

Press Briefing

Electoral Violence in the Pre-Election Period: Evidence from Field Monitoring

Press Conference – 7 February 2026 | Hotel Bengal Canary Park, Gulshan, Dhaka

Headline Message

Odhikar's monitoring shows electoral violence is systemic, concentrated in rural areas and public spaces such as streets, with intimidation as the dominant tactic. Nearly two-thirds of incidents discouraged or prevented participation, while authorities failed to act in almost half the cases.



Our monitoring covered 50 constituencies—a modest slice of the national picture—but even limited data reveals urgent risks. These findings provide a critical snapshot of electoral violence, underscoring the need for the Election Commission and security institutions to strengthen rural presence, act swiftly, and ensure impartial enforcement to restore public trust in democracy.

Background

Odhikar, founded in 1994, is a leading human rights organisation that has consistently defended civil and political rights in Bangladesh through rigorous documentation and advocacy. With support from the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD), it has been monitoring electoral violence across 50 constituencies in 22 districts since 18 January. This initiative, part of Bangladesh's democratic transition following the 2024 mass uprising, provides impartial documentation to strengthen safeguards and inform stakeholders. Today we share findings from 18 January to 5 February 2026.

While this covers only a fraction of the 300 constituencies, the initiative provides timely evidence of electoral violence. The findings are not comprehensive, but they highlight pressing concerns and call for broader attention and immediate action.

This initiative, part of Odhikar's broader mandate and Bangladesh's democratic transition following the 2024 mass uprising, provides impartial documentation to strengthen safeguards and inform stakeholders. Today we share findings from 18 January to 5 February 2026.

Key Findings

- **Scale of Violence:** 30 incidents documented across 14 districts; Chattogram (7 cases) and Cox's Bazar (4 cases) were primary hotspots.
- **Locations:** Two-thirds of incidents occurred in Union Parishads; half took place in public spaces such as streets and marketplaces.

- **Types of Violence:**
 - Threats, intimidation, and harassment (33%)
 - Property damage (20%)
 - Physical clashes (17%)
 - Electoral process obstruction (17%)
 - Fatal violence (1 case, involving a law enforcement official)
- **Actors Involved:** BNP affiliates most frequently implicated (15 cases -50%), followed by Jamaat (6 cases-20%), independents (5 cases-17%), and smaller numbers from other parties.
- **Impact:** Nearly two- thirds of incidents discouraged or prevented participation; victims reported injuries, property damage, and psychological distress.
- **Authority Response:** In 47% of cases, authorities took no action. Investigations or protective measures were rare, reinforcing perceptions of impunity.

Major Trends

- Violence concentrated in rural constituencies and public spaces.
- Intimidation was the dominant tactic, alongside physical clashes.
- Party supporters—particularly BNP and Jamaat—were predominantly involved in violence.
- Weak institutional response perpetuated cycles of violence and eroded public confidence in electoral integrity.

Recommendations

To Electoral and Security Institutions (including the Election Commission):

- Prioritise protection of vulnerable groups, including national minorities, by strengthening security presence on election day and ensuring swift, impartial action in the post-election period.
- Extend the security forces' presence on critical constituencies beyond the planned 3- day period after election day.
- Deploy security forces in adequate numbers to hotspots such as Chattogram, Cox's Bazar, and other vulnerable locations.
- Respond swiftly and impartially to intimidation and clashes to protect voters and candidates.
- Establish complaint desks at local offices so citizens can report violence and receive timely action.
- Coordinate closely with law enforcement to ensure consistent protection during the remainder of the campaign period, on Election Day, and after the elections.

To Political Parties:

- Commit publicly to non-violence and discipline supporters engaged in intimidation or clashes.

To Civil Society and Media:

- Continue documenting incidents and amplify victims' voices to keep exclusion visible and influence the authority's response.

International Partners:

- Engage with electoral stakeholders, including political parties and institutions, to strengthen safeguards and accountability.

For Media Inquiries:

Contact: odhikar.hrdn1@gmail.com; odhikar.documentation@gmail.com | +880 1711405166