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The Asia Foundation

Election Violence Education and Resolution (EVER)

IFES

Report on Electoral Violence
31 October to 13 November 2006

Prepared by Odhikar and IFES
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Odhikar **EVER-Incident Report**

This report details the key findings from the second period of monitoring for the Election Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) project in Bangladesh. The EVER project provides a systematic methodology for monitoring, reporting and mitigating election violence, and has been implemented in several countries around the world.

This second report of the EVER Bangladesh project details with the findings from EVER monitoring in 45 constituencies during the period from October 31 to November 13, 2006. A total of 51 incidents of election-related violence were identified and verified by Odhikar-EVER monitors during this period. The key findings from this period of monitoring are:

- Unlike the first period of monitoring when most of the violence took place between 27 and 29 October 2006, the violence in this second reporting period was spread out throughout the two week period with a spike toward the end of the period on November 12 and 13, 2006 as supporters of the 14-party alliance led by the Awami League (AL) once again took to the streets to protest the composition of the Election Commission (EC).

- The total number of incidents during this reporting period was roughly half of the number of incidents during the first reporting period (51 compared to 99), and the number of constituencies in which violence took place dropped from 35 to 29.

- As in the first EVER reporting period, supporters/activists of the 14-party alliance were the most active participants in the violence that took place during this reporting period. Supporters/activists of the 4-party alliance led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) were also active participants in many of the incidents of violence.

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

- As in the last reporting period, two constituencies, Patuakhali – 1 and Cox's Bazaar – 1, stand out for having the highest number of incidents out of the 45 monitored constituencies.

- This reporting period witnessed a doubling of the number of incidents involving intra-party confrontations. The incidents recorded during this period were not as deadly as those in the first reporting period. In total, **three people were reportedly killed** and more than **250 wounded** in the recorded incidents during this period.

DETAILED FINDINGS

<u>Timeline</u>

There were a total of 51 incidents recorded during the October 31 to November 13, 2006 period, a drop form the preceding October 17 to 30 period in which a total of 99 incidents were recorded by EVER monitors. Violent incidents related to the election process were fairly spread out during the October 31 to November 13 period, with a spike occurring during the end of this period as the fourteen-party alliance took to the streets demanding the reconstitution of the Election Commission. Figure 1 highlights the timeline of incidents during this reporting period.
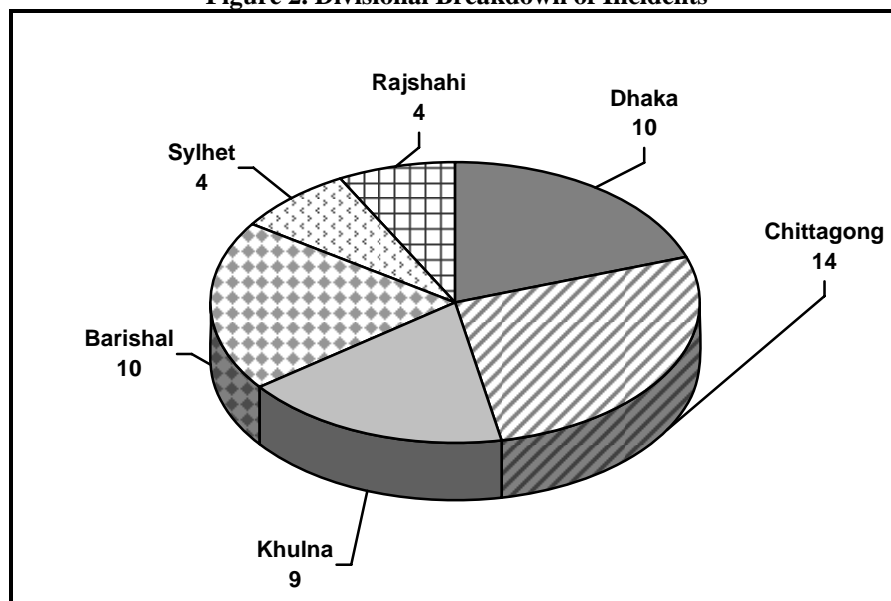
Figure 1. Number of Incidents by Date

Regional Distribution of Incidents in the 45 constituencies

The regional distribution of incidents in this second reporting period is fairly similar to the pattern observed in the first reporting period. As in the first reporting period, relatively few incidents took place in Sylhet or Rajshahi. **The highest number of incidents took place in Chittagong, while a comparatively high number of incidents also took place in Dhaka and Barishal** (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Divisional Breakdown of Incidents

A total of 14 incidents were recorded this period in Chittagong division, while 10 each were recorded in Dhaka and Barishal divisions. In the four weeks that EVER monitoring has been taking place, Dhaka has been the location for a total of 46 incidents while there have been 38 incidents in Chittagong. In the past four weeks, there have been 25 incidents each recorded in Khulna and Barishal, while Sylhet and Rajshahi have had 9 incidents each.

In the last reporting period, incidents were recorded in 39 of the 45 constituencies in which EVER monitoring is taking place. For the current reporting period, the number of constituencies in which incidents were recorded has dropped to 29. This decrease is most probably a result of the general decrease in recorded incidents from the previous reporting period to the current reporting period.

In the last reporting period, there were several constituencies which were highlighted as having a high number of recorded incidents. **Two of these constituencies continue to have a high number of incidents in this reporting period: Patuakhali – 1 (6 incidents) and Cox's Bazaar – 1 (3 incidents). The continued high number of incidents in these areas in this reporting cycle indicates that special attention should be paid to these two constituencies by those organizations leading conflict mitigation efforts during the election process.**
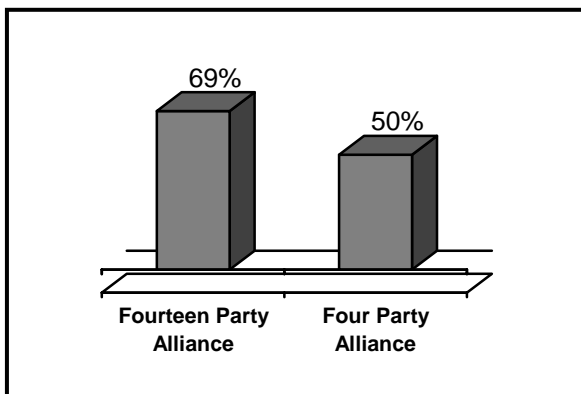
On the other hand, the four weeks of reporting have not yet led to any recorded incidents in three constituencies: Dinajpur – 3, Kustia – 3, and Tangail – 4.

The pattern of violence in this reporting period continues to be characterised by back-and-forth clashes between supporters of the two major party alliances in the election. However, there has been an increase, during this reporting period, in the number of acts of intra-party violence between different factions of the same party. In the last reporting period, roughly 9% of the recorded incidents were intra-party feuds with all but one of these incidents involving factions of the BNP fighting each other. In this report, intra-party incidents have increased to almost 20% of all incidents, and factional fighting is evident among both major parties, AL and BNP.

Perpetrators of Election-Related Violence

As was the case in the first reporting period, almost all of the violence recorded during this reporting period was perpetrated by supporters and leaders of political parties in the country. This pattern reflects the increased likelihood of violence when one political group or another organizes mass actions. In 48 of the recorded incidents, one of the perpetrators was a supporter or leader of a political party (defined loosely as a high-ranking member or someone seen as a local or national leader). In three cases, the police forces were identified as perpetrators.

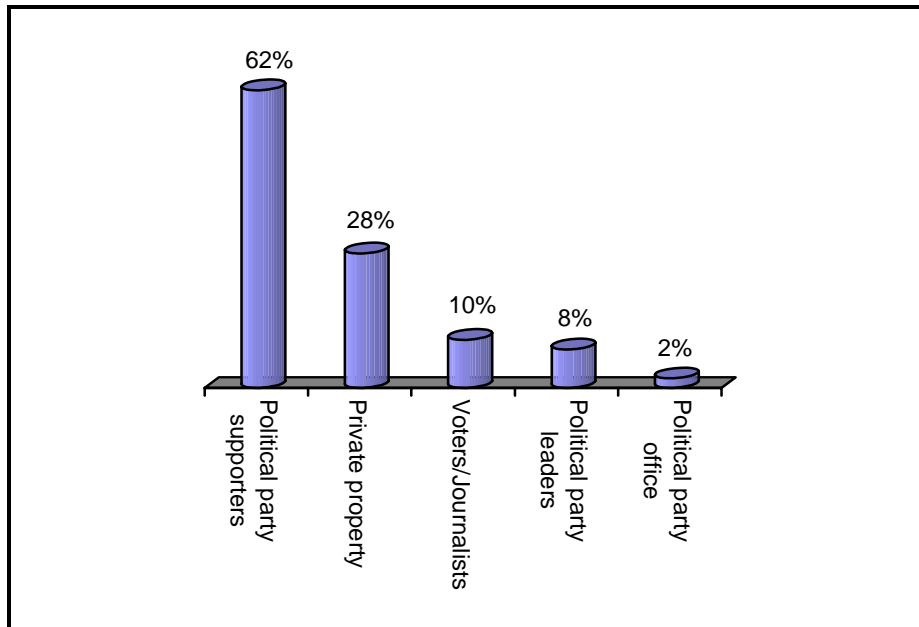**Figure 3. Political Party as Perpetrators**

Supporters of the fourteen party alliance were identified as perpetrators in 69% of the cases, while supporters of the four party alliance were the perpetrators in 50% of the cases. In cases where there are clashes between supporters of the political parties, supporters of both parties are recorded as perpetrators, and as victims. One notable, though not widespread, development in this reporting period is that the police were identified as perpetrators in three incidents. This is a change from the first reporting period when the police were not the perpetrators in any of the incidents.
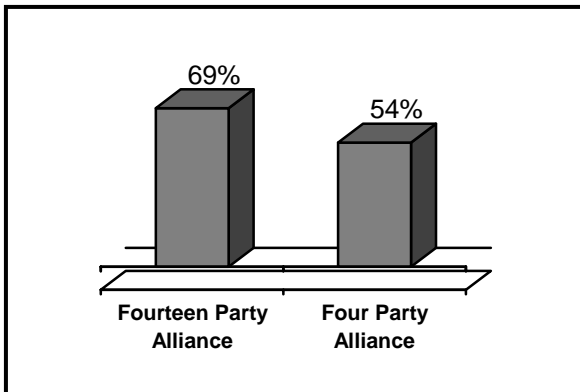
Victims of Election-Related Violence

This reporting period sees the continuation of a pattern where the victims of violence tend to be more varied than the perpetrators of this violence. While the perpetrators of violence during this reporting period are almost exclusively political parties, victims comprise of not only political party supporters and leaders but also private and public property. Figure 4 reports on the percentage of incidents with specific types of victims during this reporting period.

Figure 4. Victims of Election Violence (% of incidents)

The percentage of incidents in which supporters of political parties were victims is relatively the same as in the first reporting period. This is also the case for the percentage of incidents in which private property was victimized as well as ordinary voters. Political party leaders and offices were slightly less likely to be victimized in this second reporting period compared to the first reporting period.

Figure 5. Political Party as Victims

Compared to the first reporting period, there has been a shift in the parties that are likely to have been victims of the violence during this reporting period. In the first reporting period, supporters of the four party alliance were more likely to have been victims of the violence than supporters of the fourteen party alliance. This was not surprising given that supporters of the fourteen party alliance were more likely to be perpetrators in the incidents. However, in this reporting period, supporters of the fourteen party alliance are more likely to have been victims in the recorded incidents despite the fact that they are also more likely to have been perpetrators. Two factors account for this finding. One, this reporting period saw many m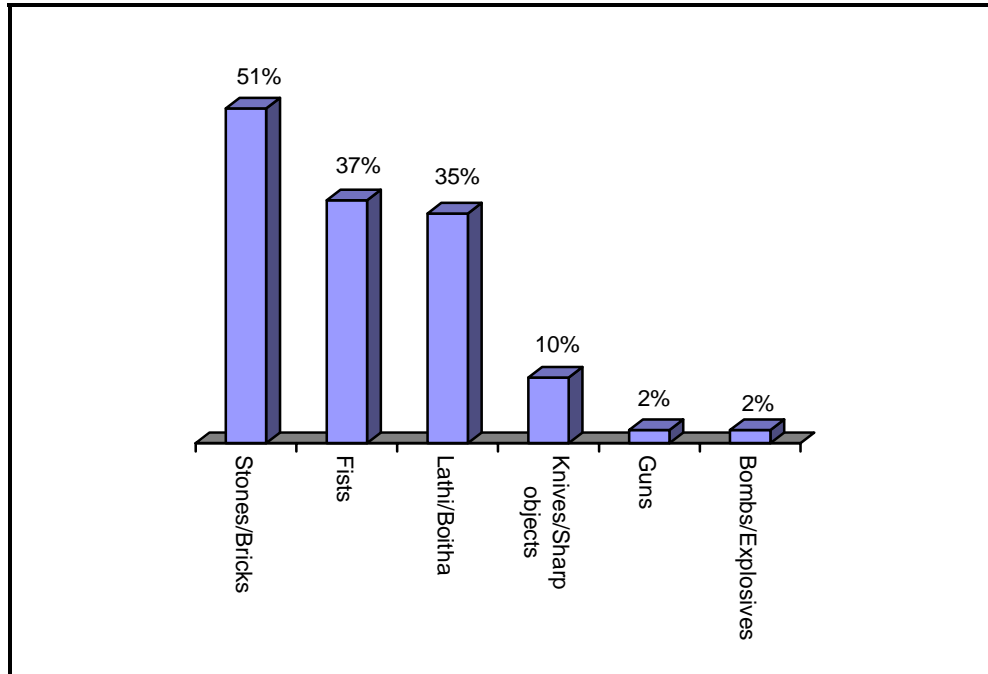ore incidents in which factions of the AL were in conflict with each other during an incident, thus making supporters of the fourteen party alliance both perpetrators and victims of the violence. Second, all three cases in which the police were perpetrators were incidents in which supporters of the fourteen party alliance were victims of the police actions. These factors account for the slightly unconventional pattern of party victims during this reporting period.

Type and Methods of Violence

As was the case during the first reporting period, the most frequent types of violence during this reporting cycle were repeated confrontations between the supporters of the two rival political party alliances, with 76% of the incidents resulting in physical harm. In most of these cases, the physical harm resulted from clashes between groups of party supporters. Destruction of property was a far less common type of violence in this reporting period, falling from 65% of incidents in the first reporting period to 37% of incidents in this reporting period.

Twelve percent of incidents were characterised by intimidation or verbal harassment of the victims. The percentage of incidents which resulted in murder fell from 15% in the first reporting period to 6% in this period. The methods of violence continue to show the same pattern exhibited in the first reporting period, with stones/projectiles and lathis/boithas being the primary weapons, besides fists being used in the violence (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Methods of Violence (% of incidents)

There has been an increase in the percentage of incidents in which people used their fists/physical attacks from 18% to 37%, while there has been a decrease in the percentage of incidents in which guns were used from 15% in the first reporting period to only 2% in this reporting period. The use of bombs or other explosives has also gone down from the first to the second reporting period.

Impact of Violence

The reduction in the use of guns and explosives during recorded incidents in the second reporting period, as well as the lower number of incidents in this period, may account for the lower number of deaths and injuries reported during these incidents. In the first reporting period, a total of 12 deaths and more than 650 wounded were reported during the incidents. In this reporting period, three deaths and slightly more than 250 wounded were reported. The average number of people wounded per incident declined from approximately 6.5 in the first reporting period to approximately 4.9 in the second reporting period. Two of the deaths during this reporting period were recorded in incidents in Khulna while one was recorded during an incident in Chittagong.

Recommendations

- Patterns of violence identified in this report should be addressed by local political, community, and law enforcement leaders. In particular, attention should be paid to addressing causes and patterns of violence in Patuakhali-1 and Cox's Bazaar-1, which have had the highest number of incidents overall.

- Findings indicate that rallies/strikes are the sites of most violence, and prevention efforts should focus on 1) ways to offset the continued reliance by party supporters on violence, instead of peaceful advocacy, to assert strength over other parties or groups, and 2) putting mechanisms in place within parties and within the security presence at rallies that to prevent or at least reduce the incidence of violence.

- All political parties should publicly condemn the use of violence by their supporters, and should state their commitment to nonviolence. All political parties should be encouraged to come together to discuss the frequent violence, and consider the development of a public code of conduct or commitment to nonviolent activism and campaigning.

- Civil society, community, religious, and business leaders and organizations, as well as other high profile citizens, should make public statements denouncing the cycles of violence and promoting peaceful resolution of differences.

- Police should increase efforts to maintain law and order during rallies or strikes in the interest of preventing violence – however they should refrain from using excessive force.

- All stakeholders, and in particular, groups specializing in conflict resolution or mitigation during the elections should make use of data relevant to their communities and offer feedback to Monitors or through Odhikar headquarters about the EVER project, and are welcome to offer suggested recommendations.

Conclusion

Although the number of incidents is lower than in the last report, violence occurs nearly every day. Odhikar believes that election-related violence increases fear and decreases participation of citizens in the election process specifically and the democratic processes in general. Therefore all stakeholders are requested to come forward and take necessary and new measures to ensure an election free from violence.

About the EVER Project

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.[1] 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 (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 constituency the incidents captured by the EVER monitors may not reflect all incidents rumored to have taken place in the constituency. 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 45 constituencies in which Odhikar is implementing the EVER methodology.

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[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 the EVER team at Odhikar for methodological details and questions.