norm. Women were often thought to integrate better with general students, who would often shy away from masculinist and violent student politics. Female halls also mostly do not have seat politics. In the DUCSU elections this was one of the key reasons enabling them to vote for independent candidates.

4.1. Dhaka: The center of (student) politics

The capital Dhaka with a population of roughly 20 million is by far the largest city in Bangladesh and the nucleus of a highly centralized political system. Similarly, DU, has always been at the center of student politics. It is important to note that Dhaka is home to many other private and public higher educational institutions. But due to its historical and contemporary importance this report will focus foremost on DU student politics.

DU, established in the colonial period in 1921, is the oldest university in Bangladesh with a student body of approximately 38.000

students. DU and its students have been at the center of all major movements contributing to a Bengali/Bangladeshi sense of identity and the end of military autocracy in 1991. Alumnae of DU include figures such as the country's founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and 2006 Nobel Peace Prize laureate and founder of Grameen Bank Muhammad Yunus.

Today, DU remains at the center of partisan as well as non-partisan student politics as well as the forefront of all major student movements. DU thus provides a model for the ruling party's student wing, whose activities and organizational structure are often reproduced (or at least attempted) by respective committees in higher educational institutions across the country.

DU's nationwide importance in student politics is corroborated further by the prominent position of its leaders. The large majority of members of the BCL central committee, for example, are DU students. The president and general secretary of central BCL have always been selected from the DU BCL committee. And many high-ranking AL leaders, such as current general secretary Obaidul Quader, and MP and member of the AL council Tofail Ahmed, have a history in DU based student politics. DU is thus considered the main breeding ground for future national level politicians.

The organization and mobilization capacity of the incumbent student wing is key to ensure absolute control on campus. Opposition student organizations are traditionally less visibly active at DU than at other educational institutions in the country. Only when the organizational structures of the ruling parties' student wing are underdeveloped, do opposition activities and claims over campus control become more visible. This is particularly true for ICS, whose leadership never had a strong hold over DU but is more active in places such as Chittagong, Rajshahi, Sylhet and others.

As student organizations' main source of power is their mobilization capacity, the control over male halls marks the backbone of their organizational capacity and political influence. At DU, control over student halls and the organizational structure of the ruling party's student wing is strong. As previously mentioned, the reactivation of the DU Central Students' Union (DUCSU) with the election in March 2019 has influenced the political landscape of the campus and might have effects on student politics in other parts of the country.

4.1.1 City politics in Dhaka

Compared to other cases in this report, city politics and city politicians have a very limited impact on DU student politics. Instead, DU politics is dominated by national level political events and leaders. Recent popular national level movements – like the

Quota Reform Movement or Road Safety movement and the concomitant, violent street agitations – took center stage at DU and its surrounding areas.

Student leaders at DU depend on the recommendation of important central party

“Connections to the central party leaders are important. [...] Recommendation is a big factor; you have to be noticed by them. This connection with the mother party is very important for power politics (BCL activist, DU).”

leaders on the other hand maintain patronage relations with student leaders to further their own influence in the party. While ideological commitment can be one driver of student political participation monetary inducements, provision of facilities, favoritism, and access to government jobs or business opportunities also play a role.

The constitutions of both BCL and JCD theoretically provide for an electoral process to fill leadership positions and form committees. However, it has become common practice that leaders are *selected* in complicated lobbying events based on a

multitude of factors¹³. Especially in the case of DU, the recommendations by national level, rather than city-level party leaders are vital for student leaders to be selected.

The *Madhur Canteen* on the DU campus is the symbolic and (unofficial) operational headquarters of the ruling party’s student wing. It is here where the central leaders and DU leaders of BCL come to meet with activists, followers and other party leaders. The *Modhur Canteen* was established together with the University in 1921 and adjacent to the DUCSU office marked the starting point of various critical political movements in the history of the country (e.g., the 1948-52 Language Movement and 1969-71 Bangladesh Liberation Movement). Today the central and DU leaders of BCL organize important meetings and press conferences in and around the canteen. Activists and leaders from all levels and regions come there to meet with them and show their support and manpower. Not only students frequent the canteen, but also the upper echelons of the ruling party and the government, including MPs and Ministers.

4.1.2 Data on student violence in Dhaka

As mentioned above, Dhaka remains the single most violent location in Bangladesh, not surprisingly given its large population

¹³ Kuttig, J. (2019) ‘Urban political machines and student politics in “middle” Bangladesh: violent party labor in Rajshahi city’, *Critical Asian Studies*, Vol. 51 (3), pp. 403-418.

and its position as the center of national politics.

Figure 5 shows both violence happening on campus and student violence more in general. It is clear that student violence has maintained a continuous presence throughout the period under review. Student violence spiked in election years, when students also engaged in violence off campus. While students always have engaged in violence off campus 2018 was an extreme example, with very high levels of student violence and low levels of campus violence. This suggests that in the last electoral year student forces were primarily deployed off campus, which could be a worrying trend.

BCL has participated in most violent events in the city in the last ten years (see Table 10). However, while this violence has led to many wounded, only about ten percent of all lethal casualties are recorded in violence in which BCL participates.

Given the full control of BCL in Dhaka and given that violence is a sign of a relative political openness in Bangladesh, it is not surprising that JCD and ICS are fairly marginal in Dhaka violence. Given that Dhaka student politics is deeply intertwined with national politics, space for the opposition to operate on and around campuses is highly limited.

FIGURE 5: EVENTS OF STUDENT/CAMPUS/TOTAL VIOLENCE IN DHAKA CITY (1991-2018)

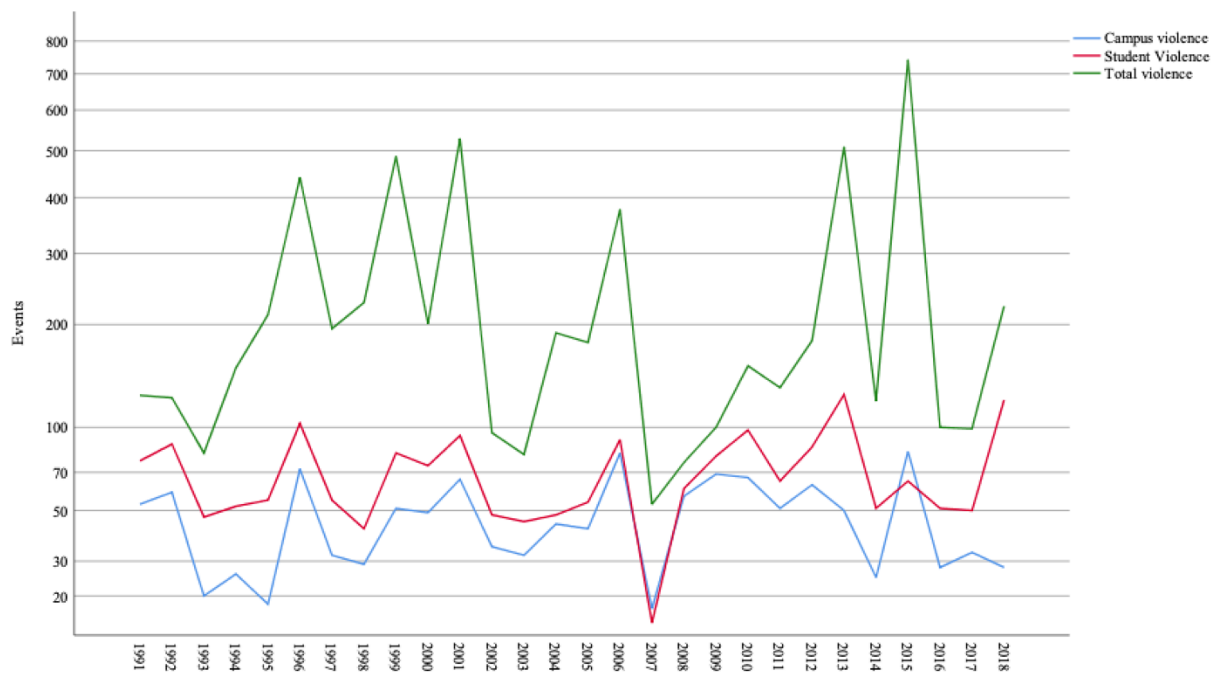


TABLE 10: SHARE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE BY ORGANIZATIONS IN DHAKA CITY (2008-2018)

	Events	Wounded	Casualties
BCL	25,6%	30,5%	11,3%
Civilian/non-participant	25,6%	9,5%	20,2%
Law enforcement agency	22,7%	54,5%	56,8%
BNP centred alliance of actors	18,8%	6,7%	3,4%
Criminal (known)	18,6%	4,6%	23,3%
Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	8,8%	20,6%	4,2%
JCD	7,4%	6,5%	1,8%
Awami League	7,2%	9,3%	10,7%
Jamaat-e-Islami centred alliance of actors	5,1%	6,0%	3,1%
ICS	4,4%	3,8%	2,4%
Jubo League	3,4%	2,5%	6,3%
Insurgent islamist group	2,7%	5,1%	32,2%
Jamaat-e-Islami	1,2%	2,6%	0,8%

Figure 6 below shows that the dominance of BCL, certainly in relation to JCD, is of relatively recent nature. Throughout the 1990s and in the BNP dominated early 2000s, JCD matched, and in 2002-2006 superseded, BCL violence. It is only after 2008 that we see an extreme discrepancy between BCL and JCD, with BCL engagement in (factional) violence reaching a high. It is clear that ICS always was more marginal in Dhaka, where the rivalry between BCL and JCD as well as factional violence within these two parties dominated. The main exception is 2013, when ICS threw its full weight behind the anti-War Crimes Tribunal protests.

Finally, it is also clear that in Dhaka, factional violence takes a large share in the violence of student groups, and sometimes at higher rates than inter-party violence (Figure 7). Factional infighting has grown in strength since 1991, with the ruling party student group being ever more prone to factional infighting. This was at its peak in 2002 for JCD. However, after BNP has lost power at the national level, factional violence has been steadily decreasing. For BCL, factional violence increased since 2008, regularly being more important than non-factional violence.

4.1.3 Student politics at Dhaka University

While the *Modhur Canteen* can be identified as the main meeting place for student leaders of the ruling party's student wing, it is the student halls where everyday politicking and recruitment of activists takes place. The following section on "political graduation" outlines generically the mechanisms at play in what is commonly referred to as *seat* or *hall politics*, which, most pronounced in Dhaka, is central for understanding student politics elsewhere in the country. Furthermore, the section will outline the generic organizational structure of the major party student wings.

FIGURE 6: PARTICIPATION IN VIOLENT EVENTS BY PARTICULAR STUDENT GROUPS IN DHAKA CITY (1991-2018)

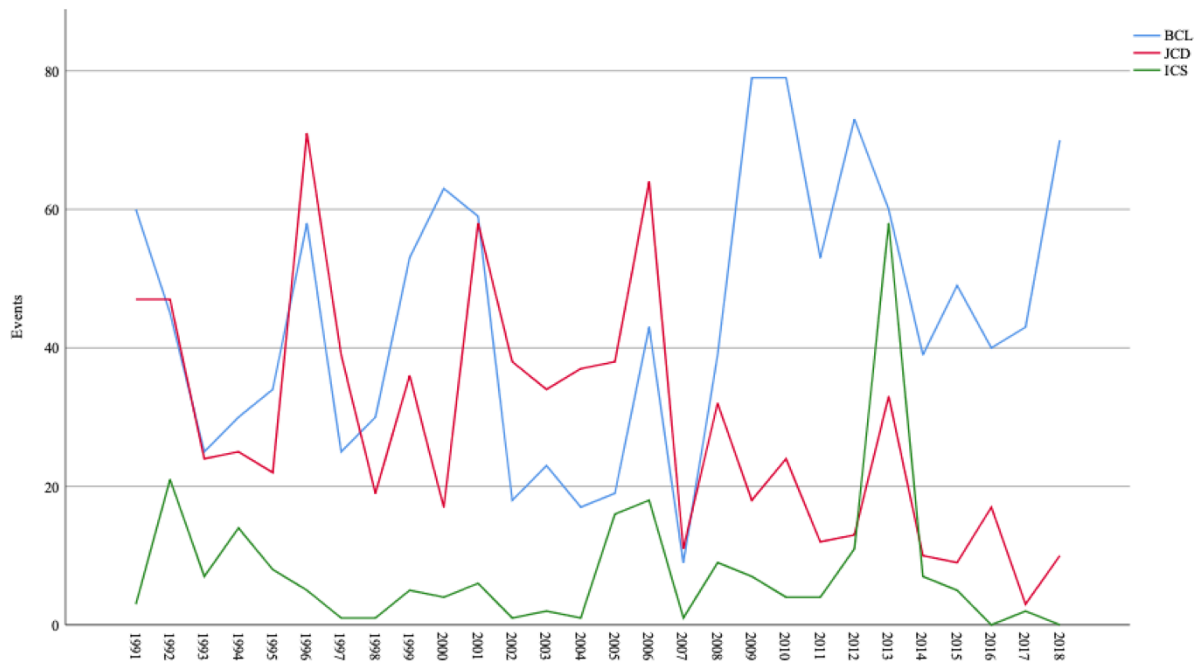
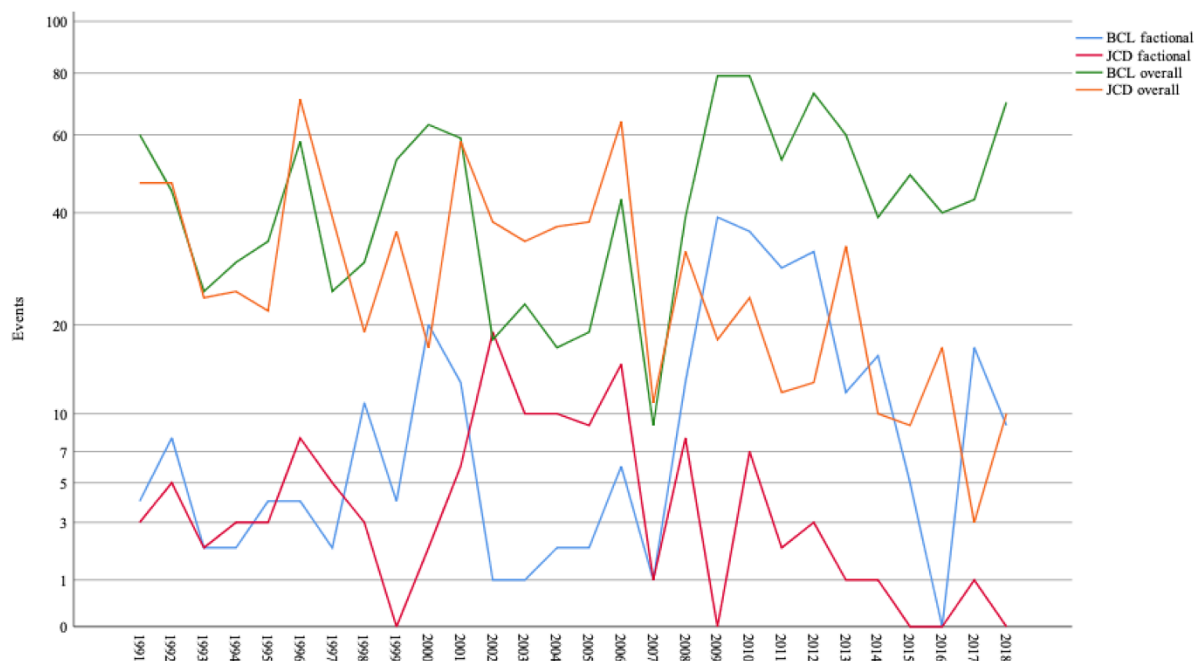


FIGURE 7: SHARE OF FACTIONAL VIOLENCE BY YEAR BY PARTICULAR STUDENT GROUPS IN DHAKA CITY (1991-2018)



4.1.3.1 Political graduation

Apart from following their academic duties, male students at DU are forced to follow a parallel system, which Aynul Islam and Mehedi Hasan Babu coined “political graduation”. It starts from the day of admission and lasts until the end of academic life.

Here “political graduation” refers to the process by which (general) students are recruited as activists and (potentially) ascend to become leaders. In principle the same process is in place under AL as well as BNP rule. The ruling party’s student wing takes over the student halls and introduces the system in their favor, especially by engaging in so-called ‘seat-politics’. Seat politics means that a place/bed to sleep in the hall is made contingent on participation in the ruling parties student wing activities. Since AL has been in power for the past 10 years, BCL controls all the male halls at DU. Each hall is run by a BCL committee led by a president and general secretary. These committees are subordinated to the University level committee, which in turn is subordinated to the central BCL committee (Figure 8).

As figure 8 shows, university committees are on the same hierarchy level as district and city corporation committees. While this also applies theoretically to DU, in practice DU *de facto* outranks all other committees and is only subordinated to the central committee.

At some universities BCL has formed faculty and department committees to create more positions for activists. The hall committee president and general secretary, however, are usually more powerful as they have a larger mobilization capacity. This also applies to colleges that are either subordinated to the district or city committees. The hierarchical relationship between college committees and *upazila* (subdistrict) committees (district) or *thana* (police station) committees (city) depends on the local power structures and leadership as well as the size and importance of the colleges as well as the seniority of its students. In Bangladesh there are four different kinds of colleges: 1. only 11-12th grade (College B); 2. 11-12th grade and honor’s (undergraduate) programs (College A or B); 3. only honor’s and master’s programs (College A); 4. both 11-12th grade, honor’s and master’s programs (College A). College types 2, 3 and 4 are commonly administratively attached to the National University Bangladesh.

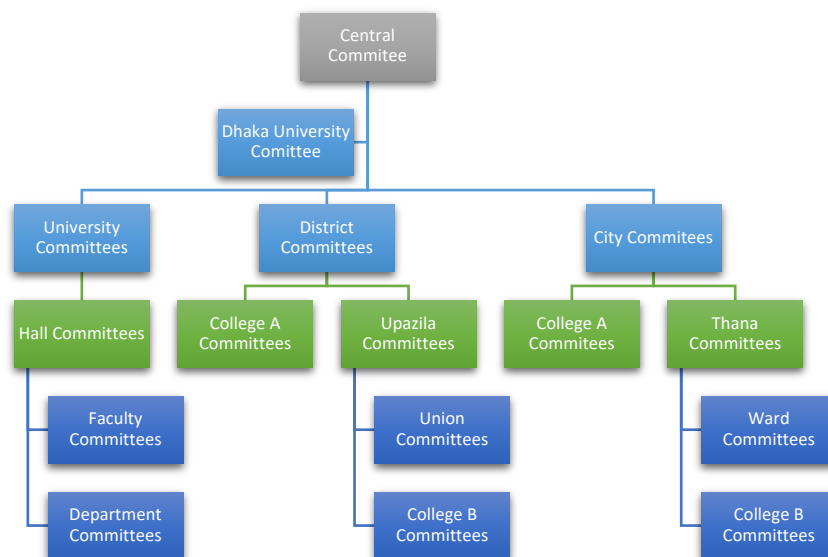
Officially, student recruitment and committees start only from 11th grade, but there is evidence that school children are recruited as activists and participate in political activities such as processions at a much earlier age. In districts, the union level committees are subordinated to the *upazila* committees and in the city the ward level

committees are subordinated to the *thana*¹⁴ committees. In some places, such as Rajshahi for example, BCL split some bigger wards into two separate committees to accommodate more activists. However, it is important to note that full-fledged committees do not necessarily exist everywhere and can also depend on local party leaders' influence and organizational capacity, which in turn signals their value to the party and influences his/her career possibilities. Furthermore, student wing committees only exist officially in public educational institutions, but our research suggests that the ruling party's student wing attempts to establish committees in private educational institutions as well. In the cases this is known to us, these committees seem to not actively engage in politics on campus as compared to public institutions, but rather

serve local party leaders as sources of mobilization.

The president and general secretary are the key positions in each committee as they appoint the other committee members. Committee sizes vary between a few dozen to several hundred members. The ruling party usually is able to recruit many more members as well as organize committees than the opposition. Positions in these committees range from vice president, joint secretary and organizational secretary to *inter alia* sports secretary or communications secretary. While there are also hierarchies between these positions, they often don't have specifically defined responsibilities beyond supporting/obeying their respective leaders. The actual decision-making positions are president and general secretary.

FIGURE 8: HIERARCHIES IN PARTY STUDENT WING ORGANIZATION



¹⁴ Neighborhood, associated with the jurisdiction of a police station (thana), comprising of multiple wards.

Formally, the president and general secretary of the center, university, district or city are elected on so-called BCL councils. But in recent decades, this process, as we will show below, has become a selection process based on political lobbying that also guides the actions of individual student politicians. Formally, the central president and general secretary have to provide the official signature for the appointment of university, district and city president and general secretary. However, their decision is influenced by local or national level leaders, depending on the respective power structures.¹⁵

When a student is admitted into DU, he¹⁶ is assigned a specific hall. However, there is a shortage of space or *seats* in the halls. As a result, students, especially from rural and impoverished backgrounds who can't afford the high rents outside the campus and have no family in the city, are bound to stay in the inexpensive university halls if they seek to pursue their studies. Each hall is divided into several blocks or factions, led by different (regional) leaders who control the room allocation. The allotment is either based on previous affiliation to a leader or the home region, making halls regional powerhouses. Apart from some new halls and the female hall, the university administration has almost no control over the allocation of seats.

In every hall four to five rooms are used as so-called *ganarooms* to lodge more students and to thus strengthen the mobilization capacity of the party more in general and the specific faction more in particular. In these *ganarooms* 20-40

“We were staying [sleeping] in the games room of the hall. Normally, a thousand students can be housed in the hall but now it has increased to 3200. When a boy comes from the village to Dhaka University, he has to learn the [proper] behavior. That is why the guest room is so important (General student/hall resident, DU).”

students live together under severely cramped conditions in a room that is otherwise designed for a maximum of six to eight students. In some larger halls the student leaders use big hall rooms as *ganarooms* in which they house more than 200 students. In smaller halls balconies are also used as *ganarooms*. As these balconies are commonly secured with iron grilles, students often refer to these poor sleeping arrangements as prison. First and second year students predominately occupy the *ganarooms* while other rooms in the hall are reserved for senior students who have showed satisfactory political performance in their first two years. Some students remain in the hall who participated in political activities in their first years, but now simply

¹⁵ For a more detailed account of these selection processes see J. Kuttig (2019).

¹⁶ As previously mentioned, seat or hall-based student politics is almost exclusively pertaining to male halls.

focus on their studies and are not politically active.

In every hall there is also a room for visitors, which is known as a *guest room*. Though the *guest room* indicates a specific room, it is synonymously used to refer to a specific activity. Usually after 10:00 pm the different groups or blocks of BCL gather either in this *guest room*, another large room or a *ganaroom*.

The main purpose of the *guest room* is to establish authority and to manage and control the new students. Here first-year students are introduced to the rules or political culture in the halls and on campus. They learn how to behave respectfully in

front of senior leaders and are introduced to the various political activities that they are expected to participate in if they want to stay in the

“My role model is Hitler. I also support extreme nationalism. Suppose Israel is my country and I am controlling South Asia. I would also want this for Bangladesh. Hitler did everything for his nation, this inspires me. That is why he is my role model since my childhood (BCL activist, DU).”

ganaroom or become eligible for better accommodation. Senior students monitor everyday activities. In these *guest rooms* first year students receive feedback, which can include scolding, threats, and physical

punishment. It is here where the students are indoctrinated with the party ideology, which in case of both AL and BNP includes radical nationalism, the heroic struggle for independence and leadership cult. It is also here where they start to develop their first ideas about a certain leadership style, which is continuously reproduced in the political context of Bangladesh manifesting a certain political culture in Bangladesh, which we elaborate on throughout the report.

Before big events, such as large processions or commemoration events students are expected to participate in, these *guest rooms* are also used for preparation. Babu and Islam thus suggest that *guest rooms* can be regarded as small training institutes in which students are forced to learn and practice student politics necessary for potentially becoming a political leader in the future.

As mentioned above, at DU the blocks in the halls are formed based on regional connections. Newcomers can find phone numbers of regional or block leaders on posters all over the campus during the admission period. New students would call the number of the block of their home region to receive help finding accommodation in a hall. Every block/region has their respective leader. The main block leader is usually followed by three or more leaders, mostly master level students, who are regarded as second in command of that block. Under these leaders there are forth and third year

students who control the first- and second-year students.

The president and general secretary of a hall are usually selected from the blocks in a negotiation process, which includes the leadership of central and DU committee to ensure a more or less equal share of influence on campus. As a result, there are at least four factions on campus, the president factions of the DU and central committee as well as the two general secretary factions of the DU and central committee. The hall president and general secretary are selected based on various factors such as regional importance, personal connection to university and central committee as well as the mother party, block size and control over the hall etc. Theoretically the president is the head of the committee but in practice the president and general secretary share equal importance and their rivalry is often the basis of factional infighting.

The introduction to violence is one of the main practical lessons for first year students. One of the core rules is to beat up students from other halls, rather than being beaten up by them. The leadership in a hall motivates and encourages engaging in violence by depicting it as an act of bravery, power and individual show of strength. Apart from inter-party clashes/violence, which have been rare at DU in the past decade due to BCL's strong hold over the campus, the second-year students, usually initiate other

conflicts on and off campus. Second year students are in-charge of the first-year students. They use them for personal reasons such as beating up shopkeepers who refuse to serve them for free, or serve them late, as well as beating up fellow students who disobey them. They are also used for intimidating or vandalizing roadside shops for extortion. On campus these student groups are often seen rushing to the nearby market areas like Shahbag, New Market, Nilkhet, or Chankharpool to fight for their seniors when they have created a conflict with the local shopkeepers or the general public.

Sometimes first year students are sent to parks on or near the campus to beat up or intimidate outsiders and harass couples. If orders are not obeyed or certain students are not as active in these exercises, senior leaders order their own group mates to beat them up as punishment. In the past, before the e-tender process was introduced, these student groups went to government offices to use their manpower to capture tender boxes and prevent rival bids from being dropped on behalf of senior leaders.

Students who participate in such events with dedication are considered as brave and loyal. Whoever leads the violent clash is regarded as powerful and a potential leader in the future, also referred to as "cadre". Senior cadres provide these prospects with special

training, including the use of firearms and making crude bombs (IEDs).

As a cadre activist they participate less in the everyday activities and events. Instead, they are expected to be at the forefront during major violent clashes. In return they receive much earlier better accommodation in the halls than their peers. In their rooms one can commonly find steel pipes, bamboo sticks, large daggers, knives, and sometimes even crude bombs or firearms.

Cadre activists also serve the top-level

“Giving protocol is an important factor now-a-day. If a central leader goes somewhere, providing him transport, staying or walking beside him is very effective for getting post-positions (BCL activist, DU).”

leaders as bodyguards, also called “giving protocol”, during crowded events or motorcade

rallies, also called “showdowns”, which are used by factions to physically show their presence in a certain territory and perform strength. To give “protocol”, however, does not only mean to provide protection but it can also mean to keep a senior leader company signaling his importance and boosting his public performance. The cadres either own or are given motorbikes to drive the leaders around or sit in the back to provide protocol. Cadres, however, are not the only ones “giving protocol” to the top leaders, ambitious candidates aiming for

higher level positions regularly accompany and seek proximity, especially in public, to higher level leaders. A practice mimicked from their role models from the mother party, which is reproduced in student politics maintain a certain political culture.

To sum up, in their first-year students are forced to become accustomed to violence and are trained to be aggressive and participate in various political activities such as party procession and commemorations. As first year students are the main strength of the ruling party in terms of manpower, building their capacity for violence and street politics is key to suppress dissent, demands or movements from general students or other political parties and to ensure hegemonic control over the public space.

The most active and loyal second year students are invited to oversee the *guest room* and teach first year students what they learned in the first year. They are also the main recruiters of new block members. As part of their duties, politically ambitious students are already looking to create their own group.

Third- and fourth-year cadres are considered rising leaders of groups and blocks. The number of active members also lessens in these years. Ambitious activists maintain close connections with their hall leaders, university level leaders as well as

central leaders. They increasingly pass their time in the *Modhur Canteen*. There they become familiar to the university and central level leaders and start to create networks. They are often assigned to leadership positions where they have to arrange manpower for events and everyday protocol for top leaders. They are also considered as middlemen in their blocks, as they are the link between junior level activists and senior level leaders. For both levels they are the main contact persons to help resolve any sort of issues in the block. In return, they are usually entitled to single or double room facilities. At this stage, the number of active leaders is again gradually declining.

The master level students that remain active politicians form their own blocks and try to assume top leadership positions. Currently the common discourse posits that past activities or sacrifices made for the party are less important than personal connections with top-level leaders to become hall, university or central president/general secretary. Potential candidates are usually busy providing protocol to central leaders. They also keep connections with the university administration and Detective Branch¹⁷. The Detective Branch is in charge of preparing reports on the activities of different leaders for the central party leadership. A positive report is crucial for

assuming a central leadership position in the student wing. Besides patronage relationships and dedication to the party, family background is also considered in the selection process for the top positions. The top leaders have good chances to continue their political career within the party after their student life. Many student leaders at this level have to make the trade-off between academic excellence and following a time-consuming political career during their student life. Those who fail to reach the top leadership positions are thus often offered privileged access to government jobs or business opportunities.

The student wing of the ruling party plays a vital role in recruitment and training of new activists and future leaders to serve the party as armed labor. The importance given to the students was illustrated when Prime Minister and AL chairperson Sheikh Hasina took back control over the selection process for the 2018 central BCL council after she has left that to other leaders in 2009. This time she personally interviewed and appointed the central BCL president and general secretary. This was to strengthen her hold over the party and to ensure unity prior to the December 2018 elections.¹⁸

4.1.3.2 DUCSU elections

DUCSU is the official representation of the student body to the administration. Due to its

¹⁷ The Detective Branch is a specialised unit of police.

¹⁸ BDnews 24 (2018) 'Bangladesh Chhatra League names Shovon as president, Rabbani General Secretary. Available online at: <https://bdnews24.com/politics/2018/07/31/bangladesh-chhatra-league-names-shovon-as-president-rabbani-general-secretary>.

historical significance DUCSU is sometimes also referred to as the second Parliament of Bangladesh. Concomitant to the co-optation of student politics by the political party's student wings in the early 1990s, however, DUCSU became inactive with no elections held between 1990 and 2019. The DUCSU office, located right next to *Modhur Canteen*, laid abandoned for almost 30 years when upon a High Court order elections were scheduled for March 2019.

DUCSU was a direct challenge to the existing political hierarchy on campus, as it would have to operate parallel to the existing BCL hall system. In the past, DUCSU elections would sometimes also embarrass the ruling student group, as opposition student wings would win, suggesting a lack of legitimacy of the government-backed student wing.

While there was some hope that the DUCSU elections (and the hall committee elections) would be a step towards democratization of student politics and the end of one-party hegemony on campus, BCL was able to solve the tension by influencing and manipulating the election process in their favor while the student wings of the opposition boycotted the elections. The only organization that ran against BCL was *Sadharon Chattra Adhikar Songrokkhon Porishad*, an organization that gained nationwide popularity for spearheading the Quota Reform Movement in 2018. BCL won 23 out of 25 DUCSU posts. Surprisingly, *Sadharon Chattra Adhikar*

Songrokkhon Porishad won with Nurul Haque Nur the vice-president position as well as the position for social welfare. Out of 36 Vice President and General Secretary positions for 18 student hall committees, BCL was able to secure 26 while the rest went to independent candidates, most of whom were associated with the Quota Reform Movement.

Most of the hall committee posts won by independent candidates came from female student halls (7), which are not under direct BCL control. The female halls also voted with a majority for the *Sadharon Chattra Adhikar Songrokkhon Porishad* DUCSU candidates. These results are a good indicator of the general less than unanimous acceptance of BCL presence on campus.

Prior to the elections, there had already been protests against holding the elections in the student halls, with opponents preferring the more neutral ground of other university buildings. However, the election of Nur as Vice-President and the margin by which he won the post came as a surprise. Given the irregularities in voting elsewhere, it is unclear whether this was a miscalculation by BCL, or a move to try to appease the movement.

4.1.4 Conclusion

DU offers the ideal stage for student politics, with its interests decided by national level politicians and the national political

ambitions of its student leaders. It is also where the ruling political party has traditionally held most sway over the campus. Hall politics has provided the central focus of student organization until now.

It remains to be seen how the DUCSU elections will influence DU student politics. Although the elections were fairly controlled by BCL, the results in the female halls should at least worry some of the BCL leadership as it shows the cracks in any BCL narrative of legitimacy. It offers inroads for policy as well as the female halls might provide a counterweight to masculinist and violent male student politics and offer spaces to discuss other means of student engagement with politics and social movements more broadly.

4.2 Chittagong: The port city

Chittagong, officially Chattogram, with roughly 3 to 4 million inhabitants is the second largest city in Bangladesh and the eponymous district as well as divisional capital. The coastal city with its international port is the principle maritime gateway to Bangladesh and thus a major financial center, which makes it arguably the second most important city in the country.

The city is home to a range of renowned private and public higher educational institutions such as Chittagong College, the second oldest College in Bangladesh

established in 1869; Government Hazi Mohammad Mohsin College (1874); Government College of Commerce (1947); Government City College (1954); Islamia Degree College (1964); the private Premier University (2001); and Chittagong University of Engineering & Technology (CUET), to name just a few. All of these educational institutions have active student politics that shape the political environment in the city, including incidents of political violence.

In this report, however, we will primarily focus on student politics at the University of Chittagong, established in 1966 and located about 22 km north of the city in Hathazari Upazila. Chittagong University (CU) was the third university established in East Pakistan after Dhaka and Rajshahi University and remains one of the largest and prestigious higher educational institutions in the country.

4.2.1 City politics in Chittagong

Under AL rule the city is divided between two networks of power. The first faction is led by the current mayor and AL general secretary A.J.M. Nasir Uddin and the second faction by Deputy Minister of Education and Chittagong-9 MP Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury also known as Nowfel. Nowfel inherited the leadership of the faction from his recently deceased (2017) father A.B.M. Mohiuddin Chowdhury, who served as the mayor for three consecutive terms from 1994 to 2010. All AL committees and other party wings in

the city are broadly divided between these two factions, including BCL. They compete over territorial influence and access to resources, which often leads to factional violence. Mayor A.J.M. Nasir Uddin's faction seems to have the advantage as his position allows his followers to have access to city corporation resources (e.g. as contractors), which is more interesting for grassroots leaders and activists. The second reason is the death of popular faction leader A.B.M. Mohiuddin Chowdhury. His son Nowfel needs to consolidate his power by proving that he can fill the shoes of his father, which is questioned by some of his followers.

The most influential BNP leader in Chittagong is former Minister of Fisheries and current Vice President of central BNP Abdullah Al Noman. Overall, BNPs influence in the city corporation has been historically weak. The only elected BNP mayor since the return to democracy was M. Manjurul Alam Manju who served from 2010 to 2015.

JeI and ICS traditionally had a strong presence in Chittagong. The city has become known as the hotbed of JeI and ICS politics in the past years and was the site of numerous major clashes with ruling party members and law enforcement agencies. The AL government crackdown has met more resistance in Chittagong than elsewhere but has severely impeded the public activities of JeI and ICS in recent years. While both organizations are believed to be operational,

they conduct their activities mostly underground.

Chittagong is also a major center of wider Islamist politics. Madrasa teachers in Chittagong formed 2010 Hefazat-e-Islam, the Islamic pressure group that challenged the AL government in 2013 with a major nationwide movement that was met with brute force by law enforcement agencies. Prior to the last elections, however, the AL government felt it had to give in to some of the groups' demands to appease the more radical elements in society.

Student politics in Chittagong is strongly influenced by general political trends in the city and the country. During AL's first term (2008-2013), BCL struggled to take control of the various educational institutions. In recent years, however, even in Chittagong the space for the opposition has been closing dramatically and BCL has manifested itself as the only dominant student organization.

4.2.2 Data on student violence in Chittagong and Hathazari

To understand the situation in Chittagong, we have to look at Chittagong city corporation and the Hathazari Upazila. The former hosts a number of colleges and is home to many students who study at Chittagong University. However, the latter is located outside town in Hathazari Upazila and data shows, perhaps as a result of this location, that in Chittagong city off campus

student violence incidents (almost 80 per cent of all student violence) far outnumber campus violence incidents and vice versa in Hathazari Upazila where on campus violence is dominant (at about 67 per cent of all student violence)(see below).

Figure 9 provides data on the overall prevalence of campus and off campus student violence (with the total violence for comparison). What is obvious is that violence spiked from 1996 to 2000, slumped from 2001 to 2008 and has been on the upswing since 2009. Both these violent periods are clearly associated with AL rule at the center.

Chittagong City Corporation was ruled by BNP from 1991-1996 after which long-term mayor A. B. M. Mohiuddin Chowdhury ruled until 2010, when he was defeated by M. Manjur Alam Manju from BNP, who was in power till 2015, when he was dislodged by current AL mayor A. J. M. Nasir Uddin.

While Chittagong's AL was divided throughout Chowdhury's rule, and until the time of writing, into two main factions, Chowdhury was able to control JCD violence during BNP central rule accounting for the slump in student violence in this period (see also Figure 10), while BNP (in power at the center) was able to dampen BCL violence accounting for the relatively peaceful 2001-2008 period. While violence was relatively controlled during Manju's rule, if we

disregard the 2013 protest, violence again started to rise under the new AL mayor,

“The opposition student organizations have no position on campus. We cannot enter the campus due to the oppression of BCL. (JCD activist, CU).”

showing the importance of local control over violence. Importantly this rise in

violence can almost completely be ascribed to BCL—with factional violence on the rise since 2017—as JCD and ICS were completely marginalized from 2015.

Chittagong has a strong ICS tradition, and ICS violence also has been pronounced, with major violence in the mid 1990s when BCL tried to dislodge their hold on campus and of course as part of the 2013 anti-War Crime Tribunal protests in which BCL did not only clash with ICS but also with Hefazat-e-Islam (HeI).

In the last ten years (2008-2018), BCL has clearly been the perpetrator of most violence in the area (Table 11). What is also interesting, and this is the effect predominantly of the anti-war-crimes tribunals movement, ICS is much more prominent than JCD, which did not see an upsurge of violence during the period of BNP mayoral control, which was still dominated by BCL violence. ICS was in fact the dominant Islamist force engaged in violence in the period and much more active than its mother party JeI.

FIGURE 9: EVENTS OF STUDENT/CAMPUS/TOTAL VIOLENCE IN CHITTAGONG CITY AND HATHAZARI UPAZILA (1991-2018)

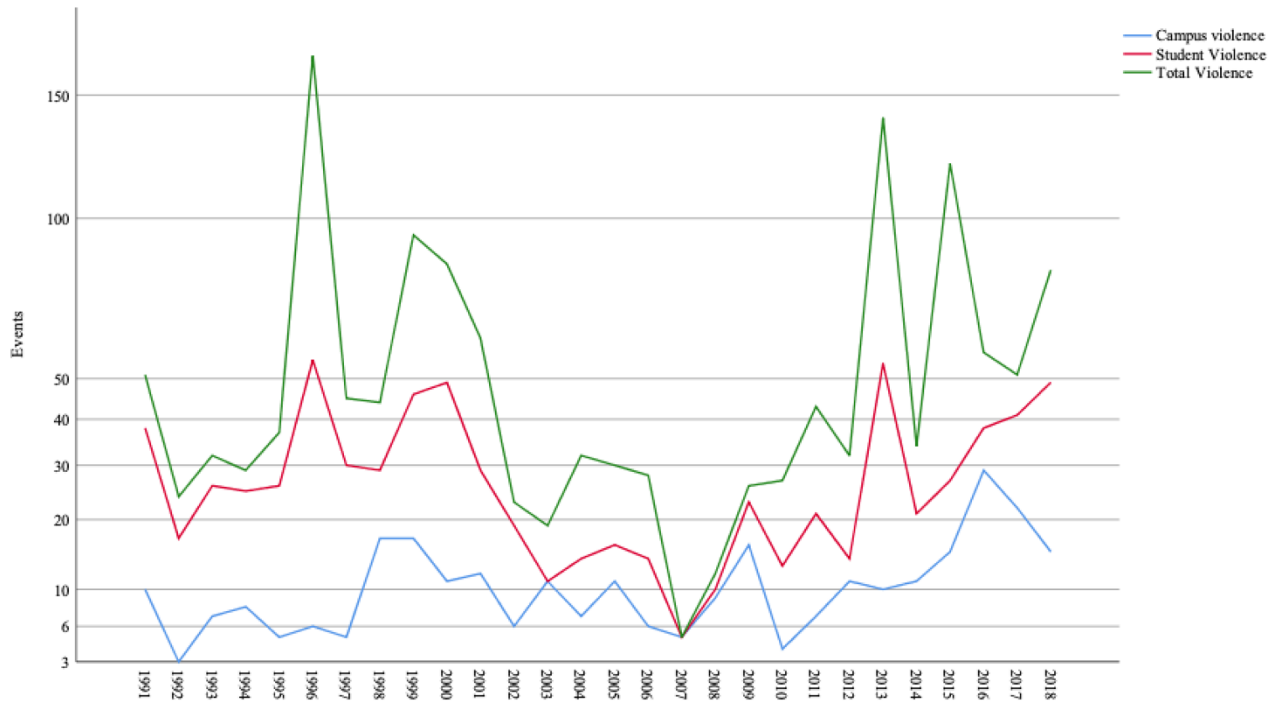
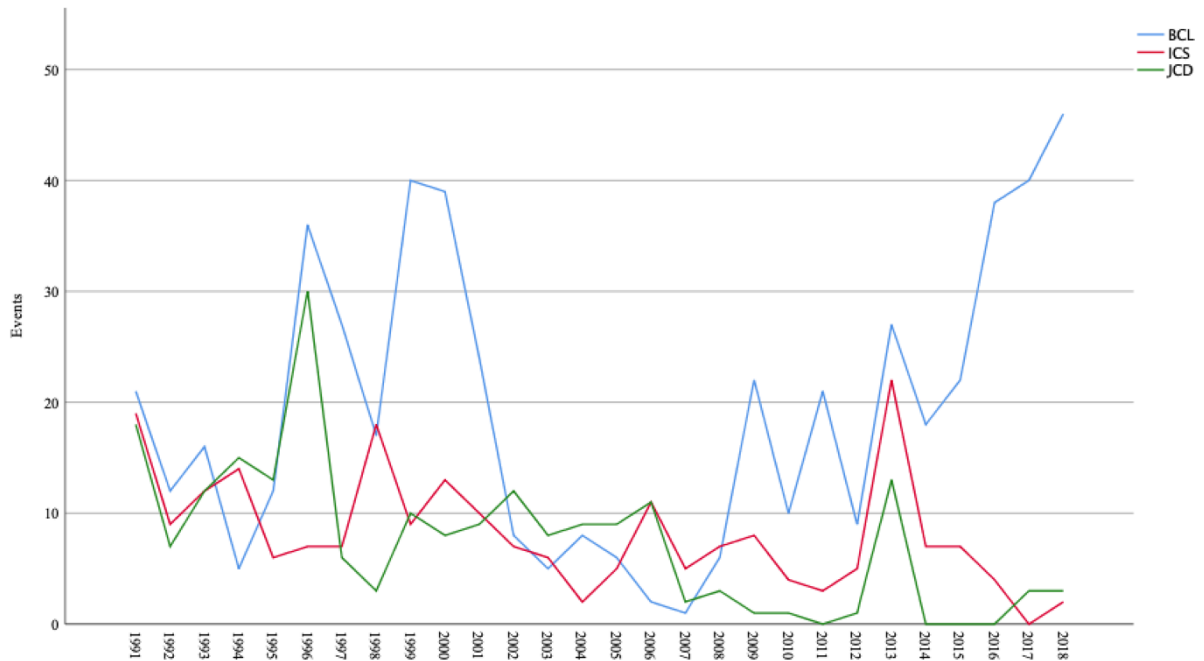


FIGURE 10: PARTICIPATION IN VIOLENT EVENTS BY PARTICULAR STUDENT GROUPS IN CHITTAGONG CITY AND HATHAZARI UPAZILA (1991-2018)



With regard to factional violence (Figure 11), trends are not so easy to distinguish, as factional violence has been prone to a lot of variation. Overall, BCL has been more prone to factional violence than JCD. Factional violence accounted for one quarter of all violent events for BCL and almost 17 per cent of all violent events for JCD. It is also clear that like regular violence, factional violence also increases when one’s party is in power at the center. Since AL returned to power in 2008, the share of factional BCL violence rose. The highest levels of factional violence overall were seen in 2018. BCL factional violence after 2010 might have been the result of an open struggle of power within Chittagong AL. As in the absence of an AL mayor, power relations were not clear.

4.2.3 Student politics at Chittagong University

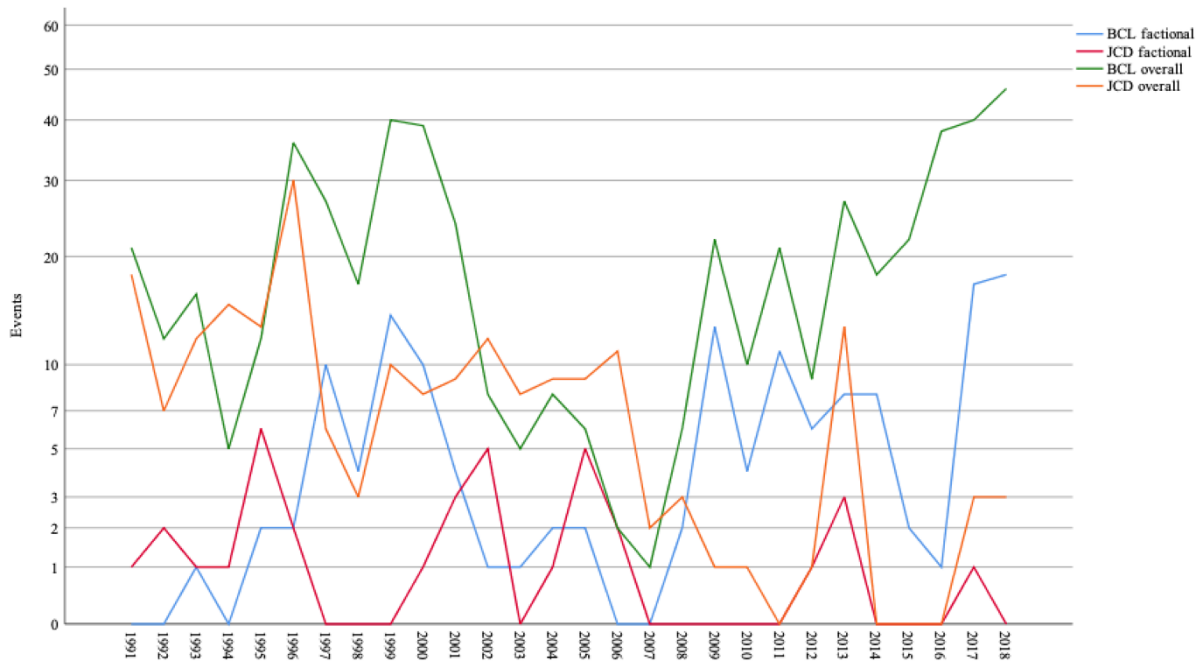
When it comes to our research in Chittagong, this report focuses primarily on student politics at CU. What sets CU apart from universities such as Dhaka or Rajshahi University is the enormous size of the campus and its location 22 km north of the city. The remote site has significantly shaped the development of student politics on campus. For example, student political activists and leaders are barely involved in events of political violence in the city and thus have only limited influence outside of

the campus. According to our interviewees, “It is common practice for a long time that the city leaders have the most influence. That’s why we go to them. The central BCL committee has no capacity to monitor the everyday activities on campus, or even guide us (BCL activist, CU).” events of political violence in the city are mostly driven by college or ward units of the respective student organizations and are thus more concentrated on off campus locations.

TABLE 11: SHARE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE BY ORGANIZATIONS CHITTAGONG CITY AND HATHAZARI UPAZILA (2008-2018)

	Events	Wounded	Casualties
BCL	41,4%	35,2%	20,8%
Law enforcement agency	20,2%	45,7%	44,2%
Civilian/non-participant	18,6%	5,8%	10,4%
Criminal (known)	13,8%	1,6%	39,7%
ICS	11,0%	20,7%	6,6%
BNP centred alliance of actors	10,9%	11,2%	5,7%
Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	8,8%	13,8%	0,9%
Awami League	6,7%	6,6%	2,8%
Jamaat-e-Islami centred alliance of actors	6,4%	6,8%	4,7%
Jubo League	5,4%	4,5%	14,2%
Jatiyatabadi Chhatro Dal (JCD)	4,0%	4,0%	0,9%
Insurgent Islamist Group	3,4%	11,8%	12,9%
Jamaat-e-Islami	1,1%	2,0%	0,0%

FIGURE 11: SHARE OF FACTIONAL VIOLENCE AS OF OVERALL BCL/JCD VIOLENCE BY YEAR IN CHITTAGONG CITY AND HATHAZARI UPAZILA (1991-2018)



Facing logistical difficulties, especially commuting between the city and the university at night, prevents *everyday* involvement in city politics, which is more dominated by the BCL leaders from more centrally located educational institutions. Instead, BCL activists and leaders of CU only support the city AL unit for larger political events such as campaigning for local and national elections or processions held to commemorate important historical or party events.

While city level committees are more active in the city itself, it is common for university committees to focus more on their campus and the surrounding areas, which in most cases comprises already a vast territory. The distance between city and CU campus is in

Chittagong significantly larger than other campuses, (e.g., Rajshahi, Dhaka, Khulna or Sylhet) which makes it particularly arduous to deploy large numbers of activists from the campus to the city and has thus been named as a core reason for the relatively low involvement of CU BCL in the city.

The university houses twelve halls and one

“I engaged in bogie politics from my first day of university. From that day, I dreamed of becoming president or general secretary of my organization one day (BCL activist, CU).”

hostel which is insufficient for the approximately 28,000 students. Thus, many also commute from the city. While busses run

between the city and the campus they are often stuck in traffic, making the journey unpredictable in terms of time.

Most students, especially undergraduates, thus use the shuttle train which is operated by the university during the day and takes about 45 minutes. Even though some of the students live in the city, the organizational center of the university committee is located on campus and thus, as mentioned above, their activities remain focused on the campus and the surrounding areas.

4.2.3.1 *Bogie politics*

The shuttle train has become a central element in CU's political and cultural life. Students form group identities based on the coach or *bogie* they ride in which were given names and were decorated/painted by the students to symbolize a distinct group identity.

During the BNP-Jamaat period (2001-2006), when the campus was dominated by ICS, BCL used the *bogies* to organize politically. It was here where they tried to recruit new students and with time most of the *bogies* turned political with each coach representing a BCL faction. BCL struggled to take control over the campus after AL took over power in 2008. For more than two years ICS remained the dominant force on campus and, more importantly, the student halls.

During this time BCL factions continued the tradition of naming their groups and painting their coaches, but they started to compete over seats in halls and influence on campus, which has regularly led to factional violence. There are currently around 10-20 *bogie*-based factions. The leaders of these *bogies* follow one of the two city AL factions. This proliferation of factionalism has prevented hall committees from being formed, fearing that the appointment of a hall leadership would lead to further clashes.

“These days are the times of propaganda politics. The ruling party’s student organization considers politics as a business. They extort huge amounts of money in the name of various programs they organize; they also take a percentage from every tender. There is [factional] violence for these reasons (University administrator (former BCL activist), CU).”

In the hope of curbing the factionalism and intra-party violence, the BCL at the national level formally banned *bogie politics* in 2016. This led to the disappearance of the colorful paintings, symbols and logos on the coaches but the groups as such did not disappear. Logos and symbols of the dominant groups can still be found on walls across the campus and the groups remain active. Unable to recruit students in the shuttle train, *bogie* groups reverted to other strategies. During

the admission period, BCL *bogie* factions distribute business cards and offer assistance with administrative issues or orientation on campus, including help finding a seat in a hall. From there they will be brought into contact with department, regional or hall leaders of the faction depending on the identity of the new student. New students quickly learn that joining one of these factions gives them privileges on campus and connection with campus political leaders accelerates administrative processes. These informal but effective services, facilities and prospects of power are a main driver for new students to join *bogie* politics

Bogie politics has tremendously complicated the selection process of the university BCL president and general secretary post. Usually, the two city factions receive one of the posts each. These two candidates, however, would also need the support of all *bogie* factions. As a result, candidates are usually chosen from the strongest *bogies* in terms of manpower and political connections. Interestingly, in recent years and contrary to the Dhaka and

“There is a proverb in our culture: ‘where there is money there is violence.’ Presently, they do politics for power everywhere, for gaining financial and other undue benefits, and personal interests (University administrator (former BCL activist), CU).”

Rajshahi case, central BCL leadership did not even personally attend the party wing council on campus in which the CU BCL president and general secretary would be selected. Instead of the usual spectacle involving a large stage, posters and processions, the selection was negotiated behind closed doors with the city AL leaders. This further corroborates the limited influence of the national AL and BCL, as compared to the more direct influence by the two city AL factions, on CU student politics.

4.2.3.2 Towards hall politics

Still, national level AL and BCL leadership instructed the recently selected CU BCL president and general secretary to breakup *bogie* politics on campus and organize hall committees based on the Dhaka model. This shows that the central leadership’s main concern after the ousting of ICS from campus are the high numbers of factional violence and lack of discipline within the organization. Violence between the various groups has easily erupted in the past competing over resources such as the staff (academic and administrative) recruitment process on campus, the contracting process of infrastructure development projects – from the purchase of furniture and equipment to vehicles, as well as controlling the allocation of seats in the student halls. Also, violence is a common means to establish influence over various facilities on campus such as dining halls, *jupri* (*food shacks*), *bogies*, sports fields, or reading and

TV rooms. Intra-party violence, however, can also be triggered by much more trivial matters such as teasing of female students of another group or personal quarrels between leaders of competing factions. For example, recently an incident, known amongst students as the HaHa-incident, triggered by one factional leader commenting with HaHa on a Facebook post by another factional leader, resulted in four consecutive days of fierce clashes on campus requiring major deployment of law enforcement.

Violence can range from threats to beatings, one-day abductions, and attacks using knives, bamboo sticks, metal rods or even firearms. A common strategy that is unique to CU is the forced suspension of the shuttle train by blocking the tracks or vandalizing the train using petrol/crude bombs.

Violence is also sometimes directed against law enforcement personnel. As a reaction to the high levels of violence the police established a small office at the train station on campus and posted a riot tank for deterrence at the main entry gate, which was the most visual presence of police we have seen in any of our cases. In Dhaka, for instance, two police stations are located right next to the campus, but they only play a small role except in the case of large-scale violence and are thus visually not present on campus on an everyday basis.

4.2.4 Conclusion

The case of Chittagong and particularly CU offers new insights into how student politics is organized in major urban centers outside of Dhaka. What stands out is the former dominance of ICS rather than JCD on CU campus. Like elsewhere, however, BCL has, after some years of fierce clashes and violence, consolidated its power on campus. Both ICS and JCD have been completely marginalized and are not publicly active on campus anymore due to BCL's zero tolerance policy.

Instead, BCL is now struggling with prolific factionalism and intra-party violence. While the central party leadership is trying to discipline the organization, they rely on the two city AL faction leaders to use their influence on campus to curb BCL factionalism. However, the city AL leaders both have an interest in expanding their dominance over the campus to reap financial benefits as well as manpower in order to strengthen their own positions within the party.

What makes student politics at CU unique is its *bogie-based* politics, which stems from its remote location and shuttle train communication. From the interviews it seems that despite its ban, bogie-based factionalism persists, and it remains to be seen whether the central leadership will be able to tame their own and establish a clear-

cut chain of command and organizational structure similar to DU.

Interestingly, there has been a significant rise of female activists and leaders in the past few years, who increasingly politicize the female student halls with two effects. On the one hand, the party is encroaching into new spaces to further consolidate their one-party-state regime, on the other hand, female leaders and activists seem to be less involved in self-interest based violent power politics and instead engage more with actual student issues. In most cases we found that female activists do not receive the same attention and are often perceived as ‘ornamental’ by their male counterparts. While walking at the front of most processions they do not receive an equal or no share of the financial benefits. One reason female activists repeatedly voiced for not being able to engage in student politics on an equal level as their male counterparts was their restriction to move around in the evenings and at night. Some felt that “real politics is done at night”. Exceptions are daughters of high-level politicians such as MPs. In CU, these women often become leaders of the female activists and have some influence over male activists who seek access to a powerful patronage network.

4.3 Rajshahi: City of education

Rajshahi city is located at the western border of Bangladesh on the river Padma. With a population of between 750,000 and one

million it is the capital of the eponymous division and district and was known during colonial times as “Silk City” for its central role in the silk and indigo trade. After partition, however, Rajshahi saw itself debased as a border town. Poorly connected to the capital Dhaka and cut off on the other side by a strictly monitored and increasingly impermeable border with India, this former trade hub has experienced a significant economic decline and plunged into political insignificance.

Established in 1953, Rajshahi University (RU) became the second university after DU in what was then East Pakistan. It has more than 37000 students (but only slightly over 1200 teaching staff) and is now the largest public university in Bangladesh.

“face value, highlighting yourself in front of the leaders means everything in our politics (BCL activist, RU).”

With more than 60 public and private higher educational institutions Rajshahi is today known as “city of education”. In the absence of major industries or trade centers, educational institutions are one of the main economic drivers and an important source for employment in the city. Apart from RU, Rajshahi is *also* home to the Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology (RUET), Rajshahi College, as well as the Rajsahi Government City College, which are

also major hubs for student politics in the city.

4.3.1 City politics in Rajshahi

Rajshahi has traditionally been a BNP stronghold since its upgrade to city status in 1991 and was ruled by former BNP mayor Minazur Rahman Minu for 17 consecutive years until AL city president and current mayor A.H.M. Khairuzzaman Liton superseded him in the 2008 Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC) elections. In the 2013 elections Liton lost again to BNP candidate Bulbul, an intra-party rival of Minu, only to win again in a highly contested election in 2018.

Fazle Hossain Badsha, secretary of the Workers Party of Bangladesh and part of the AL alliance, has been MP of the Rajshahi 2 constituency since 2008. While fairly popular in the general population he holds relatively little power due to his reliance on AL “muscle”. In the 2018 general election, he could only beat BNP candidate Minu by a small margin despite widespread electoral fraud in his favor. As elsewhere, however, the 2018 landslide AL victory severely curbed the BNP’s organizational capacity.

Compared with other places studied for this report, both major parties, AL and BNP, suffer less from intra-party factionalism. As organizing secretary of the central BNP committee, Minu is the most senior active BNP politician in the city and enjoys not only

widespread popularity in his own party but the whole city. Liton is the son of A.H.M. Kamaruzzaman one of the four national leaders who was killed during the so-called “jail killing day” in the course of Sheikh Mujibur’s assassination in 1975. His personal proximity to Sheikh Hasina and the central AL government has made him the undisputed leader of the urban political AL machine in Rajshahi. His followers call him the “father of modern Rajshahi”, in reference to “father of the nation” Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

As compared to Liton, whose position of power is solely owed to his father’s political legacy, both Minu and Badsha began their political careers as student leaders in Rajshahi. Liton, however, recognizes the importance of student politics for a future political career in Bangladesh. In an attempt to continue the political legacy of his family and establish a local political dynasty, he has arranged for his eldest daughter to be selected as Senior Vice President of Rajshahi city BCL and Vice President of central BCL.

Similar to Chittagong, Rajshahi has also been considered a JeI and ICS stronghold. Their influence under BNP was concentrated mostly on RU and RUET (Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology) campus as well as in the wider semi-urban vicinity. According to local public discourse many ICS activists and leaders have settled with their families in the surrounding area after they

finalized their studies. In recent years, Jel and ICS have gone underground in the course of the AL government crackdown. Despite government pressure, however, sources suggest that both Jel and ICS committees are still fully operational.

4.3.2 Data on student violence in Rajshahi

In Rajshahi, student groups were involved in almost 65 per cent of all incidents of political violence between 2008-2018, which is the highest number among all major cities (Table 6). The data should not come at a surprise for the “city of education”, especially considering the density and size of higher educational institutions in relation to the size and population of the city. At the same time, the data shows that especially BCL but also JCD engage in relatively less factional violence in Rajshahi. This may be explained by the relative cohesive and not factionally divided AL and BNP party machines and, in case of BCL, an intense, protracted and at times lethal struggle with ICS that united BCL leaders and activists. This is in contrast to Chittagong where factionalism remained regardless of the struggle with ICS. Key difference here is the setup of party-political leadership, with Rajshahi under the almost unitary leadership of Liton and power within Chittagong AL divided between two (equally) powerful factions.

Figure 12 shows the evolution of student and campus violence from 1991-2018. What is

immediately apparent is that most student violence happened on campus and only limited violence outside. The only exception was in 2013 when there was widespread deployment of student forces off campus. What is also clear is that Rajshahi saw relatively low figures of student violence until 2008. One reason might have been the firm control of BNP Mayor Minu. BNP dominance did not allow BCL to fully organize, while the dominating figure of Minu could keep JCD in check. After 2008 we see a marked rise in student and campus violence, although the last few years have seen a return to pre-2008 figures.

Figure 13 shows that JCD and ICS participation in violent events exceeds that of BCL during most of the period under study. This is certainly the case during BNP periods of rule nationally, but they also maintained their position quite well under AL, which can be traced back to the longtime BNP mayorship. This changes, however, after 2008. One sees a clear peak in 2009-2010 where BCL is trying to consolidate its position, but also experiencing substantial factional violence under the new AL mayor Liton. This struggle over RU campus control is even more pronounced with ICS than with JCD. The BCL is finally able to consolidate power in 2015. After which time, both ICS and JCD are completely marginalized.

FIGURE 12: EVENTS OF STUDENT/CAMPUS VIOLENCE IN RAJSHAHI CITY (1991-2018)

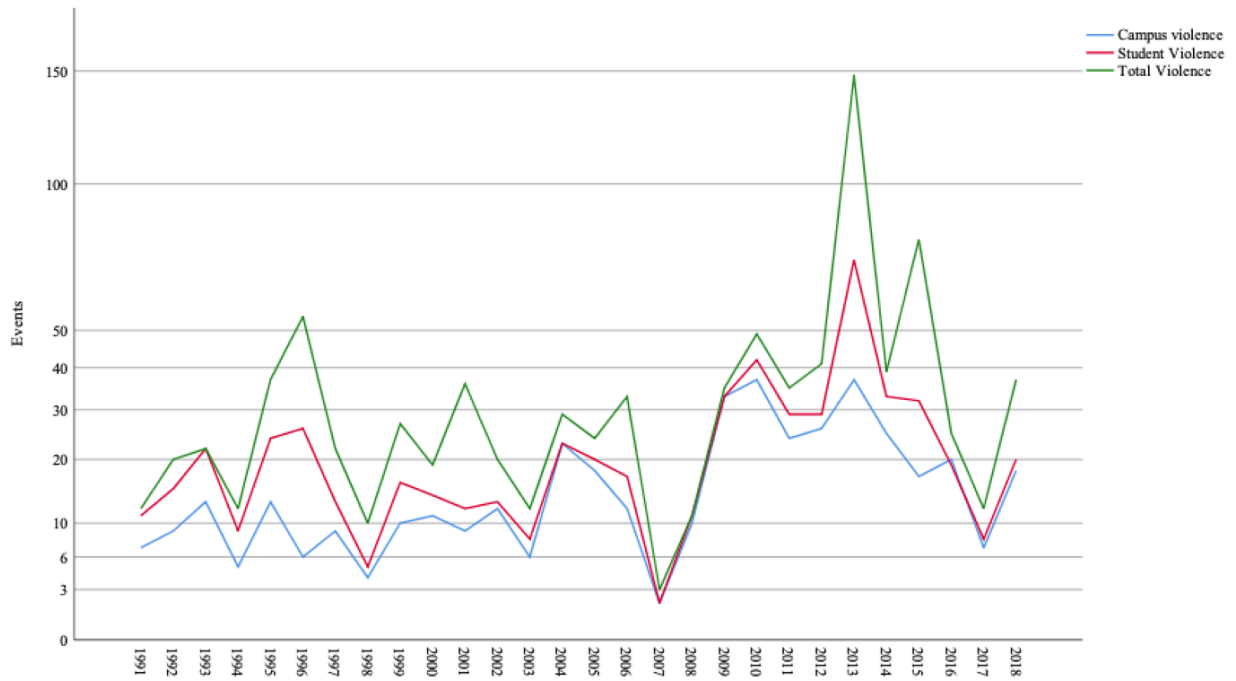


FIGURE 13: PARTICIPATION IN VIOLENT EVENTS BY PARTICULAR STUDENT GROUPS IN RAJSHAHI CITY (1991-2018)

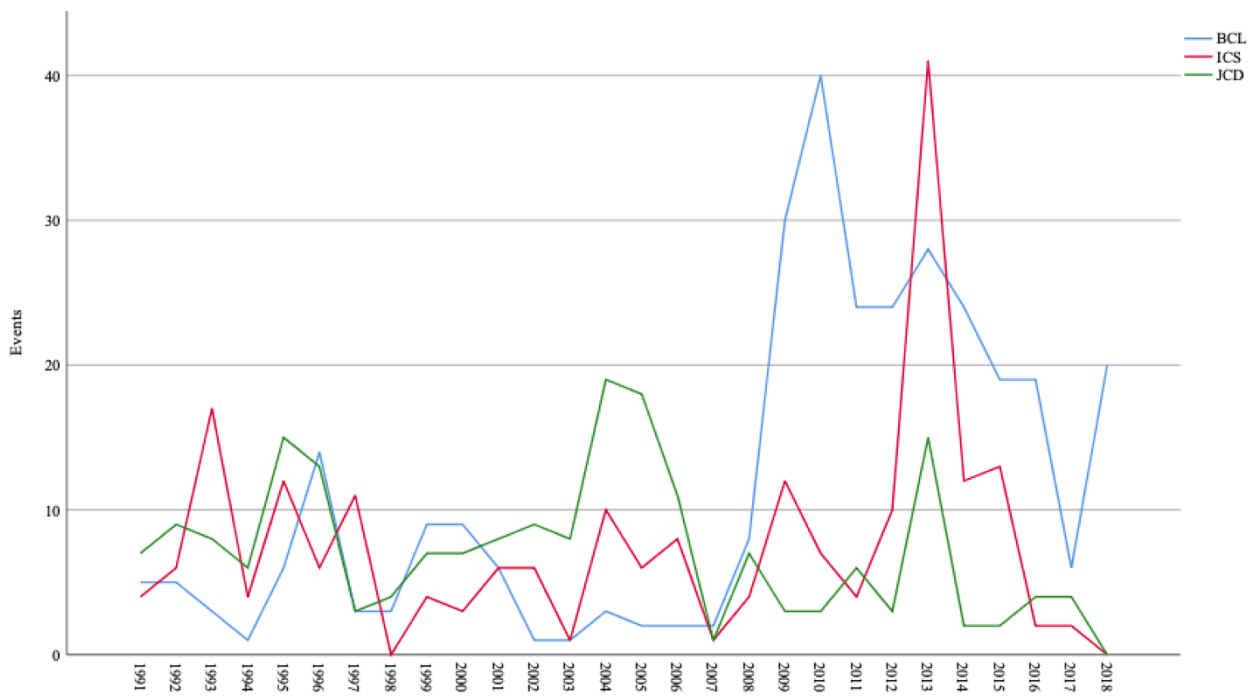


Table 12 shows the involvement of the different organizations in violent events from 2008-2018 and confirms this picture. What stands out is that ICS was involved in more than 20 per cent of all violent events, which illustrates ICS's former strong position in the city. Even more interesting is that these incidents account for almost 30 per cent of wounded and lethal casualties. This shows that violent events with ICS involved were relatively more brutal. In the context of Rajshahi, the data reflects the fierce contest between ICS and BCL but even more the lethal crackdown on ICS by law enforcement agencies in the last ten years. JCD is reduced to less than 10 per cent in the past 10 years. This is remarkable as they have a share of over 22 per cent for the full 1991-2018 period.

TABLE 12: SHARE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE BY ORGANIZATIONS IN RAJSHAHI CITY (2008-2018)

	Events	Wounded	Casualties
BCL	47,4%	44,5%	22,8%
Law enforcement agency	31,3%	54,7%	61,4%
ICS	20,9%	28,7%	28,1%
Civilian/non-participant	15,1%	13,9%	7,0%
BNP centred alliance of actors	10,0%	13,5%	7,0%
JCD	9,6%	11,6%	0,0%
BNP	8,6%	9,4%	5,3%
Criminal (known)	7,4%	1,4%	26,3%
Jamaat-e-Islami centred alliance of actors	6,8%	8,3%	12,3%
Awami League	6,8%	3,4%	10,5%
Jamaat-e-Islami	2,3%	2,5%	1,8%

Upto 2001 factional violence was rare, both for BCL and AL (Figure 14). JCD saw a clear increase in factional fighting between 2001 and 2006, which directly corresponds with the Khaleda II period (2001-2006). BCL factional fighting was highly limited upto

2008 when both BCL violence and factional violence saw a clear increase, which corresponds with the Hasina II period. (2008-2013). Factional violence levels, however, dropped after 2013, which can partly be explained by Mayor Liton's surprising electoral defeat in 2013 partly due to a lack of discipline and support by local party leaders and activists and his subsequent attempts to discipline and unite the party behind him. 2018, however, saw somewhat of a resurgence of factional BCL violence.

4.3.3 Student politics in Rajshahi

BCL rule in Rajshahi is broadly divided between two power centers. One is city BCL and the other one RU BCL. The city BCL envelops all college, ward and *thana* level committees, while the BCL RU committee has the same status as a district or city committee. In Rajshahi, these two centers are always in competition over the depth of their patronage relationship to Liton.

This becomes most evident during joint processions in the city when every committee tries to mobilize as many activists as possible and parades their respective manpower in front of the AL city leaders. In terms of manpower the city BCL is superior to the RU BCL committee and is directly controlled by the city AL. Several Rajshahi AL leaders have confirmed that for the functioning of the party machine, especially during elections, the city BCL committee is

more important. Patronage relationships run deeper based on the fact that most BCL city leaders are local, while many RU BCL leaders and activists come from different parts of the country and leave again after the end of their studies.

On the other hand, RU BCL leaders are considered more elite. The president and general secretary can expect to join either the central BCL or pursue another promising career within the party after their tenure.

“Non-locals have to perform twice as good to be selected as a leader (non-local BCL activist, RU).”

Like in other examples studied, to balance power between

local and non-local students in the RU BCL, an unwritten rule results in one of the two top positions being filled by a local and the other by a non-local. In the last RU BCL student council in 2016, however, the city AL committee convinced central BCL leaders to select two local leaders as president and general secretary who were directly patronized by Liton. Like in other cases, for a city politician to control the selection process is key to exert control and establish and maintain patronage relations.

In Rajshahi, Liton has absolute control over the party. At the sublevel there is, of course, some fragmentation, which might have been the cause of infighting in the past, but in the end, given his families political legacy he is

the supreme leader of AL in Rajshahi. Current AL general secretary for Rajshahi Dablu Sarker attempted to challenge Liton’s reign and supported his own candidates during the 2016 RU BCL council selection process, but his efforts were unsuccessful, as his strong support by local party activists and grassroots leaders was not enough to counter Liton’s strong central AL support and thus access to party-state resources. It can be assumed that AL’s fairly unified political machine in Rajshahi is the main reason for the relative low levels of factional violence and the strong organizational consolidation of BCL.

4.3.3.1 BCL-ICS violence

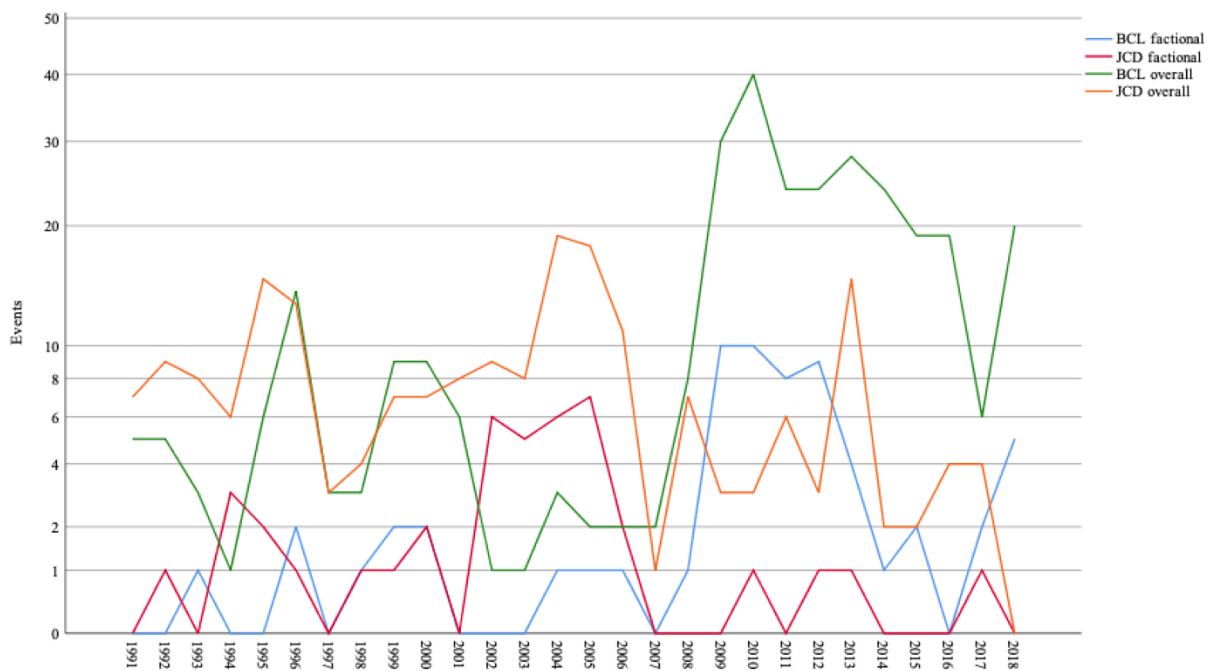
BCL domination has not always been the case. RU was previously an ICS stronghold while the city, but especially Rajshahi College, was dominated by JCD. RU was the

“They [BCL] came and chased people away from the tea stalls and broke some benches and slapped and kicked some general students that were just sitting randomly there. They wanted to show their power and to intimidate, that is what they [BCL] do (general student, RU).”

site of intense and sometimes lethal clashes and gun violence between BCL and ICS as well as pro Jel

locals from the neighborhood during Sheikh Hasina II’s government (2008-2013). But also, party violence within BCL was lethal at times.

FIGURE 14: SHARE OF FACTIONAL VIOLENCE BY YEAR BY PARTICULAR STUDENT GROUPS IN RAJSHAHI CITY (1991-2018)



Over the years, and with the help of the law enforcement agencies, BCL was able to gain control of the halls and campus while ICS had to resort to more covert activities and guerilla tactics. A signature attack was to ambush individual senior BCL leaders, beat them unconscious, cut their achilleas tendons and cut off their trigger fingers. Many BCL leaders also regularly received threats by ICS, either by letter or phone. Due to the fierce violence and inferiority of BCL in early years, RU, together with CU, is one of the few higher educational institutions that has not only permanent police barracks on campus, but also police checkpoints at every major entrance point as well as one or two officers posted in front of every (male) hall.

These attacks have spread fear amongst BCL leaders and has influenced the way BCL operates at RU. For several years, BCL leaders avoided moving around campus at night, and if they had to take the risk and travel 10 minutes to the city for some reason, it was common to use one of the ambulances of the RU medical clinic. Bodyguard style protection was used. When the RU BCL general secretary would ride on a motorcycle to the city, he would ride in a convoy of three motorcycles. He would sit in between two of his men on the second motorcycle, which would follow closely behind the first motorcycle manned by three activists, while the third and last motorcycle (also carrying three activists) would follow a couple of minutes behind to provide reinforcements in case of an ambush.

Military tactics such as these have also permeated the language. RU has received the nickname “mini-cantonment”, referring to its almost insatiable source of violent party labor. Furthermore, two parts of campus, which have been the sites of many clashes have been coined Afghanistan and Iraq referring to the wars taking place in these countries. Main criteria for being selected in the last 2016 RU BCL council was Liton’s patronage and previous engagement in the fight against ICS. Some former BCL leaders even received honorary scarfs during the council for this reason.

As elsewhere, from 2014/2015 onward ICS has shifted their activities completely underground and avoided any open confrontation. According to some interviewees, however, they have full-

“When a new student comes to a hall, *boro bhai* (senior brothers) pressure the fresher to make him join politics [...]. Activists sometimes use force and ask how you were able to get a room. To avoid this student come to seek political shelter. And after sometimes, they start liking it (BCL activist, RU).”

be substantiated with certainty, such as ICS activists trying to covertly infiltrate BCL, also cannot be dismissed as groundless. The BCL

university leadership at least seems alert. Frequently, students are beaten up and handed over to the police by BCL activists, accusing them of being ICS cadres. How reliable these claims are, is

“Now, because of my close relationship to the general secretary of BCL RU I’ve got a job with the police, they prefer to recruit us [BCL cadres] (BCL activist, RU).”

difficult to corroborate. As compared to the city BCL committee, the majority of students at RU are non-local, which makes it more difficult to identify the political identities of general students or even their own members. This is one of the reasons intelligence agencies such as the Detective Branch (DB) or even the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) try their best to gather information and prepare reports, especially for the selection of leadership positions during BCL councils, to *inter alia* prevent the infiltration of their ranks by the opposition and JeI in particular.

4.3.3.2 Halls and careers

At RU the student halls are also the main source of recruitment. Like at DU the hall committees are led by a president and general secretary and their rivalry sometimes results in factional violence. When compared to DU, however, the student halls at RU do not have *ganarooms*. While the halls can also not accommodate all the students that need accommodation, the price to stay in private accommodations (a so-

called student mess) in the neighborhood are much more affordable than in Dhaka. Still, many first- and second-year students are pressured to join BCL activities to avoid harassment or extortion, especially those that are non-local, and come from impoverished rural areas and thus lack protection. After receiving the benefits – which can include tea, cigarettes, food, alcohol or a better room – some enjoy the position of power and continue.

The RU BCL president and general secretary have good chances to pursue a political career in Rajshahi or at least use their political connections to engage in lucrative contracts or tenders, if they have maintained good relationships with city AL leaders. However, in the central BCL committee RU leaders have traditionally been underrepresented and not selected for higher positions. This has led to some disillusionment among senior RU BCL leaders who see themselves as being at the forefront in the fight against ICS and thus believe they should be represented more prominently in the central committee. A vast majority of RU BCL committee members, however, have either received a government job within the university administration or as Superintendent of police after their student life.

4.3.3.3 Non-partisan student movements

BCL has also been active in suppressing non-partisan student movements, focusing on

matters of public policy, on RU campus. Two such incidents in particular resulted in major violence. In 2014, a mass student movement backed by some leftist organizations protesting a student fee hike were brutally attacked by BCL activists, who purportedly followed a direct order from the AL dominated university administration. BCL used guns to shoot into the crowd as well as metal rods and bamboo sticks, injuring around 60 students.

A more recent incident happened in the course of the Quota Reform Movement in 2018. In what has become known as the “hammer incident” young BCL activists attacked Quota Reform protesters and beat one of the conveners with bamboo sticks, metal rods and a hammer and left their victim barely conscious on the floor. The incident was captured on video and distributed by the media. The gruesome attack sparked a countrywide outcry, but the attackers have still not been brought to justice. According to our interviewees this was an overreaction by the young activists who were ordered to prevent the movement from entering the campus but not to resort to such violence against general students. However, as there are no big clashes with ICS anymore to prove one’s heroism and loyalty to the party, young activists may have used this opportunity to gain attention by the party leadership with the hope of being rewarded with a high post in the student council (s)elections. And indeed, the activist

with the hammer has reached a sort of celebrity status within the organization. It remains to be seen whether he will be rewarded with a senior position in the next council.

4.4 Khulna: The peaceful university city

Khulna is the main city in Southwest Bangladesh and, with a population of 700,000 to one million, is vying with Rajshahi for the position of third largest city in Bangladesh. It is the administrative capital of the eponymous division and district and is home to three public universities—Khulna University, Khulna University of Engineering and Technology and Khulna Agricultural University—and to many colleges, including Brajalal (BL) College, the oldest institution of higher education in the city founded in 1902, and Khulna Medical College. As such, like Rajshahi it has a large student population. It is considered a business hub and has an Export Processing zone. Many local student activists have a family background in business.

When we look at political violence in general, Khulna is less violent than the other major university towns. The absence of student politics in Khulna University plays an important role in this. (Party-)political student organizations have been banned on campus since its official inauguration in 1991. The program for establishing a Khulna University had been finalized in 1987 and

The Khulna university Act was passed in 1990. Military ruler Ershad faced strong resistance from the student wings of AL and BNP at the time and thus enshrined a ban

on student politics in the university's constitution. As a result, student politics in Khulna is not dominated by the universities, but rather by the colleges, that commonly also have halls. Specifically, the Azam Khan Government Commerce College is currently considered to take the lead in student politics. BL College and Government Majid Memorial City College have held similar titles in the recent past and are still political hotbeds. The absence of university student politics also means that there is not one clear-cut center of student political control in the city.

Interestingly, student leaders tend to strive to become businessmen rather than career politicians. This might provide them a different outlook on the use of violence than their fellow student leaders in other cities who want to enter professional politics.

Figure 15 shows that apart from the mid 1990s – when there were major national

“In Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi politics is University based. Because Khulna University is free of student politics, there are no leaders here who have the highest level of education. This is why Khulna is very calm. (female JCD leader, BL College).”

protests around the organization of the 1996 elections – Khulna has not really witnessed major rounds of student violence, with campus violence being almost uniformly low. The share of student violence in the overall violence is also lower than in the other major university cities. Interestingly, students of Khulna are largely proud of the absence of student politics on their campus. Respondents even stated that now students come to Khulna specifically because student politics is less practiced and less violent.

4.4.1 City politics in Khulna

Khulna has been firmly under BNP rule. This should not come as a surprise as BNP has been much more business oriented. BNP member Sheikh Tayebur Rahman led the city from 1991 to 2007, after which he was barred from contesting the 2008 elections due to corruption charges. The 2008 elections were won by AL's Talukder Abdul Khaleque who then lost to BNP's Md. Moniruzzaman Moni in 2013. Khaleque returned to power in the 2018 Khulna City Corporation elections, but many irregularities were cited. AL in Khulna is factionally divided with one faction siding with mayor Khaleque and the other with the former MP of Khulna-2: Mizanur Rahman. Khaleque is the established politician, but Rahman emerged quickly in 2005 and later became MP. The factional divide between the two is said to have caused the failure of Khaleque to renew his term as a Mayor. This in turn led to criticism from AL at the

national level, and Rahman was not given the nomination in 2008. It remains to be seen how this will affect AL factionalism.

4.4.2 Data on student violence in Khulna

While JCD was slightly more dominant during Rahman's period of rule, levels of violence remained relatively limited, with JCD, BCL and ICS having fairly balanced shares of violence (Figure 16). This changed when Rahman was ousted from power, with a notable increase in BCL-related violence, which was matched to some extent by ICS. The return to power of BNP in the city in 2013 reduced the levels of violence (disregarding the role of ICS in the anti-war-crimes tribunals). With current Mayor Khaleque's AL rival at least temporarily out of the picture, there is a good chance that student politics could remain fairly peaceful.

The resurgence of BCL in Khulna in recent years is clearly reflected in the data (table 13). BCL is the major student group, but in contrast to other places studied for this report, the levels of violence are much lower. ICS and to a much lesser extent JCD maintain a presence. Given the more spatially fragmented nature of student politics in

“While doing party politics, violence is a must [...] no one is completely good in politics. Sometimes you have to jump in a violent scenario because there is nothing you can do about it (BCL activist, Azam Khan College).”

Khulna, ICS was able to remain present in B.L. College, even to this day. The reason for ICS' continued capacity is their strict organizational structure and the close

control they keep on their activists. They also continue to recruit among former Madrasa students. Khulna's hinterland also has a tradition of strong Islamist organization.

FIGURE 15: EVENTS OF STUDENT/CAMPUS VIOLENCE IN KHULNA CITY (1991-2018)

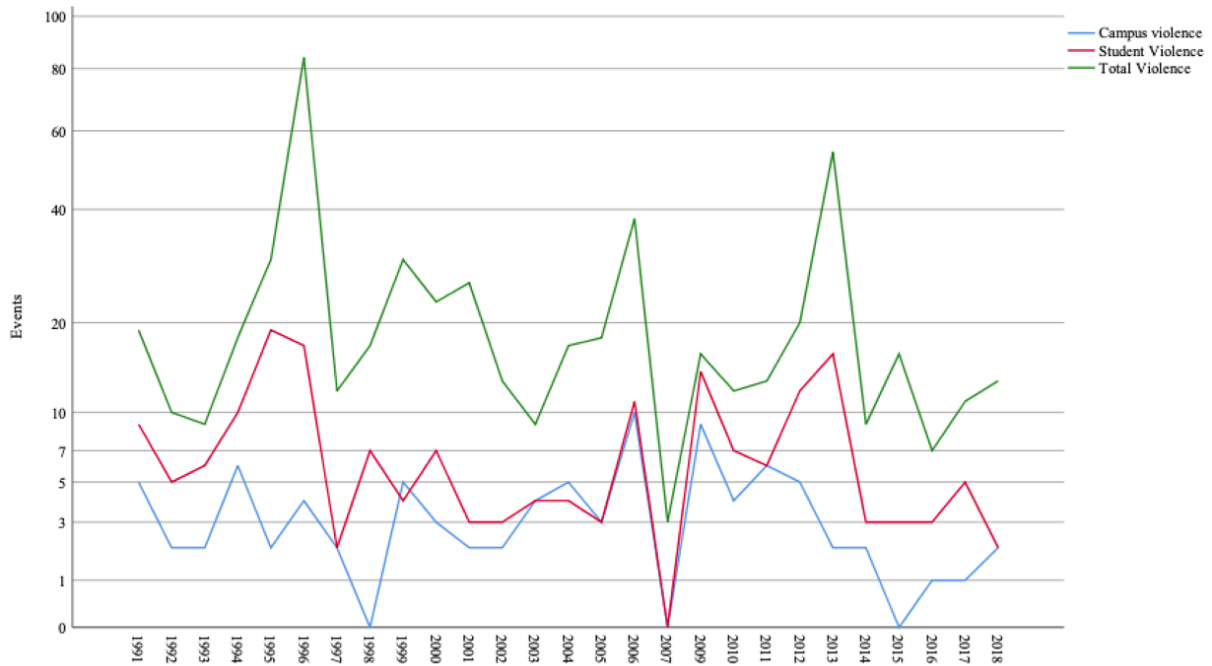
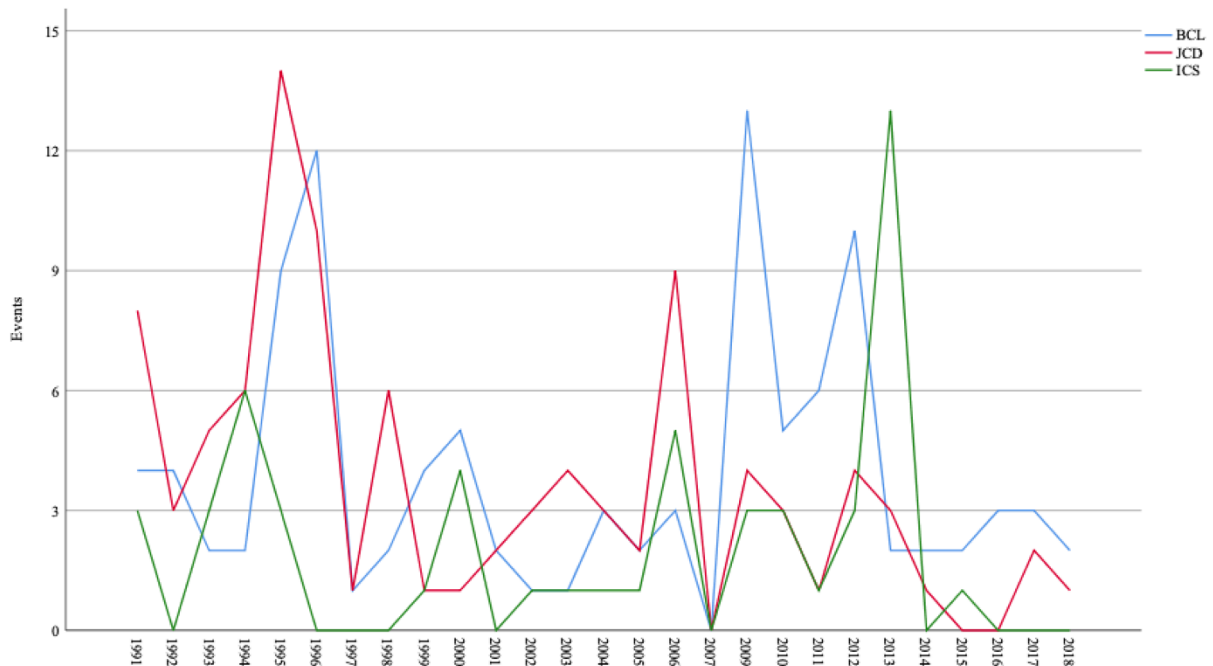


FIGURE 16: PARTICIPATION IN VIOLENT EVENTS BY PARTICULAR STUDENT GROUPS IN KHULNA CITY (1991-2018)



The figures for lethal casualties are fairly hard to interpret given the very few fatalities in political violence in Khulna. While BNP has been able to maintain a (violent) presence in Khulna, JCD has played a more minor role in political violence in Khulna than its mother party.

TABLE 13: SHARE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE BY ORGANIZATIONS IN KHULNA CITY (2008-2018)

	Events	Wounded	Casualties
Law enforcement agency	33,3%	61,0%	35,0%
BCL	28,1%	40,2%	15,0%
BNP centred alliance of actors	17,0%	10,2%	0,0%
ICS	14,0%	15,1%	0,0%
BNP	14,0%	19,9%	0,0%
Awami League	13,5%	7,0%	25,0%
JCD	11,1%	9,4%	15,0%
Criminal (known)	9,9%	1,3%	45,0%
Jamaat-e-Islami centred alliance of actors	8,8%	8,5%	5,0%
Civilian/non-participant	8,2%	4,5%	0,0%
Jamaat-e-Islami	0,6%	1,9%	0,0%

Factional violence has been markedly low in Khulna as well (Table 14) with very low incidents during the Khaleda I and Hasina I governments, and none for JCD. The latter group, however, recorded higher figures under the last Khaleda Zia government. BCL remained faction-free under Khaleda II, however, there was a notable increase during Hasina II's government, with more than 30 percent of all BCL violence identified as factional.

This trend has continued under the Hasina III government, likely as a reflection of the contest between Khaleque and Mizanur Rahman. The Hasina III period has also seen a rise in JCD factional violence as a percentage of all violence but representing only very low absolute numbers of incidents due to overall low levels of JCD violence. Respondents suggested that it was in fact the increased factionalism within the JCD that made concerted action nearly impossible.

4.4.3 Student politics in Khulna

As in some of the other cities studied, hall politics are a central feature of student politics in Khulna. This takes a distinctly different nature in universities and colleges in Khulna, however, perhaps because as one college principal said, colleges do not get funding to look after student halls. To fill the gap, politicians supply the necessary funding and therefor have a direct grip on the functioning of the halls. BCL is now to have control over all halls (with the exception of one hall in B.L. College where JCD has still a presence and ICS maintains a limited presence). This opposition presence is probably only possible, as the foremost center for student politics has moved to Azam Khan Government Commerce College.

TABLE 14: FACTIONAL VIOLENCE BY GROUP AND GOVERNMENT IN KHULNA CITY (1991-2018)

Khaleda I		Hasina I		Khaleda II		Hasina II		Hasina III	
BCL	JCD	BCL	JCD	BCL	JCD	BCL	JCD	BCL	JCD
10,0%	0,0%	10,5%	0,0%	0,0%	31,8%	32,4%	0,0%	25,0%	25,0%

As on many other campuses, student activists work for or under the city political bosses. BCL committee members in Khulna are said not to be able to take any decision without the consent of the city politicians.

“City politicians have a hundred percent influence in student politics. This is because they use student leaders to work for them (JCD activist, BL college).”

The absence of a clear-cut university center for student politics, gives city politicians the upper hand.

Some respondents note that college activists are quite junior and need the advice of city politicians, where in other university cities, master-level activists provide leadership to more junior students, while at the same time pursuing their political careers. College students are thus easier to control by city leaders than university master level student leaders with their own political ambitions.

Factionalism among city bosses is considered to be the main driver of party infighting among students. Mizanur Rahman, the more popular leader among student activists, is considered to be less blunt, and more “cultured” than Khaleque. He also

allows his student activists to derive income from government contracts and other sources. Regardless, now that Rahman has been sidelined by central AL, Khaleque has been gaining in strength.

Rahman’s popularity with student activists could also be explained by his former national appeal as an MP. In contrast to other places, in Khulna non-local students tend to play more significant roles, with local students instead relying on their business family relations. This has not always been the case as interviews indicate that the local leaders tried to dominate the ones from neighboring districts. This used to be one of the main sources of factional violence.

Students from e.g. Sathkhira are said to attend Azam Khan Government Commerce College specifically to engage in student politics. The

prominent presence of students not local to the city, who often have a bigger stake in party politics

“Most senior leaders within the committee are non-local. So, being local does not count, nor does it help (BCL activist, Government Majid Memorial City College).”

in their home localities, also helps to dampen violence. While they are recruited into the city politicians networks for shelter, and to ensure positions, they at the same time remain somewhat removed from local politics in mapping out their own future, both in terms of jobs and future political party careers. For them it is often more important to be seen as active—which of course includes violence if necessary—by their political patrons in their home districts, then engage in violence as man-power for Khulna-based politicians. Student politics is a key way to secure future career prospects, both in politics and beyond. For this they will be more dependent on the goodwill of politicians in their home districts than the ones in Khulna, who would be more likely to support locals for jobs and political careers.

4.5 Sylhet: The “Londoni” city

Sylhet city is located on the Surma river in Eastern Bangladesh and is the administrative capital of the district, bordering Northeast India. The municipality was upgraded to city corporation status in 2001 and to metropolitan city status in 2009. With a population of more than half a million, Sylhet is unique in that it is the center of the so-called ‘Londoni belt’¹⁹, so named due to the high proportion of British-Bangladeshis that migrated from there to the UK, and who maintain intimate links with their ancestral homeland to this day. These connections

have significantly shaped socio-political dynamics not only in the city but the entire region.

The Sylhet metropolitan area is one of the main business centers in Bangladesh. The region is a major recipient of annual remittances from the diaspora in the UK, which is a main driver of economic growth and development. Furthermore, the country’s principal reserves of gas and crude oil, as well as the largest tea plantations, are located in Sylhet’s hinterland. Politicians from Sylhet “When campus politicians need to show muscle power, they go to city politicians. Every group from the campus takes shelter in the city to empower them (University professor, SUST)”. figure prominently in Bangladesh’s central and international politics, most significantly former speaker of the parliament and president of the UN General Assembly, Humyun Rashid Choudhury; but also, a number of finance ministers. Today, many leaders in the region reside with their families between Bangladesh and the UK and are active in diaspora politics as well as local politics in the UK. As a result, the city is wealthier and more developed than other provincial places in Bangladesh.

¹⁹ Gardner, K. (1995) *Global Migrants, Local Lives: Travel and Transformation in Rural Bangladesh*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Shajahal University of Science and Technology (SUST), established in 1986, was the first of eight science and technology universities in the country and, with more than 10,000 students, is the largest institute of higher educational in the city. Its comparably strong research focus had led to a ranking among the top research universities in Bangladesh. Given the strong links to the UK, every student at SUST has to take at least one English course. The campus is located in Kumargaon, about six kilometers away from the city center.

4.5.1 City politics in Sylhet

Sylhet saw a long period of rule by AL, with BNP having less of an impact in municipal and city corporation elections until the last 5 years. From 1995, AL's Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran was mayor, first of Sylhet Municipality and later of Sylhet City Corporation. In 2013 he was defeated by BNP's Ariful Haque Choudhury, who won again in 2018.

The 2018 BNP victory was especially remarkable, as most other city corporations went to AL this year due to widespread election engineering.²⁰ In Sylhet, however, BNP candidate Ariful Haque Choudhury took advantage of the deep fragmentation of AL into at least six different factions. He was able to mobilize enough manpower to

protect enough polling booths from being captured and manipulated by AL and BCL activists. And AL and BCL were not able to mobilize enough manpower, as some factions decided not to support Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran, or even supported the BNP candidate Choudhury, based on personal friendship relations.

4.5.2 Data on student violence in Sylhet

Sylhet is not the most violent city. At the same time, and with the clear exception of 2005-2006 and the 2012-2015 period, student violence has been by far the most dominant form of violence in the city (see

figure 17). Interestingly, for most of the long period of rule by Kamran, Sylhet only witnessed limited student violence. As Figure 18 shows, BCL has been minimally engaged during this period, a

situation which has altered since 2008 when BCL for the first time since 1991 clearly dominated JCD. The return of mayoral power to the BNP did not really alter this. ICS has

“During 2013-14 the SUST campus was totally unstable. Political riots were the daily occurrence. We experienced a lot of political clashes especially between ICS and BCL. ICS resided in the halls until 2012. But then, they were washed out from the halls after a large riot ((former) ICS activist, SUST).”

²⁰ See e.g. Human Rights Watch (2019) ‘Bangladesh election abuses need independent probe’. Available online at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/02/bangladesh-election-abuses-need-independent-probe>.

been on par with BCL for many years and saw a clear increase in violence between 2012 and 2014.

Sylhet thus forms an interesting case for student violence. It is a city in which JCD has clearly dominated when it comes to the use of political violence from 1991 until 2008

(Figure 18). “Central BCL has not organized a council since 2013, because of too many factions in the city and on campus. I asked them to organize a council, but they weren’t interested. They wanted to wait until AL has sorted out their factionalism in the city (BCL activist, SUST).” After 2008, the shares of JCD and ICS in overall violence in the city have remained high and BCL violence spiked, leading to the

most violent period since 1991. The period from 2008 to 2014 saw major violence between JCD, ICS and BCL in which BCL made every effort to dislodge JCD and ICS from campus, where they had been very influential. This effort was finally successful in 2016.

While the role of BCL in violence is reflected in Table 15, we see high percentages of JCD and ICS violence as well, notwithstanding their relative demise in the last four years. JCD also clearly is much more engaged in violence than its parent party.

Also interesting compared to the all Bangladesh figures are the high percentages of lethal casualties of student violence, with more than 30 per cent of lethal casualties caused by BCL violence, with JCD at around 15 per cent, and ICS-related violence being markedly less lethal.

TABLE 15: SHARE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE BY ORGANIZATIONS IN SYLHET CITY (2008-2018)

	Events	Wounded	Casualties
BCL	42,6%	38,9%	32,2%
Law enforcement agency	18,6%	35,1%	28,8%
JCD	17,8%	16,4%	15,3%
Civilian/non-participant	15,1%	7,5%	20,3%
ICS	11,6%	18,9%	5,1%
Jamaat-e-Islami centred alliance of actors	11,3%	13,5%	5,1%
Criminal (known)	9,2%	0,7%	20,3%
Awami League	8,4%	9,7%	13,6%
BNP	6,7%	9,6%	3,4%
BNP centred alliance of actors	6,5%	2,6%	3,4%
Jamaat-e-Islami	2,7%	3,5%	3,4%

If we look at the factional data (table 16), we see the trend that the student group of the party in power is more engaged in factional violence reflected also in Sylhet. Certainly, the Khaleda II government for JCD and the Hasina II government for BCL saw high levels of factional violence. The former is probably the result of less clear-cut power relations, as at the time an AL mayor was in office during BNP rule nationally. While the Hasina II government still saw relatively high levels of JCD violence, this was much less the case during Hasina III. This is probably the result of both the strengthening of AL/BCL which were able to clearly dominate JCD and the ability of BNP mayor Ariful to control violence.

FIGURE 17: EVENTS OF STUDENT/CAMPUS/TOTAL VIOLENCE IN SYLHET CITY (1991-2018)

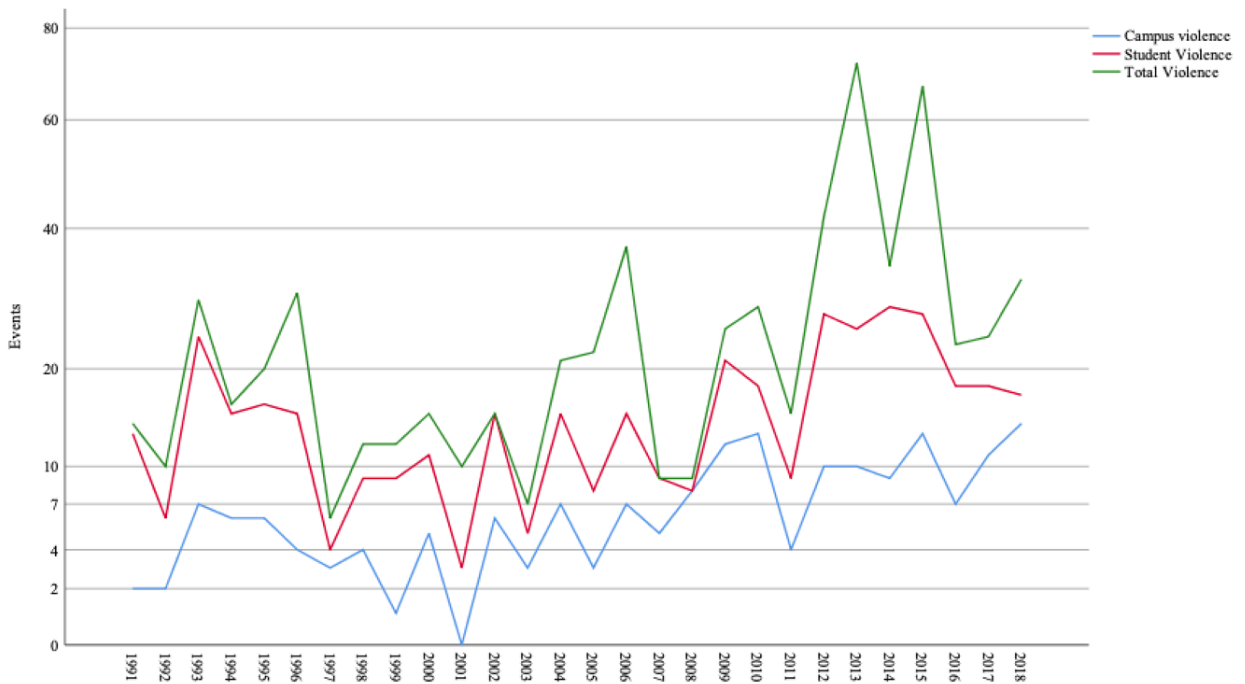


FIGURE 18: PARTICIPATION IN VIOLENT EVENTS BY PARTICULAR STUDENT GROUPS IN SYLHET CITY (1991-2018)

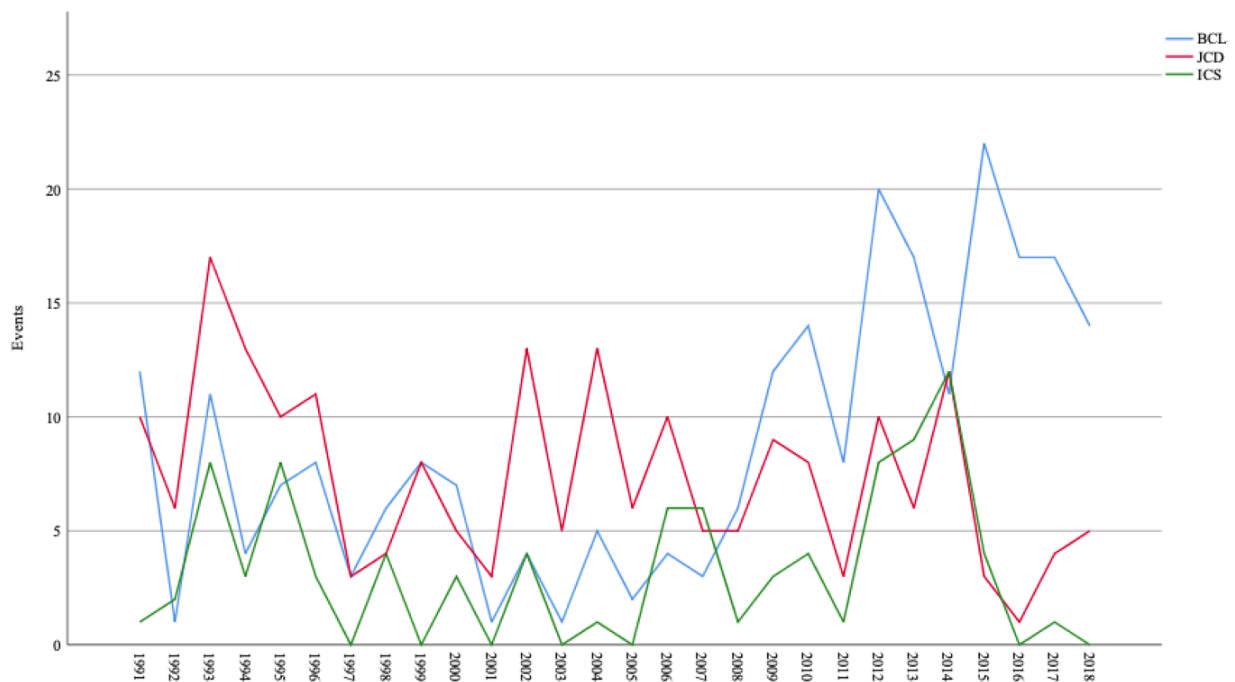


TABLE 16: FACTIONAL VIOLENCE BY STUDENT GROUP AND ACCORDING TO GOVERNMENT IN SYLHET CITY (1991-2018)

Khaleda I		Hasina I		Khaleda II		Hasina II		Hasina III	
BCL	JCD	BCL	JCD	BCL	JCD	BCL	JCD	BCL	JCD
7,1%	16,4%	19,9%	7,4%	15,5%	26,2%	33,7%	17,1%	19,2%	8,3%

4.5.3 Student politics at SUST

ICS primarily dominated student politics on campus during the Khaleda II period (2001-2006). JCD never had a strong presence at SUST but instead was more active at the colleges in the city. As in other places in this report, BCL struggled to assert their dominance on campus in the first years of Sheikh Hasina II period (2008-2013) and was only able to “wash out” ICS from the halls and the campus in early 2012.

From then on student politics on campus was dominated by BCL, and SUST BCL has since been heavily influenced by the power politics in the city. As a result, SUST BCL has also fragmented into six to eight factions, competing over the influence on campus, specifically seats in halls. This factionalism is the core reason for intra-party violence and has deeply impacted the organizational capacity of BCL on campus.

There are no hall committees in place out of fear of factional violence. Instead, the halls are internally divided into the various factions. The last SUST BCL council (i.e. committee [s]election) took place in 2013,

which means that the current president and general secretary have been in power for almost six years. The unofficial rule on many campuses that one post should be filled by a

“I lived in the student hall for a few days. But I observed that those who are living in the hall must go to political functions. That is why I left the hall (General student, SUST).”

local and the other one by a non-local also exists in Sylhet, but at the time of writing both leaders were

non-locals,

from Habiganj and Gazipur. As in other places, the role of SUST student politics is different than city student politics. While city student politics is dominated by locals who maintain patronage relations designed to last much longer, many SUST student activists and leaders are non-local and their patronage relations to city leaders are temporally constrained.

This is one of the reasons why the president and general secretary have only partial control over some factions. Central BCL has not called for a council as there is no dominant faction that would be able to unite the committee, and a council would likely be

overshadowed by violence. Interestingly, not even the previous BCL central general secretary, S.M. Jakil Hossain from Sylhet, was able to arrange a council.

“Violence is always very negative. It hampers the regular activities on campus. But I was involved many times in violence on campus. There is a saying: “Survival of the fittest”. So, it is important to deal with the violent activities otherwise you cannot be a leader (BCL activist, SUST).”

An attempt was made about two years ago by a Sylhet born vice president of BCL’s central committee, to arrange a council with the blessing of the then AL Mayor. He

wanted to enter the SUST campus with his supporters and unite the factions under the leadership of his faction. However, before he could enter, the vice chancellor of the University intervened, denying the mayor’s request and banning him from campus.

This incident illustrates the complex power networks at play. First, it shows that central BCL has only limited influence on campus. At the same time, factions are the result of the direct influence of city politics on campus. And yet the vice chancellor was able to resist local power due to his own powerful contacts in the central AL leadership.

The current situation has led to much frustration

amongst BCL activists and leaders.

Especially younger activists feel deprived, as they are not

being considered for official posts due to the delay of the council and formation of a new committee, which is vital for their position in their home area, access to resources or a future career in politics. Senior leaders are also frustrated, as some of them are not students anymore and want to move on.

At SUST, female involvement in student politics has not been realized. Currently there is only one female BCL leader on campus, and she struggles for recognition among her male counterparts.

4.6 Bogra town: The home of BNP

Bogra town is located in the north of the Rajshahi division and is the administrative capital of the district. Bogra town has a population of roughly half a million and is often considered the capital of North Bengal. It is believed to be the oldest city in Bengal. Today, Bogra is a major commercial hub in the northern region, connecting it to the peripheral Rangpur Division.

“Not engaging in power politics is very difficult in this political situation. I do not like it, but I have to if I want to preserve and do good things as well (BCL activist, SUST).”

Historically and politically Bogra plays a prominent role. It was not only the site of the Battle of Bogra during the Liberation War of 1971 but is also the hometown of the founding father of BNP and former military dictator Ziaur Rahman as well as Khaleda Zia's home constituency. Since the formation of BNP in the second half of the 1970s, Bogra had been a BNP stronghold. The city has profited from its prominent politicians, compared with Rajshahi, especially during BNP rule. City infrastructure is well developed, and business is flourishing. The city is famous for red chili production, banking and a growing IT sector.

The city, however, has no public university and only a few colleges. The most politically active colleges are Government Azizul Haque College (AHC) established in 1939, Shah Sultan College (SSC) (1968) and Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College (1992). AHC, which is a public college under the National University of Bangladesh, figures prominently in Bogra's political landscape with its roughly 48,000 students.

4.6.1 City politics in Bogra town

Bogra is considered one of the strongholds of BNP. Long-term BNP mayor A.K.M Mahabubur Rahman (2005-present) continues to run the municipality after winning his reelection in 2015 by bagging double the number of votes than his AL contender. Bogra municipality is part of Bogra 6, which used to be Khaleda Zia's

constituency. In the 2018 elections Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, the current central secretary general of BNP, won the constituency. He refused to take the oath, however. It was one out of only four constituencies BNP was able to win. In the following by-elections BNP candidate Golam Mohammad Siraj won and took the oath to become MP.

There are multiple BNP factions in Bogra. Recently, however, the central committee of BNP announced a new district BNP committee where they replaced previous senior leaders with new ones, as the central committee deemed the followers of the previous leaders ineffective. Some JCD leaders admitted that some of the previous JCD and BNP leaders purposefully stay in jail in order to avoid further harassment by the police, and risks of getting shot in crossfire (extrajudicial police killings) or having more political cases filed against them. The recently elected MP Golam Mohammad Siraj is said to have been given full authority of JCD by the central committee.

AL Bogra is divided in many groups, but they broadly relate to two main factions. The first was led by the AL president of Bogra district, the late Mumtaz Uddin, who died in February 2019. The second is led by Bogra district AL Joint Secretary, Monjurul Alam Mohon. These two men used to control BCL as well as all other AL party wings and were locked in a fierce rivalry. Mumtaz Uddin is senior to

Mohon and was commonly considered the father of AL in Bogra. Mohon started as a follower of Mumtaz Uddin but some years back created a new faction in the course of AL's domination in national politics. Today, almost every AL or BCL committee is divided into these two factions. Therefore, competition and rivalry are fierce, which has ultimately created a politically volatile environment that turns violent at times.

Tensions have been further increasing since Mumtaz Uddin died earlier this year. His death has created a political vacuum, which various senior leaders are competing over. Currently the situation is convoluted, and Mumtaz Uddin factions seems fragmented as his followers look for different leaders and patronage networks.

4.6.2 Data on student violence in Bogra

Looking at levels of violence, BNP has been in a prominent position in the last ten years, notwithstanding AL rule at the center (Table 17). Meanwhile, JCD has become a marginal player. One possible explanation is that student activists continue to participate in events organized by their mother party, but do not operate independently as JCD. BCL records much lower shares of violence than in most other places discussed here, as it is only involved in around 14 per cent of incidents. ICS has also become a marginal player, with almost all their violent events restricted to 2013 (Figure 20).

It is hard to distinguish clear-cut trends in student violence in Bogra. Incidents are

“They [city leaders] have 100 percent influence. They decide and operate everything. We are like their hands and feet (BCL activist, AHC).”

much fewer, with no more than 15 in any given year. As such Bogra is much more representative of a college, rather than a university town, where party-politics supersedes student politics and where student activists mostly participate in activities under a party-political banner due to their junior status and limited individual political ambitions (see also the role of colleges in Khulna). In the final three years hardly any student violence was reported in Bogra.

This might in fact explain the relative strength of BCL, as given the relative weakness of AL in Bogra, BCL can often operate independently from their mother party.

Overall, student violence is much lower in absolute numbers than in the cases above, and this is, of course, because Bogra has no university and is a much smaller municipality and not a city corporation (Figure 19). Over the full 1991-2018 period, the different student organizations have been fairly balanced, although BCL, rather surprisingly given the BNP stronghold, registers an important presence. The impact

of the dominance of AL at the center is also clear as BCL overpowers both JCD and ICS

after 2008 (again with the exception of 2013) (Figure 20).

FIGURE 19: EVENTS OF STUDENT/CAMPUS VIOLENCE IN BOGRA SADAR UPAZILA (1991-2018)

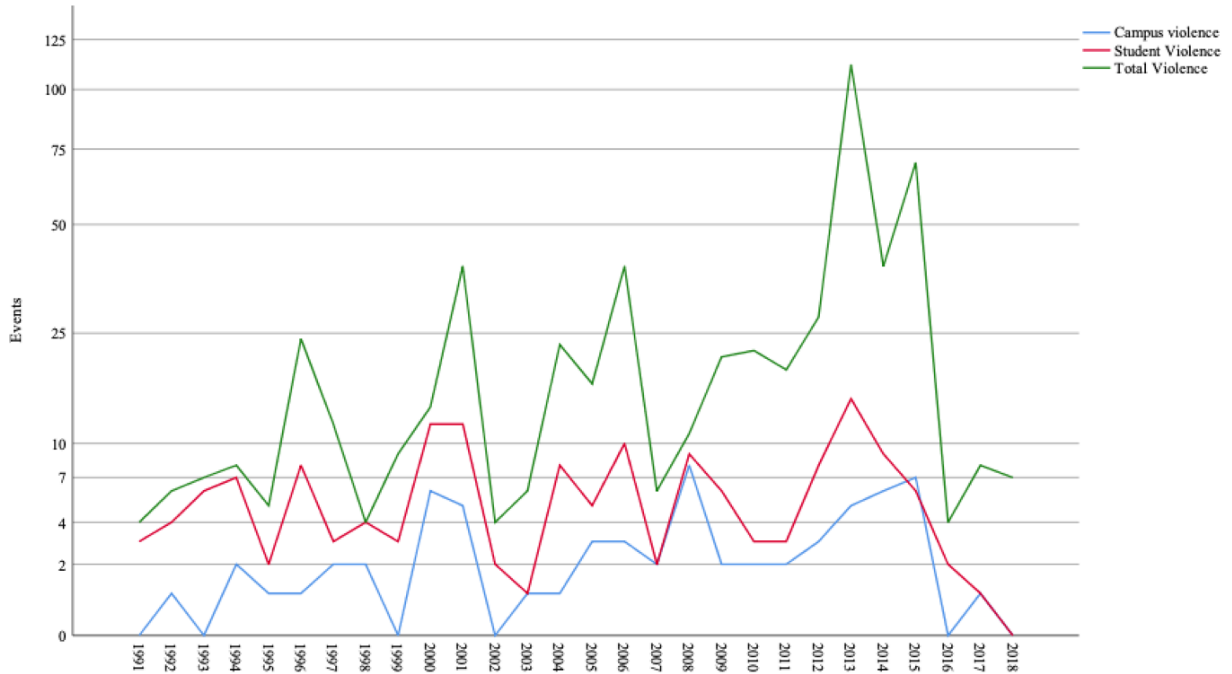


FIGURE 20: PARTICIPATION IN VIOLENT EVENTS BY PARTICULAR STUDENT GROUPS IN BOGRA SADAR UPAZILA (1991-2018)

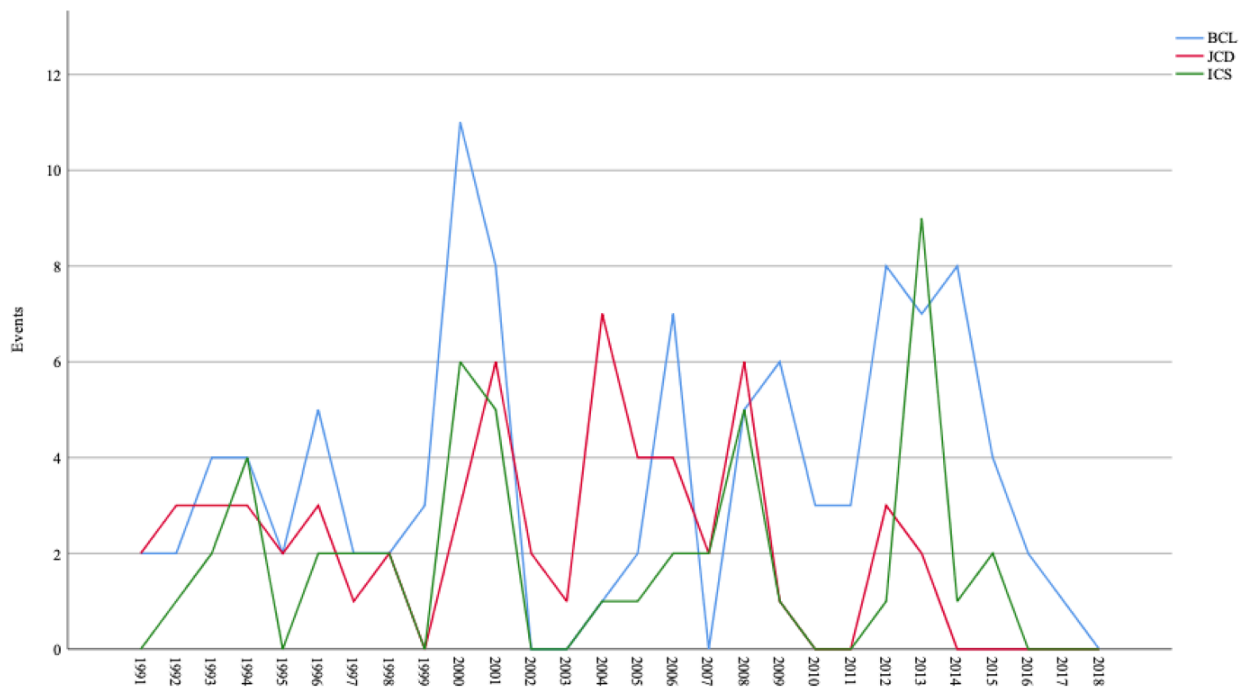


TABLE 17: SHARE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE BY ORGANIZATIONS IN BOGRA SADAR UPAZILA (2008-2018)

	Events	Wounded	Casualties
BNP centred alliance of actors	22,7%	14,7%	10,4%
Law enforcement agency	20,6%	56,4%	41,6%
Awami League	20,1%	16,2%	19,5%
Civilian/non-participant	17,7%	4,8%	14,3%
BNP	17,4%	17,9%	11,7%
BCL	13,9%	18,5%	6,5%
Criminal (known)	13,0%	2,9%	22,1%
Jamaat-e-Islami centred alliance of actors	12,1%	5,7%	27,3%
Jubo League	9,7%	5,7%	16,9%
Islami Chhatro Shibir	5,6%	9,9%	2,6%
Jamaat-e-Islami	4,1%	29,8%	5,2%
Jubo Dal	3,8%	2,1%	3,9%
JCD	3,5%	6,0%	0,0%

Factional violence is also much more limited than in most other places (Table 18). Factional violence accounts for a maximum of 17 per cent of violence in which JCD participated, under the Khaleda I government. BCL reached its highest share of factional violence under the Hasina III government, at around 23 per cent.

4.6.3 Student politics in Bogra

The Azizul Haque College is the leading educational institution and the heart of student politics in Bogra. Despite BNP's strength in the city, BCL has been able to take control over the campus. AHC plays an important role in Bogra's student politics, as almost all BCL senior leaders are selected

from this college. The student halls of AHC, however, remain closed after a major clash between BCL and ICS in 2008. Still, AHC students are considered potential future leaders by local city leaders, as their students are better qualified/senior and more regionally diverse than those of Shah Sultan College (SSC) that only offers 11-12th grade and honors courses while AHC offers degree, honors and master courses. Therefore, local leaders focus more on the students from AHC and with the student halls closed down student politics has expanded to private messes (hostels) outside the campus, where most non-local students reside.

“I don't have intentions of continuing politics. I'll focus on jobs. I believe this BCL background will be helpful (BCL activist, AHC).”

The current district BCL committee is led by a president from AHC and a general secretary from SSC. This is rather rare as previous leadership came only from AHC. SSC activists and leaders primarily serve as “muscle” to control the surrounding areas of the campus, to engage in extortion, tender business, or other work that demands violent party labor.

TABLE 18: FACTIONAL VIOLENCE BY STUDENT ORGANIZATION AND ACCORDING TO GOVERNMENT IN BOGRA SADAR UPAZILA (1991-2018)

Khaleda I		Hasina I		Khaleda II		Hasina II		Hasina III	
BCL	JCD	BCL	JCD	BCL	JCD	BCL	JCD	BCL	JCD
0,0%	16,7%	4,8%	14,3%	11,1%	10,5%	17,2%	0,0%	23,1%	0,0%

Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College is also officially “Lobbying absolutely plays a huge role these days. Lobbying actually gets the job done more than anything else. You got to be their best pet. Nothing happens without lobbying. I would put lobbying and hard work in a 70-30% ratio (BCL activist, AHC).”

The activists interviewed felt like they were placeholders on the obligatory committee. Some activists admitted that they do not have much to add to local politics other than strengthening the mobilization capacity of the party, “giving protocol” to the leaders and filling up an otherwise political void in the medical college. However, others mentioned the various sources of money for activists to tap into, such as the medical college’s food service. Another interviewee complained about the delayed district BCL council for the formation of a new committee, as they hoped to receive more attention of the party leadership in the form of better posts. Others admitted they only participate in BCL politics

for their career, as medical associations are also politicized and dominated by AL these days, having BCL in your CV would prove useful for the future career in the medical field.

As mentioned above, all committees were until recently divided into the two main factions. Since the death of Mumtaz Uddin, the long-

term AL father, inter-party divisions have become messier. For example, the general secretary of AHC BCL, who was under the

patronage of Mumtaz Uddin, is currently a strong candidate for the district BCL general

“Violence maybe bad [...] but sometimes we are left with this as the only option. Previously there was shibir and JCD, [...] but now there are factions within us. Like there was a clash between the president and secretary group. A few shots were fired. Nowadays it is more about taking control of an area, such as this campus. We were chasing each other. We also had sticks made of tree branches with us. We got involved because we had to be there for our leader. He needed us and we need him (BCL activist, AHC).”

secretary position in the soon to be held council, but so is another leader from the same group. The general secretary is now seeking support of the district AL Organizational Secretary, while his contender is supported by a former two-time AHC general secretary who belongs to another faction that is related to, but in the process of splitting from, the AL organizational secretary's faction. The BCL council is a good opportunity for ambitious AL leaders to shift the distribution of power in their favor by having their men selected for powerful positions, especially in times of a political vacuum.

JCD is similarly organized with regard to the different colleges but, despite its still strong

support in Bogra, it is in political disarray due to the political situation at the national level, which has prompted a crisis of leadership. The severe political situation was substantiated in our eyes by the fact that

“Violence sometimes becomes crucial. No matter how much we try to avoid it, it always comes down to it sometimes. If we are to hold our ground and make our presence known, we must be violent sometimes. There are many groups among us. Lack of opposition leads to these sorts of problems. As a result, we ended up with factions (BCL activist, AHC).”

JCD leaders and activists were very hesitant

to speak with researchers, as they are worried about being spied on by the government.

The current situation of ICS in Bogra is interesting. It is commonly known that medical colleges are safe havens for the Islamist student wing, and it was confirmed to us by both ICS and BCL

“Politics. I want to die doing it. It is the only goal of my life. I don't have any other plans. I just want to be on the field, on the streets. There is nothing more thrilling to me than this (BCL activist, AHC).”

activists that ICS activists are indeed still residing in student halls of the medical college as well as the Shah Sultan College (SSC). We also heard that BCL leaders in collusion with local AL leaders, take hefty sums of money (up to 1 lakh BDT) in exchange for a seat in the hall and confidentiality about their political identity. ICS activists further confirmed that their organizational structure was still in place and that they still participate in their regular partisan programs but that they would refrain from engaging in any public activities due to the hostile environment.

To sum up, the student political situation in Bogra at the time this research was conducted was shaped by political upheaval in both AL and BNP. The upcoming councils, especially on the AL/BCL side, have drawn attention to the political fragmentation just

under the surface. In this context leaders have been careful to keep a clean image before the council and thus largely refrained from public displays of violence to not jeopardize their chances to be awarded a lucrative position.

Another interesting observation that is not necessarily unique to Bogra, is the multi-layered relationship between BCL and JCD leaders. On a superficial level there is the public display of inter-party rivalry that can turn violent but is seldomly lethal. Under the surface, behind closed doors or in tea stalls at night, leaders, mostly at the senior levels, maintain good relationships and sometimes are even childhood friends. There seems to be a clear-cut separation between their political obligations and their personal relationships. The third layer is jealousy. JCD leaders sometimes envy their BCL friends for their power and access to benefits. In some instances, a BCL leader would even join in a business with a JCD friend.

What is maybe more unique in Bogra is the strong influence of non-local students in senior BCL leadership positions (see also Khulna). Both the current president and general secretary of the district BCL are not from Bogra. This is also true for the BCL leadership of AHC, and one reason for the colleges' prominent position in student politics. Some activists even said that being local is a detriment in BCL politics in Bogra. There is no clear-cut answer to this anomaly,

especially in comparison to other cases in this report. This might be due to the longstanding BNP domination of Bogra town itself, which allowed for limited scope for local AL activists (or AL political families). Non-local students, whose politics would be foremost

grounded in their home localities, are therefore more likely to have a stronger AL or BCL profile (e.g., family background etc.) than local students.

Another reason could be that for city AL leaders, non-local students might be easier to control, as they do not have family links to other political networks in Bogra.

“Students from different parts of the country come here. So, there is a huge variety of people. I am not a local. I am having no trouble doing politics. There are all sorts of people from so many cities. I don't think being a local or non-local matters (BCL activist, AHC).”

4.7 Kushtia: Islamic University

Islamic University, Bangladesh, better known as Islamic University Kushtia, is located on the border between the Kushtia and Jhenaidah districts in Southwest Bangladesh. As compared to the other cases in the report, this is a rural university. It was originally funded by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and founded in 1979, although it only started operating in 1986. It was originally part of Ziaur Rahman's foregrounding of an Islamic Bangladesh

state, in contrast to AL's desire for secularism.

While initially focusing on theology, Islamic studies, social sciences and humanities, its departments have continued to grow, and it now is a comprehensive university. Currently around 15,500 students are enrolled at Islamic University. Initially, the University specifically wanted to provide higher education for *madrassa* students, with 50 per cent of the student body recruited from *madrassas*. Female students were first enrolled in the 1990-91 session.

4.7.1 Local politics in Kushtia and Jhenaidah

The decision to establish the University on the border between Kushtia (Kushtia Sadar Upazila) and Jhenaidah (Shailkupa Upazila) district was a compromise to placate rival factions in Kushtia and Jhenaidah, both vying for the University. This factional division continues to impact on the university student politics to date.

Factionalism within BCL and JCD is organized according to the division between the two districts, although Kushtia has been the most dominant. However, Kushtia and Jhenaidah politicians would traditionally cooperate to divide the top positions to students from the two districts. Different respondents described this as a syndicate that ensured control over student politics by the two district AL leaderships. Some see a

weakening of this syndicate, because in the present university committee no one from Jhenaidah is represented in top leadership. The importance of local party-political control is also exemplified by the role of the local AL MP. He was originally elected from a constituency in Jhenaidah, but later shifted to Kushtia, changing the balance of power between the two main factions. However, it is important to note that ICS, a key player in Islamic University was not plagued by factionalism of this type.

The importance of the two district factions also means that being local is highly beneficial for pursuing a political career.

“[A] syndicate has been working here to ensure that non-locals shouldn't be leaders. This syndicate has strong relationship with local leaders (BCL activist, Islamic University Kushtia).”

Outsiders cannot be so easily enrolled in the factional struggle between the two districts and cannot play a role in the

campaigns of district leaders and find it harder to establish themselves politically.

Intra-party factional divisions also extend to the halls, where respondents noted that some halls are dominated by one of the main district factions.

4.7.2 Student politics: The dominance of ICS and the rise of BCL

Respondents clearly indicated that ICS has dominated student politics for most of the university's lifespan. They controlled the halls and the campus. In early years, competition existed between ICS and JCD, who both operated on campus, but as one teacher indicated, while JCD "went for money politics, ICS moved to a cadre-based political system". ICS became much better organized, and by controlling manpower was able to dominate the campus.

The dominance of ICS should not come as a

surprise as the Islamic University catered, at least initially to a large section of *madrassa* students. In addition, its general student population were not only attracted by the quality of education, but also by the Islamic nature of the university. Ideologically, ICS thus found natural allies in the student body.

"Corpses were left hanging at the main gate of the campus. It is thought to be the doing of local miscreants, but ICS used the incident later on while threatening BCL (BCL activist, Islamic University Kushtia)."

The violence data (see figure 22) clearly shows this initial struggle between JCD and ICS, with BCL playing only a marginal role until 1996.

With the coming to power of AL in 1996, BCL tried to establish themselves and violent clashes took place, mostly with ICS. As the quote indicates, dead body politics formed an integral part of this campaign. A fairly vicious campaign took place as BCL failed to establish itself as a force on campus. It did not help that surrounding areas had great support for the Islamists.

Interestingly, the 2001-2006 period, dominated by BNP at the national level, saw a concerted effort to oust ICS. This manifested itself in a coalition between BCL and a number of leftist student groups, and according to some of our respondents JCD also participated. However, this coalition failed, showing the strength of ICS' cadre-based politics, as well as the support for its Islamist agenda. If this coalition engaged ICS extensively in violence this is not reflected in our data, as the 2001-2006 only sees low levels of ICS violence (figure 22). Overall this period also saw the lowest levels of student violence (figure 21).

FIGURE 21: EVENTS OF STUDENT/CAMPUS/OVERALL VIOLENCE IN KUSHTIA AND SHAILKUPA UPAZILA (1991-2018)

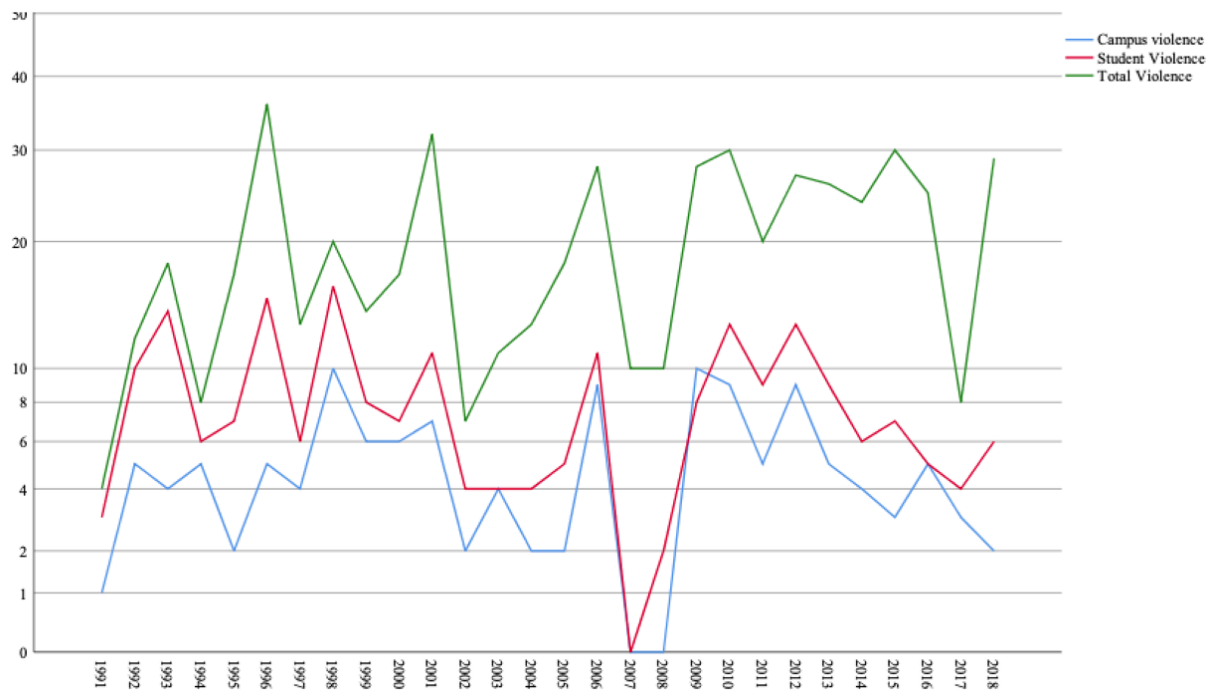
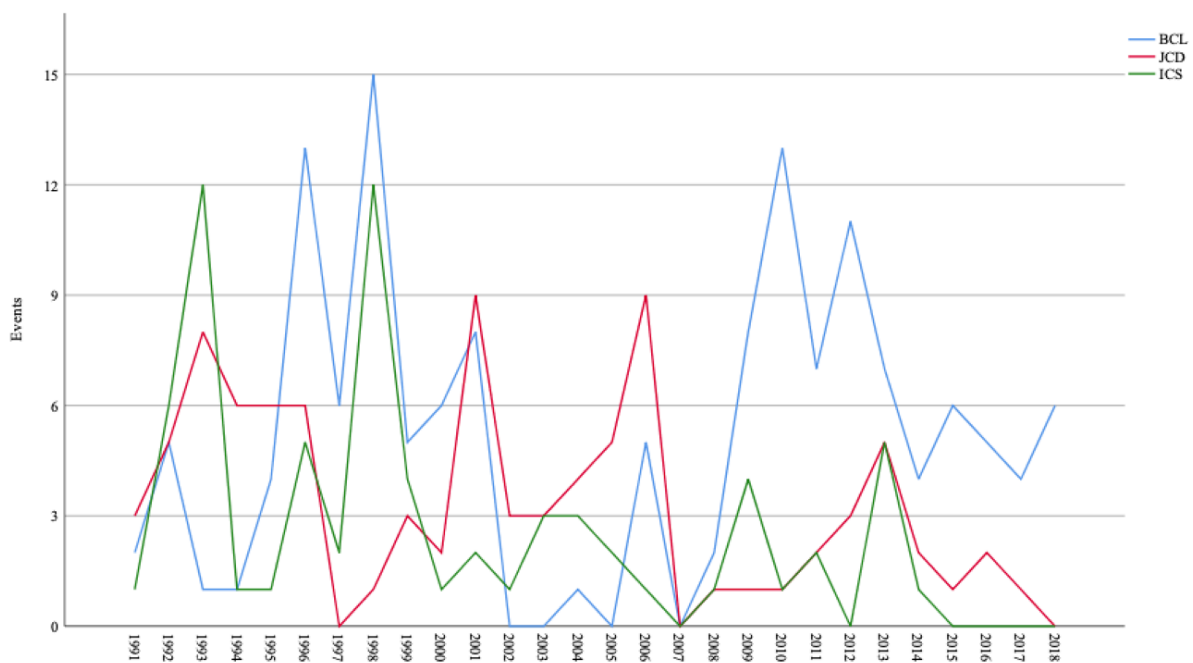


FIGURE 22: PARTICIPATION IN VIOLENT EVENTS BY PARTICULAR STUDENT GROUPS IN KUSHTIA AND SHAILKUPA UPAZILA (1991-2018)



However, after the 2008 elections, with AL set to establish full control over Bangladesh, and invigorated by the 2013 War Crimes Tribunals, BCL started a new campaign to oust ICS from campus.

From 2009-2014 a violent campaign was waged to eliminate ICS. Respondents argue that it was not only the support of AL at the national level, which made this possible, but also a tightening of BCL's internal organization. This period saw a return to the higher levels of violence of the early to mid 1990s. With opposition MPs out of the picture, certainly after 2014, BCL seemed to gain some momentum. ICS was no longer able to organize political programs and meetings on campus, although our sources indicate as recently as 2017 ICS still maintained control over a majority of the student halls. After one particularly large clash (not in our data), ICS vacated the student halls overnight, a move, which left a senior BCL cadre bewildered as they were not able to explain the sudden and complete withdrawal of ICS.

The data show that ICS did not violently contest the BCL take-over. Today, neither JCD nor ICS is able to be active on campus. This could be considered a watershed moment in Islamic University's history given not only the long history of ICS control on campus, but also the support for political Islam in the area. It is surprising that the AL and BCL, given their support for secularism

(despite recent support for some Islamist organizations) could establish themselves in Islamic University. As our data show, this has been done by an extensive deployment of force.

As can be read from table 19, this was not simply done by BCL. In contrast to our other cases BCL is not most active in violence. Rather, it is AL itself which is dominant. ICS and JCD have been notably less violent than BCL and this reflects their growing marginalization in recent years. What is also interesting that while major clashes have taken place, this has not led to (many) lethal casualties.

Finally, it should be mentioned that a number of respondents, and particularly those from more established AL families, were critical of a recent increase in BCL numbers, as they saw an opportunistic group of (former opposition) cadres entering the party.

“I think politics is a type of education which you have to get from your family. There are many differences between the family-educated politicians and politicians who only start their political life in campus (University Administrator, Islamic University Kushtia).”

TABLE 19: SHARE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE BY ORGANIZATION IN KUSHTIA AND SHAILKUPA UPAZILA (2008-2018)

	Events	Wounded	Casualties
Awami League	35,9%	56,2%	32,1%
BCL	28,5%	29,2%	3,6%
Law enforcement agency	22,7%	11,5%	52,4%
BNP	11,7%	11,2%	7,1%
Criminal (known)	10,9%	1,8%	21,4%
Rebel Group	10,2%	0,1%	36,9%
JCD	7,4%	7,4%	0,0%
Civilian/non-participant	7,0%	4,5%	1,2%
ICS	5,5%	6,8%	0,0%
Jamaat-e-Islami (JI)	1,2%	2,0%	0,0%

4.7.3 Seat politics and factionalism

As in most other universities seat politics in the halls is a central feature of student politics. This is even more important in a University like Islamic University, which is not located in a city but is more remote. ICS' political strategy and cadre based political organization has been rooted in hall control. One importance difference with other cases should however be noted: while halls are often factionally divided and/or halls form the organizations base for factional organization, this seems not to have been the case under ICS. As in other cases, the Islamist student organization sees very little factional violence.

Some noted an increase in seat politics after the take-over of the student halls by BCL. They claim that "illegal seats", those occupied by political students, now form the majority. BCL uses the same techniques as they do in DU, where first- and second-year students are enrolled in political programs of all kinds and are incentivized or forced to participate. The situation is better in female

halls, although being politically active in women's halls is also not without its benefits. Moreover, the Khustia-Jhenaidah factionalism has at least partially impacted on hall organization.

With BCL now in control, regional factionalism might increase in the next years, although the share of factional violence in Kushtia-Jhenaidah is and has been relatively low (table 20). Respondents indicated that after BCL took control the politics of Kushtia versus Jhenaidah became more central. The share of factional BCL violence did increase under the Hasina II government, but since then has come down. Overall, BCL has been much more prone to factional infighting than JCD, while Shibir (again) hardly recorded any factional infighting.

Recent years saw factional struggles emerge out of the process of University BCL Committee formation. Very recently, in July 2019, a new BCL committee was announced, but factional struggles immediately broke out not only with those who did not get posts in the committee (certainly Jhenaidah seems to have been ignored), but also with members of the previous committee, who wanted to maintain their power. Some respondents also indicated that university teachers are implicated in the factional struggles often controlling particular factions for their own interests.

TABLE 20: FACTIONAL VIOLENCE BY STUDENT ORGANIZATION AND ACCORDING TO GOVERNMENT IN KUSHTIA AND SHAILKUPA UPAZILA (1991-2018)

Khaleda I		Hasina I		Khaleda II		Hasina II		Hasina III	
BCL	JCD	BCL	JCD	BCL	JCD	BCL	JCD	BCL	JCD
0,0%	7,1%	16,3%	0,0%	20,0%	24,0%	26,1%	7,7%	8,0%	0,0%

5. Conclusion

This report has tried to provide in-depth understanding of how student politics functions across Bangladesh. We have looked at the heart of student politics in Bangladesh: Dhaka, as well as the major urban centers of Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna and Sylhet, and the rural areas of Kushtia and Bogra.

Understanding regional variation and looking beyond Dhaka has proven key to understanding variations of student violence in the country. DU remains a special case. While DU student politics centers around national politics, in the regional centers, local interests are often more important. Local MPs, and city and town mayors often play a central role as patrons of student politics.

Local patterns of violence are also often related to intra-party factional struggles at the local level and understanding those better could be key to mitigating them. Paying close attention to the multiple centers of power – local, regional, and national – and their interactions is the only way to devise durable solutions to overcome student violence in the country.

Violence plays a key role in establishing power and authority in student politics, and student activists are gradually trained to

normalize violence. However, most, if not all student activists interviewed agreed that violence is morally wrong, but also stressed that it was an inevitable part of being politically active. Often, respondents pointed out that students are used to fight the battles of their local patrons. Thus, we have to move beyond a campus-centric approach to understand and mitigate violence in student politics.

“We believe that students who are now involved in politics, later will be goons or local mastaans (ex-Chhatra Union member, Khulna University).”

While in many places we studied, the mid-1990s to 2008 were relatively peaceful, violence has been on the rise since AL came to power in 2008. Most of this violence involves BCL engaging their opponents in an all-out confrontation. JCD, for example, has been almost completely marginalized. The same is true for ICS. At the same time, BCL infighting has emerged – with multiple BCL factions competing to reap the benefits of their now well-established power.

What distinguishes Dhaka from many of the regional centers we have studied is the role of ICS. While in Dhaka BCL was able to establish themselves quickly after AL came

to power in 2008, in most of the other places we studied, ICS was able to maintain power and control over campuses and student halls much longer, and, according to some we spoke with, has just gone underground and may still be a force to reckon with.

ICS was a major player in Chittagong University, Rajshahi University, Sylhet University and Islamic University, and maintained an important presence in the colleges in Khulna and Bogra, regardless of the party in power at the center. Their main asset has been their strict hierarchical organization, based on firm ideological commitment. It is quite telling that ICS has hardly seen any factional fighting. Also, they have shown ruthlessness in their fight with rivals and certainly with BCL, as evidenced by the dead body politics at the Islamic University in the 1990s, and the more recent violence in Rajshahi and Chittagong.

Despite this nascent threat, BCL seems to have consolidated power on most campuses across the country. Not only do we see an almost complete reduction of JCD and ICS violence, but BCL has taken firm control over student halls, which in most universities and colleges studied were the main center of student politics. By controlling halls, student politicians gain access to a reservoir of fresh recruits attracted by cheap accommodation. While many discontinue their political activities as they progress through university or college, every batch provides

new leaders and new violent manpower for student organizations.

Although they have established their dominance now almost universally, BCL is at the moment of writing going through a period of soul-searching. Sheikh Hasina has expressed her anger with the BCL central committee and has threatened to dissolve it. Her main complaints focus on the lack of capacity to appoint local committees—which as we have seen is often tricky business involving factional struggles and violence—and graft within BCL leadership who have been accused of taking bribes in the formation of local BCL committees. While BCL played an important role in the struggle against political opponents, and importantly ICS, now that AL is consolidating its party-state, BCL has to be reined in again. Excessive violence, as well as factionalism, is said to undermine the image AL wants to project, e.g. towards the international community.

The DUCSU elections, in which members of the Quota Reform Movement won positions, might be another turning point, as history shows that students have often been able to voice their critique of the government, by voting for the opposition in DUCSU elections. While BCL managed and controlled the 2019 elections, the results in the less politically controlled female student halls showed a lack of legitimacy of BCL.

This lack of legitimacy is a common theme in interviews conducted with students. For most non-politically active students, student politics is equated with violence, corruption and greed. This is further accentuated by the violent response of BCL to the Quota Reform Movement and the Road Safety Movement.

Wanting to address the issue of violence in student politics is difficult without taking into consideration the wider political dynamics at play. We believe that trainings that focus on democracy and tolerance may be shortsighted, unless they take into account some of the root causes of conflict that permeate student politics in Bangladesh. Our fieldwork data show that most students understand that violence or power politics should not be part of student politics, but they accepted it as “part of the game”. At times those involved even acknowledge that politics in Bangladesh is “dirty”. Yet, they engage in it anyways to avoid harassment or take advantage of the short- and long-term benefits offered when proving one’s usefulness to a senior party leader.

Another important factor, which is not specifically mentioned in any of the cases, but is a more general observation, is the importance of kinship ties. Students from political families tend to have already internalized the party ideology and have developed a stabilized political conviction instead of basing their political activities solely on inducement-based cost-benefit

calculations. Especially for local students being able to draw on already existing political networks is advantageous for succeeding in lobby-based selection processes, which tend to favor these students and enable them more often to build a political career in student politics and beyond.

Also, in many cases, especially more senior student leaders of BCL, maintain friendship relationships (childhood friends etc.) with JCD leaders, particularly in local neighborhoods. Instances where the public sphere of violent political contestation exists parallel to private sphere inter-party friendships is more common than expected. This is surprising in the Bangladesh context given the Manichean vision of student politics, the levels of violence between groups, as well as public statements made by e.g. BCL activist about the radical alterity of other student organizations.

Adding to this, the phenomenon of student politics in Bangladesh cannot be viewed in isolation to the extensive politicization of university faculty and administrative staff along party lines. While faculty level politics is complex and would warrant a separate report altogether, it is still important to assert, based on the empiric evidence, that both faculty and members of the administration are often tied into student political dynamics. They either appear as patrons, partners or abettors, are tight up in

negotiations with student leaders or are
faced with threats and even violence
depending on their political conviction

and/or insubordination to party ideology or
practices.

6. Possible Approaches for Violence Mitigation and Further Study

While we believe it would be presumptuous to offer any quick fix solution to the complex dynamics that are the underlying cause of violence in student politics, we would still like to suggest four possible approaches for mitigating student political violence. We however hope to have shown that student politics and violence is deeply integrated in local and national politics, which makes programs targeted solely at students always somewhat limited.

A first approach is to focus on providing an alternative incentive system. This is perhaps the most important area of intervention but also the most difficult one. Most students engage in power politics and violence for short- or long-term benefits, it is also the glue that connects student leaders to senior city or national level party leaders. In the short term it means a comfortable life on campus and in the long-term much better career prospects, especially when competing for scarce, but coveted, government jobs or business networks. Providing an alternative to these incentives or strengthening the career incentives for students that do not want to engage in “dirty” politics, could help to break the influence that student political organizations have on student political behavior.

While changing the incentive structure is highly challenging two key bottlenecks might be indicated, first at the start and the second at the end of the student career. First, for many students one of the main incentives for joining student politics in the first place is cheap accommodation in the student halls. As our research has shown, these student halls form the backbone of student politics, and a key source of manpower and new recruitment. Cheap accommodation (outside of the student halls) thus forms a key bottleneck, and certainly for lower and lower middle class students who really depend on the hall accommodation and find exit a difficult strategy. However, our data show that these additional student accommodations stay at risk to also be captured either by the ruling party’s student wing or the opposition, which would need to be taken into account.

Second, white collar jobs remain limited outside of the coveted government circuit, for which political patronage often is key. Strengthening the opportunities for graduates is highly necessary. Again, a differentiated, and class-based focus might be necessary, as students from lower and lower middle class background again might be more in need of political patronage as they

often lack the social and symbolic capital to easily integrated in the white collar job market. For those students who covet a political career, it has to be stressed that this often means a career in local, and not national politics. More research is necessary to gain a better understanding of the making of political careers at the local level as anecdotal evidence at least reveals that a history in student politics can provide the necessary party-political networks to become a (violent) political candidate at the local level.

The changing of student political behaviour mentioned above leads to a second possible approach: to engage more women in student politics. In some of our case studies,

“As there is a tendency to exclude women from any political activities, my hope is that critically aware youths could change this scenario; As it is also important for youths to get involved in healthy politics (Female JCD activist, Khulna, BL College).”

particularly in major universities in Dhaka, Rajshahi and Chittagong, female participation in student politics has increased quite

significantly in the past years. While this has been used as a strategy by BCL to improve the image of the student organization as “dirty” it might also prove to be an avenue to mitigate violence in student politics.

So far, though the role of female student activists in BCL has been largely symbolic (excluding those from powerful political families), those who do engage are often less involved in violence and muscle politics. Interviews showed that involvement in student political organizations has resulted in female students becoming more confident and serving the wider student-body. Women, however, still face a considerable amount of societal pressure that discourages them from joining (student) politics. Women in student politics are generally considered “loose” or “easy”, and their families find it difficult to find suitable husbands for them. Women also have to endure rumors suggesting they are romantically involved with male student politicians. Given the pervasive structural barriers women face, building confidence and empowering female students to join politics (also in DUCSU and equivalent student bodies) might thus be key for the implementation of another kind of politics. A removal or at least a deference of the curfew applied to female dormitories (currently depending on the location between 7pm and 10pm) could be a first measure to empower women’s meaningful engagement in student politics. These curfews are commonly justified with a prevalent lack of security for women to roam on campus at night. Thus, ensuring safety for woman on campus after sunset would support such a demand. Furthermore, a mentorship program might be instrumental in helping women to find the

confidence to overcome the reservations they have in engaging in student politics.

A third approach is to work with student bodies, such as DUCSU, directly, and demand for the introduction of their equivalents in other campuses. Given the role of the judiciary in forcing the recent DUCSU elections, this might provide an opportunity. Ensuring a free and fair election for student body representatives would be an ideal intervention, though would likely prove difficult considering BCL hegemony and claim over campuses. However, also in the past and with strong party-political backing the opposition student groups have been elected. Building awareness about this history might allow for gradual and incremental change. Integrating teaching staff in such a program, who as university proctors or hall provosts or tutors can play a role in ensuring the free and fair nature of these elections, seems to be mandatory. Of course, pressure on teaching staff to comply with party-political pressures makes this exercise also challenging.

Another option could be to strengthen political minorities within the organization to ensure participation and to provide support to general students. Such efforts should not simply focus on the student body, but maybe even more on the party-political leadership, both at the central and at the local level.

Another approach would try to shift the view of what a strong leader looks like in Bangladesh. Many BCL and JCD student leaders maintain a party ideology that is largely informed by a leadership cult paired with extreme nationalism and an image of leadership that is characterized by masculinity and strength. Citing political leaders such as Adolf Hitler as role models is common amongst student leaders. Raising awareness about nationalism in the context of Bangladesh and the different party ideologies could also contribute to mitigate some of the dynamics in student politics.

Finally, research should try to better understand those places, like Khulna, but also possibly more rural college towns, where student violence is absent or less pronounced. This would allow to assess which approaches to violence mitigation might work best, as well as to understand under what circumstances a ban on student politics is at the same time (democratically) advisable, feasible and effective.

Second, international comparative examples when it comes to recruitment behaviour and cooptation of student groups by authoritarian regimes could help to better understand the Bangladesh case. However, there is a general deficit in this field of literature, which either focuses on revolutionary and reformist student activism that is directed *against* the government and/or ruling elites as well as on

gangs who try to undermine the government's authority over the monopoly of violence. Studies that focus on (student) groups recruited for the establishment, maintenance and perseverance of authoritarian regimes remains largely absent. Bangladesh as well as examples from regimes in Nicaragua or Russia may serve as useful entry points for future research and comparison.

Overall, the central party leadership makes efforts to discipline their student wing, but they are limited by political expediency. The difficulty lies with the ruling party being dependent on the mobilization capacity and the exertion of control over students by their student wing to preserve their power and not leave a vacuum for the opposition to tap into. Furthermore, the uncertainty of shifting political orders, patronage relations and power structures at the local level might jeopardize intra-party cohesion and support for the national level party leadership, which would threaten the parties hold over power.

As this report has documented, local political concerns, sometimes beyond the control of

the central party leadership, have an important impact on the specific forms of student political organizations. While everyday local politicking and some degrees of violence is condoned, only gross misconduct such as murder or rape usually leads to more severe legal and political consequences. This happened, for example, recently, after the brutal killing of a general student in a student hall at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) in Dhaka by BCL cadres. Following a public outcry for justice the perpetrators were expelled from the party and arrested by the police and are now under trial. Furthermore, protests and public pressure have led the university administration to permanently ban all political activities from campus.²¹ It remains to be seen how long this decision will hold. The public response to the incident and the government's willingness to partly comply with the demands of the protestors, however, is a positive signal, which gives hope that public pressure will slowly lead to a general reevaluation of the ruling party's strategy to student politics and essentially allow for a democratization process .

²¹ The Daily Star (2019) 'Expulsion if students found involved in ragging, politics at Buet'. Available online at; <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/news/buet-expel-students-if-finds-link-ragging-political-activities-1835182>

