

Impact of Boycott and Quorum Crisis in Parliamentary Governance of Bangladesh: An Overview

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Abstract: Bangladesh's Jatiya Sangsad has experienced alternating cycles of legislative engagement and institutional stagnation since 1991, largely driven by two persistent disruptions: opposition boycotts and quorum crises. This study investigates the scale, patterns, and political incentives underlying these disruptions across the First to the Eleventh Parliaments, with concentrated analysis on the Seventh to Eleventh terms. Using a qualitative–quantitative mixed approach—drawing on Transparency International Bangladesh's Parliament Watch data, constitutional and rules-of-procedure documents, parliamentary statistics, and peer-reviewed scholarship—the study maps historical-institutional dynamics and evaluates their implications for legislative productivity, executive oversight, fiscal accountability, and public trust. The findings show that boycotts and quorum crises are not episodic events but structurally embedded practices that weaken deliberation, expand executive discretion, and impose measurable financial and governance costs. The study contributes to existing literature by integrating longitudinal session-level data to reveal cumulative effects often overlooked in prior research and by proposing a conceptual model linking political incentives to legislative dysfunction. Limitations include reliance on secondary parliamentary datasets and the absence of primary interviews. Future research may incorporate comparative legislative studies and actor-level behavioral analysis to deepen understanding of institutional reforms required to strengthen parliamentary governance in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Bangladesh Parliament, boycott, quorum crisis, parliamentary governance, legislative capacity, public accountability.

1. Introduction

For any state to have effective governance, a parliament is necessary. Legislation, oversight, and representation are among its primary functions, making it one of the fundamental governmental institutions of democracy. The basic three functions of a parliament (UNECA 2004:1) are: a) make new laws, change existing laws, and cancellation which are obsolete; b) express the views and wishes of the citizens by their elected representatives, and c) oversee the activities of the executive so that the government is accountable to the people. These three basic functions of parliament can ensure core elements of good governance, like people's participation, the rule of law, the right to expression, accountability, and transparency. Its representational role includes ensuring that citizens and other stakeholders have a strong voice at the national level and are, therefore, involved in national governance issues (Jahan, 2015).

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The public's reliance on a functional and proper legislature appears to be gradually diminishing. This decline is linked to the infrequency of full-house sessions within the parliamentary calendar. Repeated incidents of parliament boycotts and quorum crises have become commonplace, jeopardizing the effectiveness of the legislature. The parliament's effectiveness depends on its capacity to use its instruments on these issues. The Members of Parliament's (MPs') presence and engagement are prerequisites for the parliamentary session. The presence of a quorum in a parliamentary session is the primary determinant of its efficacy. One of the important functions of parliamentary government is ensuring a quorum. Bangladesh's parliament frequently has quorum crises, resulting in significant time and financial losses. Due to the opposition boycott, the ruling party's negligence, and the absenteeism of ordinary members, the standing committees of the parliaments were less effective, and parliamentary accountability of government was lacking (Rahman, 2014). Consequently, the smooth operation of the legislature faces ongoing threats and interruptions. The effectiveness of the legislature in Bangladesh has been significantly impacted by frequent boycotts and quorum crises.

2. Conceptual Clarification

Parliament

A parliament is a legislative body that represents the citizens of a country. It plays a crucial role in the democratic governance of a nation. The term 'Parliament' originated from the Anglo-Norman idea and is typically associated with the British system of governance. The word itself is derived from the Latin 'parliamentum' and the French word 'parler' and originally meant a 'talk' (Safiullah, 2006). Parliament has always been defined as a forum or house of discussion for any matter about the people, to reach decisions or policies by the agreement of the people or their representatives. The consent of the people, as expressed through regular elections, is the direct source of power for Parliament in a parliamentary system of government. Under this system, the executive is answerable to Parliament for all of its actions, both conscious and accidental. Today, parliament is a multipurpose organization. Over time, parliaments' functions have seen significant change all around the world. It carries out three crucial tasks, including representation, monitoring, and lawmaking. All of these are essential for advancing and maintaining democracy and sound governance.

Governance

Governance means how power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development efficiently and transparently. The topic of governance and good governance has been at the forefront of the global development agenda in recent years, especially since the second half of the 1980s. There are various contexts in which governance can be used, including national, corporate, international, and local governance. Governance can be defined as the system of government focused on effective and accountable public institutions, democratic values and electoral system, and representative and responsible construction of government, to establish an open and legitimate relationship between the society and the state (Halfani et.al, 1994). Factors like transparency and accountability are part of the governance process. On the contrary,

principles like justice and fairness are part of According to the World Bank, governance is how power is exercised in the management of countries' economic and social resources for development (World Bank, 1992). There are two ways to look at governance: positively and negatively. Both good and bad governance are possible.

Boycott

A 'boycott' is a way to express dissent and displeasure by refusing to attend, conduct business with, or participate in anything. To put it another way, it refers to accompanying people while refusing to engage in any business or other obligations. In general, it refers to the rejection of social or economic interactions with any person, group, authority figure, nation, or object, whether expressed individually or collectively. According to an analyst, 'Boycott: a means of political and economic struggle consisting of the total or partial curtailment of relations with a state' (Nanda, 1998). It is a kind of collective and organized ostracism applied in labor, economic, political, or social relations to protest and punish practices considered unfair.

Quorum

A 'quorum' is a predetermined number of participants that is necessary for a meeting to take place. It also refers to the number of people who, according to the rules, must attend a meeting for its activities to be authorized. The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics defines 'quorum' as the bare minimum of members required for a political body, like a legislature or committee, to have legitimate operations. As a result, the term 'quorum' usually refers to the bare minimum of approved attendees needed for a meeting to do business. In the context of the legislature, it refers to the bare minimum of members who must be present for business to be conducted. Procedures in the House are challenging when there is no quorum. A key idea in governance, quorum refers to the bare minimum of attendees required for a meeting's operations to be legitimate.

3. Objectives of the Research

The main objective of this study is to assess how boycotts and quorum crises affect parliamentary governance in Bangladesh. To achieve this goal, the research focuses on the following specific objectives –

- a) To gain an understanding of parliamentary governance.
- b) To investigate the underlying causes of boycotts and quorum crises in the Bangladeshi Parliament.

4. Literature Review

The existing body of scholarship on Bangladesh's parliamentary governance demonstrates that institutional dysfunctions—particularly opposition boycotts and quorum crises—are not isolated procedural disruptions but structural impediments to democratic consolidation. While many studies acknowledge these issues, they often treat them as routine manifestations of political conflict rather than as indicators of deeper institutional weaknesses.

Opposition boycotts, widely used by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its allied groups, have been interpreted in the literature as both a strategic response to perceived executive dominance and a symptom of the absence of meaningful inter-party negotiation mechanisms. Although boycotts are framed by political actors as tools to delegitimize controversial laws or highlight electoral irregularities, scholars argue that they often weaken the legislature itself. Sobhan (2017) demonstrates that prolonged boycotts during the 10th Parliament effectively enabled the ruling Awami League to monopolize legislative procedures, reducing opportunities for scrutiny and debate. Such findings indicate that boycotts may unintentionally reinforce the very executive dominance they seek to challenge. Islam (2019) further argues that repeated boycotts distort public perceptions of political representation, as citizens view absenteeism as a failure of democratic responsibility, thereby intensifying political distrust and weakening institutional legitimacy.

The literature on quorum crises similarly points to profound institutional fragilities. Article 75(2) of the Constitution mandates a minimum presence of 60 Members of Parliament, yet quorum failures have persisted across multiple parliamentary terms. Siddique (2018) notes that the 10th Parliament alone lost over 150 hours of legislative time due to quorum shortages, leading to both financial costs and policy stagnation. However, the scholarship diverges on interpreting responsibility: while some analysts attribute quorum failures to coordinated opposition absences, others argue that low attendance among ruling party MPs signals a culture of legislative disengagement and weak party discipline. Rahman (2020) contends that strategic manipulation of quorum rules by opposition MPs serves as a form of parliamentary obstruction, but his argument underestimates the structural incentives that allow the ruling party to tolerate low attendance without institutional consequences. Thus, quorum crises reflect not only political conflict but also pervasive weaknesses in legislative norms and enforcement mechanisms.

Taken together, boycotts and quorum crises undermine accountability, distort checks and balances, and widen the scope of executive discretion. Chowdhury (2021) argues that these recurrent disruptions strengthen the ruling party's ability to push legislation with minimal oversight, further weakening parliamentary deliberation. Economic analyses add another layer of critique by documenting the indirect fiscal costs of legislative inefficiency, as delays in policymaking and development planning reduce administrative effectiveness. However, much of the existing literature treats boycotts and quorum crises separately, thereby overlooking their cumulative and mutually reinforcing effects.

Despite extensive research on individual aspects of parliamentary dysfunction, few studies systematically compare how these disruptions evolved across the 7th through 11th Parliaments. This gap limits our understanding of whether these challenges are cyclical, politically motivated, or embedded in institutional design. The present study addresses this gap by integrating session-wise data, parliamentary proceedings, and secondary scholarship to provide a comprehensive analysis of how boycotts and quorum crises collectively shape legislative performance and democratic accountability in Bangladesh.

5. Research Methodology

This study uses secondary data analysis and a qualitative research design. The approach is intended to evaluate quorum crisis and boycott trends and their effects on legislative governance.

Data Sources

- a. Parliamentary records: Voting logs, official session reports, and attendance logs from several parliaments.
- a. Media reports: Legislative disruptions, parliamentary boycotts, and quorum problems are covered by national newspapers and reliable web news sources.
- c. Scholarly publications: Peer-reviewed studies, policy papers, and articles from organizations like the Social Science Research Network and Transparency International Bangladesh.

Data Collection and Analysis

By monitoring opposition absenteeism during significant legislative sessions and elections, boycott occurrences were found. Session logs showing unsuccessful attempts to comply with Article 75(2) requirements were used to evaluate quorum crises. The frequency, duration, and reasons of each crisis were highlighted by tabulating the data by legislative term. To find patterns in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh parliaments, comparative analysis was employed.

6. Boycotts in the Parliaments

Historical Context

Parliamentary boycotts, or the strategic abstention of elected representatives from legislative proceedings, have been a recurring feature in political systems worldwide. Globally, opposition parties have used boycotts as a tool to signal dissatisfaction with electoral processes, challenge executive overreach, or delegitimize ruling parties (Beaulieu, 2014). Historically, such actions have occurred in both nascent and mature democracies, demonstrating that boycotts are a widely recognized form of political protest.

In the late nineteenth century, Ireland had one of the first known instances of legislative boycott. Irish nationalist MPs refused to serve in the Westminster Parliament, claiming that doing so would weaken the fight for home rule and validate British dominance over Ireland (Lyons, 1971). Similar to this, nationalist leaders in colonial India periodically abstained from British-established legislative councils in order to draw attention to the limitations of representative government under colonial control (Gupta, 2002). These early instances show that boycotts frequently occur when the legislature is viewed as a symbolic or compromised institution rather than a place where important policy decisions are made.

Parliamentary boycotts became a popular strategy used by opposition groups in post-colonial Africa to deal with the rise of democratic institutions and single-party rule. To protest the consolidation of power in the presidency, opposition MPs in Kenya in the 1960s, for example, periodically skipped parliamentary sessions (Nohlen, Krennerich, & Thibaut, 1999). Similar to this, opposition parties in Tanzania used boycotts to challenge the ruling party's control and highlight electoral irregularities, particularly in areas where political competition was severely limited (Mushengyezi, 2011). These incidents show that boycotts were frequently deliberate and not just symbolic, with the goal of influencing public opinion and putting pressure on the executive branch.

Following the overthrow of communist governments, legislative boycotts became more popular throughout Eastern Europe. Opposition parties regularly skipped legislative sessions in Russia, Ukraine, and Serbia in the 1990s to express disapproval of electoral tampering, unconstitutional actions, or the consolidation of power by ruling elites (Ishiyama, 2000). Comparably, opposition parties in Latin American nations like Venezuela and Nicaragua have boycotted parliamentary procedures on multiple occasions, claiming that their actions are a defense of democratic legitimacy against regimes that are alleged to have manipulated electoral and institutional frameworks (Schedler, 2002).

Parliamentary boycotts have been employed as symbolic actions even in well-established democracies. In order to protest British authority over Northern Ireland, Sinn Féin in the UK has long practiced abstinence from the House of Commons (Mitchell, 2015). Arab parties have periodically abstained from Knesset sessions in Israel to draw attention to institutionalized discrimination or to protest laws that impact minority populations (Peled & Navot, 2005). These examples show that although boycotts vary in frequency and context, their fundamental objective of expressing disapproval and rallying support never changes.

In Bangladesh, parliamentary boycotts became entrenched after the restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1991. Opposition parties, including the Bangladesh Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), have repeatedly abstained from legislative participation to protest alleged electoral fraud, lack of political transparency, or executive overreach (Ahmed, 2018; Aminuzzaman, 2016). For example, during the 9th Jatiya Sangsad (2009–2014), the BNP boycotted nearly 80 percent of parliamentary sessions, severely undermining the legislature's oversight and accountability functions (Transparency International Bangladesh [TIB], 2014). Over time, boycotts in Bangladesh have shifted from exceptional protest measures to a routine strategy of opposition politics, reflecting both the adversarial nature of Bangladeshi party politics and broader global trends.

Globally, the historical record indicates two major patterns. First, boycotts are most frequent in transitional, hybrid, or emerging democracies where opposition groups perceive legislative institutions as compromised (Gandhi & Lust-Okar, 2009). Second, even in mature democracies, boycotts serve symbolic or moral purposes rather than directly influencing legislative outcomes. While boycotts can raise public awareness and signal dissent, they often weaken the deliberative and accountability functions of

parliaments, reduce legislative efficiency, and exacerbate political polarization (Beaulieu, 2014; Ishiyama, 2000).

All things considered, the history of parliamentary boycotts around the world shows a persistent conflict between strategic abstention and legislative action. Boycotts have shaped the legitimacy and operation of parliaments in a variety of situations, whether in Bangladesh, Ireland, Africa, Eastern Europe, or Latin America. They have also served as an instrument of resistance and a reflection of systemic political issues.

Scenario of the Bangladesh Parliament

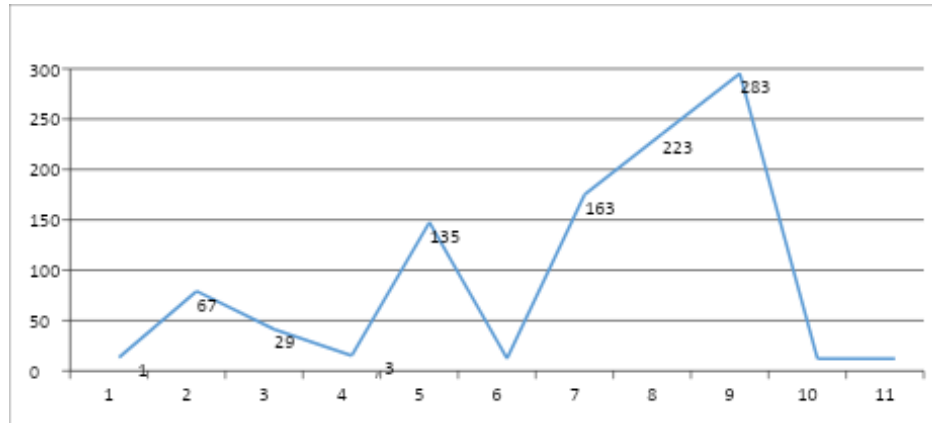
Boycotts are the common feature of the Bangladesh parliament since its inception (Alamgir, & Mahmud, 2006). However, the situation was much worse for the fifth, the seventh, the eighth, and the ninth parliaments in a row. Boycotts, of course, have not only ruined most of the working days of these parliaments but also witnessed a threat to the active presence of the parliament. The trend of repeated boycotts by the main opposition parties has gradually increased to alarming levels.

Table 1: Boycott of Parliamentary Sessions in Bangladesh (First to Eleventh Jatiya Sangsad)

Parliament	Total Working Days	Boycotted	Percentages
First	134	1	0.74
Second	206	67	32.52
Third	75	29	38.66
Fourth	168	3	1.78
Fifth	395	135	34.17
Sixth	4	0	0
Seventh	383	163	42.55
Eighth	373	223	59.78
Ninth	337	283	83.97
Tenth	327	0	0
Eleventh	272	0	0
Total	2674	904	33.81

Source: Transparency International Bangladesh, 2024, and EC, Dhaka.

Figure 1: Number of Boycotted Parliamentary Sessions in Bangladesh (First to Eleventh Jatiya Sangsad)



The table and graph show 11 parliaments (1973–2023) with a cumulative total of 2,674 working days, of which 904 days were boycotted. This means that, across the history of Bangladesh’s parliamentary democracy, 33.81% of working days were lost to boycotts - a very high proportion compared to other parliamentary democracies.

The parliamentary history of Bangladesh demonstrates a recurring tension between institutional practices and political confrontation, where boycotts became a prominent feature of legislative behavior. The first parliament (1973–1975) had 134 working days with only one day boycotted (0.74%), reflecting the absence of boycott culture in the immediate post-independence period, when the parliament was still consolidating its institutional functions (Ahmed, 2002). In contrast, the second parliament (1979–1982) saw boycotts rise dramatically to 67 days out of 206 (32.52%). This indicated the beginning of a confrontational style of politics where opposition parties used non-participation as a strategy of legitimization (Obaidullah, 2014).

The third parliament (1986–1987), with only 75 working days, faced boycotts on 29 occasions (38.66%). This high proportion of boycotted days was linked to the lack of credibility surrounding elections under military-backed regimes, leading the opposition to undermine parliamentary proceedings through abstention (Ahmed, 2001). The fourth parliament (1988–1990) recorded a relatively low boycott rate—only 1.78% (3 out of 168 days)—largely because opposition parties had boycotted the elections themselves and thus were minimally present inside parliament (Chowdhury, 2013).

With the return to parliamentary democracy, the fifth parliament (1991–1995) offered an opportunity for democratic consolidation but nonetheless suffered 135 boycott days out of 395 (34.17%). Boycotts became an entrenched practice as opposition forces sought to challenge ruling party dominance through non-cooperation (Ahmed, 2002). The sixth parliament (1996), however, was a transitional body, lasting only four days, with no boycott incidents recorded, as it was dissolved quickly to pave the way for elections under the caretaker government system.

The seventh parliament (1996–2001) witnessed 163 boycott days out of 383 working days (42.55%). Opposition abstention was frequent, reflecting deep partisan polarization and a limited willingness to institutionalize parliamentary culture. The crisis intensified further in the eighth parliament (2001–2006), which lost 223 out of 373 working days (59.78%) to boycotts. At this stage, boycotts became the dominant mode of opposition behavior, undermining legislative scrutiny and accountability (Obaidullah, 2014).

The ninth parliament (2009–2013) represented the peak of boycott politics, with an unprecedented 283 boycott days out of 337 (83.97%). The opposition's near-total withdrawal from parliamentary functions meant that the legislature's role in democratic accountability was nearly paralyzed. As Transparency International Bangladesh (2023) observed, parliamentary debate during this period was severely undermined, and effective oversight was almost non-existent.

In contrast, the tenth parliament (2014–2018) reported zero boycott days across 327 sittings. However, this was largely because the main opposition party boycotted the national election itself, leaving parliament dominated by the ruling party and its allies (Rahman, 2015). The eleventh parliament (2019–2023) continued this trend, recording 272 working days with no boycotts. While this absence of boycott might superficially suggest a maturing parliamentary culture, in reality, it reflects the marginalization of the opposition and the decline of competitive electoral politics (TIB, 2023).

Taken together, the longitudinal record demonstrates that boycotts were institutionalized between the second and ninth parliaments, peaked during the eighth and ninth, and then disappeared in the tenth and eleventh due to the erosion of opposition representation. Across all eleven parliaments, 904 out of 2,674 working days were lost to boycotts, amounting to 33.81 percent of total parliamentary time. This striking figure underscores the structural weakness of Bangladesh's parliamentary system, where adversarial politics and extra-parliamentary confrontation consistently undermined institutional accountability.

7. Quorum Crises in the Parliaments

Article 75(2) of the Bangladesh Constitution states that if at any time during which the parliament the number of members present is less than sixty, the president of the parliament shall either suspend the meeting until at least sixty members are present or postpone it. In every parliament, the country loses a huge amount of money due to a quorum crisis in the parliament.

Table: Quorum Crises and Parliamentary Productivity in Bangladesh: Working Days Lost, Time Wasted, and Financial Implications (7th–11th Parliaments)

Parliament	Total Working Days	Quorum Crisis Days	% of Days Affected	Wasted Time (Hours)	Wasted Taka (Crores)
Seventh	383	163	42.55%	3.12 hrs.	Not reported
Eighth	373	223	59.78%	227.15 hrs.	20.45 crores
Ninth	337	283	83.97%	222.36 hrs.	104.17 crores
Tenth	327	Data not specific	–	194.3 hrs.	163.58 crores
Eleventh	272	234	86%	68.35 hrs.	111.33 crores
Total	1692	903 (7th–9th only)	68.1%	715.28 hrs.	690.53 crores+

Source: Transparency International Bangladesh, 2024 and EC, Dhaka.

Since independence, the Parliament of Bangladesh has consistently faced quorum crises, undermining its effectiveness as a legislative and oversight institution. These crises became increasingly pronounced from the late 1990s onward, driven by political polarization, opposition boycotts, and chronic absenteeism, which together disrupted parliamentary functioning and weakened oversight of public resources (TIB, 2024).

Analysis of parliamentary performance over successive terms shows a troubling trend. The proportion of working days affected by quorum crises rose steadily through the 7th, 8th, and 9th parliaments, reaching peaks of over 80% of sitting days in some terms (TIB, 2014). This escalation corresponded with massive losses of legislative hours, totaling hundreds of hours, and substantial financial wastage amounting to hundreds of crores of taka. Although the 10th and 11th parliaments witnessed some reduction in absolute time lost per session, the overall percentage of affected days remained high, indicating that quorum crises remained a persistent institutional problem (TIB, 2024).

The consequences of such disruptions are profound. Not only is legislative time wasted, but the efficiency and legitimacy of parliament as a forum for policy deliberation are compromised. Ahmed (2001, 2002) highlights that these recurring disruptions reflect broader adversarial politics in Bangladesh, where boycotts and absenteeism have become normalized tools for contesting government authority. Similarly, Obaidullah (2012) and Rahman (2019) note that quorum failures undermine parliamentary oversight, delay lawmaking, and erode public confidence in democratic institutions.

The trend analysis emphasizes that quorum crises are indicative of political and structural issues that call for systemic change rather than being isolated or unusual occurrences. To reduce the institutional and financial costs of recurring quorum crises, it is imperative to improve accountability for attendance, strengthen the implementation of quorum rules, and cultivate a collaborative legislative culture.

Factors Responsible for Quorum Crisis in the Parliament of Bangladesh

The Jatiya Sangsad of Bangladesh has frequently had quorum problems, which have hampered legislative productivity, prolonged the passage of legislation, and resulted in financial losses (Transparency International Bangladesh [TIB], 2022). These crises are caused by a number of interconnected causes, according to an analysis of legislative sessions from the fifth to the eleventh parliaments.

Political Factors

Opposition parties' deliberate boycotts of legislative sessions are one of the main reasons for quorum crises. Frequently, these boycotts are employed as a means of protesting government policies, perceived injustice in legislative processes, or election disagreements (Hassan, 2019; Rahman, 2021). Quorum failures, for example, accounted for 83.97% of all working days during the Ninth Parliament, which is indicative of significant boycotts by the opposition (TIB, 2022).

High levels of antagonistic politics discourage attendance and hinder cross-party cooperation. Low quorum attainment may result from MPs skipping meetings at politically charged times (Chowdhury, 2018).

Scheduled sessions are frequently interrupted by nationwide strikes, street rallies, and other political mobilizations outside of parliament, which lowers attendance (Khan, 2021).

Institutional and Structural Factors

The constitution stipulates that a quorum must consist of a minimum number of MPs, yet there are insufficient enforcement measures in place. There are few incentives for regular attendance and insufficient sanctions for absenteeism (Ahmed, 2020). Ineffective scheduling and conflicting parliamentary agendas make quorum failures even worse.

Interaction of Political and Social Factors

Factor	Categories (%)	5th	7th	8th	9th	Implication for Quorum Crisis
Profession	Business/Industrialist	53	48	57	56	MPs with business interests may prioritize private work over attendance, increasing absenteeism.
	Civil/Military Bureaucrat	8	8	8	10	Likely consistent attendance, but small proportion.
	Lawyer	19	17	11	15	Procedurally aware, moderate

Factor	Categories (%)	5th	7th	8th	9th	Implication for Quorum Crisis
						attendance.
	Professional	14	9	11	7	Low representation, minor effect.
	Politics	2	4	7	5	Politically motivated MPs may attend selectively.
	Others	4	14	6	7	Varied impact on attendance.
Education	Postgraduate	38	40	42	37	High education does not guarantee attendance; professional interests dominate.
	Graduate	46	45	47	45	Moderate impact.
	Undergraduate	16	11	10	15	Less procedural knowledge; minor effect.
Parliamentary Experience	No experience	68	40	29	55	High absenteeism likely; inexperienced MPs unfamiliar with norms.
	One term	17	27	28	16	Moderate absenteeism; learning curve.
	Two terms	7	33	27	8	Better understanding; variable attendance.
	Three+ terms	8	0	16	5	Experienced MPs maintain quorum; small proportion limits effect.

Source: Data adapted from Transparency International Bangladesh (2022) and Saleh (2024).

Data from the 5th to 9th parliaments show that businessmen and industrialists constitute the majority of MPs (48–57%), followed by lawyers, bureaucrats, and professionals (TIB, 2022). MPs with significant private or professional interests may prioritize their non-parliamentary activities over attending sessions, contributing to absenteeism.

While most MPs are graduates or postgraduates (82–89%), education alone does not guarantee participation. The persistence of quorum crises suggests that professional or political incentives, rather than formal education, drive attendance patterns (Saleh, 2024).

Experience is a critical factor. Less experienced MPs, including those with only one term or no prior experience (29–68%), dominate several parliaments, particularly the 5th and 7th (TIB, 2022). Inexperienced MPs may lack understanding of procedural norms and incentives, reducing their likelihood of attending regularly. Conversely, MPs with multiple terms are relatively few, limiting institutional memory and the ability to enforce norms.

Quorum crises in Bangladesh's Parliament are driven by a combination of political, institutional, and social factors. Opposition boycotts, political polarization, and external pressures directly affect attendance, while the professional and social composition of MPs—particularly their business interests and lack of experience—further exacerbate absenteeism. Addressing these crises requires both political negotiation mechanisms and institutional reforms to strengthen accountability and enforce attendance (Saleh, 2024; TIB, 2022).

8. Impact of Boycott and Quorum Crisis in the Legislative Governance of Bangladesh

Weakening of Legislative Capacity

The primary consequence of frequent boycotts and quorum crises is that Bangladesh's legislative competence is weakened. Despite being the primary legislative body as required by the constitution, Parliament's effectiveness has continuously been weakened. Debate on bills is reduced when opposition parties abstain from proceedings, and quorum problems cause sessions to be postponed or adjourned. As a result, there are significantly fewer hours available for substantive lawmaking. Legislation that is poorly thought out frequently results from less discussion and examination. This weakens the balance of power by increasing the executive's control over policymaking (Sobhan, 2017). Furthermore, political impasse usually causes reforms that require bipartisan agreement—like public sector accountability or electoral reforms—to be delayed (Obaidullah, 2014).

Erosion of Oversight and Accountability

Legislators' capacity to hold the executive branch responsible is weakened by parliamentary boycotts and quorum issues. Without the opposition, oversight activities like Question Hour and standing committee involvement become less effective (Chowdhury, 2021). Additionally, in order to escape accountability demands, MPs frequently skip contentious debates, which lessens the effectiveness of ministerial inspection (Rahman, 2020). Fiscal restraint deteriorates, and corruption concerns increase as a result. Public Accounts Committee (PAC) proposals are frequently not given enough attention because of frequent quorum-related interruptions, according to Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB, 2023).

Fiscal and Economic Costs

There are also substantial financial consequences associated with parliamentary dysfunction. Quorum issues result in missed working hours and squandered parliamentary resources. Quorum crises in the 9th, 10th, and 11th parliaments, for instance, resulted in a loss of over 690 crore taka and the waste of over 715 working hours, according to TIB (2024). Additionally, delayed project authorizations and budgets have a detrimental effect on the timely execution of development projects, and ongoing instability gives investors the wrong impression about Bangladesh's political stability (Islam, 2019).

Delegitimization of Democratic Institutions

Parliamentary boycotts and quorum crises also erode the legitimacy of democratic institutions. Citizens perceive parliament as ineffective, reducing their trust in representative democracy (Chowdhury, 2021). Opposition parties often intend to delegitimize the government through boycotts, but these tactics can backfire by weakening the opposition's own institutional role (Rahman, 2020). This further entrenches public cynicism about parliamentary democracy.

Institutionalization of Confrontational Politics

The long-term consequence of repeated boycotts and quorum crises is the institutionalization of confrontational politics. Political competition increasingly takes place outside parliament through protests, strikes, and election boycotts, rather than within parliamentary deliberations. This cycle of extra-parliamentary confrontation undermines democratic consolidation (Obaidullah, 2014).

Comparative Governance Weaknesses

Compared to other parliamentary democracies, Bangladesh faces an unusually high level of disruption. While India and the United Kingdom experience walkouts and disruptions, they do not typically lose over 30% of working days to quorum crises and boycotts. In Bangladesh, these practices have become structural rather than occasional, resulting in a governance system characterized by inefficiency, accountability deficits, and declining democratic legitimacy (Sobhan, 2017; TIB, 2023).

9. Recommendations

Bangladesh's frequent parliamentary boycotts and quorum problems draw attention to behavioral and structural flaws that call for extensive reform. According to the data, these disruptions are not isolated occurrences but rather systematic issues that impair accountability, diminish legislative effectiveness, and erode public confidence (Transparency International Bangladesh [TIB], 2024). Reform must take place in a number of areas, including institutional practices, political culture, technical modernization, and legal and procedural regulations, in order to restore the Jatiya Sangsad's legitimacy and capability.

Legal and Procedural Reforms

Reviewing the quorum and attendance norms of procedure is an important first step. Although 60 members are needed to form a quorum under Article 75(2) of the Constitution, the Standing Orders can be changed to guarantee more stringent enforcement. Electronic attendance verification and automatic roll-calls could cut down on time wastage and avoid deliberate absenteeism (TIB, 2023). Furthermore, if due process protections are incorporated into the enforcement process, penalties for persistent, unjustifiable absences, including docking allowances or removing parliamentary privileges, might match incentives with institutional obligations (Rahman, 2019). Another innovation is proxy and remote voting under limited circumstances. Comparative parliamentary practices during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that secure proxy or hybrid systems can maintain business continuity while minimizing opportunities for obstruction (Inter-Parliamentary Union [IPU], 2021). In Bangladesh, such reforms could be piloted in committees before being scaled up to plenary sessions.

Strengthening Committees and Calendars

Committee structures can act as defenses against quorum crises and boycotts. Reducing disruption risks while preserving accountability would be achieved by moving more business, especially audit follow-ups, budget scrutiny, and oversight hearings, under committees with reduced quorum requirements (Chowdhury, 2021). To foster cross-party engagement, committees should also provide opposition representation in important oversight bodies like the Public Accounts Committee. Enforcing a predictable legislative timetable is equally crucial. MPs juggling constituency and parliamentary responsibilities benefit from a predictable timetable that minimizes absenteeism and includes reserved time for oversight roles like Question Hour (Ahmed, 2002).

Technological Modernization

Quorum issues can be immediately addressed by technological solutions. Real-time member presence tracking and public attendance reporting would be made possible by digital dashboards, biometric attendance verification, and electronic check-in systems (TIB, 2024). The ability of citizens to hold MPs responsible is one way that these measures improve openness. Furthermore, committee hearings that are remote or hybrid can avoid total paralysis in the event that the floor is disturbed. Legislative experiences in Canada, the UK, and NZ show that digital platforms can maintain committee supervision without compromising legislative legitimacy if they are adequately secured (IPU, 2021).

Political Party and Cultural Reforms

In the end, political behavior must shift in tandem with institutional reforms. Major parties might agree to uphold attendance at crucial national events like budgeting, disaster relief, and constitutional amendments under a cross-party "Parliamentary Confidence Pact." The harm brought on by widespread boycotts would be reduced by this type of cooperative protection (Obaidullah, 2014). Furthermore, giving the opposition significant institutional roles—like assured opposition days, vice-chair seats on committees, and more floor time—would lessen the motivation for them to stop participating in parliamentary procedures. According to research, boycotts are the go-to

form of protest when opposition parties are routinely shut out (Sobhan, 2017). Establishing positive opposition outlets, on the other hand, might bring political competition back into the parliamentary system.

Civil Society Oversight and Public Engagement

In order to track attendance and draw attention to the costs of interruption, civil society can be quite helpful. The ability of independent monitoring to spark public discussion has already been shown by TIB's Parliament Watch series (TIB, 2023). Long-term accountability would be established by institutionalizing such monitoring and having the Parliament Secretariat formally publish attendance and expense statistics. Campaigns for public education have the power to further alter political culture. People are more inclined to demand reform and punish absentee MPs through elections when they are aware of the democratic and financial consequences of quorum crises, which total over Tk. 690 crores between the Seventh and Eleventh Parliaments (TIB, 2024).

10. Conclusion

Opposition boycotts and quorum crises, especially between the Seventh and Ninth Parliaments, have often disrupted Bangladesh's parliamentary system of government. These actions have imposed high institutional and financial costs, undermined oversight procedures, and severely reduced the legislature's ability to enact laws. Although there were fewer boycotts during the Tenth and Eleventh Parliaments, the marginalization of opposition parties underscores a more serious democratic deficiency because competitive representation and parliamentary discourse are still undermined. The body of data shows that these disruptions are structurally ingrained rather than episodic, reflecting weak procedural safeguards and hostile political incentives. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive reforms encompassing legal and procedural adjustments, technological modernization, strengthened committee systems, political-party engagement, and active civil society monitoring. Such integrated measures can restore parliamentary efficiency, enhance public accountability, and reinforce the legitimacy of democratic institutions in Bangladesh.

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