

Training on Election Violence Monitoring

05 to 07 December, 2025



The right to vote is one of the most fundamental of civil and political rights. In Bangladesh, however, the criminalization of politics has been widespread, and election periods have consistently been marked by intensified violence. For example, the three parliamentary elections and all local government elections held during Sheikh Hasina's rule from 2009 to August 2024, were violent and farcical. The country witnessed persistent violence, particularly intraparty clashes that resulted in casualties and attacks.



Torture, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and political violence were especially prevalent during election periods. Keeping these election-related human rights violations in mind, Odhikar and the World Organization against Torture jointly organized a training session titled "Election Violence Monitoring" on 5-7 December at Savar, Dhaka. The programme was designed to equip participants with foundational knowledge and practical skills necessary for effective election violence monitoring, given that the interim government announced that the 13th Parliamentary Election will be held on 12 February 2026.



One of Odhikar's activities is election monitoring, with a particular focus on electoral violence. Monitoring such violence is crucial for developing strategies for prevention and mitigation and for providing informed recommendations to election commissions, people and democratic governments. In this context, human rights defenders affiliated with Odhikar, with expertise in violence monitoring, will observe the upcoming 13th parliamentary election.



At the “Election Violence Monitoring” training programme, Md. Sazzad Hussain, Member of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances, discussed the overall election context in Bangladesh and Odhikar’s historical journey in election observation. He explained that since 2009, Odhikar has faced continuous repression and harassment under a fascist government, yet has remained steadfast in documenting and reporting human rights violations. He also introduced OMCT, highlighting its role in supporting victims—particularly survivors of torture—and in strengthening the capacity of human rights defenders. Md. Sazzad Hussain outlined the core responsibilities of election observers: monitoring, reporting, and making recommendations. Participants were reminded of the importance of political neutrality, independence, and strict adherence to the Code of Conduct. Emphasis was placed on understanding local contexts, building community relationships, identifying early warning signs of potential violence, and verifying information through multiple credible sources. The training then examined the history and patterns of electoral violence in Bangladesh, analyzing its evolution, political dynamics, misuse of state power, the role of law enforcement agencies, and violations of voter rights. Comparative

perspectives from South Asian countries—such as India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan—were discussed to provide a broader regional understanding. The session also highlighted international and community-based strategies to mitigate electoral violence, including enforcement of the Election Code of Conduct, the role of civil society and international observers, and grassroots violence-prevention models.



In subsequent sessions, participants gained practical skills in identifying indicators of pre-election, election-day, and post-election violence; observing polling centers and campaign areas; and developing risk maps to identify high-risk zones. Detailed guidance was provided on field-level information verification, identifying credible sources, fact-checking misinformation—particularly on social media—and maintaining secure communication. The day concluded with group work, during which participants applied their learning through discussions and practical exercises, laying a strong foundation for effective election violence monitoring and reporting.



A session on Election-Related Laws and the Electoral Code of Conduct for Observers and Candidates was facilitated by Dr. Abdul Alim. This session provided a comprehensive overview of Bangladesh's electoral legal framework, including the Representation of the People Order (RPO), Election Commission guidelines, campaign regulations, and the roles and responsibilities of law enforcement agencies. Dr. Alim explained the Code of Conduct for observers, emphasizing neutrality, non-interference with voters and candidates, and ethical and security considerations in the use of photographs and videos. He also discussed the Code of Conduct for candidates, highlighting prohibitions on the use of government resources, hate speech or violence-inciting rhetoric, violations of rules on posters, microphones, and processions, and voter intimidation. Using real-life examples, he demonstrated how breaches of these laws often escalate into electoral violence. Dr. Alim also conducted a session on mitigating electoral violence, presenting successful strategies adopted in different countries and offering practical, experience-based insights into prevention and reduction.



Another session, led by ASM Nasiruddin Elan, a Director of Odhikar, focused on local government elections and related violence. He analyzed patterns of violence in Union Parishad, Municipality, and City Corporation elections, noting that personality-driven politics at the local level often fuels conflict, with competition frequently evolving into family or group rivalries. Common forms of violence included capturing polling centers, arson attacks on homes, and post-election retaliatory attacks. The discussion raised concerns about administrative neutrality, political influence, and the heightened vulnerability of minority communities in group-based conflicts. Special guidelines for observing local elections and methods for identifying high-risk areas were also discussed.



Taskin Fahmina, a Director of Odhikar, addressed how power struggles and toxic political practices lead to severe human rights violations during elections. She emphasized that strong political will and a genuine democratization process are essential to ending electoral violence. Drawing on the example of Sri Lanka, she illustrated how coordinated efforts by the election commission and civil society successfully mitigated electoral violence. She further stressed that observers should carefully document incidents of torture, enforced disappearances, and other human rights violations if they occur during the electoral process.



The training was highly participatory, incorporating group work and role-playing exercises. Participants demonstrated strong interest and commitment, expressing their willingness to serve as observers in the upcoming parliamentary election scheduled for February 2026.



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