The Asia Foundation

Election Violence Education and Resolution (EVER)

Report on Electoral Violence
17 October to 30 October 2006

Prepared by Odhikar and IFES
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About the Project

Odhikar was formed in 1994 as a coalition of activists and organizations dedicated to the promotion of human rights in Bangladesh. The Election Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) project will be implemented in Bangladesh by Odhikar in collaboration with IFES, an international non-profit organization dedicated to supporting democratic societies. IFES provides technical assistance to democracies in the areas of election administration, civil society building, human rights, rule of law and good governance.

The EVER project in Bangladesh is part of the Election Working Group supported by the Asia Foundation and a coalition of international development partners. The Election Working Group has thirty five partner civil society organizations (CSOs) and will be monitoring the upcoming elections in all three hundred constituencies.

EVER Methodology

The EVER methodology was developed by IFES through an examination of global best practices among CSOs which monitor electoral violence and through several country projects as diverse as Guyana, Ghana, Iraq and Kyrgyzstan. EVER provides training and tools for civil society organizations to monitor electoral conflict and to develop strategies to engage other stakeholders in sharing information and partnering to prevent and mitigate election violence. EVER data feeds into a global database containing incidents of election violence which will soon be available on the IFES website.

Goals of EVER in Bangladesh

- Collect objective data on actual incidents of violence;
- Provide analysis and recommendations for effective mitigation strategies through regular reports to stakeholders and the public;
- Facilitate stakeholder discussions, built in part on EVER reports, to facilitate communication and cooperation to mitigate and prevent election violence;
- Heighten public awareness of electoral violence;
- Improve civil society capacity to monitor and analyze electoral violence.

The Election Violence Education and Resolution (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. Odhikar, a Bangladeshi human rights organization, is implementing the monitoring program for the EVER methodology in Bangladesh. 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.

Odhikar is focusing its EVER monitoring activities on 45 electoral constituencies that have a history of election-related violence in Bangladesh. An EVER monitor is responsible for identifying and gathering key information on incidents of election-related violence within each of these constituencies. EVER utilizes a rigorous methodology that requires multiple sources to verify incidents of election-related violence. Thus, in any one constituency the incidents captured by the EVER monitors may not reflect all incidents rumored to have taken place in the constituency. But 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 45 constituencies in which Odhikar is implementing the EVER methodology.

This first report of the EVER Bangladesh project details the findings from EVER monitoring in 45 constituencies of 33 districts during the period of October 17 to 30, 2006. A total of 99 incidents of election-related violence were captured and verified by EVER monitors during this period. Division wise constituencies where Odhikar has monitored the incidents of election-related violence are mentioned below:

Dhaka Division: Dhaka-4 (Demra, part of Khilgaon, part of Sabujbag and Shyampur), Dhaka-6 (Khilgaon, part of Shabujbag and Motijheel), Dhaka-8 (Lalbag, Kamrangirchar and Hazaribag), Dhaka-11 (Mirpur, Kafrul and Pallabi), Gazipur-2 (Gazipur Sadar and Tongi), Munshigonj-1 (Sreenagar Upazila and part of Sirajdikhan), Munshigonj-3 (Tongibari Upazila and part of Sadar), Munshigonj-4 (Gazaria Upazila and part of Sadar), Narayangonj-4 (Fatulla and part of Sadar), Narayangonj-5 (Bandar, part of Fatulla and part of Sadar), Mymenshing-4 (Myemnshing Sadar), Shariatpur-1(Jajira Upazila and Shariatpur Sadar), Tangail-1 (Modhupur and Dhonbari Upazila), Tangail-4 (Kalihati Upazila) and Kishoregonj-6 (Nikli and Bajitpur Upazila).

Chittagong Division: Chittagong-8 (part of Khulshi, Pahartali, part of Double Mooring, Halishar, Bandar and Patenga), Chttagong-12 (Char pathargata, Char Laxama, Juludha, Sikalbaha and Anwara Upazila), Cox's Bazar-1 (Chokoria Upazila), Rangamati (Rangamati hill district), Feni-2 (Feni Sadar and Dagonbhuiyan), Laxmipur-2 (Roypur and part of Laxmipur Sadar), Comilla-09 (Baro para, part of Sadar and part of Laksam Upazila), Noakhali-4 (Char Jabbar and part of Sadar) and Brahmanbaria –3 (Part of Asugonj and part of Sadar).

Rajshahi Division: Dinajpur-3 (Dinajpur Sadar), Sirajgonj-5 (Belkuchi and Kamarkhanda), Pabna-4 (Atghoria and Iswardi), Noagaon-5 (Nonagon Sadar), Rajshahi-2 (Paba and Boalia) and Chapai Nawabganj-3 (Chapai Sadar).

Khulna Division: Jessore-3 (Jessore Sadar), Jhenaidah-1 (Shailkupa Upazila), Jhenaidah-2 (Jhenaidah Sadar and Harinakunda Upazila), Khulna-2 (Metropolitan and Sonadanga), Satkhira-2 (Satkhira Sadar), Kustia-2 (Veramara and Mirpur Upazila) and Kustia-3 (Kushtia Sadar).

Barisal Division: Patuakhali-1 (Mirzagonj, Patuakhli Sadar and Dumki Upazila), Pirojpur-1 (Nazirpur and Pirozpur Sadar), Barisal-1 (Gournadi and Agaljhara), Barisal-3 (Hizla and Muladi Upazila) and Jhalokathi-1 (Rajapur and Kathalia Upazila).

Sylhet Division: Sylhet-1 (Companigonj and part of Sadar), Sylhet-2 (Bishawnath and Balagonj Upazila) and Sunamgonj-5 (Chhatok and Doarabazar Upazila).

The key findings from this first period of monitoring are:

- Most of the violence took place between 27 and 29 October as supporters of the 14-party alliance led by the Awami League (AL) took to the streets to protest the proposed Chief Advisor of the Caretaker Government (CG), as well as to call for the reconstitution of the Bangladesh Election Commission (BEC).

- Supporters/activists of the 14-party alliance were the most active participants in the violence that took place during this period. Supporters/activists of the 4-party alliance led by the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) were also active participants in the violence, though not to the extent of the AL supporters.

- In addition to clashes between supporters and activists of the two electoral alliances, the violence during this period also involved significant levels of property damage, both private and political party property.

- Dhaka and Chittagong were the two divisions home to the highest number of incidents captured in the monitoring during this period. Khulna and Barishal also witnessed a fair number of incidents, while there were relatively few incidents in Rajshahi and Sylhet.

- Five individual constituencies stand out for the number of incidents which occurred during this period: Patuakhali – 1 (8 incidents); Tangail – 1 (7 incidents); Cox's Bazaar – 1 (6 incidents); Dhaka – 8 (5 incidents); and Noakhali – 4 (5 incidents). In each of these constituencies, the incidents were largely characterized by cycles of back-and-forth confrontations between the two electoral alliances over a period of two to three days during the late October period.
- Out of the 45 constituencies being monitored by Odhikar, there were no incidents of verified election-related violence in six constituencies: Dinajpur – 3; Chapai Nawabganj – 3; Kustia – 3; Barishal – 1;

Tangail – 4; and Laxmipur – 2. EVER monitors are continuing to try to verify whether certain acts that were reported in the media can be recorded as incidents under the EVER protocol.

- In the incidents captured by the EVER monitors during the period, a total of 12 people were killed and more than 650 wounded. Ten of the people were killed in Dhaka, and one person each in Chittagong and Khulna divisions. More than 250 were recorded as wounded in Dhaka, more than 225 in Chittagong, and more than 65 in Khulna. 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.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Timeline

During the 17 to 30 October period, the majority of incidents recorded occurred on 27, 28, and 29 October as the fourteen-party alliance protested the composition of the CG and the BEC. Figure 1 highlights the timeline of incidents during this reporting period.

Figure 1. Number of Incidents by Date
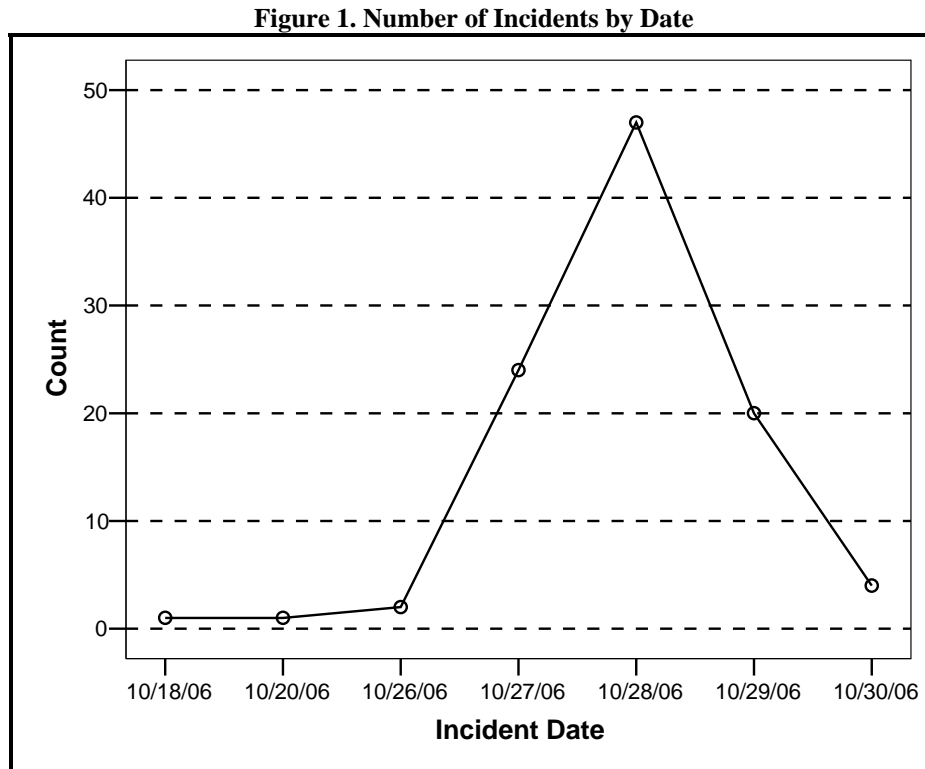
A total of 24 incidents were recorded for 27 October. The number of incidents jumped to 47 on 28 October and then declined to 20 on 29 October.

Regional Distribution of Incidents in the 45 constituencies

There were incidents recorded in all six divisions of Bangladesh during this period, but the majority of incidents took place in Dhaka and Chittagong, while relatively few incidents were recorded in Rajshahi and Sylhet (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Divisional Breakdown of Incidents
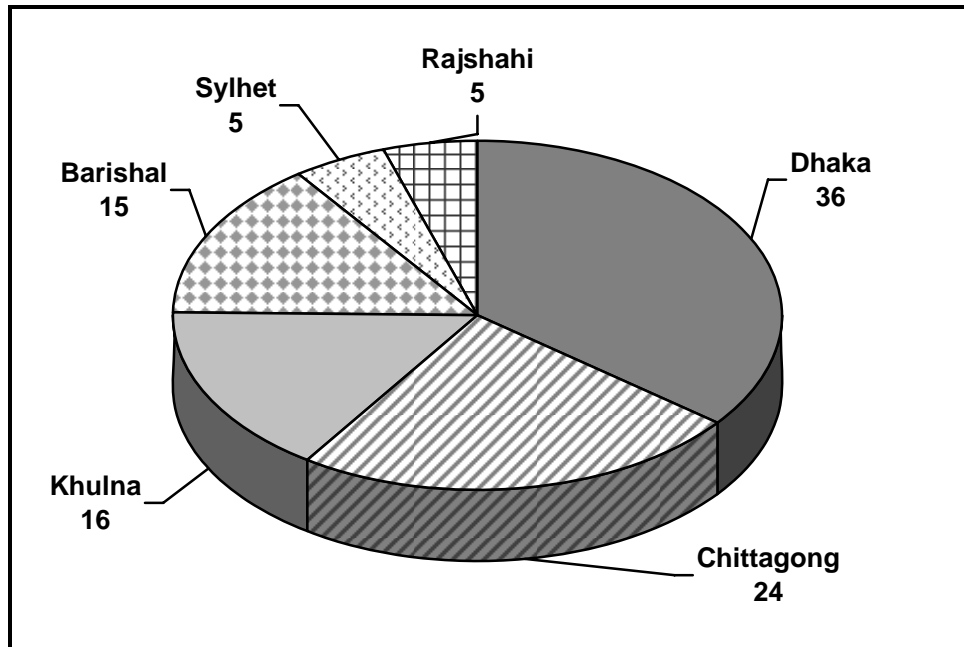
More than a third of the recorded incidents took place in the Dhaka division, while about a quarter took place in Chittagong. In each of the divisions, the vast majority of incidents took place during the 27-29 October period.

While incidents of violence were recorded in 39 or the 45 constituencies being monitored, there are several constituencies characterized by a high number of incidents: Patuakhali – 1 (8 incidents); Tangail – 1 (7 incidents); Cox's Bazaar – 1 (6 incidents); Dhaka – 8 (5 incidents); and Noakhali – 4 (5 incidents).

In all of these constituencies, the high number of incidents was driven by cycles of back-and-forth violence between the fourteen and four party alliances during the 27 to 29 October period. In the Tangail – 1 constituency, for example, all the incidents took place on 28 and 29 October and consisted of attacks and counter attacks by supporters of the fourteen and four party alliances on each other's supporters and facilities. The one exception to this pattern was in Patuakhali – 1 where five of the nine incidents were clashes and attacks on property by one faction of the BNP against another faction.

These five intra-party incidents in Patuakhali – 1 formed a majority of the nine intra-party incidents recorded overall during the monitoring period. Another 66 incidents were characterized by inter-party violence between rival political party supporters.

Perpetrators of Election-Related Violence

As indicated earlier, almost all of the violence recorded during this reporting period was perpetrated by supporters and leaders of political parties in the country. In 98% of the recorded incidents, the perpetrator was a supporter of a political party and in 10% of the incidents a political party leader (defined loosely as a high-ranking member or someone seen as a local or national leader) was also a perpetrator. As for specific political groups, supporters and leaders of the fourteen party alliance (AL) were more often the perpetrators of incidents than supporters and leaders of the four party alliance (BNP).

Figure 3. Political Party as Perpetrators
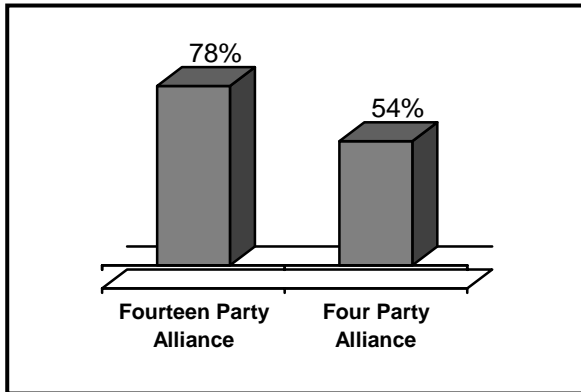
In 78% of the cases, supporters of the fourteen party alliance were the perpetrators in the incident while in 54% of the cases, supporters of the four party alliance were the perpetrators. In cases where there are clashes between supporters of the political parties, supporters of both parties are recorded as perpetrators, and as victims. Given the fact that the political parties were the prime actors in almost all the incidents of violence during this monitoring period, there is little difference in patterns of perpetrators between different regions of the country.

Victims of Election-Related Violence

While the perpetrators of violence during this reporting period are almost exclusively political parties, victims tend to be more scattered. Figure 4 indicates that while political party supporters and leaders are most likely to be victims, property was also frequently targeted during the violence.

Figure 4. Victims of Election Violence (% of incidents)
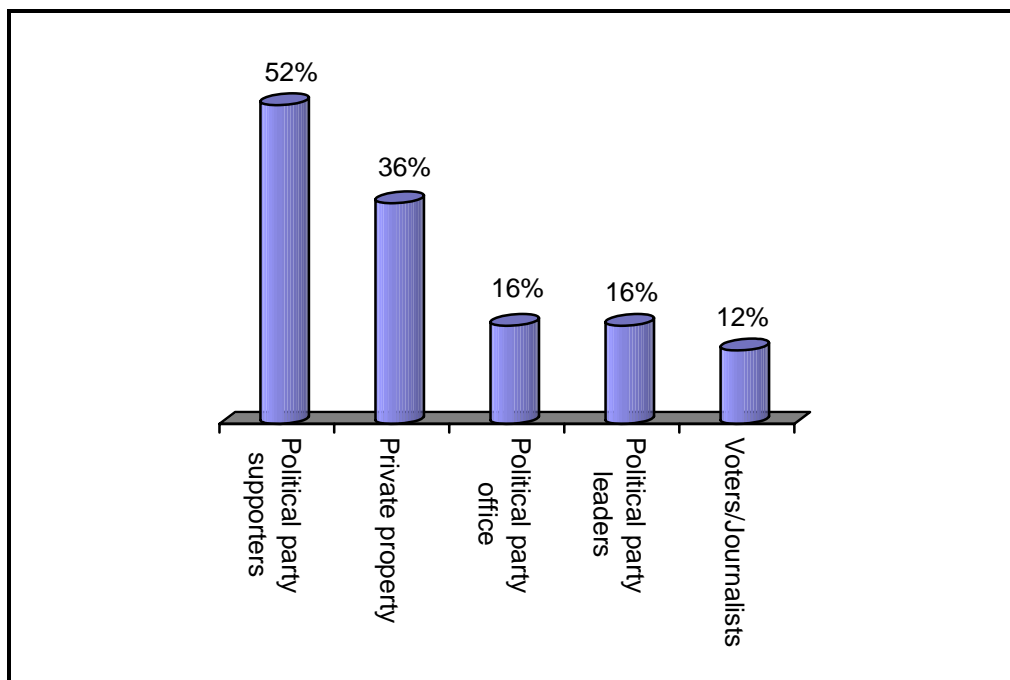
In a majority of recorded incidents, political party supporters were victims of the violence while leaders of political parties were victims in less than one in five incidents. Private property was victimized in more than one-third of incidents. It should be noted that in some of these cases, the private property such as the residence of a party leader was deliberately targeted, but in most cases the private property that was destroyed was not deliberately targeted. Political party offices were deliberately targeted in close to one in five incidents. Non-political party actors were not very likely to be victimized in the violence that was recorded during this reporting period. The most serious incident involving non-political party victims was in Dhaka when two women were crushed by a bus while trying to escape a clash between supporters of the two major party alliances.

Figure 5. Political Party as Victims
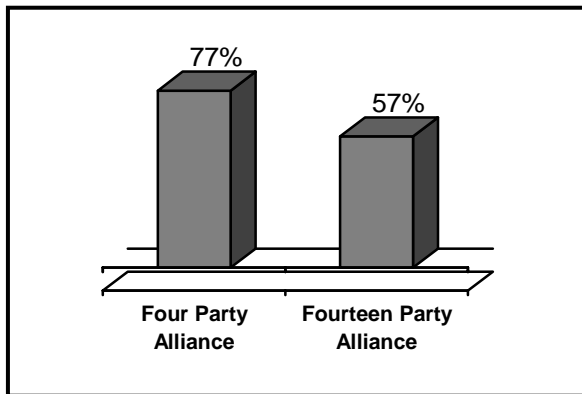
Given the fact that supporters of the fourteen party alliance were more likely to be perpetrators of incidents than supporters of the four party alliance, it is not surprising that supporters of the four party alliance are more likely to be victims of the violence (Figure 5).

Type and Methods of Violence

The most frequent type of violence during this reporting cycle were repeated clashes and physical confrontations between the supporters of the two rival political party alliances, with 74% of the incidents characterized by these types of confrontations. The destruction of property was also a frequent type of violence with 65% of incidents resulting in some destruction of property. Twenty percent of incidents were characterized by intimidation or verbal harassment of the victims. Murder or attempted murder was the type of violence used in 15% of the incidents. This pattern for types of violence is roughly consistent throughout the country. The one exception is the Barishal division where almost all of the recorded incidents involved destruction of property or at least attempted destruction of property.

Given the fact that clashes and destruction of property were the most common types of violence used during this reporting period, it is not surprising that various lethal 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.

Figure 6. Methods of Violence (% of incidents)
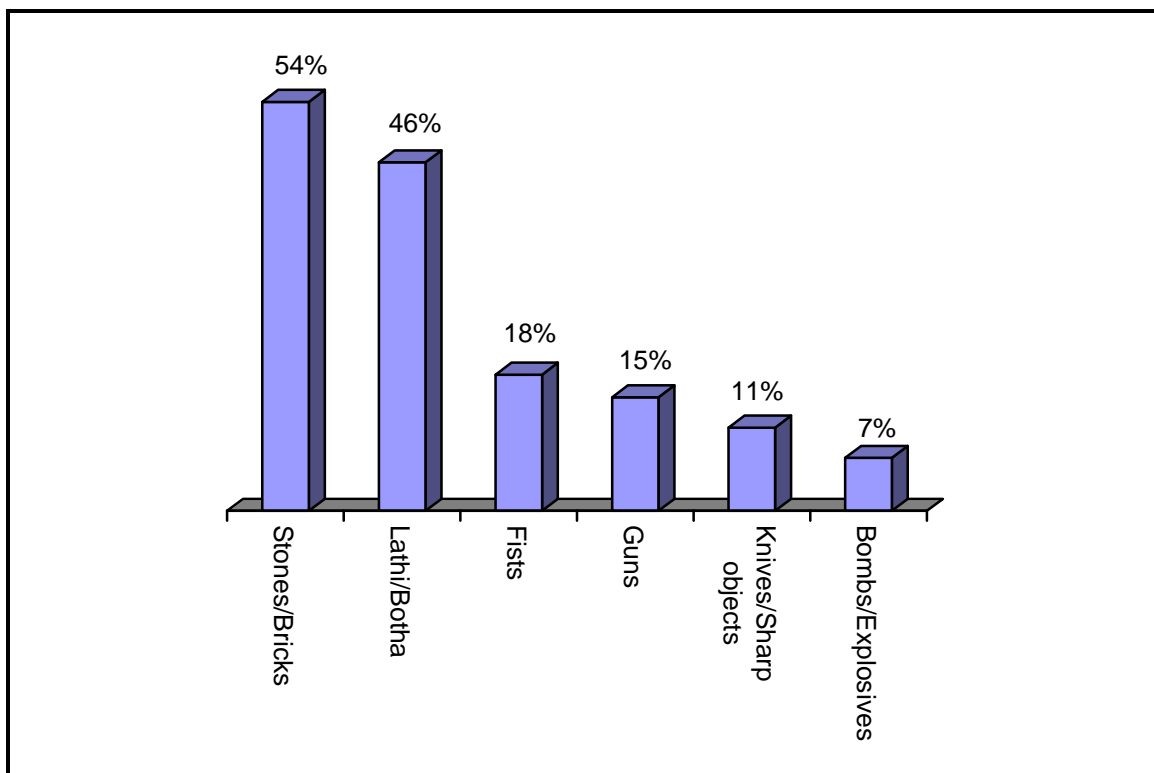
Guns and homemade bombs such as Molotov cocktails were more likely to be used in Dhaka and Chittagong than in other places. The most popular weapons during the incidents throughout the country were either stones or bricks that could be used as projectiles or club-like objects such as *lathis* (heavy sticks) or *boithas* (oars).. These two types of weapons were the primary weapons used during clashes between rival groups of political party supporters as well as in the destruction of property.

Impact of Violence

In addition to the destruction of property, the incidents of violence recorded during this period were most likely to result in physical injuries and, in some cases, death. The fact that most of the incidents involved clashes between rival supporters of political supporters, and the fact that these supporters used weapons which can be lethal helps to explain the large number of injuries and deaths resulting from the violence.

In the incidents recorded by the EVER monitors during this period, a total of 12 deaths and more than 650 wounded were reported during the incidents. The incidents in Dhaka were the most violent as 10 of the deaths were recorded in incidents in Dhaka, including five dead in a clash between thousands of supporters of the two rival party alliances on 28 October. More than 250 people were also reported as wounded during the incidents in Dhaka during this period. One person each was also reported killed in incidents in Chittagong and Khulna. In Chittagong, more than 225 were reported as wounded during the violence in this reporting period and more than 65 were reported as wounded in Khulna.

Conclusion

Odhikar is monitoring election-related violence in 45 constituencies out of a total of 300. There might be more violence prone areas other than these 45 constituencies that Odhikar had selected and more incidents of violence could have taken place during this period. Odhikar selected these 45 constituencies on the basis of previous records of violence during the 2001 elections and where it has a strong capacity to monitor election-related violence. It is also to be mentioned that Odhikar relied on its Human Rights Defenders to prepare this report. They collected information in the working areas. These incident reports were then verified with a number of sources including eyewitnesses, media, hospitals, police reports and government officials. It is hoped that this kind of fact-finding can be used nationally and internationally in order to mitigate election-related violence.