Solution Zero

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Quite unexpectedly an aura of pre-election mood prevails in the country. PM told her party loyalists to take preparations for next election.BNP said it would not take part any election under this election commission. In response AL leaders said it would cost BNP its registration.

In this backdrop possibility of another January 5 election looms large. Economist magazine in its Democracy Index downgraded Bangladesh as a "hybrid regime". Could next election graduate Bangladesh a "full democracy" or push it to the abyss of political impasse?

In order to search the answer we need to analyze the outcomes of next election under current EC. Let's assume we are dealing with 3 parties here: Awami League (A), BNP(B) and the rest(C). Participation in the election is denoted by "5" while "0" indicates a rejection.

In this 3-party game the outcome is a triple where the first element represents the choice made by A, second one represents B's choice and the third one stands for C's choice. A game mentioned in the chapter "Contract, Coercion, Intervention" of Kaushik Basu's highly laudable book "Beyond The Invisible Hand: Groundwork for A New Economics" deeply inspired me to model this game.

(5,5,5) is the outcome when all the parties take part in election. (5,0,5) represents an outcome where BNP opts out of election; (5,0,0) means a parliament full of uncontested ruling party MPs; finally, (0,0,0) indicates there is no election.

Before we go further, we need to make some assumptions:

1. Each party possesses a preference relation and it is quasi-transitive.[1]

2. Each party prefers "5" to "0".

3. One party's action has no externality on others.

4. If several parties change their actions, then a party who is not one of them can be affected.

If we apply Pareto Principle,[2] then we will see (5,0,0) is Pareto superior to (0,0,0); (5,0,5) is Pareto superior to (5,0,0); and (5,5,5) is Pareto superior to (5,0,5).

All the parties are better off with the outcome (5,5,5) and the outcome secures its position as the equilibrium.

This is not the end of the story. The problem with the (5,5,5) is that it possesses some risk. If the losing party rejects the election results the country may slide into political turmoil. Prisons may be filled with political prisoners and eruption of political violence may derail the democracy again.

So the parties faces two stark choices: election that may lead to violence and no election. The likelihood of political violence is so large that two parties change their position and decide (based on their own judgements) not to take part in election. Govt in this case does not want to be dubbed as " Authoritarian regime" and decides not to hold election. Clearly, (0,0,0) is the new outcome and it Pareto dominates (5,5,5).

But please note that in this case Pareto optimality has been compromised and we have to accept a Pareto inferior good.

However, if we view the game in light of "subliminal preference" (a complete and transitive relation [3]), then it is once again back on Pareto track.

This is basically an ordering created by fine tuning as few as possible instances of perceived indifference into strict preference.

Under this subliminal preference (0,0,0) stands out to be the Pareto optimal outcome.[4]

This game can be best interpreted as a clash between act-consequentialism and rule-consequentialism.

These are moral systems in which goodness of a behavior is judged in terms of its consequences.

Moral decision procedure of an act-consequentialist works like this: on each occasion, an agent would decide what to do by calculating which act would produce the most good.

Meanwhile, decision procedure of rule-consequentialist goes like this: At least normally, agents should decide what to do by applying rules whose acceptance will produce the best consequences. And with the aid of these rules s/he figures out the act that is morally wrong.

Now let's make some adjustment to our game. Let's introduce a moral agent who is not a player but has to advise each party on its choice of action.

Imagine our moral agent turns out to be an act-consequentialist. His piece of advice to each party is to choose"5" over"0". Thus the social outcome is (5,5,5).

Now imagine our moral agent is a rule-consequentialist and needs to choose between the following two rules:

Rule 1: Whenever parties face a choice between take part in election that may lead to catastrophe (5) and no election (0), they should opt for no election.

Rule2: Whenever parties face choice between election (5) and no election (0), they should choose election (5).

Obviously, the moral agent will throw its weight around rule 1 as it leads to Pareto optimal outcome. In this case the social outcome is (0,0,0).

It is obvious that (0,0,0) is strictly preferred to (5,5,5). It is important to note that rule-consequentialism here led us to different recommendation from act-consequentialism and at the same time led to a Pareto superior outcome.

The boycott of election by major opposition parties means the parties will create pressure on govt so that it will undertake electoral reforms, which is necessary to make a level playing field for all parties.

As for the govt, it will be difficult for it to organize another opposition less election because international community will not accept the election and Bangladesh's status will be further downgraded.

To make the next election acceptable govt needs to ensure participation of all the parties.

How does a party like BNP make govt accept its electoral reforms? Technically speaking it is not the official opposition party in the current parliament and it is in disarray as thousands of its supporters were thrown into jail. It still enjoys support of millions of Bangladeshis.

Despite its precarious position in politics, BNP has to cry for greater electoral reforms. It needs few more voices from other parties to make the cry stronger.

If the Man-with-mustache joins the Lady-in-pink to press for more electoral reforms, then the Lady-in-chair has to concede something to opposition parties that will create a favorable ground for all the parties in next election.

Now it is up to the main opposition parties. If they see little risk of violence and go for election then they will end up with (5,5,5). If they decide to listen to the moral agent they will opt for no election, (0,0,0).

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Notes:

1. A person's preference is said to be quasi-transitive if x is preferred to y and y is preferred to z, then x is preferred to z. Unlike the transitivity of preference, quasi- transitivity does not require the indifference relation to be transitive. A person with quasi- transitive preference may be indifferent between x and y and between y and z, but prefer x to z.

2. It can be seen as a normative rule that says a Pareto improvement, a change that leaves at least one person better off and no one worse off, is socially desirable and so should not be thwarted by state or anybody of that matter. However, it can be discarded when it is self-contradictory in the sense that its repeated use leads to a Pareto inferior state.

3.Transitivity: If a person considers x to be at least as good as y, and considers y to be at least as good as z, then the person must consider x to be at least as good as z.

4. If (5,5,5) is at least as good as (5,0,5), and (5,0,5) is at least as good as (5,0,0), and (0,0,0) is at least as good as (5,0,0), then (0,0,0) is at least as good as (5,5,5).

Reference:

[i]. Basu, Kaushik. 2011. Beyond The Invisible Hand: Groundwork for A New Economics, Penguin Group.

[ii].https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism-rule/