



The Asia Foundation



Election Violence Education and Resolution (EVER)



Election Violence Report-1

**Prepared by Odhikar and IFES
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Date Covered: 14-19 December 2008

INTRODUCTION

The Election Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) program has been designed by IFES to document accurate information about incidents of election-related violence in a methodologically reliable manner, so that stakeholders in the electoral process can use this information to design and implement effective electoral interventions in a country. Odhikar is implementing the monitoring program for the EVER methodology in Bangladesh.

Odhikar is focusing its EVER monitoring activities in 40 districts under 6 divisions that have a history of election-related violence in Bangladesh. Two monitors work in each of the 40 districts. Odhikar EVER monitors are responsible for identifying and gathering key information on incidents of election-related violence within each district, as well as tensions, potential for violence, and peace initiatives. The monitors are trained in the EVER methodology which requires multiple sources to verify incidents of election-related violence.

The Odhikar EVER project in Bangladesh, built on a network of monitors in 40 districts, aims to provide accurate and timely data on patterns of election violence during the campaign period to the public, political parties, election and security officials, and other stakeholders in Bangladesh to help them develop strategies to mitigate such incidents.¹ The first ‘Election Violence during Campaign Period Report’, issued by the Odhikar EVER project, covers the period from 14 December to 19 December 2008. A total of 42 incidents of election-related violence were recorded and verified by EVER monitors during this period. The following districts were monitored:

Name of the Division	Name of the District
Dhaka	Gazipur, Munshigonj, Narayangonj, Mymensingh, Rajbari, Kishoregonj, Tangail and Netrokona
Chittagong	Brahmanbaria, Comilla, Feni, Laxmipur, Noakhali, Chittagong, Cox’s Bazar, Rangamati and Bandarban.
Rajshahi	Panchagarh, Thakurgaon, Dinajpur, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Gaibandha, Chapainawabganj, Naogaon, Rajshahi, Pabna and Sirajgonj.
Khulna	Khulna, Satkhira, Jessore, Jhenaidah and Kushtia.
Barisal	Barisal, Patuakhali, Jhalokati and Pirojpur.
Sylhet	Sunamgonj, Sylhet and Moulavibazar.

Key Findings

- A total of 42 incidents of election-related violence were recorded during this period. Most of the violence took place on 19 December. There were 13 incidents that occurred. Most of the violence as recorded were political party related. The incidents were random and there was no specific reason.
- Supporters/activists of the Awami League and BNP were the most active participants in the violence that took place during this period. In 16 incidents, Awami League was directly responsible for the violence and also involved as secondary perpetrator in two incidents while BNP was directly involved in 14 incidents as perpetrator group and also responsible as secondary perpetrator in eight out of 42 incidents recorded during this period.

¹ Within the EVER framework, “election-related violence” refers to any violence (harm) or threat of violence (harm) that is aimed at disrupting any part of the electoral or political process during the election period. Election violence generally involves political parties, their supporters, journalists, agents of the government, election administrators and the general population, and includes threats, assault, murder, destruction of property, and physical or psychological harm. An “incident” of election violence refers to any act that 1) has a specific victim(s) and perpetrator(s) and occurs within a limited timeframe and location; 2) meets the definition of election-related violence; and 3) has been verified by monitors using at least two different sources of information. Please contact Odhikar for methodological details, questions, or feedback.

- Chittagong was the division where the highest number of incidents (9 incidents) occurred in the monitoring during this period. Dhaka, Rajshahi and Barishal reported 7 incidents each, while there were 6 incidents of violence each recorded in Khulna and Sylhet divisions.
- In addition to clashes between supporters and activists of the two electoral alliances, the violence during this reporting period also involved various levels of property damage, both to private and political party property.
- Five individual districts had the highest number of incidents which occurred during this period: Kishorgonj (5 incidents), Barisal (4 incidents), and Brahmanbaria, Chittagong and Moulavibazar each reported that 3 incidents of election-related violence occurred. In each of these, the incidents were largely characterized by cycles of back-and-forth attack between BNP and Awami League during the reporting period.
- There was no election related violence recorded in 17 districts during this reporting period.
- In total, **99 people were wounded** in the recorded incidents during this period and there were no deaths in any reported incident. A total of 33 persons were recorded as wounded in Dhaka division, 21 in Chittagong, and 18 in Sylhet. Lower numbers of wounded were recorded in the other three divisions.
- It is notable that law enforcement agencies were not recorded as perpetrators or victims in the vast majority of incidents captured during this reporting period.
- There was no high level of tension² found while monitoring. Mid levels of instability were prevailing in the 12 districts. Hate speeches, verbal personal attacks created and, in a few areas, protesting candidates of the same party or protesting independent candidates mainly created mid levels of instability. However, in 20 districts low level of instability is prevailing and in 8 districts the situation is quite peaceful.
- In 13 districts, the speeches of political leaders and candidates were provocative enough to have some negative impact on the general people or voters, while in 27 districts the speeches of the candidates concentrated on personal issues.

Peace initiatives: In 19 of the study areas, peace initiatives were taken by the government, various non-political cultural groups, political parties and civil society. In the mentioned areas, District and Upazila level government and election officials organized meetings with all political party members and local government officials for peaceful rallies and processions during the campaign period. In the remaining 21 districts, there was no peace initiatives observed.

Recommendations

- Different political parties are urged to avoid organizing rallies at the same time near each other. They should stick to their promises to have non-violent campaigns.
- Provocative speeches fuel violence. All political parties should refrain from personal attacks on each other and should refrain in delivering provocative speeches.

² **Tension level: High** (Openly violent, violence occurred more than 3 days in a week).

Tension level: Medium (people on the street can be heard arguing, or party supporters are tearing down posters, or protest are occurring frequently, potential for violence is high, people have changed their routines due to security concerns)

Tension level: Low (people may be discussing politics or problems or concerns, but potential for violence seems low, people are going about their daily routines)

Situation is Calm (there is little political argument, people are comfortable about security, routines are normal)

- All candidates and political parties must follow the Code of Conduct and the Representation of the People Order (RPO), 1972.
- 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 by their supporters, and should state their commitment to non-violence. All political parties should be encouraged to come together to discuss the potential for violence, and consider the development of a public code of conduct or commitment to non-violent activism and campaigning.
- Civil society, community, religious organizations, as well as other high profile citizens, should make public statements denouncing the cycles of violence and promoting peaceful resolution of differences.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Timeline

On 17th December 2008, the military backed government lifted the 23 months long State of Emergency, paving the way for political parties to gear up their election campaigns. During the 14 to 19 December 2008 monitoring period, the majority of incidents recorded occurred on 19 December as both BNP and Awami League activists/supporters involved in attacks each other. Figure 1 highlights the timeline of incidents during this reporting period.

Figure 1. Number of Incidents by Date

Examining the timing of incidents of violence shows that no incidents were reported after December 19, and a total of 6 incidents were recorded for 18 December. The number of incidents jumped to 13 on 19 December.

Geographical Distribution of Incidents

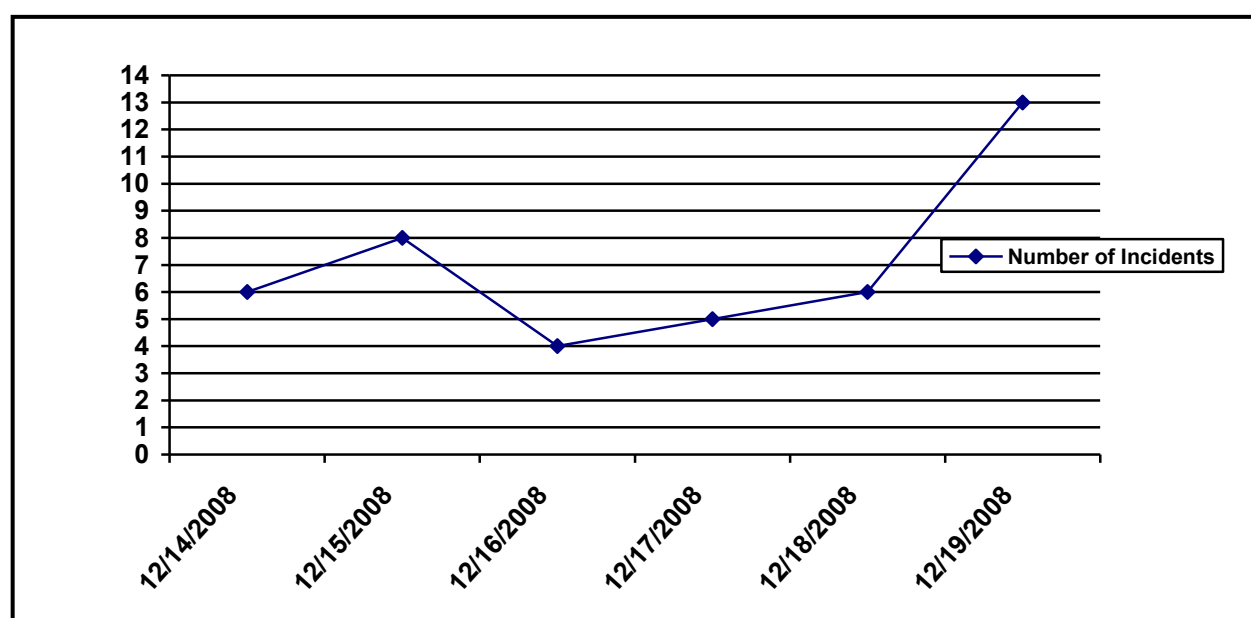
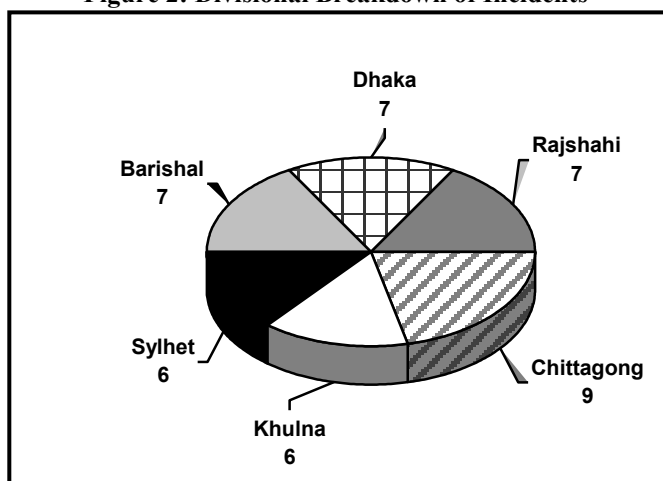


Figure 2: Divisional Breakdown of Incidents



- The highest number of recorded incidents of violence took place in Chittagong division, while lower numbers of incidents took place in Khulna and Sylhet respectively (6 incidents each).
- While district wise incidents of violence were monitored in 40 districts, there are several districts illustrated by a high number of incidents: Kishorgonj (5 incidents), Barisal (4 incidents), Brahminbaria (3 incidents), Chittagong (3 incidents) and Moulavibazar (3 incidents).
- In 17 districts out of 40, there was no election related violence recorded during this reporting period.
- Gazipur, Narayanganj, Mymensingh, Tangail, Netrokona, Comilla, Feni, Rangamati, Bandarban, Panchagarh, Lalmonirhat, Gaibandha, Chapainawabganj, Rajshahi, Khulna, Kushtia, Jhalokati were found to be very peaceful districts in which no incidents took place.
- In many districts, a large number of incidents consisted of attacks and counter attacks by supporters of the grand and four party alliances on each other's supporters and facilities. Apart from that, seven out of 42 incidents were characterized by intra party clashes and attacks on property by one faction group against another.

Figure 3: Incidents by Division

Division	Number of incidents	Number of people wounded	Number of incidents with ONLY property damage
Dhaka	7	33	1
Chittagong	9	21	2
Rajshahi	7	6	1
Khulna	6	13	1
Barisal	7	8	2
Sylhet	6	18	2

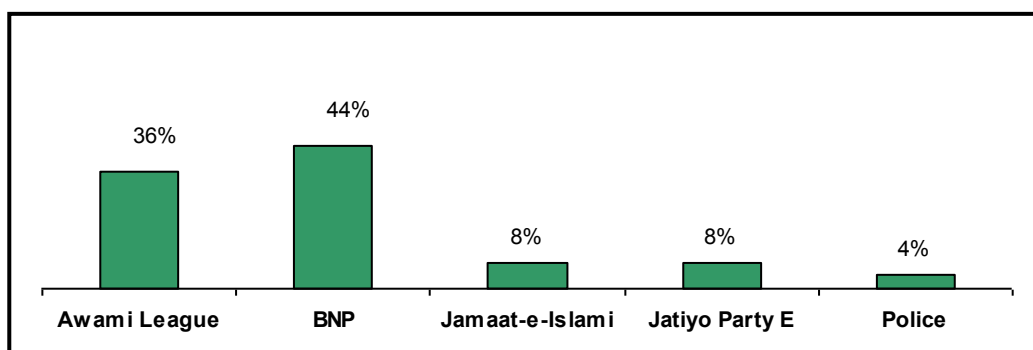
Patterns of Violence

- Violence mostly happened when the electoral alliances came face to face in processions or rallies, and over delivering hostile speeches against one another.

Perpetrators of Election-Related Violence

Almost all of the violence recorded during this reporting period was perpetrated by supporters and activists of political parties in the country. In 94% of the recorded incidents, the perpetrator was a supporter of a political party and in some of the incidents a local level political party leader was also a perpetrator. As for specific political groups, supporters and leaders of the BNP were more often the perpetrators of incidents than supporters and leaders of the Awami League.

Figure 4: Perpetrators (detailed groups) of Violence (% of all perpetrators identified)

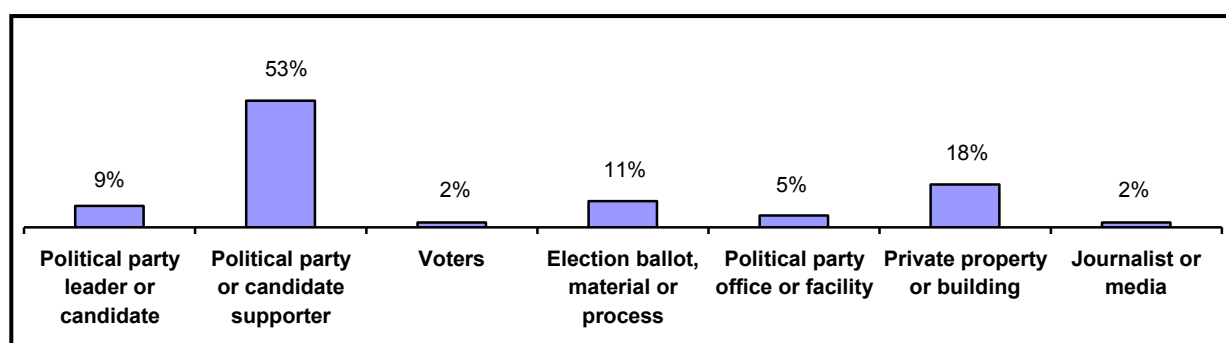


In 44% of the cases, supporters of the BNP were the perpetrators in the incident while in 36% of the cases; supporters of the Awami League were the perpetrators. In 8% each of the recorded incidents supporters and activists of Jamaat-e-Islami and Jatiyo Party (E) were also pointed out as perpetrators during this reporting period

Victims of Election-Related Violence

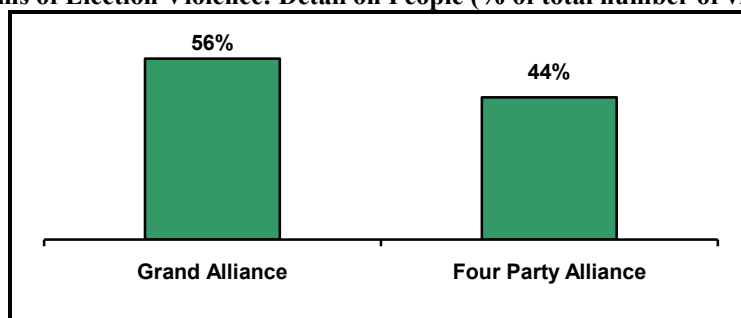
The victims of electoral violence tend to be more varied than the perpetrators of this violence. Figure 5 indicates that while political party supporters and activists are most likely to be victims, property was also frequently targeted during the violence.

Figure 5: Victims of Election Violence: People and Property (% of total number of victims identified)



In a majority of verified incidents, political party supporters were victims of the violence while leaders of political parties were victims in less. Fifty-three percent of the victims were political party supporters while only 9% of the victims were party leaders or candidates. Private property was victimized in more than one-third of incidents. It should be noted that in some of these cases, the private property such as the residence of a party leader or supporter was deliberately targeted, but in most cases the private property that was destroyed was not deliberately targeted. In 5% of the cases, a political party office or facilities were vandalized while election materials were destroyed in 11% of cases during this period. However, non-political party actors were not victimized in the violence that was recorded during this reporting period.

Figure 6: Victims of Election Violence: Detail on People (% of total number of victims identified)

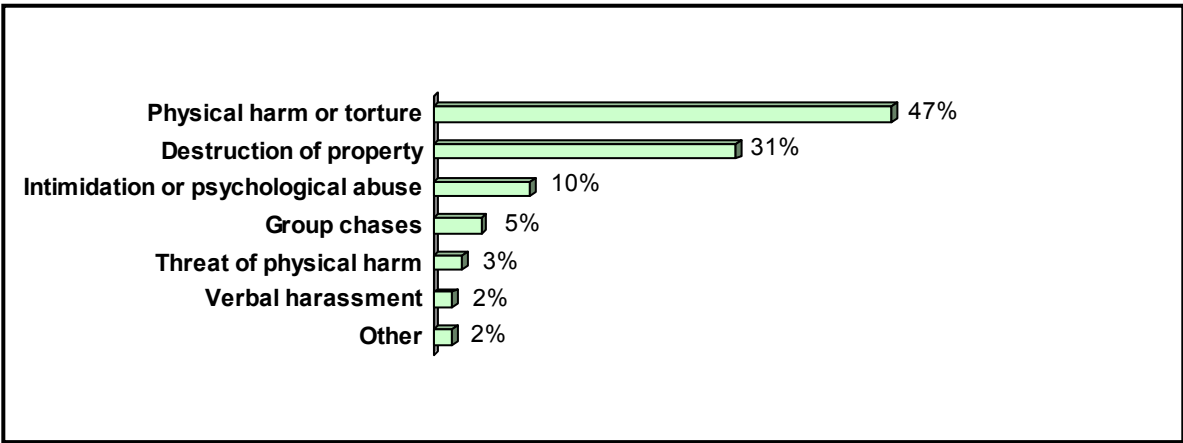


Given the fact that supporters of the four party alliance were more likely to be perpetrators of violence (44%), it is not surprising that supporters of the grand alliance were more likely to be victims of incidents than supporters of the four party alliance (Figure 6). Figure 6 also includes incidents in which property of a certain political party or party supporter was damaged.

Type and Methods of Violence

The most common type of violence during this reporting period were repeated clashes and physical attacks between the supporters of the two rival political party alliances, with a large number of the incidents characterized by these types of attacks. In total, 47% of incidents were portrayed by physical harm or torture. The destruction of property was also a frequent feature of the violence with 31% of incidents resulting in some destruction of property. Ten percent of incidents were characterized by intimidation or psychological abuse of the victims. Group clashes were also the type of violence observed in 5% of the total incidents.

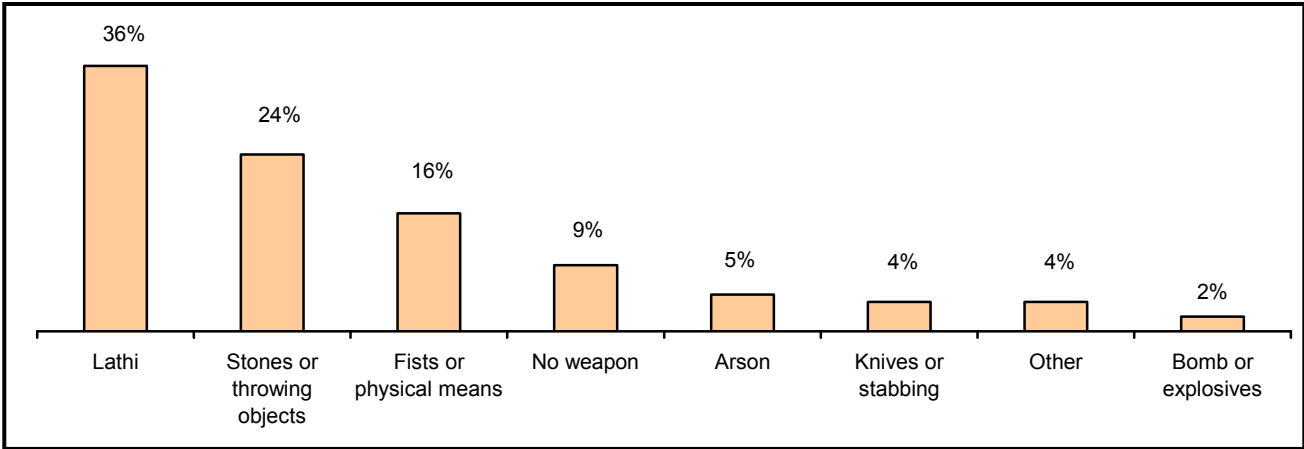
Figure 7: Types of Violence (% of incidents)



Given the fact that clashes and destruction of property were the most common types of violence observed during this reporting period, it is not surprising that various weapons were used by those taking part in most of the violence during this period. Figure 6 lists the methods of violence used during this reporting period.

The most popular weapons during the incidents of violence throughout the country were *lathi* (heavy sticks) and bricks or stones. These two types of weapons were mainly used during clashes between rival groups of political party supporters as well as in the destruction of property.

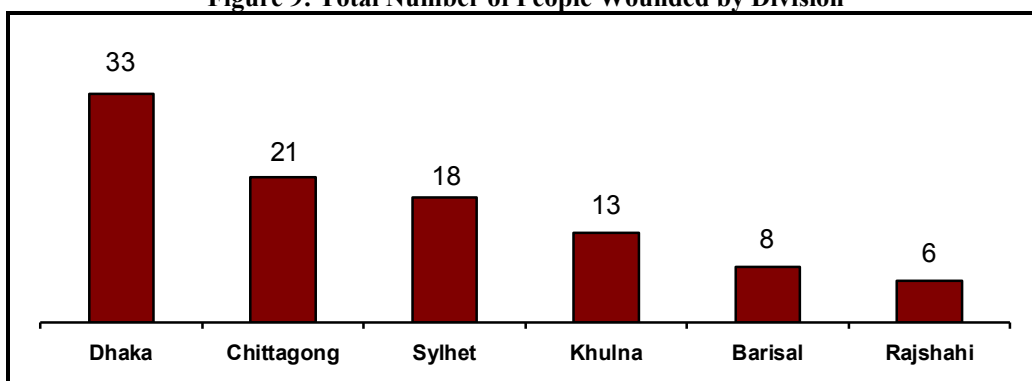
Figure 8. Methods of Violence (% of incidents)



Few incidents saw the use of knives or explosives, a fact which could account for the fact that no one was killed in these incidents of violence.

Impact of Violence

Figure 9: Total Number of People Wounded by Division



A total of 99 people were reported as having been wounded in the incidents during this period. The highest number was in Dhaka where 33 were wounded, while 21 were wounded in Chittagong, 18 in Sylhet, and 13 in Khulna. Considering that there were fewer incidents of violence in Dhaka than in Chittagong, indicates that the incidents in Dhaka were likely to be more violent than those in Chittagong. In Dhaka, there were an average of 4.7 people wounded per incident while in Chittagong the average number wounded was 2.3.

About 60% of the recorded incidents had direct impact on interference with campaign activities during this reporting period. In addition to the destruction of property, the incidents of violence recorded during this period were most likely to result in physical harm due to the fact that most of the incidents involved clashes between rival groups of political party supporters, and the fact that these supporters used weapons to cause the large number of injuries resulting from the violence.

Conclusions

Odhikar is monitoring election-related violence in 40 districts out of a total of 64 districts in Bangladesh. Odhikar selected these 40 districts on the basis of previous records of violence during the 2001 elections and where it has a strong network of human rights defenders and capacity to monitor election-related violence. It is also to be mentioned that Odhikar relied on its district monitors to prepare this report. They collected information in the working areas. These incident reports were then verified from a number of sources including eyewitnesses, media, hospitals, police reports and election officials. It is hoped that this kind of fact-finding can be used nationally and internationally in order to mitigate election-related violence.

This report indicates that there are specific districts in which the incidents of violence exceed most other districts being observed. The data indicates that mitigation efforts should be intensified in the districts of Kishorgonj, Barisal, Brahmanbaria, Chittagong, and Moulavibazar. On the positive side, there are significantly more districts in which no violence was recorded and those working on mitigating the violence should look at strategies used in these districts, such as peace initiatives, to reduce the level of electoral violence in these districts.

One notable fact observed in the report is that security or police were very rarely recorded as being perpetrators or victims of the violence. While on the one hand this suggests that the security forces are not acting as agents fostering election-related violence, on the other hand this also suggests that they may not be playing a forceful role in trying to counter the violence (on the assumption that more security forces would have been recorded as victims if this was the case). This seems to suggest that the security forces should be more active in countering the violence, particularly in the case of reaction-counter-reaction type of violence observed between supporters of the two major political blocs.

About the Odhikar EVER Project

Odhikar, a Bangladeshi human rights organization, is implementing the monitoring program for the EVER methodology in Bangladesh. The EVER program has been designed by IFES to capture accurate information about incidents of election-related violence in a methodologically reliable manner, so that stakeholders in the electoral process can use this information to design and implement effective electoral interventions in a country. This first-of-its-kind activity in Bangladesh is intended to focus attention on the very serious issue of election violence in the country, and provide data that can be used to reduce the level of violence related to elections in Bangladesh. The Odhikar EVER project is conducted in association with IFES and supported by the Asia Foundation and DFID. Odhikar is focusing its EVER monitoring activities on 40 districts (spread throughout each of the 6 divisions) that have a history of election-related violence in Bangladesh. Each EVER monitor is responsible for identifying and gathering key information on incidents of election-related violence within each of these constituencies, as well as identifying tensions that exhibit the potential for violence. EVER utilizes a rigorous methodology that requires multiple sources to verify incidents of election-related violence. Thus, in any one area incidents documented by the EVER monitors may not reflect all incidents rumored to have taken place. However, the incidents reported by EVER monitors have a high degree of reliability that will allow election stakeholders to identify the patterns of election-related violence in the 40 districts.

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