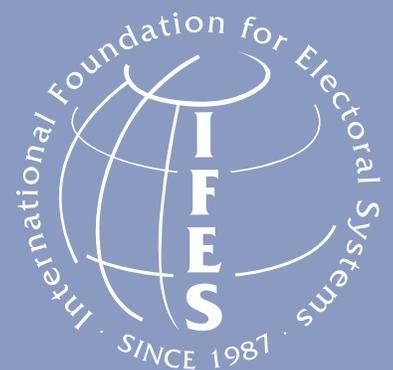


# FINAL REPORT

## Election Violence Education and Resolution project in Bangladesh

The Asia Foundation  
Project No. 31174.410

Project Period: July 15, 2006 – February 28, 2009  
Total Budget: \$126,896



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Under the award from the Asia Foundation (TAF), IFES adapted its proven Election Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) methodology for application in Bangladesh. The IFES EVER project, implemented in partnership with Odhikar, was designed to focus on the issue of election-related violence in Bangladesh in a systematic manner, and to provide critical information on trends in election violence leading up to the planned January 2007 parliamentary elections. A key goal of the EVER program was to share data and information on trends in election violence with the Election Working Group (EWG) and coordinate efforts with the EWG and other existing local and internationally-supported election monitoring and conflict mitigation efforts. These efforts were effective in focusing attention on election violence until the imposition of emergency rule by the military in January 2007 stopped the program.

The rescheduled elections took place in late December 2008, and IFES and Odhikar anticipated tensions around the elections may have the potential to escalate to violence. The EWG fielded long-term observers (LTOs) in all districts. There remained an absence of quantitative or qualitative research on patterns of political (including election) violence in Bangladesh. In view of these three conditions, IFES and Odhikar identified the need to conduct EVER monitoring around the new election date in a way that was value-added to the wider EWG monitoring and yields reliable election violence data for both immediate mitigation possibilities as well as comparative use in the long-term.

IFES and Odhikar used the remaining TAF funds to develop a revised methodology for EVER monitoring to achieve these goals through collaboration with EWG monitors, fielding district-level Odhikar monitors, and developing election violence reports from Odhikar and EWG monitoring data. Odhikar released two reports on election violence to all key stakeholders. Odhikar ensured more frequent and less formal information sharing between its monitors and EWG monitors to allow the EWG to take action as needed in response to conflict/violence data.

The monitoring accomplished the following:

- 1) Worked with EWG to develop a simplified monitoring approach that allowed EWG and Odhikar monitors to effectively monitor election-related violence during the campaign period
- 2) Identified areas of potential or actual violence as well as capture information on incidents of election-related violence
- 3) Provided public analytical reports on patterns of election violence in the pre-election period
- 4) Built capacity of Odhikar and EWG in monitoring and analysis of election violence that can be replicated in future election cycles as well as in other conflict/violence tracking projects.

## **BACKGROUND**

The IFES EVER methodology brings together civil society organizations and other stakeholders to identify, monitor, and mitigate election-related violence. While much has been done to mitigate ethnic, religious or political conflicts, efforts to monitor and or mitigate election-related violence are often not informed by best practices of conflict mitigation, and conflict mitigation techniques do not offer the election-process specific tools necessary to address election violence. The EVER methodology implemented by IFES bridges this gap as it examines and addresses violence during the election process as a unique form of conflict, and in its implementation thus far has explored the roles that an array of stakeholders play or can play in monitoring and mitigating election violence, including civil society, political parties, election management bodies, and police and military authorities.

Political and religious violence is on the rise in Bangladesh. In 2004 there were 166 incidents of violence involving political parties in which 2044 people were injured and 41 killed<sup>1</sup>. The worst of these incidents occurred on August 21, 2004 during an Awami League party rally which shook the country to its core. Had this attack been successful, the entire opposition party leadership may have been wiped out. Grenades thrown at this rally killed 22 people and injured over 200.

The day of the 2001 national elections was relatively peaceful compared to previous elections. But the period leading to the elections and that which followed the elections saw extensive politically motivated violence. The post-election violence against the party that lost (Awami League) and the minority community which is traditionally seen as a support base for the Awami League was particularly gruesome. Political parties' alliance with hard-line Islamists and the rise of less-tolerant interpretations of Islam are also matters of grave concern to analysts.

In Bangladesh, as in most countries, traditional election observation does not focus specifically on election-related violence as a major factor in the electoral process in the country. Traditional election observation does not provide the mechanisms to capture the key data related to election violence on an incident by incident basis so that appropriate actions can be take to mitigate this type of violence. It is for these reasons that the IFES EVER methodology should be a critical element of any election support strategy in Bangladesh. The EVER monitoring and reporting enabled members of the Election Working Group (EWG) to both monitor and mitigate election violence that was likely to occur with the approach of the national elections.

The IFES EVER methodology has been implemented successfully in Ghana, Kyrgyzstan, Guyana, Nepal and is about to be implemented in Pakistan. In Iraq, training and technical assistance have been given to CSOs under a larger IFES civil society and conflict mitigation program. IFES designed and utilized a web-based database application to track media reports of election violence from 2003 to 2005, and used this prototype to create a powerful tracking tool for Iraq.

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<sup>1</sup> Human Rights in Bangladesh 2004, Ain o Salish Kendra, 2005

In Bangladesh, IFES provided technical assistance and oversight to EWG members to implement the EVER methodology. IFES' efforts focused on developing the capacity of EWG members to monitor and report on election violence in a systematic and reliable manner. IFES trained EWG members in the dissemination of the data collected so that key stakeholders were kept informed on trends in election-related violence and could take appropriate steps to mitigate or address the violence.

## **WHY EVER**

In several nations, including Bangladesh, domestic CSOs have worked to monitor election violence within the context of overall election observation and monitoring. Some have done so by collecting news stories and anecdotes. In a few nations – Sri Lanka stands out as positive example – CSOs have developed standardized approaches to monitor incidences of election violence. In other nations, (the Philippines and Benin, for example) national and international entities are involved in efforts prevent or mitigate election violence. The EVER project has assessed approaches undertaken in numerous settings, conducted monitoring efforts in three countries and developed a recommended global standard and approach to monitor election violence. IFES trained EWG members to standardize their approach to monitoring election violence, and provided oversight and technical assistance as EWG members implemented the methodology through the course of the pre-election to post-election phase of the process. IFES also worked with the EWG members to widely disseminate the data and reports on election violence to facilitate mitigation efforts using this data.

### **Project Objectives**

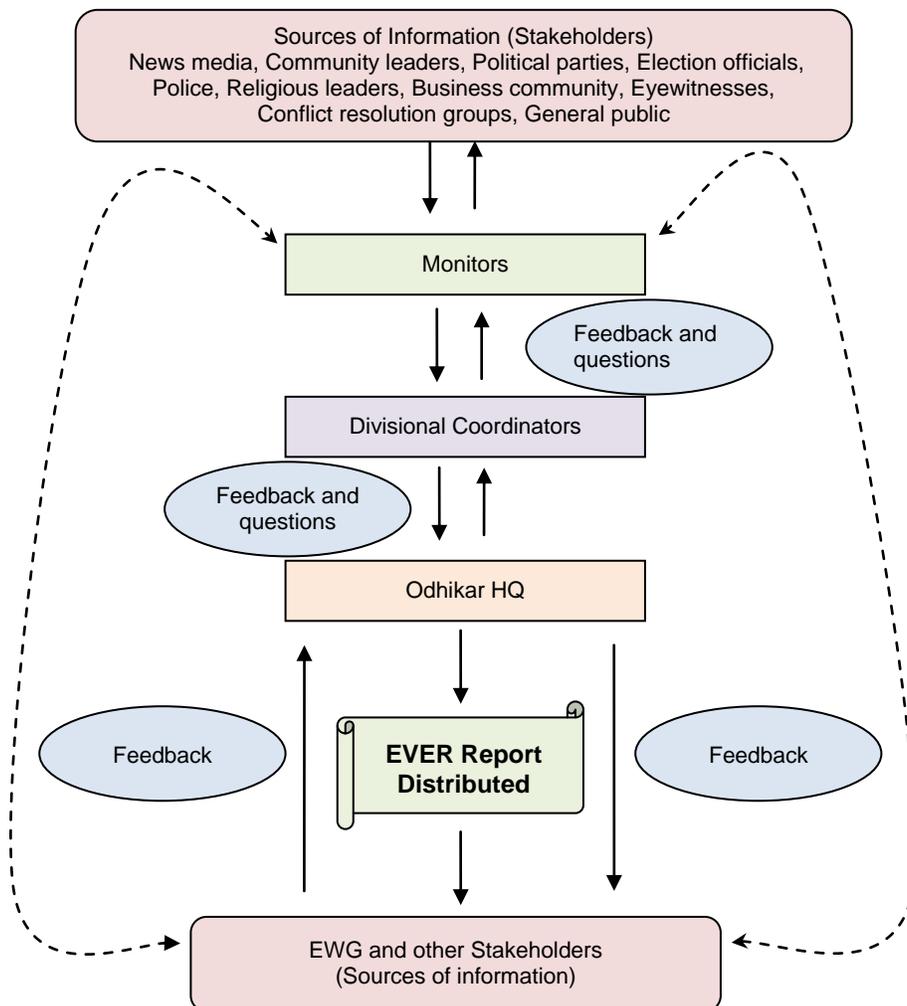
- To provide technical assistance and oversight to member of the Election Working Group (EWG) to identify, monitor, and regularly report on incidents of election violence and potential areas of politically motivated conflict as relates to the electoral process;
- To enable a core group of Bangladeshi stakeholders (i.e. election officials, civil society, security officials, and domestic and international observers) to coordinate responses to reported incidents of violence and potential for violence through monitoring and reporting that relate to political conflict and security during the electoral process;
- To gauge the impact of electoral and political violence on elections through targeted surveys of political party, civil society, security personnel, and electoral officials at a local level;
- To raise awareness of election violence among all stakeholders (including media) as a unique form of conflict and promote peaceful elections;
- To develop the capacity of EWG members and other stakeholders to carry on election violence monitoring and mitigation efforts through future election cycles that will contribute to long-term reduction of election violence.

## PROJECT ACTIVITIES

### Selection of High-Risk Constituencies and Monitors

Drawing from its election monitoring experience since 1998, a detailed analysis of incidents of violence during the 2001 elections, and in consideration of on-going political developments, in 2006 Odhikar identified 45 constituencies as high-risk areas for electoral violence for the Bangladesh Parliamentary Elections. Odhikar has also selected EVER monitors for these constituencies. Care was taken to ensure that there was representation of women and minorities (ethnic and religious) in the team of monitors. Odhikar also appointed coordinators for each division to supervise and coordinate the work of the EVER monitors. A list of the original 45 constituencies is provided in Attachment 1.

IFES recognized that there was a very high probability that incidents of electoral violence would occur outside of the selected 45 constituencies. EVER envisioned that Odhikar's nation-wide network of human rights defenders would be mobilized to address additional high-violence areas and the broader EWG monitors would be a resource to be drawn upon as needed. The divisional coordinators were responsible to expand coverage to new constituencies as necessary. A flow chart showing the information channels is provided below.



## Orientation for the EVER Team



IFES Regional Program Manager conducted an orientation for the EVER team in Dhaka and surrounding areas in August 2006. Close to 33% of the EVER monitors and four out of the six divisional coordinators attended this orientation which was a curtain-raiser to the EVER methodology for the participants. Subjects covered included unique nature of electoral violence, arriving at a definition for electoral violence, examples of electoral violence, motives of electoral violence and the actors involved. The orientation was structured so that local realities informed the discussion at every stage. At the end of the presentation the following

questions were discussed by the participants.

- What forms of electoral violence happen in Bangladesh?
- What efforts can be done to prevent these violent incidents?
- What role can EVER monitors play in this respect?

After this orientation, the date for the first formal training for the entire EVER team was set for mid-October 2006.

## Training

Odhikar trained not only its own monitors on the EVER methodology, but also provided this training to EWG division coordinators (six people), who then trained the EWG district coordinators (128 people).

Odhikar delivered the training to its 80 monitors in two two-day training sessions. Odhikar provided materials for the trainees. The monitors were made aware of the EWG LTOs who were covering their districts. Exchanging information with the EWG LTOs was part of their mandate as well, and covered in the training. IFES provided technical assistance to the design of the training from Washington, DC and short-term on the ground support for training preparation and to observe the two training sessions.



## Training Materials Development



As preparations on the ground were taking place, IFES EVER experts in Washington, DC were adapting EVER materials to the Bangladeshi context. The material development took place with input from Odhikar and their extensive regional network. IFES experts travelled to Bangladesh in November, 2008 to implement the training program. The IFES team had trained Odhikar's EVER program coordinator and program analyst to conduct the training. The entire training was conducted in Bangla with the IFES team present as resource persons. This approach enabled building Odhikar's capacity to conduct

follow-up training for the monitors and the broader EWG group. This also developed a core group within Odhikar where the EVER methodology is used as an in-house tool in Bangladesh.

## Monitoring

*Structure:* The monitoring structure included 2 Odhikar monitors in 40 districts (a total of 80 monitors) in which Odhikar had a significant presence and in which there had been historical patterns of and potential for election and political violence.

the EWG, through direct funding from the Asia Foundation for general election observation, had its own LTOs in every district to monitor the election process during the campaign period. Odhikar supplemented this team with 80 monitors in 40 districts specifically focusing on election violence and potential violence in their areas.

Odhikar and EWG worked together to facilitate a collaborative approach to the monitoring in the districts in which both sets of monitors were working. While Odhikar monitors focused exclusively on election-related violence, Odhikar worked with EWG to develop mechanisms whereby each set of monitors could alert the other set if they hear of reports of violence in an area where one set of monitors may be in a better position to monitor the incident than the other.

Information-sharing at the district level provided an efficient way to allocate the resources of the two monitoring efforts in a particular district. Coordination with EWG sub-district coordinators was more informal due to the number of these coordinators.

*Timeline:* Odhikar monitors undertook their activities during the last 15 days of the pre-election period starting December 14, 2008.

*Methodology:* IFES and Odhikar worked with EWG to design a data collection form for its monitors that was also included as a section of the EWG form. Odhikar monitors didn't monitor other types of election activities but rather focused on election violence only. At

the same time, EWG coordinators used the EVER section on their forms to capture data for any incidents of violence that they came across during the pre-election period.

IFES provided technical assistance in the design of the data collection form and EWG form component from Washington, DC and during short field visits.

## **Reporting**

*Structure:* Odhikar district monitors had been sending their information to Odhikar headquarters on a regular basis, where the analyst and project coordinator compiled and analyzed the data. Odhikar also collected and incorporated into the analysis the data from the EWG division coordinators.

*Report Dates:* Odhikar issued a number of reports until imposed emergency situation in January 2007. The final two pre-election reports were issued in December 2008 and early January 2009 on the data captured.

The first pre-election report was issued approximately ten days before the elections and the second one a few days after the December 29, 2008 elections. Odhikar used the data collected by its monitors as well as those of EWG to draft the reports. All the data gathered was shared with EWG, and as appropriate released to the press as well as all the local and international stakeholders

EWG was also able to issue a comprehensive post-election observation report including a section on election violence.

IFES and Odhikar issue a final report to TAF on activities during the monitoring period. This report captured critical findings from the monitoring and also provided recommendations to enhance mitigation efforts related to election violence in Bangladesh. This report is included in this final report as Attachment V.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

IFES General Recommendations on work in Bangladesh building up on the capacity of the local partner- Odhikar:

- Continue monitoring and reporting on political conflict/violence to promote peaceful political processes in Bangladesh;
- Form multi-stakeholder dialogue groups: consultations with national/local leaders on participants and locations of groups facilitated meetings/assessments to determine training needs in dispute resolution, and larger lessons-learned Peaceful Political Processes conferences.
- Improvement of existing formal mechanisms of dispute resolution

Following are the general recommendations from the December, 2008 pre-election monitoring. These recommendations may be useful for future election cycles in Bangladesh:

- All political parties should refrain from personal attacks on each other and should refrain from delivering provocative speeches. Many of the monitors reported that violence often resulted from this type of inflammatory rhetoric. Violations of the election Code of Conduct occurred more often as election-day approached. All candidates and political parties are urged to follow the Code of Conduct and the Representation of the People Order (RPO), 1972. Allegations of violation of the Election Code of Conduct were reported frequently from the monitoring districts. The inquiry committee of the Election Commission received evidence of violations of the Code of Conduct regarding 22 candidates from different constituencies. The inquiry committee submitted an investigation report with specific information and evidence before the Election Commission. The allegations were made and investigated under section 12 of the RPO<sup>2</sup>. Along with the Four Party Alliance and the Grand Alliance, most of the political parties were involved in violating the election Code of Conduct randomly in the monitoring areas. Almost all the political parties were involved in conducting rallies on the street, disrupting people, using megaphones the whole day for campaigning, writing political graffiti on walls, putting poster up on walls, provocative speeches etc. In Sylhet district, colored posters of the four party alliance candidates were pasted in various parts of Sylhet-1 constituency, while in Sylhet-3 constituency, a lot of wall writing was seen in favor of the Grand Alliance candidate and color posters for the Jatiyo Party candidate were found in the same constituency. Similarly, there were also violations of the election Code of Conduct found in Rajshahi, Jessore, Pirojpur, Netrokona, Brahminbaria and Chapainawabgong<sup>3</sup>.
- Different political parties are urged to avoid organizing rallies at the same time near each other. In many of the cases observed during monitoring, the violence took place as rival rallies came in close proximity to each other which in turn set off a chain of events

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<sup>2</sup> RPO: Representation of People Order, 1972 (As Amended to 2008)

<sup>3</sup> According to sections 11(a), 13, 7 of the election Code of Conduct, provocative speeches, colored campaign posters and graffiti are illegal and the use of the loudspeaker/ megaphone is allowed only from 1400 hrs – 2000 hrs.

leading to violence. In future election cycles, parties should stick to their promises to have non-violent campaigns.

- Local political and community leaders and law enforcement agencies should address patterns of violence identified in EVER reports. In particular, attention should be paid to addressing causes and patterns of violence in Pabna, Kishorgonj, Brahmanbaria, Cox's Bazar, Barisal and Moulavibazar, which have had the maximum number of incidents overall.
- Law enforcement agencies need to be proactive in handling the violent situation. Police should increase efforts to maintain law and order during rallies and meetings in the interest of preventing violence; however, they should refrain from using excessive force.
- All political parties should publicly condemn the use of violence during the campaign by their supporters, and should state their commitment to peaceful cooperation and debate as the new Parliament begins its sessions.
- Civil society, communities, religious organizations, as well as high profile citizens, should make public statements denouncing the cycles of violence and promoting peaceful resolution of differences.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

- ATTACHMENT I.**                    **List of 45 constituencies**
- ATTACHMENT II.**                **Bangladesh EVER Factsheet**
- ATTACHMENT III.**               **Odhikar/IFES Bangladesh EVER Monitoring Reports**