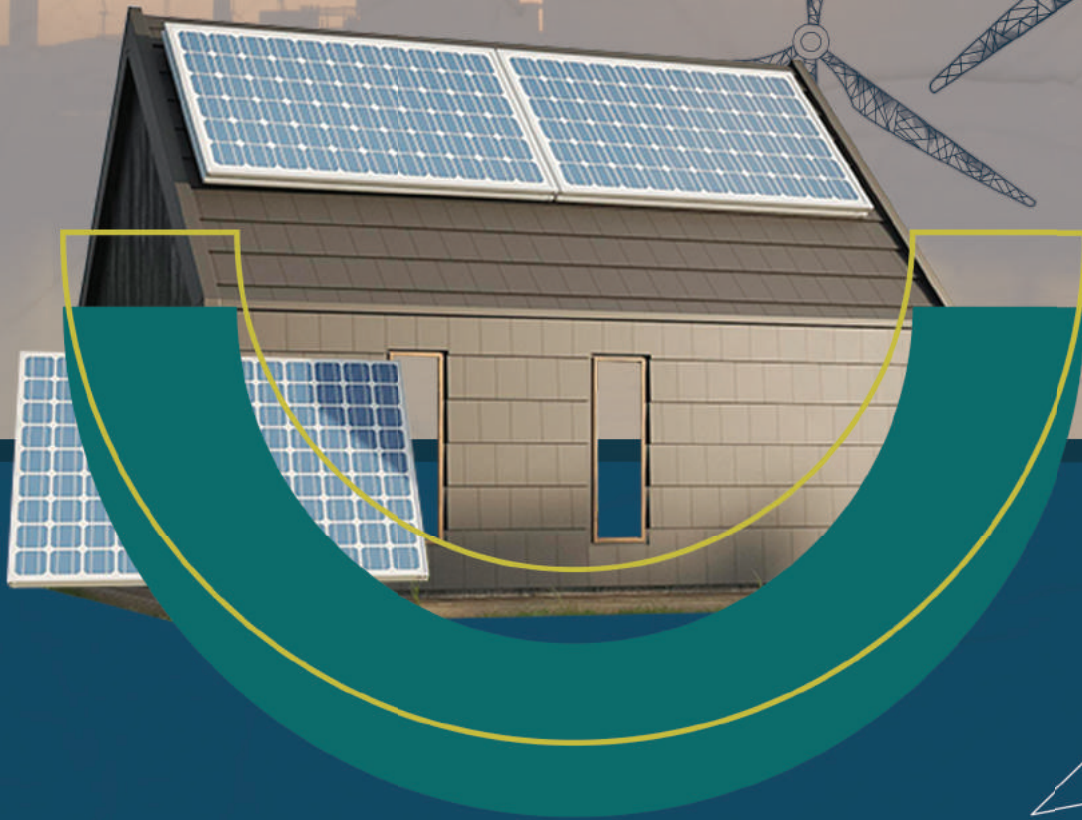


Energy Transition for Addressing Energy Crisis in Bangladesh

Perception of Political Parties



Khondaker Golam Moazzem
Helen Mashiyat Preoty
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Abstract

The political perception on different aspects of the power and energy sector of Bangladesh varies depending on different party ideologies, scientific knowledge and understanding, experiences, public demand, national mood and the country's overall socio-economic condition. Political party representatives explicitly acknowledge the urgency and importance of energy transition while ensuring energy security in Bangladesh. The power and energy sector has always been perceived as one of the key components for the political party manifestos to connect with the mass people. However, the presence of fossil fuel is also prominent in their manifestos with the expansion of power generation capacity. Unfortunately, commitments and pledges on renewable or clean energy and the strengthening and upgradation of the transmission and distribution system towards that direction have been found insignificant in the manifestos of all political parties. A number of challenges are hindering the just energy transition in Bangladesh. They include the prominence of fossil fuel in the public discourse about energy, unclear trajectory towards energy transition, unwillingness to involve peoples' representatives and national experts in the policy-making process, not fully functional National Parliament and a lack of political coalition and consensus on energy narratives.

This paper lays out three sets of recommendations for the elected party, new members of the National Parliament and opposition parties. The upcoming elected government should create a fully functional parliament where the policy, plan, and acts can be presented and passed and discontinue discriminatory, non-competitive policies and set up a committee with specialists and climate-responsive people to prepare a roadmap for attaining the 40 per cent renewable energy target by 2041. The appointed members of National Parliament should utilise the opportunity to put pressure on the government by creating consensus among fellow parliamentarians, promote parliamentary debates and discussions for renewable energy roadmap to achieve the target, and make sure that the sectoral policies, rules and acts of this sector are presented and passed as bills in parliament. Lastly, political parties with a spirit of activism can mobilise the peoples' movement through knowledge sharing and create a public mood in favour of renewable energy.

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Acronyms

AL	Awami League
BDT	Bangladeshi Taka
BPDB	Bangladesh Power Development Board
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
BSD	Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal
COP	Conference of the Parties
CSO	Civil Soceity Organisation
CPB	Communist Party of Bangladesh
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPPs	Independent Power Producers
JP	Jatiya Party
LNG	Liquidified Natural Gas
MCPP	Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan
MW	Mega Watt
RE	Renewable Energy
R&D	Research and development
SREDA	Sustainable and Renewable Energy Development Authority
TnD	Transmission and Distribution
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
USD	United States Dollar

1. Introduction

Bangladesh's power and energy sector's development trajectory has no shortage of policies, plans, acts and rules, indicating the political commitment in formulating and implementing those. To shape the long-term energy and power policies and plans targeting energy transition, the government takes up policies whenever required. But debates are aplenty about the incumbent government's political and policy objectives, and whether those are adequate to achieve the long-term energy goals. As the world is moving towards achieving net zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2050 through the global energy transition, Bangladesh has also expressed its desire to achieve sustainable energy transition goals. Bangladesh has made important commitments in the national and international arena – the prime minister has committed to achieving 40 per cent of renewable energy by 2041 through the energy transition. The Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan (MCP), adopted in 2023, has laid out the plan to attain 30 per cent renewable energy by 2030. At the same time, several existing and upcoming energy and power-related policies are not in line with the commitment regarding energy mix, renewable energy, energy efficiency, and security. The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) tried to understand the viewpoint of peoples' representatives on Bangladesh's energy transition from fossil fuels to renewable or clean energy, and identify the pathway to use their bargaining power in transiting the national energy policy narrative.

According to global literature, public policies related to the power and energy sector is linked with national and international commitments. There is an evident political character of decision-making about long-term policies to orient transitions in large sociotechnical systems. Politics and power play important roles in shaping pathways by identifying which paths to win out and why, and who benefits from them through changes to laws, rules and expenditures (Scoones, et al., 2015). In the process of policy transition, the public choices are reflected through peoples' representatives in various means and instruments, including policy

debates in parliament among parliamentarians, public debates, interactions with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), and information and evidence gathered by grassroots leaders. In case of energy transition, the role and functions of the peoples' representatives need to be reviewed based on their engagements in the policy debates, perception regarding the urgency of shifting from fossil fuel and the importance of transitioning towards renewable energy, and the future plans to influence the policies and plans in these regards.

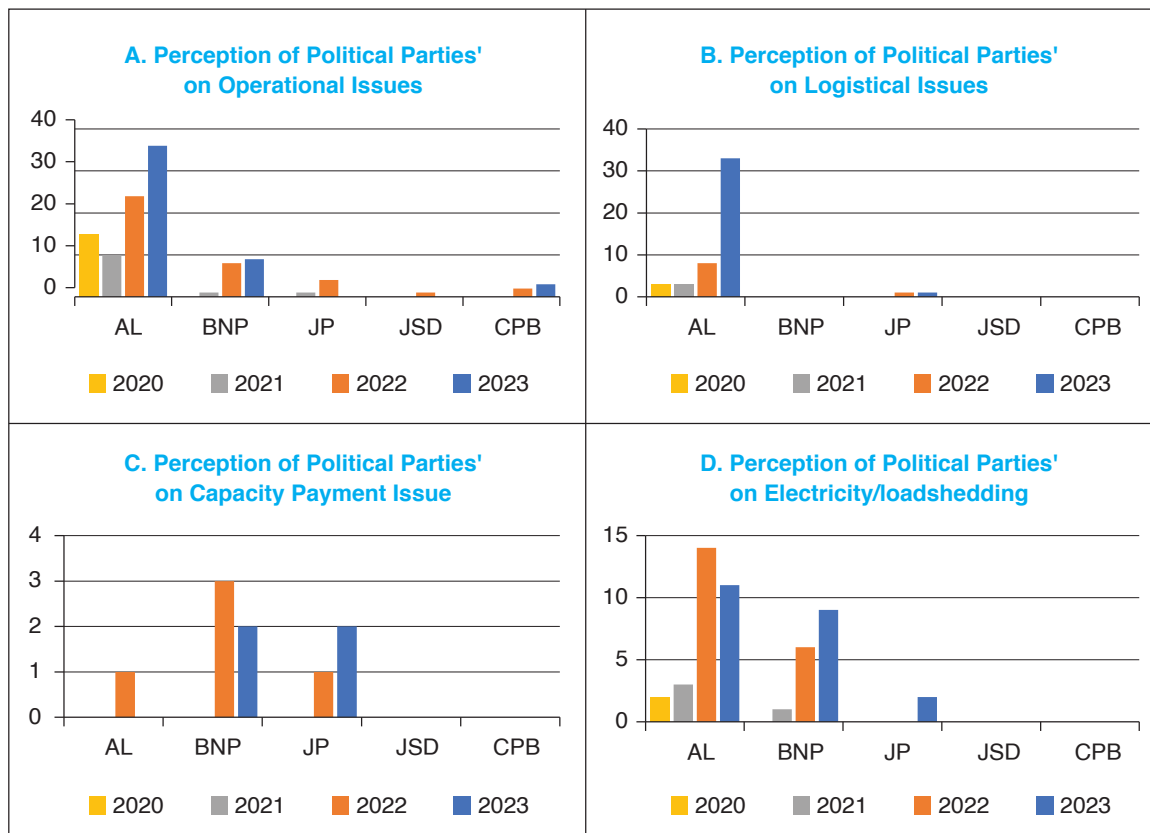
This brief highlights the political process in shaping, formulating and implementing different policies and plans related to Bangladesh's power and energy sector. The main objective of this study is twofold – (a) to understand the nature and ways of intervention of peoples' representatives in the policy-making process to ensure energy security and energy transition; and (b) to identify what roles public representatives can play in shifting the existing policy narratives towards energy transition from a clean energy point of view.

The policy brief was prepared based on interviews, statements, and perceptions of four major political parties of the country –Awami League (AL), Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Jatiyo Party (JP), Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD). Perceptions of these political parties have also been collected through newspaper screening. Previous election manifestoes and pledges have been analysed to better understand the political parties' stance on power and energy policies, energy transition, renewable energy, and phaseout of fossil fuel. A total of six Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with different political parties were conducted.

2. Perception of the People's Representatives on Different Aspects of the Power and Energy Sector

Before utilising the politics and powerplay in designing the pathway of energy transitions towards an energy-secure clean energy landscape, the perception of the political parties

Figure 1: Perception of Political Parties on Operational, Logistical, Capacity Payment and Electricity/ Loadshedding Issues



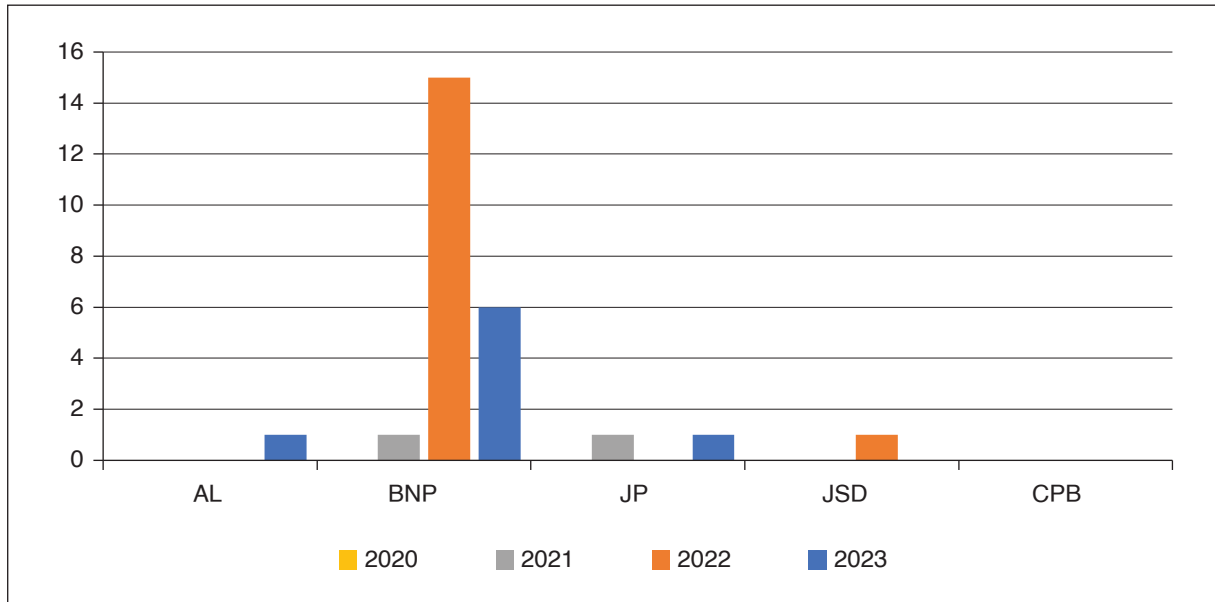
Source: Based on the news/reports published in national dailies.

must be understood. The political perception of different aspects of the power and energy sector can be different depending on party ideologies, the socio-economic condition of a country that varies with time, scientific knowledge, experiences, and the country's overall economic condition and demand. A year-wise snapshot of the political party's discussion points on different issues is presented in Figures 1-5. The discussion points include operational issues, logistical issues, capacity payment issues, load shedding issues and corruption-related issues (See also Annex Figures 1-4).

2.1 Party Ideology regarding Power and Energy

One key commitment of the AL government is to ensure energy and power availability and

accessibility at an affordable price. The party while in power has successfully increased per capita electricity consumption from 224 kWh to 497 kWh. Moreover, 100 per cent electricity coverage implementation process is also underway. To provide electricity at an affordable price, the government is giving substantial subsidies, since it is believed that without subsidies, the general people would suffer since high electricity tariffs would fuel inflation. The government also considers the environmental impacts of power generation and has taken up projects to decrease dependency on fossil fuels and increase renewable energy. The government has also set a target of producing 40 per cent clean energy by 2041 and is taking various measures to this end, promising significant improvement in Bangladesh's renewable energy condition by 2030.

Figure 2: Perception of Political Parties' on Corruption

Source: Based on the news/reports published in national dailies.

Promoting electricity as public goods and ensuring that consumers can enjoy their rights to consume electricity is a clear goal of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Providing affordable electricity is another core commitment of the BNP. In terms of energy mix, the party's three key considerations are a) possible energy sources, b) affordability and, c) possible balance of energy mix.

Jatiyo Party (JP) believes in renewable energy transition to justify resource usage. The JP accuses the government of losing a huge amount of money by deploying rentals and quick rentals as capacity payment and opines that the resource could have helped the economy to achieve 10 to 15 per cent of the renewable energy capacity.

The Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) aims to stop corruption in the power sector, increase research, and strengthen accountability. On the other hand, the left party sees the future energy mix of domestic natural gas and renewable energy by reducing dependency on LNG imports and increasing national companies' capabilities to supply energy at an affordable cost.

A well-crafted national policy is essential for ensuring a stable and reliable energy supply by minimising the risk of energy shortages, disruptions, and supply chain vulnerabilities. The policies taken or adopted by the ruling parties show the reflection of their priorities. Although policies are taken to achieve specific objectives, it can also have some unintended consequences. Likewise, the national policies adopted by the current government in the last three terms (14 years) of their tenure had pros and cons to the power and energy sector. Keeping the core party ideology to ensure energy accessibility, availability, and affordability, the government has undertaken several policy measures, initiatives and steps. Policies and plans such as Power Sector Master Plan 2010 and 2016, Integrated Energy and Power Master Plan (IEPMP) 2023, Gas Sector Master Plan 2017, and Quick Enhancement of Energy and Power Supply Act 2009 (Khondaker Golem Moazzem, 2023) were adopted to chalk out the future power supply demand forecast, primary energy mix scenarios, transmission and distribution system, roadmap for primary energy supply through domestic resource exploration and import plan. During the last decade, the government constructed few policies

to solely adopt and mitigate the climate change challenges and deploy renewable energy. Through these policies such as the Renewable Energy Policy, Perspective Plan, Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan (MCP), Energy Efficiency and Conservation Master Plan (EECMP), Net Metering Guidelines 2018, and Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 the ruling government has set the tone and direction for the energy transition in Bangladesh.

The opposition parties think that the current policies are keeping the domestic energy sector hostage to the international market as the sector is heavily dependent on imported fuel. The extension of the Quick Enhancement of Energy and Power Supply Act, 2009 for three terms has been highly criticised by the opposition party representatives. The government's unwillingness to explore domestic gas was also pointed out by them. The recent transfer of funds from the Gas Development Fund (GDF) to purchase LNG from the spot market was a violation of the purpose of the creation of such a fund, as opined by the opposition parties. According to them, the government has been hostile towards national companies as it adopted policies that only facilitate private companies. The national institutions' incapacities and incompetency in performance are said to be the result of anarchy in the power sector. According to the Bangladesh Somajtantrik Dol, the systematic weakening of the public institutions through faulty policy measures adopted by the government is the main reason behind that.

In the case of renewable energy targets and energy transition goals, the ruling party considers itself on the right track. However, the opposition parties think that there is a lack of a forward-looking action plan to attain the ambitious goals. BNP has pointed out the jargon modification done through the draft IEPMP, from a '40 per cent renewable energy' target to a '40 per cent clean energy' target. It has been labelled as dangerous for the energy transition pathway as the ruling government may try to slow down the transition process by sugarcoating carbon lock-in technologies in disguise of CCS, ammonia and hydrogen. As these technologies are expensive and yet to be tested, Bangladesh's

economic and technological readiness to deploy these technologies remains a concern.

2.3 Existing Fossil-fuel based Energy System, Energy-mix, and Diversification

Bangladesh has been heavily dependent on fossil fuel-based energy sources that have significant negative environmental impacts and sustainability challenges. The government has recognised the challenges long ago, yet it stands far behind in reducing its dependency on fossil fuels. The numbers from the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) show that the lion's share (approximately 93 per cent) of the power supply is generated by fossil fuel-based energy. The ruling party still finds it difficult to reduce its dependency on fossil fuels and so continues to keep the newly built coal-based power plants for the next decade.

Opposition parties such as BNP, CPB and representatives from the left-wing parties think renewable energy and natural gas should be prioritised as the main energy sources because both are environmentally friendly, safer and can reduce production cost. The opposition parties further questioned the government's wrong methods of electricity generation, wrong selection of energy mix, and import-based fossil fuel power plants that are resulting in huge capacity payments by the taxpayers. This crisis is compelling consumers to pay high fuel prices even as their energy consumption demands remain unmet.

2.4 Urgency of Renewable Energy Transition from Fossil Fuel in Bangladesh

The transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy should be made faster to reduce carbon emissions, protect our coastal regions, and preserve the ecosystem and population. The AL government did set the target to achieve 5 per cent of power from renewable energy by 2015 and 10 per cent from renewable energy by 2020. However, the goal of achieving 5 per cent from renewable energy still has not been achieved by the government in 2023. On top of that, an even more ambitious target of

40 per cent renewable energy has been set by the AL government. Currently, 108 renewable projects are under process and are projected to generate 10,000MW of power, according to a statement by the state minister for Power, Energy, and Mineral Resources of Bangladesh. According to the Sustainable and Renewable Energy Development Authority (SREDA), poultry waste biogas production is successfully generating half of a MW of electricity. The ruling party leaders think that financial support and aid from home and abroad are needed for a smooth transition from fossil fuels to renewables.

BNP's focus is on natural gas, biomass, solar and hydroelectricity. In the current economic condition of depleting reserves, BSD leaders put the power sector crisis and the urgency of transition above other development projects of the country. According to them, the transition should be considered with greater concern rather than making infrastructures for tunnels and bridges. Lastly, to reduce environmental impacts, the left party leaders emphasised renewables and natural gas and reduced dependency on imported LNG. Though CPB does not seem to have a specific roadmap towards the transition, they fully understand the adverse environmental effects of non-renewable-based power plants and emphasise the need for a faster transition to renewable energy.

2.5 Grid Transmission and Distribution Mechanism

During the political tenure of BNP from 1991-1996 and from 2001-2007, the transmission and distribution system was advanced and expanded but there was a shortage of electricity generation. Contrarily, the AL government has notably increased the power generation capacity, but it has not given enough emphasis on building adequate transmission and distribution system. This weakness is causing load sheddings and inefficiencies of the sub-stations. The issue is even more serious with renewable energy as solar is a highly variable energy.

The ruling government accepts its weakness in modernising the transmission and distribution system and expresses their willingness to establish the smart grid system immediately. BNP's Vision 2030 mentions some steps to modernise inefficient power plants to ensure efficient energy and quality electricity at a reasonable cost. But this vision lacks comprehensive plans towards efficient electricity supply and modernisation of the technologies. Other political parties agree that the power distribution and transmission facilities must be improved in line with the power generation, but they also lack in proper planning necessary to achieve the objective.

2.6 Private Sector's Participation/ Partnership

Privatisation can play a role in the transmission and distribution system of the power sector. Although the government acknowledges that it is not possible to bear the financial burden of the sector with public money alone, some opposition parties speak against privatisation and blame the private sector for the prevailing crisis. The ruling government claimed that an investment-friendly atmosphere prevails in the country, which is encouraging investments from the private sector as well as different US-based companies in the power and energy sector. Additionally, it is stated that the projected integrated power master plan by 2050 of infrastructural development can be made possible if finances worth USD 180 billion from both private and foreign investments can be managed. The government can use this money for smart grids, modern technologies, advanced transmission and distribution systems, electric vehicle infrastructures, and cost-effective production systems.

The opposition parties argue that the government is ignoring the national interest and is taking steps that only benefit a certain group of people. While CPB thinks nationalising this sector is a must to ensure mass people's welfare, BSD leaders fear that privatising the transmission and distribution

(TnD) system would push the sector towards commercialisation. BNP encourages further privatisation of the sector. According to the BNP, competitive privatisation of TnD will help setting a market clearing price for the sector, and consumers will be able to choose among multiple options, which are now solely operated and conducted by a single entity. Both the left wing and BSD leaders believe that the private sector's urge for profit-making is creating instability in this sector. All the opposition parties hold the ruling party accountable for the Quick Enhancement of Energy and Power Supply Act, 2009 which gives the government the power to make any agreements without leaving room for questioning the decisions.

2.7 Pressure from Interest Groups

The key objection against the ruling government is the fact that the increasing import of LNG is mainly the result of pressure from lobby groups. The ruling Awami League rationalised the LNG import blaming the depleting natural gas reserves as a short-term measure to address the current crisis. That is why the government is investing in LNG import and giving the private sector the responsibility to import it. The government is further planning to keep importing LNG to meet the growing demands and to apprehend the uncertainty of shifting away from LNG anytime soon.

On the other part, BNP does not see any international or external pressure; it rather holds responsible for the weakness in governance for the decision behind LNG import. The party blames backwards-looking national energy policies as the main reason behind the unwillingness of international companies to invest in Bangladesh.

Agreeing with BNP, another political party, Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), opines the dependence on LNG import is mainly due to government policies that contradict the constitution. CPB is in favour of empowering state-owned companies. On the other hand, partnering with foreign or private companies facilitates scope for commission and further profit-making. For example, BAPEX has previously proved its capability but did

not provide capacity-building opportunities. The lack of technology as well as expertise can be addressed by bringing in foreign experts through contracts. However the government is giving away the ownership of national resources to foreign companies that serve the interests of a specific group of people only. The people's representatives from the left wing draw attention to the structural weakness that failed to make the state-owned companies stronger and self-sufficient mainly in the face of pressure from lobby groups. There is a tendency to replace the state-owned companies with companies supporting foreign involvement from these institutions. According to the left-wing parties, if the national companies become stronger, there will be no scope for doing business with the private companies that are currently acting as substitutes for the state-owned companies.

Conversely, the current main opposition party in parliament JP explicitly expresses that lobbying exists in every country. However, these agreements must not go against the national interests. For that, the government should publish the draft agreements publicly before signing any agreement. It will allow examination of the agreements in terms of public interests by power sector experts, energy specialists and policymakers to make amends in these agreements. As these agreements usually do not get published or published very late, it becomes difficult for the government to foresee the problems that might arise as a result of these agreements. So, the government should be open and transparent.

2.8 Subsidies and Consequences

The power and energy sector receives the majority of the subsidy allocation from the total national subsidy. In the national budget of FY2024, the power and energy sector received an allocation of BDT 32,000 crore. The ruling government has decided to end the subsidy in this sector to fulfil International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditions. The ruling party has expressed the inability to subsidise this sector any further. As a result, electricity price has gone up and are expected to rise further. The ruling party argues that the country's power

tariffs are lower than that in many other developed nations, and subsidies are still provided to keep electricity more affordable. However, opposition party representatives do not welcome the initiative to hike electricity prices. Political party like CPB has stated that the IMF mechanism to rationalise subsidies is a faulty one as this type of mechanism usually fails to address the key structural problems. According to them, the reason behind the high subsidy allocation is the capacity payment provided to the rental and quick rentals. Hence, passing the burden on the consumers' shoulders through price hikes instead of addressing the core issue is unjust.

2.9 Burden of Capacity Payment

Under the indemnity act titled Quick Enhancement of Energy and Power Supply Act 2009, the ruling government has paid 82 Independent Power Plants (IPPs), and 32 rental power plants a sum of BDT 104,000 crore in capacity payment in the last 12 years. The AL thinks it was necessary for that challenging time during 2009, and up until recently. However, the government is renewing the contracts based on the No Electricity No Payment method after acknowledging the adverse financial implications of such a non-competitive act. Other political parties have vehemently opposed this initiative of extending the act for the third time. According to them, despite being burdened with 50 per cent unutilised generation capacity, the ruling party has been extending the act to distort the energy and power market.

2.10 Measures for Better Governance, Transparency and Accountability in Public Procurement

All the opposition parties questioned the recent public procurement procedure and contractor selection process. The ruling party has been heavily criticised for not considering public sentiments and demands, and not involving parliamentary members and peoples' representatives in these decisions. The government has also been accused of failing to ensure better governance, transparency and accountability in public

procurement. Without termination of the faulty agreements between the government and the private sector, the corruption and inefficacy cannot be curbed, BNP leaders argue. According to the opposition parties, the government can go for new contracts with the private sector by reviewing the existing policies and prioritising transparency and accountability before signing new agreements and making policy decisions,.

3. Reflection of Power and Energy Sector in the Election Manifestos of Political Parties

The power and energy sector has always been perceived as one of the key components of the political party manifestos to connect with the mass people. The parties usually have an entirely separate section on the sector. However, fossil fuel has an overwhelming presence in the manifestos along with the expansion of power generation capacity. Power import from the neighbouring countries are also a prime focus in the manifestoes of AL, BNP and JP. The import of LNG and fuel oil was also emphasised in the AL manifesto. Unfortunately, the strengthening and upgradation of the transmission and distribution system is hardly mentioned in any of the manifestos of any political parties. Also, no political parties in their manifestos make any significant commitments and pledges on renewable or clean energy.

Awami League (AL): Awami League is considered to have significantly enhanced the power generation capacity, which the party touts as one of its key successes. In its 2008 manifesto, AL pledged to increase power generation capacity to 5,000 MW by 2011 and to 7,000 MW by 2013. The next election manifesto set the target at 24,000 MW by 2021. In the 2019 manifesto, AL committed to generate 28,000 MW of electricity, which it has achieved successfully. Unfortunately, no such commitment and pledges have been observed regarding the transmission and distribution system before the last national election in 2019. The diversification of the fuel mix for power generation is not much reflected in any previous Awami

League manifestos. Exploration of domestic energy sources such as natural gas and coal has been emphasised in all three election manifestoes of the party. In 2008, the priority to explore natural gas and oil sources was emphasised. However, from the 2014 manifesto and onwards, rather than exploring domestic gas, the import of LNG and establishment of LNG infrastructure have been emphasised. Its 2008 manifesto committed the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, but the party has never committed to promoting renewable energy in its manifestoes. The manifestoes even lack the work plan to achieve the already mentioned renewable energy targets.

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP): The expansion of the generation capacity, transmission and distribution lines has no reflection in the BNP manifestoes. The party's election pledges rather focus mainly on energy availability and efficiency. The last election's manifesto included some initiatives to reduce dependency on natural gas

and furnace oil and diversify the fuel mix to hydro dams. In the 2018 manifesto, BNP also committed to developing renewable energy from solar, biogas, geothermal, wave radiation and waste. Through these, BNP intends to resolve the power crisis sustainably and reduce its carbon footprints if in power.

Jatiyo Party (JP): JP's manifestos for 2008 and 2014 were not available, so the study reviewed its 2018 manifesto only. It lacks appropriate attention to the power and energy sector. The pledges only included the party's aspiration to keep the fuel and electricity tariffs as low as possible. The party also pledged to ensure gas transmission and distribution throughout the country especially in the Northern parts of Bangladesh. No such commitments on renewable energy have been made and reflected in the manifesto. Table 1 summarises the manifestoes of three political parties and election pledges in the last three national elections.

Table 1: Reflection of Energy-related Issues in Party Election Manifesto

Issues	AL			BNP			JP		
	2008	2014	2018	2008	2014	2018	2008	2014	2018
Installation of power generation capacity	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	NA	No	NA	NA	No
Existing fossil-fuel based energy systems, energy mix and diversification	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	NA	Yes	NA	NA	Yes
Grid transmission mechanism	No	No	Yes	No	NA	No	NA	NA	No
Private sector participation	No	No	No	No	NA	Yes	NA	NA	No
Subsidies/incentives	No	No	No	No	NA		NA	NA	No
The urgency of renewable energy transition	No	Yes	No	No	NA	Yes	NA	NA	No
Mitigative measures	No	No	No	No	NA	Yes	NA	NA	No
Regulatory policies	Yes	No	No	No	NA		NA	NA	Yes
Power import	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	NA	No	NA	NA	No

Source: Authors' compilation from political party manifestos.

4. Engagement of the Political Parties in Influencing the Domestic Energy Narrative

4.1 Parliamentary Discussion, Debates, and Actions of Political Parties

Parliament is the ultimate platform for political parties to debate issues relating to the nation's betterment. AL representatives claimed to have had effective discussions with government officials, the minister, and advisers regarding different power and energy issues. The targets or agendas are usually set based on their opinions and collaborative discussions, with eagerness to implement them. There is a caucus in the national parliament called 'Climate Parliament' which focuses on issues related to climate change. The parliamentarians of the Climate Parliament seem to be playing an active role in mitigating the climate crisis and actively discussing the issues regarding climate.

BNP speaks about their direct interaction with consumers to understand public perceptions regarding price and power quality. When asked about energy policies and corruption, the ruling party's misuse of power and actions against the opposition party were stated as frustrating. JP leaders say discussions have taken place in the parliament regarding the concerns about the current capacity payment policy and the importance of aligning the transmission and distribution (TnD) system with the production system. Another opposition party, CPB, said they faced backlash, including physical harm and arrests, during their protests, strikes, and marches that they held in public interest.

4.2 People's Movement to Strengthen the Narrative of the People's Representatives

The role of people's representatives in influencing the domestic energy narrative cannot be overstated. This is reflected in a number of major power and energy-related incidents. Public discomfort over the price hike of electricity bills by 15 per cent, petrol by 51.2 per cent, diesel and kerosene by 42.5 per

cent and gas in commercial and industry sectors by 14 per cent and 179 per cent respectively were clearly visible in street rallies and discussions meetings. Ruling party leaders acknowledge that price hikes negatively affect the common people, Small and Midsize Enterprises (SMEs), and other businesses and emphasise the need for keeping prices at a tolerable level. However, this issue of energy security and dual-energy pricing system is expected to be in this year's manifesto.

BNP alleges the government does not consider the public opinions and demands while making decisions about the energy sector. One example is the extension of the contracts of the quick rental power plants, which is against the public demands. The party also opines that there should have been enough public discussions, parliamentary debates, and analysis regarding power and energy sectors, including generation cost and price at the consumer level. Although the power tariff increased, the government could not sufficiently improve the quality of power in line with tariff hikes.

CPB criticised the government for not following the constitution in formulating economic policies. It says the government failed to fulfil its previous pledges to reduce electricity prices as it adopted the wrong policies. The prevailing economic condition is yet to improve unless adequate policy measures are taken. The left-wing perspective highlights the presence of a 'Culture of Denial' in the government that induces the government to downplay the problems in this sector to protect the interests of lobby groups. The government remains indifferent to public anger indicating a lack of dependency on public preference in elections, they said.

4.3 National Mood on the Power and Energy Sector

Electricity has been made available to mass people at a high cost, creating a negative public mood. In order to control the overall public perception, the ruling party is trying to keep the price at a tolerable level. As a result, the electricity tariff has not been hiked despite the urgency of doing so in line with IMF conditions.

BNP representatives say they directly interact with the people to understand their perception of power and energy-related issues. Activists of political parties such as CPB actively work to mobilise people to build a coalition, like the one they did through long march in Mongla. However, these political parties reported facing problems from the ruling party and police and some local people while arranging meetings.

4.4 Partnership with the CSOs and Other Stakeholders

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are often closely connected to the grassroots level of their communities as a result of their knowledge and information-sharing activities. Politicians who make decisions that have far-reaching implications for society can benefit from collaborating with the CSOs in knowledge sharing. This type of collaboration leads to more effective solutions to societal issues and promotes transparency and accountability in governance.

The ruling government acknowledges the importance of collaboration with CSOs. The party appreciates the work of CSOs but mentions that their recommendations are often theoretical and may face practical challenges due to political, bureaucratic, and financial factors. Nevertheless, CSOs play a crucial role in shaping their perspectives. Hence, the ruling party has been involving CSOs and other stakeholders in the recent IEPMP formulation process.

BNP also appreciates the policy advocacy of the CSOs as it broadens the scope for new ideas to take rational policy measures appropriate for the time. Jatiyo Party leaders suspect a presence of duality in the government. They claim its rigid bureaucracy and short-term profit-making intention impede the implementation of policy recommendations proposed by the CSOs. The CSOs also have to come forward together with complementary policy recommendations from time to time. CPB leaders also point the finger at the intentions of the ruling party. A lack of good intentions to make positive changes and adapt environmentally-friendly

policies prevents it from knowledge-sharing with CSOs and experts.

It is crucial to have synergies between politicians and civil society organisations in order for democracy to function properly and the economy to function better. It can lead to better comprehension and coherence. It promotes citizen engagement, fosters participation in the political process, and ultimately strengthens democratic institutions.

4.5 Engaging with International Partners using Global Platforms

International platforms like COP (Conference of the Parties) facilitate international co-ordination to address issues associated with climate change, set targets, and implement strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote sustainable and clean energy transitions on a global scale. This is an opportunity for Bangladesh to highlight the dire situation that the country is in and bring in climate funds, technologies, and experts for building climate-resilient infrastructures and capacity enhancement. This financial assistance can be vital for the adoption of renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies in less economically developed regions like ours. The political leaders were asked about their plans for achieving climate agendas in the international platforms such as COP. A number of parties appreciated the government for seeking aid for reducing carbon emissions and reaching climate goals, while others showed disappointment for not properly representing the country and its needs on these international platforms.

The ruling party claims it is implementing various projects in different sectors for climate mitigation while it keeps its eyes on the Loss and Damage fund. The government's primary focus in COP28 is establishing a Loss and Damage fund, where developed countries will support climate-vulnerable nations in addressing environmental challenges. While some issues related to the modalities of this fund need to be resolved among countries, it is crucial for Bangladesh's climate adaptation efforts as a climate-vulnerable nation.

According to BNP leaders, the representation of Bangladesh on these international platforms as a victim is dissatisfactory; the country should rather play the role of a leader for the other climate-vulnerable nations in the South Asia region. What Bangladesh needs is a strong mindset about its abilities and possibilities, which can help it negotiate with the development partners for funds and investments from these platforms, they opine. Like them, JP leaders expressed despair over the improper representation of Bangladesh. The Bangladesh officials attending the sessions were unable to show the actual needs and demands, although a dedicated team to negotiate better and represent the country should have been prepared.

CPB says the current policies are not environmentally friendly and they hinder the ability to demonstrate a genuine commitment to environmental preservation. CPB is also seeking for international assistance on platforms such as COP. If the previous pledges to protect the environment could have been fulfilled, then sharing our gained experience and expertise on international platforms could upscale the country's status and set an example, CPB argues. The left-wing party appreciates the fact that the government is requesting financial assistance for environmental issues due to the impact of emissions from developed countries. However, the current power and energy sector approach is expected to exacerbate environmental problems rather than alleviate them. This contradiction and hypocrisy in their stance on international platforms is evident.

5. Political Party Initiatives Towards Future Energy Transition in Bangladesh

As Bangladesh is going through a transitioning phase, these political parties have a role to play in expediting the transition. Before identifying the roles of public representatives in influencing the policy-making on energy transition in Bangladesh,

the existing level of interventions of the people's representatives needs to be reviewed to understand to what extent the tone of the existing discourse is fossil fuel-based.

5.1 Reflection on the Energy Transition in the Election Manifesto and the Upcoming Election

The previous manifestoes have been found insignificant in terms of inclusion of renewable or clean energy issues. This lack of willingness to incorporate energy transition into their election manifesto and pledges for the upcoming national election is also evident. Only one political party, BNP, has set its targeted energy mix for the power and energy sector. According to BNP's plan, the main source of power will be natural gas, biomass and RE (solar and hydroelectricity). The party is not considering wind as a key fuel mix immediately as capacity buildup will take time for it. Table 2 summarises the energy transition reflection in the previous election manifestoes of three political parties.

Keeping the renewable energy targets and sectoral targets set in the 2021 NDC, representatives of the AL have vowed to include pledges and measures on renewable energy deployment and promotion in the manifesto of the upcoming national election. If elected, one of the party's key objectives for the upcoming tenure would be to ensure that renewable energy has a significant share in the total energy mix. Although the current government cannot commit to the 100 per cent phaseout of fossil fuel, a gradual shift towards renewable energy is on the agenda. In this year's election manifesto, the current government argues that energy transition can boost employment generation. JP has committed to incorporating renewable energy investment and allocation in its latest manifesto and would try to implement it if elected as the ruling party. Unfortunately, no BNP representatives spoke about putting the renewable energy agenda in the upcoming election manifestos.

Table 2: Summary of Renewable Energy-related Pledges from Election Manifestoes of Three Political Parties

Issues	AL			BNP			JP		
	2008	2014	2018	2008	2014	2018	2008	2014	2018
Energy-mix	No	Planned installation of 30 lakh solar panels	No	The potentiality of power generation from hydro, wind and solar will be tested	NA	Additionally, RE like solar energy, biogas, geothermal, wave radiation and waste to energy plants would be developed and encouraged	NA	NA	No
Generation Target	No	No	No	No	NA	Small, medium and large environmentally-friendly power plants would be developed	NA	NA	No
Efficiency	No	No	No	No	NA	No	NA	NA	No
Smart Grid	No	No	No	No	NA	No	NA	NA	No

Source: Authors' compilation from political party manifestos.

5.2 Alliance Building to Provide Strategic Support for the Energy Transition

All the political parties understand and acknowledge the importance of intra-party partnership, political co-operation with those outside the government, as well as national, regional, and international alliances to strategically make energy transmission successful. To achieve its policy targets, the ruling government plans to adapt different measures inside and outside the government. AL leaders have also sought recommendations from CSOs in achieving renewable energy goals in policy measures, institutional and technological measures, product standardisation and differentiation, and research and development (R&D). The co-operation from the international players is also crucial as the peoples' representatives have already argued using the Loss and Damage fund to build the renewable infrastructure that was primarily established in the context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to address the environmental damages of the developing countries. Through multi-dimensional co-operation, the government, private sector, foreign missions and CSOs can launch a unified initiative to support the energy transition by attaining renewable energy goals.

5.3 Creating a Parliamentary Caucus in Favour of Energy Transition

The agenda needs to be brought to a higher level inside parliament. Political party representatives look forward to bringing the energy transition agenda within the caucus. The current ruling party is confident that the functionality of the parliamentary caucus will be even better if they are in power again. Following the queue, the opposition parties recommended debates and discussions in parliament in favour of energy transition.

5.4 Influencing Regulatory and Operational Policy, Jurisdiction and Legislation

A sign of a functional parliament is the role its members and opposition political parties are allowed to play in the policy-making process. Unlike

other democratic countries, the policy-making process is not often inclusive in Bangladesh. Another example is the discontinuation of the Quick Enhancement of Energy and Power Supply Act 2009. Opposition parties are trying to negotiate the discontinuation of this non-competitive act which hinders the promotion of renewable energy in Bangladesh. The peoples' representatives have been trying to expedite the energy transition of Bangladesh through operational policy, jurisdiction and legislation.

5.5 Roadmap for Achieving 40 Percent Renewable Energy by 2041

The ruling party, Awami League, plans to achieve the 40 per cent renewable energy target by adopting three main activities. The first one is to formulate strategies to attract domestic and foreign investment in renewable energy through foreign, national and multinational financial support, and aid. The second is phasing out of fossil fuel-based power plants.

Representatives of JP plan to allocate a dedicated yearly budget of BDT 20,000 crore to implement renewable energy-related projects to achieve renewable energy targets through a five-year plan. Then it will produce cheap, affordable, and quality RE. Consumers will get the option to choose between traditional and renewable energy according to their needs. Additionally, by installing big RE power plants in every district, upazila and then union, the energy transition journey can proceed to the next level. BNP representatives also support the allocation required for the renewable energy investment and call for channelling more money into the Loss and Damage Fund for its use towards achieving economic and social protection development, especially in Bangladesh's most vulnerable areas.

CPB believes that setting a goal is not sufficient, rather a concrete roadmap or action plan is required to achieve the renewable energy capacity target. The party previously proposed a draft with proof of producing electricity at low cost using RE as a part of the environment protection movement with

a target set for 2041. The party also sent a letter to the government calling for an open discussion on this matter, but the proposal was not accepted.

5.6 Identifying Possible Risks for Energy Transition

An energy transition pathway cannot be defined as comprehensive if it does not identify possible risks and challenges and discuss its ways out. Political party representatives in general have duly identified some of the key possible risks for energy transition.

The public discourse on energy still centres around fossil fuel: The public discourse on the power and energy sector still centres around imported fossil fuel. It not only slows down the energy transition trajectory but also threatens the energy security of Bangladesh.

The trajectory towards energy transition is unclear: On one hand, the government is setting targets for reducing carbon emissions. But coal-based power plants seem to get duty-free access and other benefits for importing fuels on the other hand. So, the vision is ambiguous in the absence of strong principles.

Unwillingness to involve peoples' representatives and national experts in the policy-making process: Opposition parties and other peoples' representatives point out that the ruling government is unwilling to involve other parties and stakeholders in the public discourse on energy policies. The absence of climate experts in policy-making and their capability to influence policy decisions cannot bring any good for the people and the environment.

National parliament is not fully functional: The fact that parliament is not fully functional, participation of the peoples' representatives in policy discourse makes it difficult to push the energy transition journey further.

Challenges in building coalition and consensus: There is still a lack of national coalition-building efforts, especially within the political parties. All

the parties seem certain about the need for energy transition, but a uniformed plan and year-wise target are yet to be fixed through a consensus among own party colleagues and opposition party leaders.

The national mood still does not favour energy transition: One major drawback in Bangladesh is that there still has not been a shift in the public narrative and national mood towards the energy transition. Political parties are yet to be successful in making people aware of the need for transition from fossil fuel to renewable or clean energy.

Identifying and addressing these risks require careful planning, stakeholder engagement, effective regulation, and adaptive management. It is important to have a comprehensive risk assessment and mitigation strategy to ensure a successful transition to a more sustainable and low-carbon energy system.

6. Recommendations and Concluding Remarks

Political party representatives explicitly acknowledge the urgency and importance of energy transition while ensuring energy security in Bangladesh. However, ruling party leaders, representatives in parliament both from ruling and opposition parties, as well as other opposition parties outside parliament will have to carry out a set of responsibilities to expedite Bangladesh's energy transition.

6.1 Recommendations for the Upcoming Ruling Party

Comprehensive roadmap towards the target: Before setting any targets, it is crucial to consider the consequences, possible risk management, and unexpected situations, and a roadmap towards making the sector resilient enough to any crisis should also be prepared in detail. A committee could be set up with specialists, climate-responsive people, and experts who will review the policies, analyse the threats based on experience, scientific

knowledge and updated information and guide the government accordingly to attain the 40 per cent renewable energy target by 2041.

Renewable energy needs to be incorporated into the energy mix as a conventional energy source: The first and foremost way to deploy renewable energy is to make space for it in the energy mix by phasing out fossil fuels. The energy mix should mainly focus on renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and biomass as renewable energy is not only environment-friendly but also will be the cheapest energy source for power generation in the future.

Creating a fully functional parliament where policies, plans, and acts can be presented and passed: The first responsibility of the members of parliament is to make sure the issue of energy transition is being discussed, debated and passed. Engaging the political parties in the decision-making process is a must-have characteristic.

Setting up a budget in response to the climate crisis: A climate budget can be created by borrowing funds from the private sector and foreign investors with a holistic plan of saving the environment and the ecosystem that is getting polluted by emissions mainly from the power sector, transport, and industry.

Discontinuation of the Quick Enhancement of Power and Energy Supply Act, 2009: As discussed repeatedly, this indemnity act should be discontinued immediately by the next elected government. The act promotes non-competitive fossil fuel-based power and energy structure while distorting the national fiscal resources.

Foreign Investments: However, a domestic climate fund had been created with adaptive measures. Greater concerns are on climate mitigation by implementing energy, transport, and agricultural projects. These projects involve reshaping the energy mix, attracting investments, and reducing costs to address climate change. The government should consider foreign investments both in power

generation as well as in the manufacturing of parts. The private sector should also be encouraged to invest in the renewable energy sector by providing them with a business model.

6.2 Suggestions for the Members of Parliament

Creating consensus within parliament for discontinuing the Quick Enhancement of Power and Energy Supply Act, 2009: The nominated members of parliament should have the opportunity to put pressure on the government by creating consensus among fellow parliamentarians. Collective effort, coalition building and consensus will be required to put an early end to the Quick Enhancement of Power and Energy Supply Act, 2009.

Parliamentary debate and discussion for renewable energy roadmap to achieve the target: The parliament members (MPs) should have the chance to vouch for the urgency of a roadmap to achieve the renewable energy targets of 2041. The MPs can strongly demand a year-wise target with existing potentials, investment plan, and work plans.

Making sure that the policies, rules and acts of this sector are presented and passed as bills in parliament: As the government usually adopts policies and plans related to the power and energy sector regularly, the MPs must put all their efforts into making sure these policy decisions are proposed and passed as bills in the national parliament.

6.3 Way Forward for the Peoples' Representatives

Mobilising public movement against the continuation of the Quick Enhancement of Power and Energy Supply Act, 2009: Political parties can also mobilise people by creating awareness through knowledge sharing about the acts, policies and rules. This way, the peoples' representatives can contribute to the public discourse even outside parliament.

Conversation with the general people: The authorities must discuss the crisis and the ways out of it with the public. Different public responses can help create alternative policy measures sometimes. These types of conversations can build public trust in government.

Creating a public mood in favour of renewable energy deployment: Creating a public mood can play an important role in pushing the energy transition of Bangladesh forward. Therefore, the peoples' representatives who can go to the mass people's doorsteps should try to build the narrative in favour of energy transition through deploying renewable energy.

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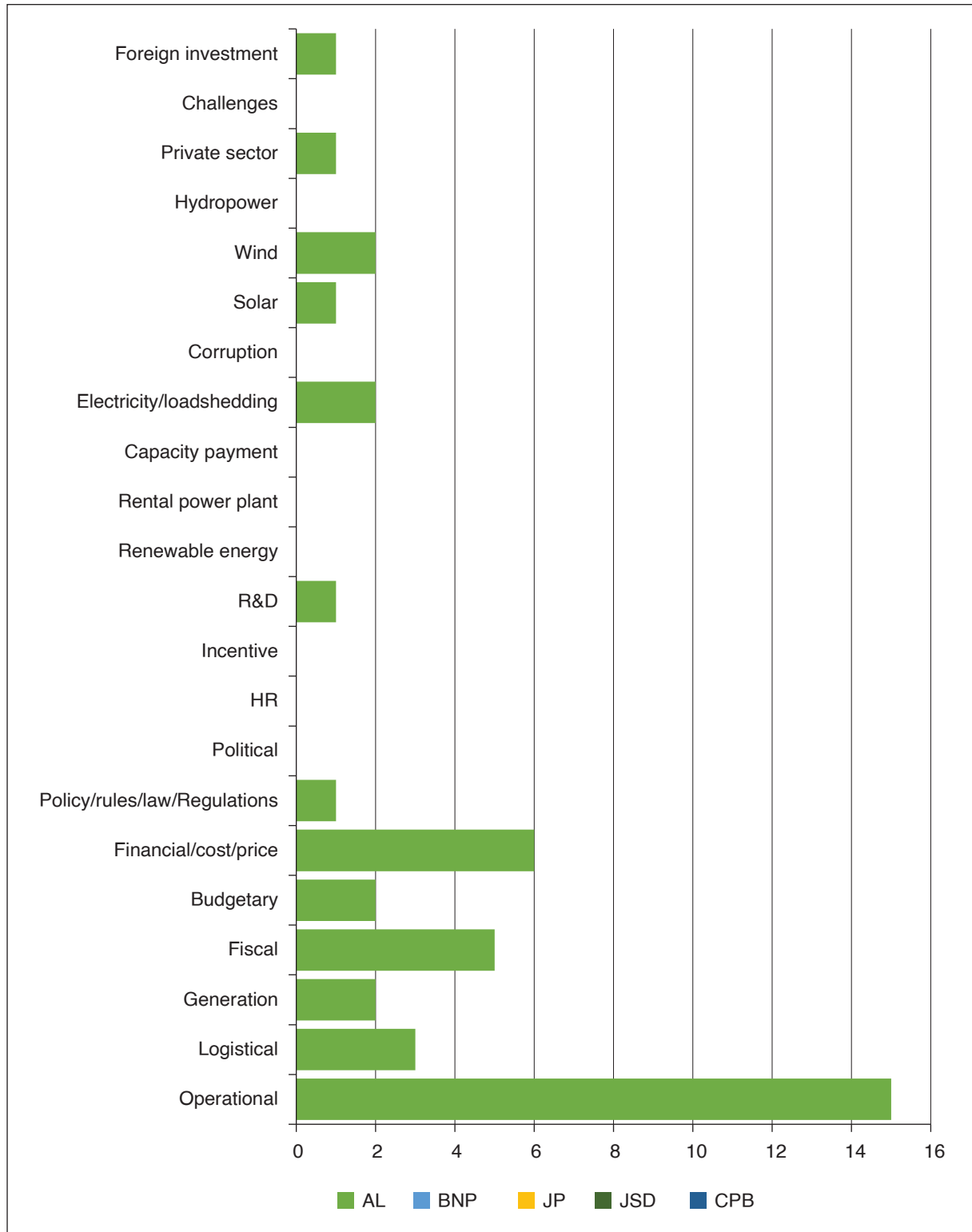
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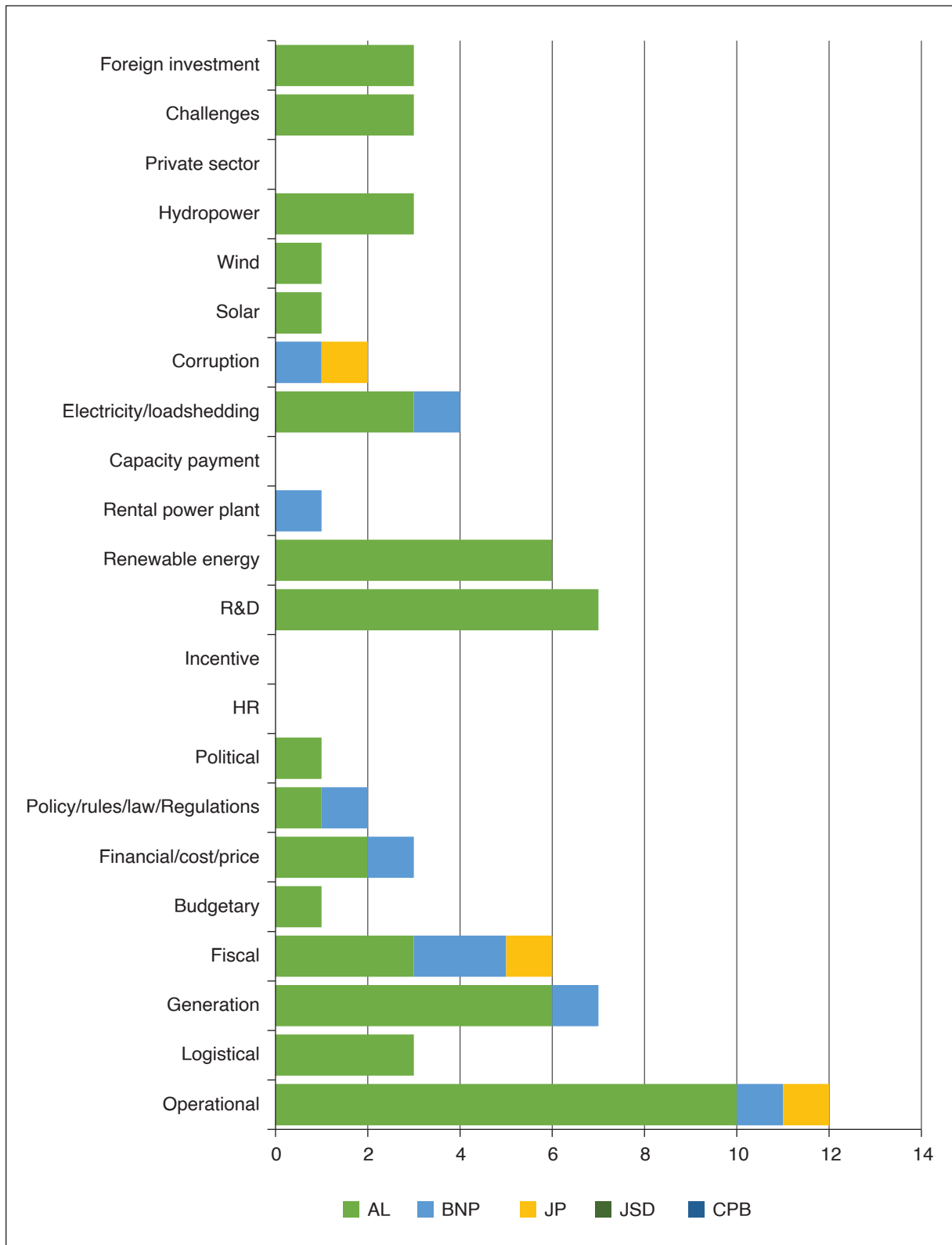
Annexure

Annex Figure 1: Perception of Political Parties' on Power and Energy related Issues in 2020



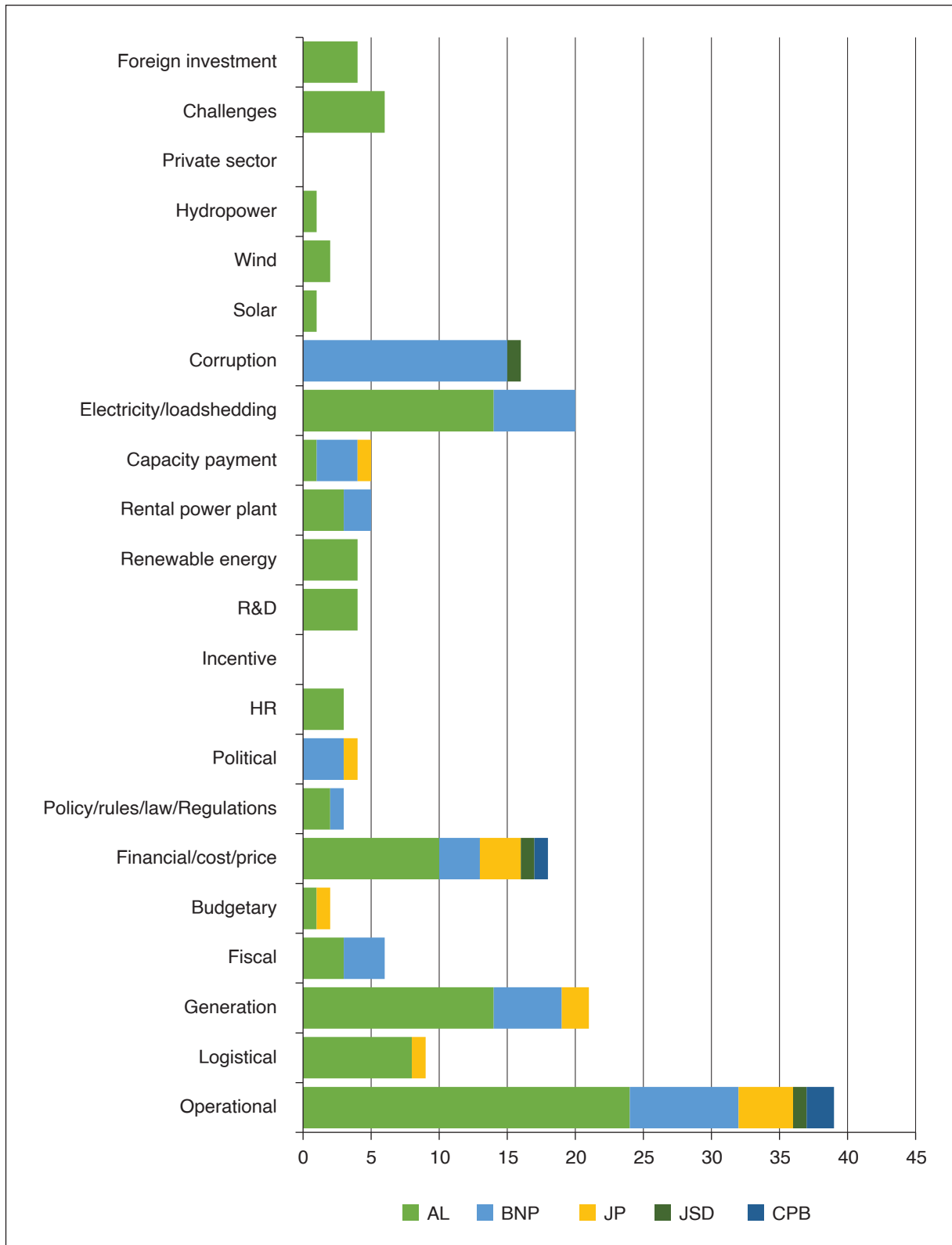
Source: Based on the news/reports published in national dailies.

Annex Figure 2: Perception of Political Parties' on Power and Energy related Issues in 2021



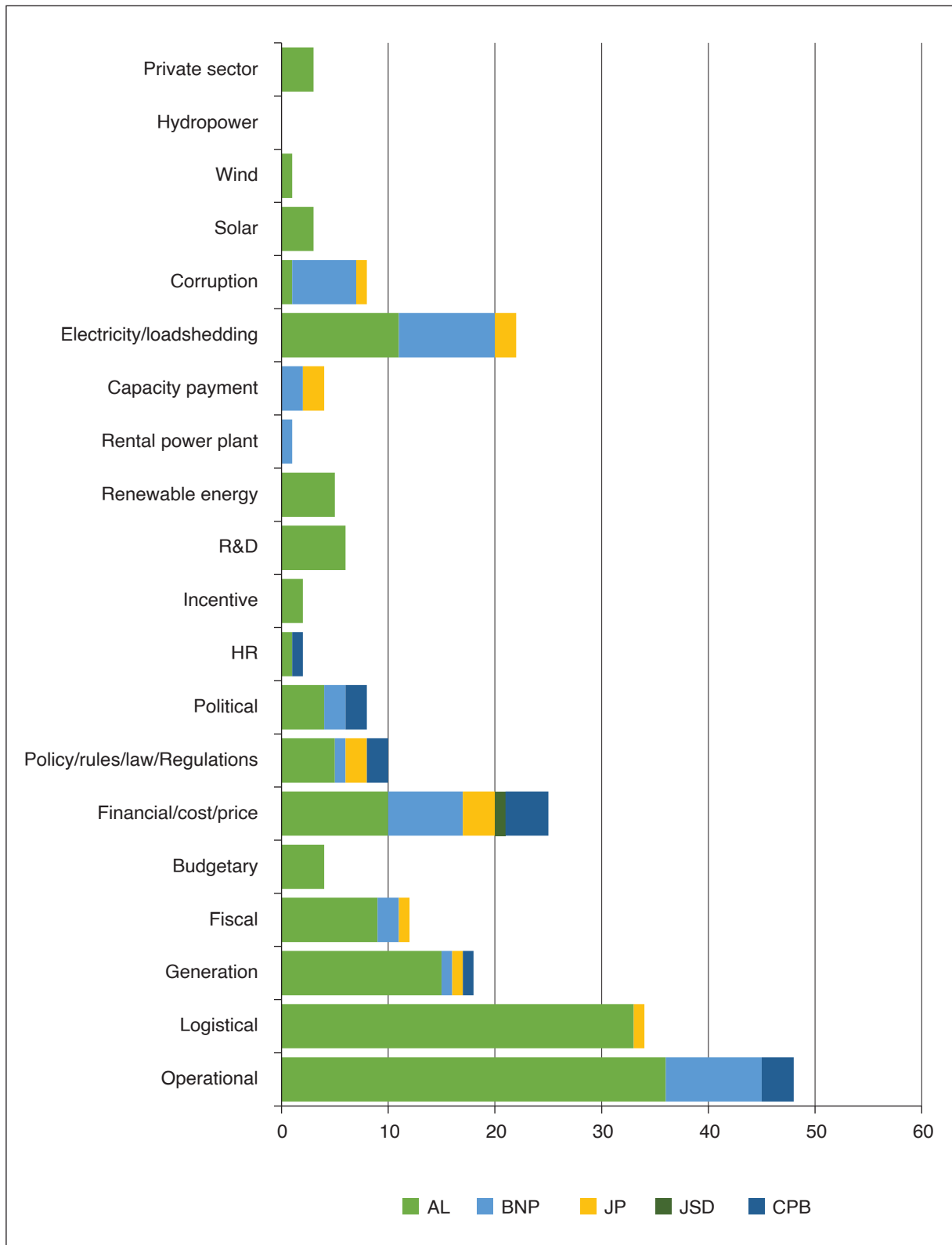
Source: Based on the news/reports published in national dailies.

Annex Figure 3: Perception of Political Parties' on Power and Energy related Issues in 2022

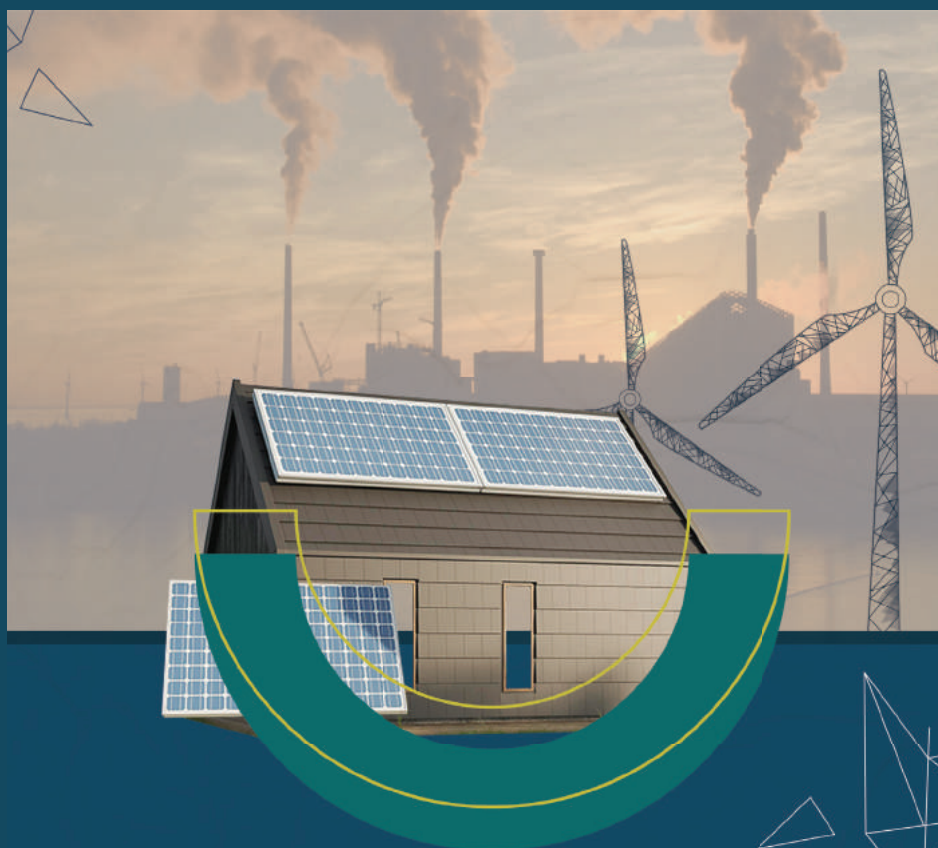


Source: Based on the news/reports published in national dailies.

Annex Figure 4: Perception of Political Parties' on Power and Energy related Issues in 2023



Source: Based on the news/reports published in national dailies.



Political parties through their pro-active role both in the Parliament and outside can best contribute in shaping the long-term energy and power policies and plans targeting energy transition in Bangladesh. Achieving the commitment of 40 per cent renewable energy by 2041 requires coherent policies, initiatives and actions. However, most of the existing and upcoming energy and power-related policies are not in line with that commitment. Hence, voice of the political parties is crucial within and outside the government and Parliament to achieve just energy transition.

This study tries to understand the viewpoint of peoples' representatives on Bangladesh's energy transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy and identify the pathway to use their bargaining power in transiting the national energy policy narrative.



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