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**Election Violence,
Mega-Identities, and
Electoral Reforms**

**Analyzing the Trend of
Pre-election Political
Violence in Bangladesh**

**Comparative Analysis of
Electoral Violence in
South Asia**

**Violence Against
Women During
Elections**

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Election Violence, Mega-Identities, and Electoral Reforms

In Bangladesh, elections are celebratory events as they allow voters to shake hands with politicians, who often remain too busy to mingle with the voters once they are elected until the next round of elections comes. But like many developing countries, elections in Bangladesh often result in violence, with the opposition parties seldom agreeing to the results, calling it unfair and rigged. This has led to three types of Caretaker Government (CTG) in Bangladesh, mainly to contain violence and hold free and fair national elections. One in 1990-1991 under the incumbent Chief Justice of Bangladesh, who led an interim government until the elections were held in February 1991. This could be called Type 1, which resulted from mass agitation against the military, calling the latter to withdraw from politics and return to the barracks. Save for ten months in 1981-1982, Bangladesh remained under military rule since 15 August 1975 when the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was brutally killed along with his family members by a section of the military in a coup d'état. However, the return of civilian rule in 1991 polarized the country into two civil platforms, one led by the Awami League (AL) and the other led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Following mass agitation under the leadership of the Awami League in 1994-1996, Bangladesh formed the second type of CTG in March 1996, within the constitutional framework, with the legal obligation of conducting national elections within three months of the expiry of a government's tenure.

Only two national elections, the 7th Parliamentary Election in June 1996 and the 8th Parliamentary Election in October 2001, were held under Type 2. This is because the BNP-led government tried to manipulate the constitutional framework of the CTG in 2006, which, following mass agitation once again under the leadership of the AL, led to the third type. This has been referred to as the military-backed CTG. The latter remained in power for two years (2007-2008) on the grounds of fixing fake voter registration and producing national identity cards for all citizens of the country. Type 3 CTG was qualitatively different from the first two, which made the AL, after winning the national election with an overwhelming majority in December 2008, rethink the CTG system. In 2011, the AL-led government abolished the CTG by passing the 15th Amendment of the Bangladesh Constitution with a two-thirds majority in the National Parliament. The opposition BNP and other like-minded political parties, along with some members of civil society, protested the change, unmindful that it was the BNP that earlier objected to such a system and later tried to manipulate it to its benefit. Most opposition parties, or what could be labeled as anti-AL forces, still longed for the CTG system, arguing for its fairness and merit in holding peaceful national elections.

Let me, at this stage, debunk two myths. One is the peaceful nature of national elections held under the CTG. Save for the 9th Parliamentary Election of 2008, held under the military-backed CTG, none of the national polls was peaceful (Figure 1). The 8th Parliamentary Election of 2001 saw 248 violent deaths. Incidentally, the

military-backed 9th Parliamentary Election of 2008 had the lowest death figure (only 21) compared to even the 5th Parliamentary Election of 1991, which saw 49 violent deaths. To back this contention further, the 10th Parliamentary Election of 2014, held under the elected incumbent government, which was equally fierce, saw 142 deaths, lower than the CTG-backed 8th Parliamentary Election of 2001. The above figures are based on four weeks of mapping of electoral violence - three weeks before and one week after Election Day. This time, in the 12th Parliamentary Election, again held under the elected incumbent government, and based on ten weeks of mapping, there were 30 deaths, still significantly lower than the 5th Parliamentary Election of 1991. Even if one maps election-related violence from 28 October 2023, when major violence took place in Dhaka, the number of deaths still remained lower than the 2001 Parliamentary Election (44 overall deaths) (Figure 2). I must quickly add here that a single death is painful, more so for the family members. Still, sadly, a comparison of the scale of electoral violence could only be made through a numerical representation of deaths, injuries, and incidents.

Figure 1
Electoral violence

Inter-party election violence				All other election-related violence
Elections	Incidents	Deaths	Injuries	Overall Death
5 th Parliamentary Election 1991	39	31	590	49
6 th Parliamentary Election 1996 (15 February)	56	18	1382	51
7 th Parliamentary Election 1996 (15 June)	51	27	979	45
8 th Parliamentary Election 2001	345	150	9174	248
9 th Parliamentary Election 2008	73	10	836	21
10 th Parliamentary Election 2014	77	41	2603	142
11 th Parliamentary Election 2018	175	33	2537	61
12 th Parliamentary Election 2024	-	07	-	30

Source: Bangladesh Peace Observatory, Centre for Alternatives, Dhaka, 15 January 2024.

Figure 2
Electoral violence from 28 October 2023 to 11 January 2024

Dates	Motives	Inter-party tensions	Intra-party tensions	Other political issues	Grand Total
28-Oct				2	2
29-Oct		1		1	2
31-Oct				4	4
2-Nov		1	1		2
4-Nov		2			2
11-Nov		1			1
12-Nov				1	1
18-Nov				1	1
21-Nov			1	2	3
23-Nov				1	1
4-Dec		1			1
5-Dec				1	1
11-Dec				2	2
13-Dec				1	1
18-Dec				1	1
19-Dec				5	5
23-Dec				1	1
29-Dec			1		1
30-Dec			1		1
03-Jan		1			1
04-Jan		1			1
05-Jan				4	4
07-Jan		2			2
08-Jan		1			1
09-Jan				1	1
11-Jan		1			1
Grand Total		12	4	28	44
Three weeks before and one week after the election day.		7	3	20	30

Source: Bangladesh Peace Observatory, Centre for Alternatives, Dhaka, 15 January 2024.

The second myth is that the major political parties were becoming more tolerant of each other with each CTG-backed national election. Therefore, if the system is continued, it will contribute to peaceful elections, and the parties will gradually learn to tolerate each other. To debunk this myth, let us calculate the number of boycotts by the opposition party in the National Parliament. If anything, it has increased progressively for the worse, from 34 percent in the 5th Parliament, 43 percent in the 7th Parliament, 60 percent in the 8th Parliament, and 83.38 percent in the 9th Parliament in 2009-2014. If over 80 percent of the parliamentary sessions are boycotted by the opposition party, why call it a democracy? Moreover, what a waste of public money! But more significantly, the politics of protracted parliamentary boycotts only indicates that the major political parties are now engaged in what could be referred to as mega-identity politics.

In Bangladesh, the political identities of two major political platforms, led by AL and BNP, have become political mega-identities, with contradictory positions on the 1971 liberation war, the 1971 genocide, the Father of the Nation, the brutal killing on 15 August 1975, and, on top of this, the 21 August 2004 grenade attack on the then-opposition leader, now prime minister, Sheikh Hasina. Trust between major political parties is the minimum pre-condition required for holding national elections under the Westminster system. I'm afraid that after the 21 August 2004 grenade attack, such trust has gone down to zero. And no one, not even the Western countries, is investing in the issue of building trust between the major political parties. On the contrary, such countries, even their supporters inside Bangladesh, are fuelling the mistrust in the name of democracy and human rights. This is unfortunate because the Western countries, under the leadership of the United States, are now complicit, if not directly involved, in Israel's genocide against the Palestinians. Their call for democracy, fairness, and human rights runs hollow. This remains clear from the mass protests in thousands and, in some cases, millions in London, New York, Sydney, Toronto, Washington DC, Berlin, Madrid, and many other Western cities, calling their respective governments not to aid a genocidal regime in Israel.

However, this should not imply that Bangladesh's democracy is perfect. On the contrary, there is a democratic deficit in conducting free and fair elections. But then, as Patrick Loch Otieno Lumumba, the Kenyan lawyer, noted, "There is no nation in the world without trials and tribulations."¹ But whatever the scale of the trials and tribulations or the democratic deficit in Bangladesh, it is the responsibility of the people of Bangladesh to fix it. No external power can or ought to police Bangladesh in this endeavour. External powers' meddling in domestic politics complicates the efforts to reach a political consensus as it tends to polarize the political parties further. Moreover, such meddling invites geopolitical attention, which, in the age of multipolarity, makes other prominent global actors equally eager to take sides, often diametrically opposite to each other, making the people even more fearful of the intention of the external powers. In this context, one can only take solace from Rabindranath Tagore's words, "মানুষের প্রতি বিশ্বাস হারানো পাপ (I shall not commit the grievous sin of losing faith in

¹ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRIf3g0TYJU>. Accessed on 15 January 2024.

humans).”² Only the people of Bangladesh, through their political activism, insights, and imagination, can transform democracy deficit into democracy surplus.

The moot question then becomes, what is to be done? There are many ways to respond to this question. One would be to delve into the *meaning of democracy*. In a massive survey in five South Asian countries in 2004-2005, when the question was asked about the meaning of democracy, 40 percent of South Asian masses responded by saying, “basic necessities” or food, clothing, health, and shelter. Only 17 percent said election or “power to change the government.” In Bangladesh’s case, 52 percent said “basic necessities,” much higher than the South Asian average, and only 13 percent said, election, which remains lower than the South Asian average. This could be one clue why the Sri Lankans came out on the streets in thousands despite having free and fair elections and forcefully entered the President’s House to force the Rajapakse government to resign. Lack of having access to “basic necessities” certainly played a role. Contrariwise, the same could be the reason why the opposition parties in Bangladesh failed to attract the support of the masses for keeping their campaign only on the “election” and not on how they would make a difference from the ruling party on the question of “basic necessities,” which the latter has been relatively successful in addressing.

The second would be to delve into the *meaning of election*. There is a public perception that the word ‘election’ stands for a competition among candidates holding opposite political positions or views. This is not true. As described in *The Law Dictionary*, the legal definition of election is “The act of choosing or selecting one or more from a greater number of persons, things, courses, or rights” or “The selection of one man from among several candidates to discharge certain duties in a state, corporation, or society.”³ In this context, a political party has the right to participate as much as it can boycott, provided it is not engaged in coercive acts to force or deter the voters from participating in the election. This also allows individuals to stand in elections outside the formal nomination of political parties, which incidentally took place in the 12th Parliamentary Election. I will return to this issue shortly.

The final one would be to delve into the *meaning of people’s representation*. In capitalist societies in contemporary times, whether developed or developing, or fully democratic or hybrid, seeking nomination and getting elected has become costly. In the United States, for instance, the majority of lawmakers in Congress are millionaires, including two or three billionaires.⁴ In Bangladesh, too, as disclosed in the recent election, the bulk of the candidates have moveable or liquid assets of Taka one crore (or 10 million) and more (Figure 3). No less telling in this figure is that more than 57 percent of the candidates are businesspeople, and only 2.86 percent are politicians by profession! Put differently, the house representing the people has become a millionaire’s club in the

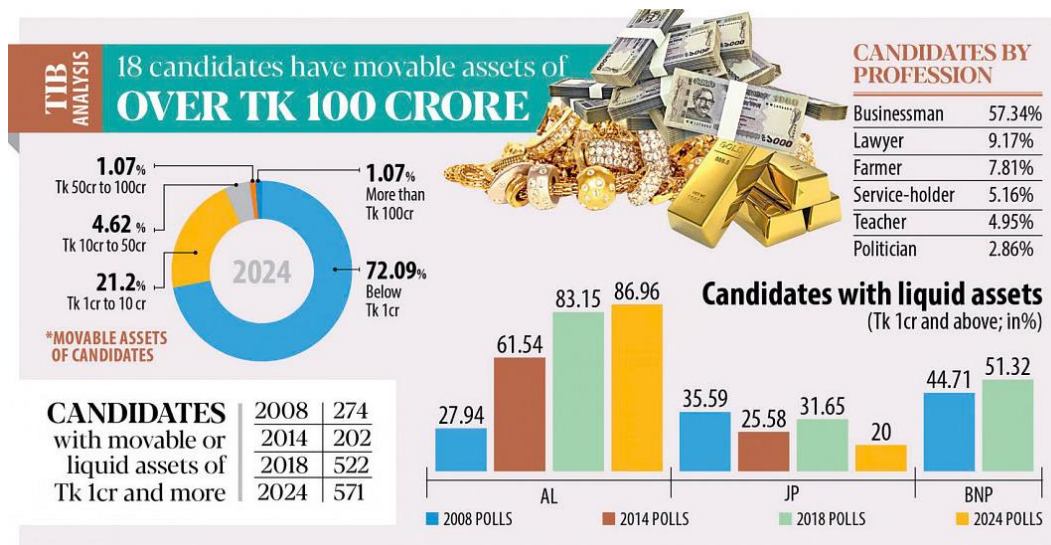
² Tagore, “Crisis in civilization,” in Sisir Kumar Das (Ed.), *The English writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol. III (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996), pp. 722–726.

³ See <https://thelawdictionary.org/election/>. Accessed on 15 January 2024.

⁴ Karl Evers-Hillstrom, “Majority of lawmakers in the 116th Congress are millionaires,” *Open Secrets*, 23 April 2020. See also, Marcus Lu, “Charted: The Richest Politicians in the U.S.,” *Visual Capitalist*, 9 December 2023.

United States and Bangladesh in dollars and taka, respectively. If that is the case, why are we calling it democracy? Shouldn't we call it *plutocracy* – a system ruled or controlled by people of great wealth or income? But then, it would run contrary to the country's constitution, achieved through the sacrifice of millions of people.

Figure 3
12th National Election: Candidates' Wealth



Source: Staff Correspondent, "Record rise in candidates' wealth," *The Daily Star*, 27 December 2023.

Demystifying the conceptualization of 'democracy,' 'election,' and 'representation,' as outlined above, can create space for innovation and democratic futures for the citizens of Bangladesh. But then, I have no ready-made prescriptions for strengthening Bangladesh's democracy or overcoming the country's political instability. In this context, one thing needs to be made clear. Bangladesh has never had political stability since its birth in 1971. What it had for the first time since 2009 was regime stability, which allowed the government to carry out several durable social, economic, and mega-developmental projects. Not surprisingly, it succeeded in making a positive impression on the country globally for initiating a 'developmental model' or 'South Asian miracle'! Whether protracted regime stability would contribute to political stability remains an open question or an issue to be witnessed. Therefore, one need not worry about political instability. On the contrary, if the regime stability can hold, there is a unique possibility of not only making its development the envy of many but also addressing the politics of mega-identities and cementing it in favor of emancipatory forces.

Mega-identities of opposing political platforms are here to stay; one cannot wish them away overnight. Nor can such mega-identities dissolve independently or obliterate them from the members' minds by enacting

rules and regulations or by coercive means. In this context, three things remain pertinent. One, mega-identities often create compulsions for ideological compromises to confront the opposing identity. This sometimes erodes the character of identity politics, resulting in fissures within the camps, with one faction becoming more rigid and conformist than the other. Two, there is a question of leadership race in mega-identities, with the newer generation becoming more desperate, competitive, and 'holier than the pope' than the older generation. This practically puts a stop to bipartisanship and political compromises between the mega-identities. And this is more the case when the mega-identities are opposed to each other, as in Bangladesh's case. Third, the desired resolution of mega-identity politics can come only from a long-term educational and cultural intervention. This is precisely why the education and cultural ministries can play critical roles in establishing a unifying identity for the country by creatively using their respective consenting power.

The new cabinet has been formed, and the honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has wisely kept the cultural ministry to herself. I wonder whether this was done temporarily until a suitable person is found. But given her knowledge and sensitivity to issues related to Bangladesh culture, the Prime Minister can undoubtedly make a difference in reproducing and deepening the mega-identity based on the spirit of 1971. The cultural discourse of the country, with its civilizational roots stretching back for thousands of years, needs to be mainstreamed if we are to confront and neutralize communal and sectarian identities.

In this quest, electoral reforms can simultaneously play a role. Considering our discussion, it is not difficult to see that significant reforms are required to make people's representation accurate and meaningful. As indicated earlier, the Westminster system of holding national elections will not work. Bangladesh's electoral system must evolve from historical experience, demographic composition, and political compulsions. In this context, the following may be considered:

Firstly, the number of parliamentary seats ought to be increased from 300 to 600 to make representation of the voters meaningful. In the 12th Parliamentary Election, the number of voters included 55,325,292 males plus 54,280,542 females plus 353 transgender people, a total of 109,606,187. This implies that each Member of Parliament (MP) represents 365,353 voters, which is impossible for the MP even to shake hands, let alone represent them. Doubling the parliamentary seats will reduce the voter representation to 182,676 per MP. The UK Parliament, for instance, has 427 seats when there are 650 MPs. Historically, the number of seats in the UK Parliament (House of Commons) has risen from 615 in 1922. The number is based on the number of registered voters, between 60,000 to 70,000 for each MP. This is a relatively ideal number for representation, but one could begin by bringing it down to 182,676 per MP for Bangladesh. I'm aware that the doubling of seats will favour the big parties more than the small ones, as the former would only be in the position of running the election from all 600 seats. This would be difficult for the smaller parties. However, the reform is geared toward shifting the election from a race between political parties to a race between the vote-seekers and the voters, how much the former can attract and work for the latter.

Secondly, a two-tier election system can be introduced, potentially stopping the much-maligned nomination business. One could take lessons from the 12th Parliamentary Election on this. In the face of a major opposition party boycotting the national election, the ruling Awami League, despite formally nominating a person to stand in the election as the party's candidate, allowed other aspirants to seek nomination and participate in the election and did not reprimand them for violating party's decision. However, such multiple candidacies from one party would not have worked under normal circumstances because it would have divided the votes and favoured the candidate from the opposition party if it were to participate and nominate only one candidate. This is where a two-tier election system, like the Turkish or French presidential elections, can make a difference. In the first round, any individual, within or outside a political party, can stand for the election. However, only the first two with the most votes in the first round will be eligible for the second and final rounds.

This certainly has the potential to stop the nomination business. But then, how will political parties fund their activities? Although practiced by all political parties participating in elections, the nomination business remains unlawful and is geared toward displacing genuine politicians with businesspeople or those with loads of money. But then, why such business? Too many candidates seek nominations from registered political parties against a limited number of seats. Since there is no state allocation of funds for the registered political parties, the nomination business is the quickest and easiest way of raising funds for the party. But this time in the 12th Parliamentary Election, almost as "unintended consequences," to use a Popperian phrase, multiple candidacies from the same party, particularly the AL, allowed independent candidates to seek nomination without handing over a hefty amount, as it is alleged, to the political party. Amid free-floating candidacies in the first round of the national election, state allocation of funds for political parties could be introduced based on the number of parliamentary seats. This would go a long way in transforming the current dismal state of democracy or what has been referred to earlier as a plutocracy.

Finally, there ought to be specific criteria for nomination related to the spirit of 1971, including recognition of the 1971 genocide and adherence to the fundamental principles of the Bangladesh Constitution. The Election Commission could also look into the history of the nomination seeker, mainly written statements or publications, and whether these match the specific criteria for nomination. No grounds ought to be given to those who question the historical foundation and the sacrifice of the people for an independent, sovereign, and democratic Bangladesh.

Nothing less than a paradigm shift will stop the politics of mega-identities and the intolerance and violence arising from them in national elections in Bangladesh. Let us keep our dreams alive!

20 January 2024

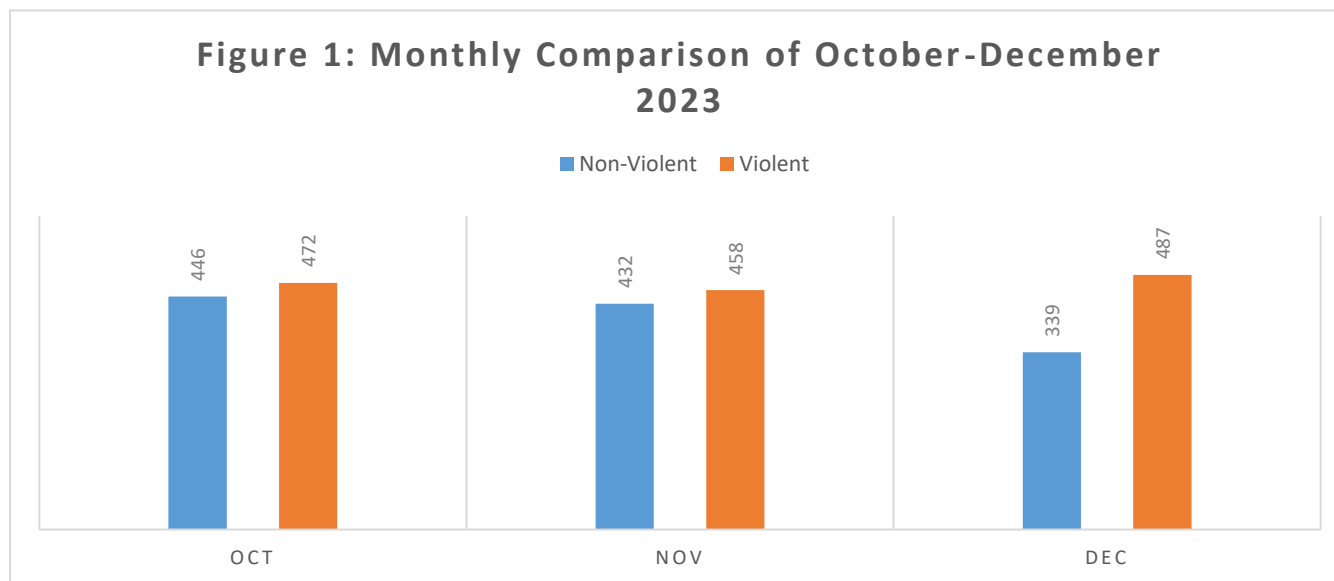
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Crime and Violence Update in Bangladesh: From October to December 2023

The Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) brings together different streams of publicly available data on violence using news reports from prominent national and regional dailies. From October to December 2023, BPO recorded 1417 violent⁵ and 1217 non-violent⁶ incidents. Figure 1 shows the monthly segregation of the violent and non-violent incidents throughout these months. Drawing a comparison between these three months, it is noticeable that non-violent incidents

decreased each month. On the other hand, the violent incidents showed a nominal up-and-down trend.

According to BPO data, the overall number of incidents gradually decreased. The number of incidents decreased by 3.05% in November compared to October and fell again by 7.19% in December compared to November.



⁵ Violent Incident: According to the BPO Codebook: The reported incident involved the intentional use of physical force by an individual or group against another individual or group, in a manner that resulted or could have resulted in death, injury or any other form of physical harm to persons or property.

⁶ Non-violent Incident: According to the BPO Codebook: The reported incident did not involve the intentional use of physical force by an individual or group against another individual or group, in a manner that resulted or could have resulted in death, injury, or any other form of physical harm to persons or property, e.g. Arrest, Peaceful Protest, Rescue and Recovery.

Table 1 summarises the updates on major violence types that constitute the most violent incidents. A brief description of each category is available in the Annex.

Table 1 shows that most of the violent incidents fall under the Assault, Destruction of property, Clash,

Sexual Assault, and Abduction categories. Destruction of property incidents increased in November and December. The number of assaults decreased significantly in November. Also, the number of fights increased in November and December.

Violence Types	October	November	December
Assault	326	269	290
Destruction of property	48	97	95
Clash	60	48	51
Sexual assault	21	19	26
Abduction/hostage	12	10	12
Fight	7	9	14
Violent demonstration	5	17	5
Mob violence (large group assault)	9	7	5
Sabotage	4	8	3
Other	2	4	7
Gunfight	1	3	2

Table 2 depicts the comparison of consequences, the total number of killed, injured, sexually assaulted, abducted, and arrested in each month in discussion. It points out a sharp decline in the number of deaths and

arrests, nominal changes in sexual assault, and an up-and-down trend in the other categories from October to December.

Months	Total Killed	Total Injured	Total Sexually Assaulted	Total Abducted	Total Arrested
October	290	2097	20	38	6361
November	216	832	22	11	2310
December	192	1193	23	18	1322
Total	698	4122	65	67	9993

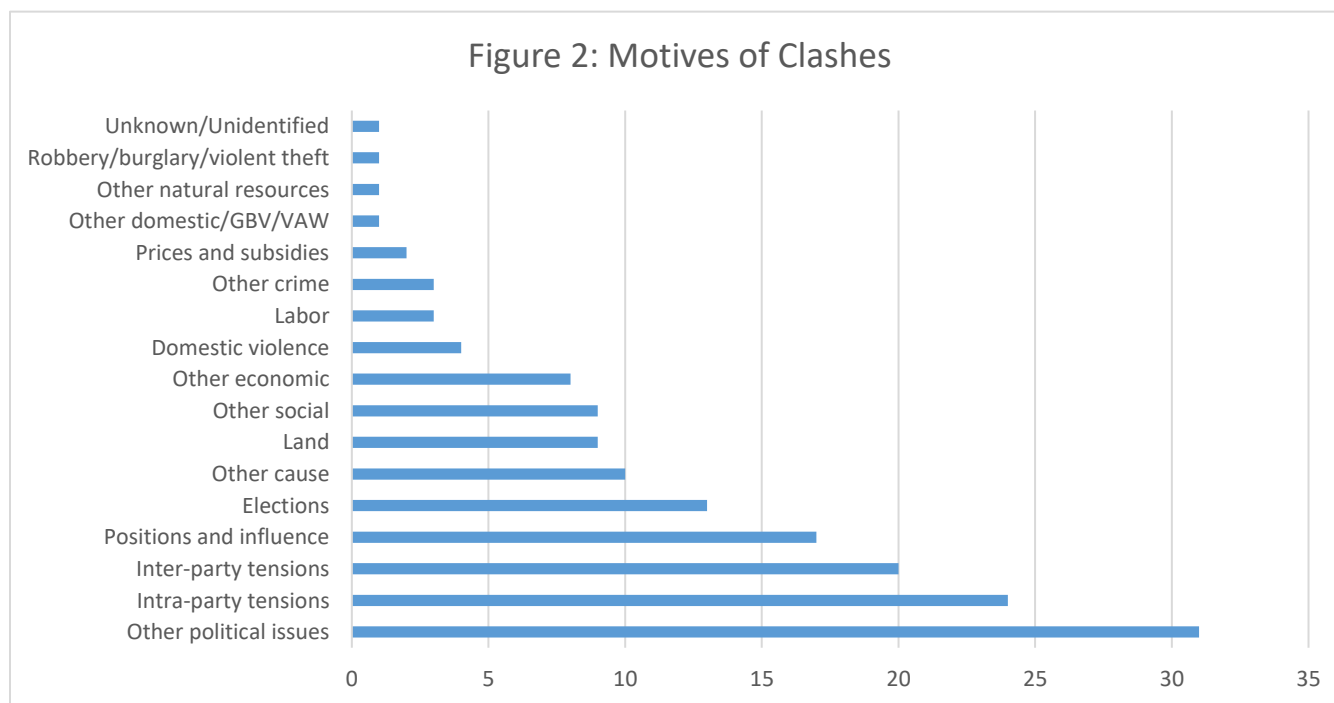
Understanding the high number of assaults

BPO enlists the inter-personal attacks carried out by different parties against one person/persons by another person/persons for various motives under the assault category. BPO recorded a total of 885 cases of assault in October-November 2023. The motives include domestic violence, dowry-related, land and other enmities related to economic factors, social-personal rivalry, attacks with criminal intent, suicide attempts, etc. In this quarter, political and election-related attacks took place. Under the assault category, 169 cases of suicide and attempted suicide were reported, and in those cases, 167 people were killed, including 82 women. Besides, the recovery of

unidentified dead bodies is also enlisted under this category.

Political motives for clashes

In the October-December timeline, Most of the clashes were politically motivated. There were violent confrontations between the major political parties, including the ruling party and its affiliated fronts. The intra-party tensions and establishing supremacy also fuelled many clashes in these months. Besides the political motives, land-related disputes, economic disagreements, and other social issues were the causes of some clashes. Figure 2 represents the motives of clashes from October to November.



Sexual Assaults: Victims and Perpetrators

Reported incidents of sexual assault have nominally decreased in November and then increased in December. Out of 66 reported cases of sexual assaults, there were 16 gang rapes. The perpetrators of these offenses were men of different ages, including eve-teasers, local miscreants, teachers, family members, relatives, neighbors, etc. However, the majority of the victims are girls. Six boys were reportedly victims of sexual assault.

Destruction of Property Doubled in November

The number of Destruction of Property (DoP) doubled from November to October and decreased insignificantly. Like the clashes, this type of violence increases primarily due to changes in the country's political scenario as the election nears. The majority of the incidents were vandalism and arson attacks on

public transports, election offices, party offices, etc., carried out by goons and miscreants. Some cases of DoP were associated with assaults and clashes, too.

Increase in Fight

Fight incidents also increased in later months, mainly in December. The significant motives of these violent incidents are land-related disputes, social and personal feuds, family tensions, etc.

Violence-Population nexus

Figure 3 provides a spatial glimpse through the divisional distribution of the recorded violent and non-violent incidents. The Dhaka, Chattogram, and Rajshahi divisions have the highest incident numbers. The number of non-violent incidents is higher than violent incidents in Dhaka and Rajshahi. In the rest, violent incidents are dominant.

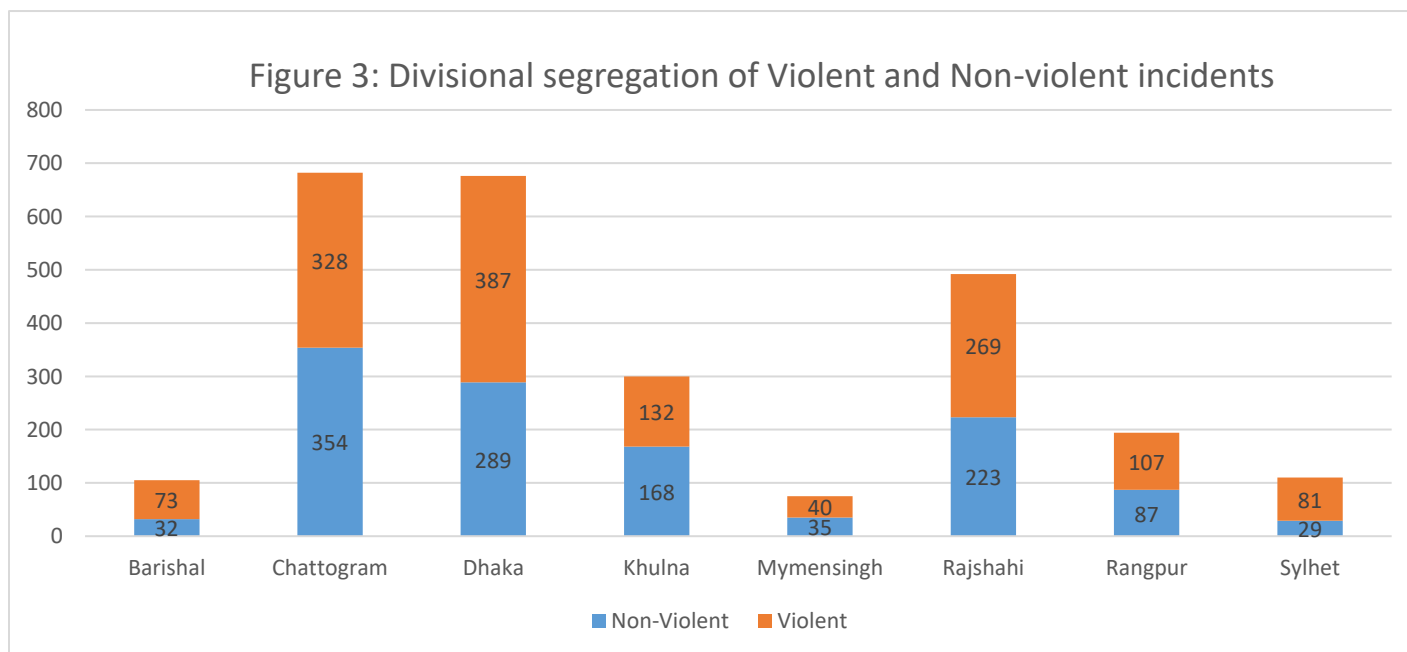
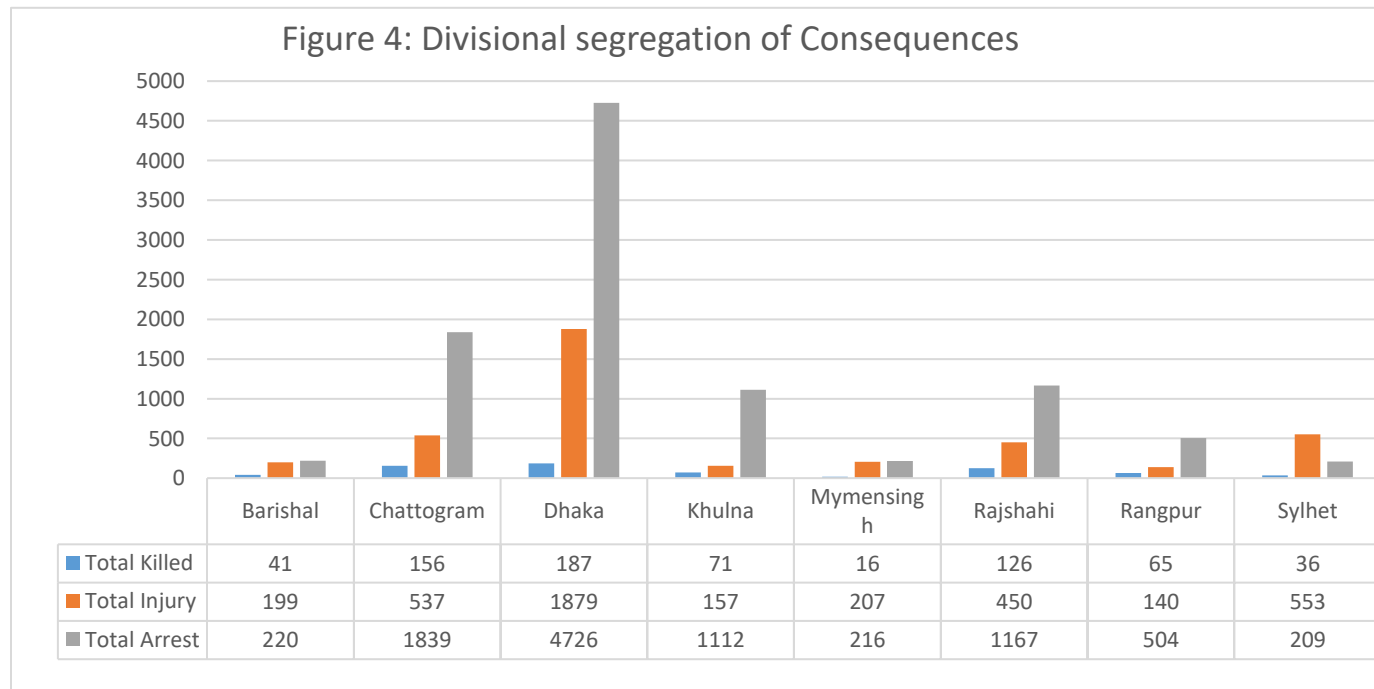


Figure 4 illustrates that the Dhaka, Chattogram, and Rajshahi are the first, second, and third regarding the death count and arrest. In addition, these three divisions are the most populous in Bangladesh. Sylhet, the second most minor division in terms of population, has the second-highest injury count.

But if the population ratio⁷ is applied to understand the incidence prevalence and its consequences, then a different picture emerges. The Rajshahi and Dhaka

interchange their positions in the chart according to the projected yearly rate per 100,000 population. The Rajshahi division ranked first in the death rate, female death rate, and sexual assault rate categories. The Sylhet division has ranked first in injury rate, which is unsurprising. Also, an interesting finding is that Barishal (the smallest in terms of population) and Dhaka (the largest in terms of population) have equal rates of female death and sexual assault. (see Table 3).



⁷ The population data is based on the Preliminary report on the Population & Housing Census 2022, Bangladesh, by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. Cited in:

[https://sid.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/sid.portal.gov.bd/publications/01ad1ffe_cfef_4811_af97_594b6c64d7c3/PHC_Preliminary_Report_\(English\)_August_2022.pdf](https://sid.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/sid.portal.gov.bd/publications/01ad1ffe_cfef_4811_af97_594b6c64d7c3/PHC_Preliminary_Report_(English)_August_2022.pdf)

Table 3: Comparison of projected Yearly rate of incidents and consequences in the Divisions

Divisions	Incident number in Three Months	Yearly rate per 100,000	Total Death in Three Months	Yearly rate per 100,000	Female Death in Three Months	Yearly rate per 100,000	Total Injury in Three Months	Yearly rate per 100,000	Sexual Assault in Three Months	Yearly rate per 100,000
Barishal	105	4.6	41	1.8 (3 rd)	13	0.6 (2 nd)	199	8.7	4	0.18 (2 nd)
Chattogram	682	8.2 (2 nd)	156	1.9 (2 nd)	31	0.4	537	6.5	17	0.20
Dhaka	676	6.1 (3 rd)	187	1.7	64	0.6 (2 nd)	1879	17.0 (2 nd)	20	0.18 (2 nd)
Khulna	300	6.9	71	1.6	22	0.5 (3 rd)	157	3.6	2	0.05
Mymensingh	75	2.5	16	0.5	4	0.1	207	6.8	1	0.03
Rajshahi	492	9.7 (1 st)	126	2.5 (1 st)	34	0.7 (1 st)	450	8.8 (3 rd)	11	0.22 (1 st)
Rangpur	194	4.4	65	1.5	23	0.5 (3 rd)	140	3.2	6	0.14 (3 rd)
Sylhet	110	4.0	36	1.3	9	0.3	553	20.0 (1 st)	4	0.14 (3 rd)

Analyzing the Trend of Pre-election Political Violence in Bangladesh

Faizah Sultana⁸

Bangladesh has a long-standing tradition of pre-election political violence. In this issue of the Peace Report, an attempt is made to discover the trends, similarities, and differences of the political violence in the pre-election quarters of the last three National Elections and the quarters comprising the months of September, October, and November of 2013, 2018, and 2023.

The national election that took place in 2014 has been under a lot of attention since its commencement. The main political party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), boycotted the election.⁹ Not only this, the election was marked by severe post-election violence carried out reportedly by BNP-led opposition parties.¹⁰ Several stakeholders raised complaints of vote rigging in the 2018 general election.¹¹ Many national and international eyes have already scrutinized the recent one, and the stakes seemed high for the ruling party.¹²

Since another national election has just been held, a trend analysis would be helpful to understand the political culture we are heading to as a nation. It could be beneficial to study the patterns for future elections as well.

The analysis is solely based on the data recorded by the BPO, a publicly available open-source database, and the focus was on the trend of incidents, the motives, types, consequences, locations, actors engaged in the violence, and other essential features.

The analysis of BPO data:

Figure 1 shows the number of incidents (both violent and non-violent) connected to political motives that occurred in the September-November quarter, and it displays a consistent upward trend.

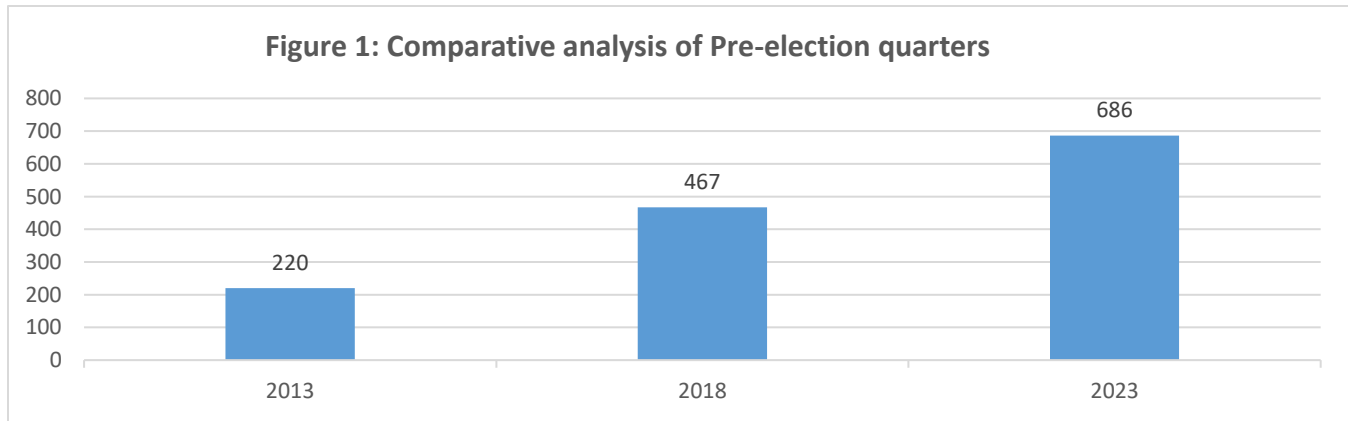
⁸ Research Data Analyst, Centre for Alternatives.

⁹ "Clashes and boycott mar Bangladesh election," *BBC News*, 5 January 2014, available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-25602436>.

¹⁰ "Bangladesh election violence throws country deeper into turmoil," *The Guardian*, 6 January 2014, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/06/bangladesh-election-violence-awami-league>.

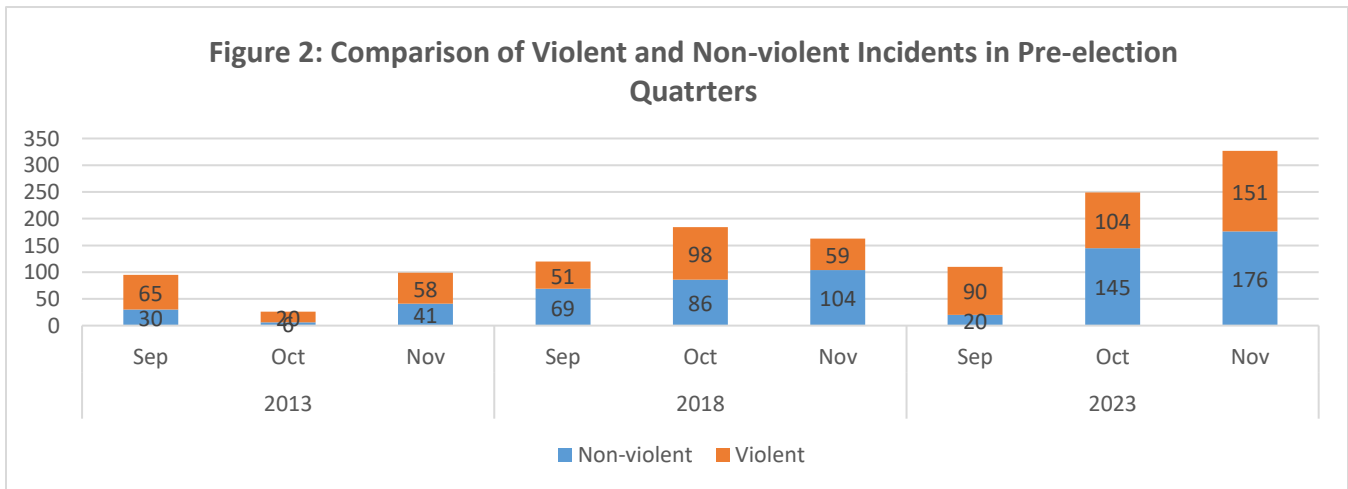
¹¹ "Bangladesh PM Hasina wins thumping victory in elections opposition reject as 'farcical,'" *The Guardian*, 31 December 2018, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/30/bangladesh-election-polls-open-after-campaign-marred-by-violence>.

¹² Ruud, A, E, (2023), "As Elections Near, 3 Scenarios for Bangladesh," *The Diplomat*, available at <https://thediplomat.com/2023/08/as-elections-near-three-scenarios-for-bangladesh/>; Islam, M,S, (2023), "Will next election be free, fair and participatory?" *The New Age*, available at <https://www.newagebd.net/article/197790/will-next-election-be-free-fair-and-participatory>.



The incidents are divided into two categories: violent and non-violent.¹³ The following figure will compare violent and non-violent incidents in pre-election time. Figure 2 shows that the non-violent incident occurred

in the later months of the quarters or, in other words, as the election came nearer. In 2023, the violent and non-violent incidents were both higher than in the previous years in consideration. One of the reasons



¹³ **Violent Incident:** According to the BPO Codebook: The reported incident involved the intentional use of physical force by an individual or group against another individual or group, in a manner that resulted or could have resulted in death, injury or any other form of physical harm to persons or property.

Non-violent Incident: According to the BPO Codebook: The reported incident did not involve the intentional use of physical force by an individual or group against another individual or group, in a manner that resulted or could have resulted in death, injury, or any other form of physical harm to persons or property, e.g. Arrest, Peaceful Protest, Rescue and Recovery.

was the nationwide blockade and Hartal in October and November, declared by the Opposition party and like-minded political parties. Notably, public and private vehicles were vandalized across the country. Also, law enforcement agencies arrested many activists and people in charge of causing violence and sabotage.¹⁴

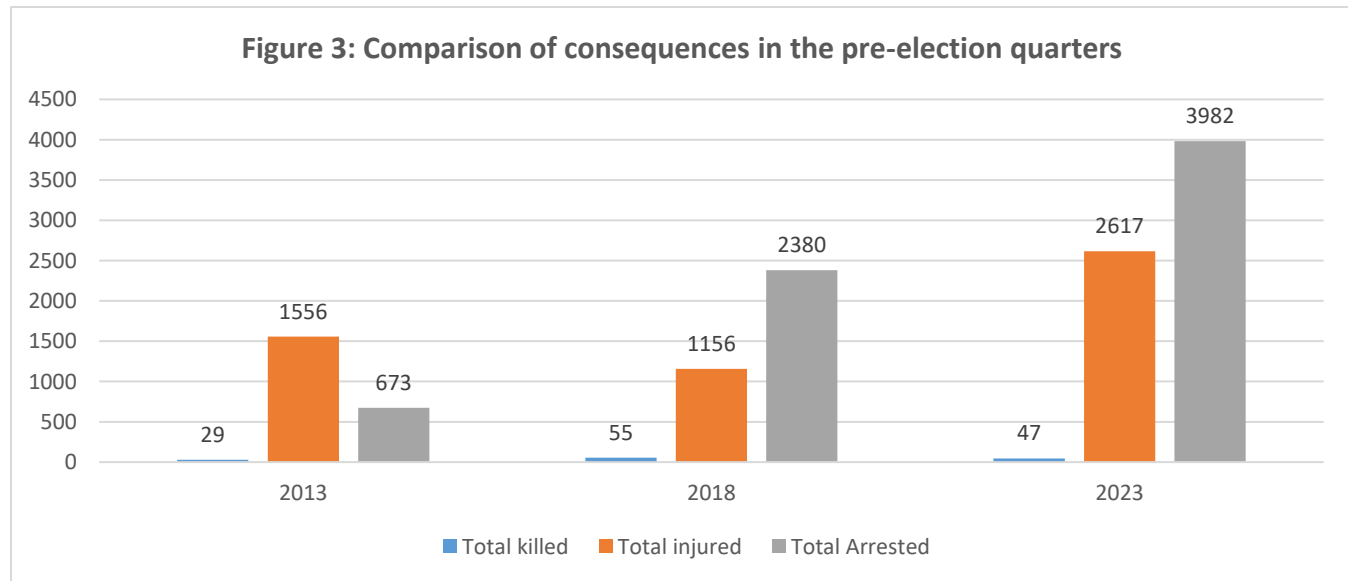
About the trends depicted in Figure 1 and Figure 2, a little information about the 2008 national election will be relevant to this discussion. BPO recorded a total of 193 incidents regarding pre- and post-election of 2008. The comparison was needed to indicate that the incident number leaped in the 2014 election. It increased rapidly (a 112.3% rise in 2018 from 2014 and a 47% rise in 2023 from 2018).

The consequences of these events were categorized into the number of killed, injured, and arrested. Figure

3 shows the picture of the consequences of pre-election incidents.

By observing this data, we can notice a significant rise in the 'injured' and 'arrested' categories in the year 2023, in comparison with 2013. The number of arrests has skyrocketed. The number of deaths in 2023 is similar in magnitude to that of 2018, but the number of injuries has more than doubled.

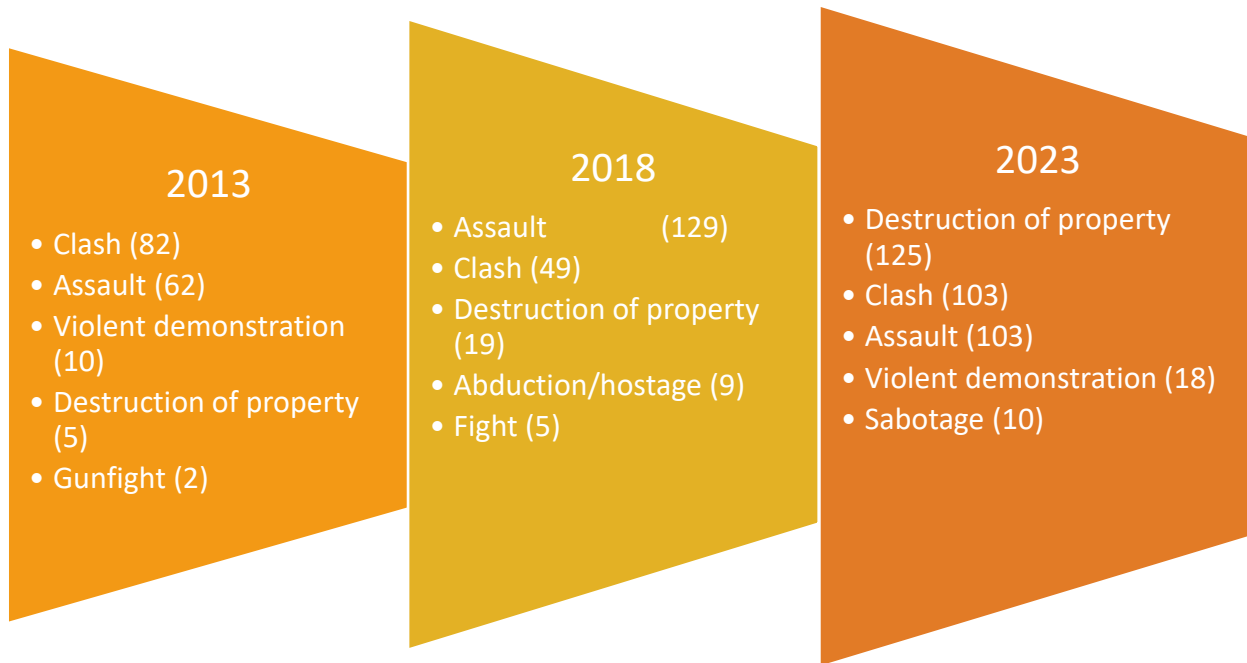
The violent incidents having underpinnings of political features are sorted into the clash, assault, violent demonstration, destruction of property, sabotage, abduction, fight, and gunfight categories. The definitions of these categories are shown in the annex. Figure 4 shows a more detailed picture of the events that occurred over the years. The figure shows the discussion of the top five violence types of the election years.



¹⁴ "Nationwide Blockade: Arson, arrests, clash in second phase too," *The Daily Star*. 5 November 2023, available at <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/nati>

[onwide-blockade-arson-arrests-clash-second-phase-too-3462606](https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/nationwide-blockade-arson-arrests-clash-second-phase-too-3462606).

Figure 4: Major violence types in pre-election quarters

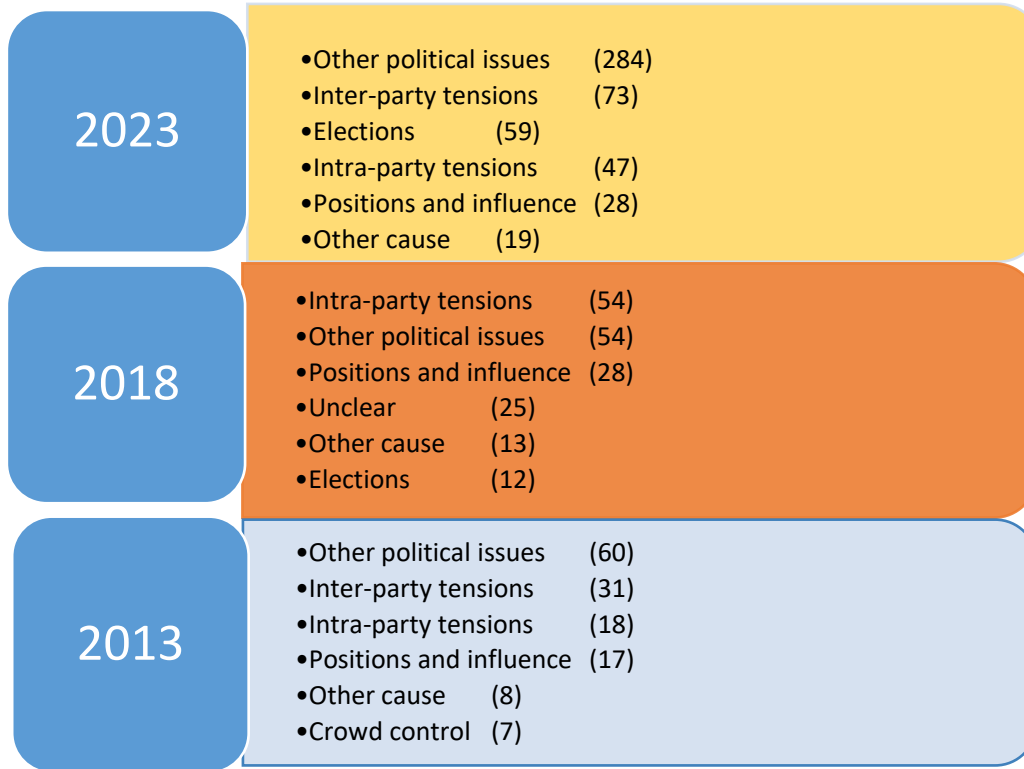


The incidents of clash, assault, and destruction of property have always been very high in the individual years and have increased in the timeline considered for this study. An alarming rise is noticeable in the destruction of property, sabotage, and violent demonstrations in 2023.

This section will shed some light on why the violence was incited. In 2023, inter-party tension re-emerged as a compelling motive for political violence after 2013.

On the other hand, intra-party tensions also reflect the internal tensions among the party dynamics in 2023. The most frequent motive, other political issues, represents the violence incited by known, unknown actors and miscreants whose affiliation is unknown, but the motive was political. This motive is heavily used to categorize the attacks on vehicles and public and private property during political activities like blockade, hartal, procession, etc.

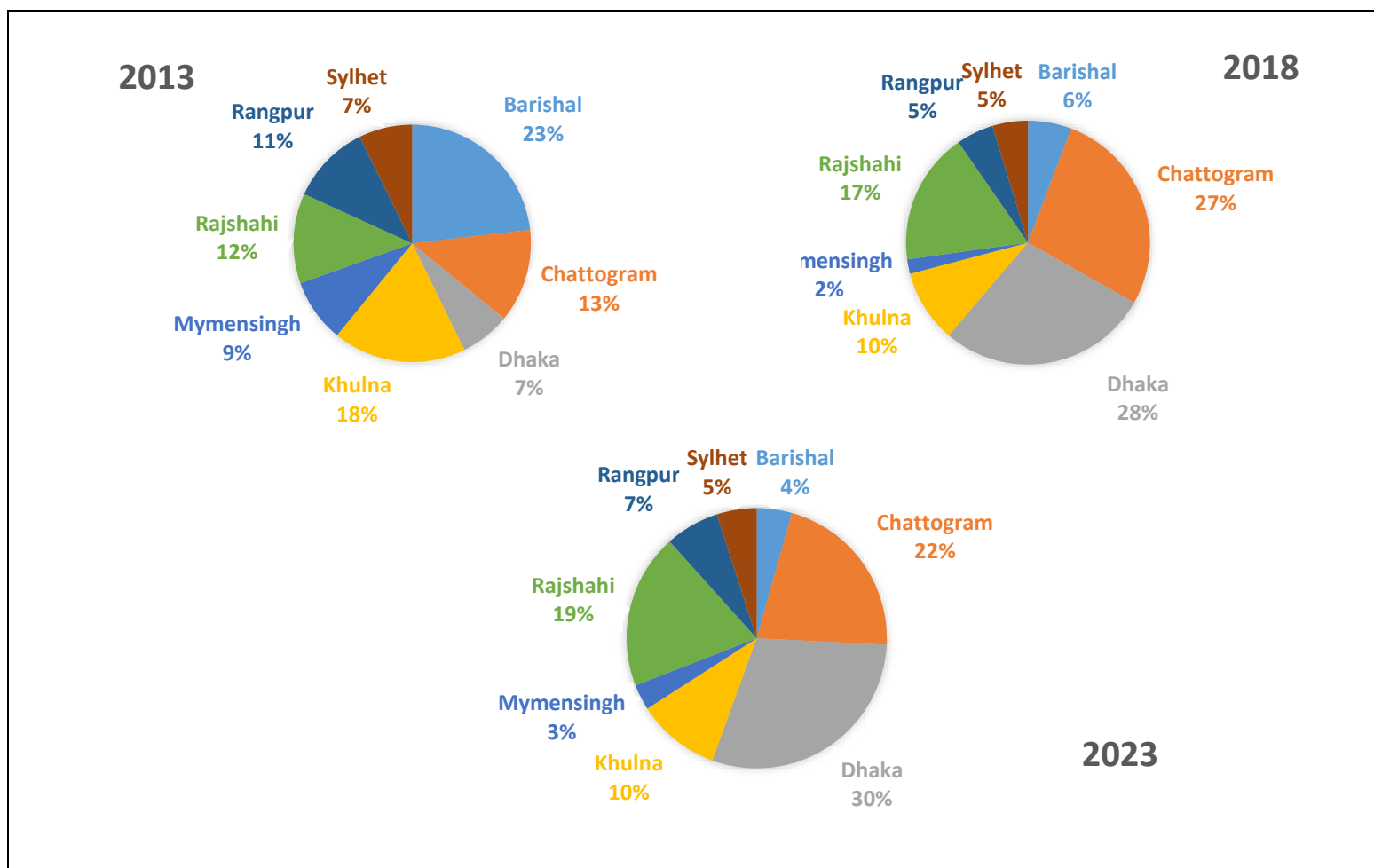
Figure 5: Major motives of politically influenced incidents in pre-election quarters



Divisional analysis of these incidents was included to get a bird's eye view of pre-election activity in all divisions in Bangladesh. In 2013, the most violent regions, according to the recorded data, were Barisal and Khulna. Chattogram and Rajshahi were less violent regions. But in the following two election years, most

violent incidents occurred in Dhaka, Chattogram, and Rajshahi, along with less activity in Khulna. It can be said that, in 2013, political violence was spreading more evenly across the country, but after 2018, the violence was more centralized into three big divisions.

Figure 6: Division-wise segregation of politically influenced incidents in pre-election quarters



The zonal activity analysis would be incomplete without a district-wise incident ranking. Table I below shows the most violent districts in pre-election times of each election year. From this Table, we can see that

the capital and the port city, along with their adjacent districts, suddenly became the centre points of violence in 2018. Interestingly, Barisal as a district and a division became more peaceful in each election.

Table 1: District ranking in terms of incident numbers

Ranking	2013		2018		2023	
	District	Number of incidents	Districts	Number of Incidents	Districts	Number of incidents
1	Barishal	16	Chattogram	71	Dhaka	116
2	Patuakhali	12	Dhaka	63	Chattogram	74
3	Rajshahi	11	Bogura	25	Bogura	52
4	Pirojpur	10	Narayanganj	21	Narayanganj	31
5	Satkhira	10	Sirajganj	17	Sirajganj	23
6	Sylhet	9	Cox's Bazar	14	Noakhali	22
7	Chattogram	8	Gazipur	14	Khulna	21
8	Khulna	8	Rangamati	14	Rajshahi	19
9	Mymensingh	8	Barishal	13	Gazipur	18
10	Dhaka & Jamalpur	7	Sylhet	13	Natore	16

Considering the population density of the administrative and commercial capitals of Bangladesh, the higher frequency of violence is justifiable. After applying the population ratio,¹⁵ the intensity of violence can be shown in the divisions according to their respective populations. In Table 2, the rate of incidents is shown for the divisions in each election year. In 2013, the Barishal had the highest incident rate, and the Rajshahi came to the top in the following election year. The Rajshahi division has the highest incident rate this year, too. Dhaka has become more

eventful in 2023 than in the rest of the election years. Recalling the data shown in Figure 2, the number of arrests and non-violent incidents rose in the last two months of the September-November quarter. Many Political leaders of the opposition party were arrested nationwide for their alleged connection with the violence that occurred during the nationwide blockade and Hartal. In Rajshahi, BPO recorded 71 non-violent incidents and 63 violent incidents in the September-November 2023 quarter. Out of 63 violent incidents, 23 were assaults, and 18 were clashes.

¹⁵ Population and Housing Census 2011, Bangladesh, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. Cited in: <http://www.bbs.gov.bd/site/page/47856ad0-7e1c-4aab-bd78-892733bc06eb/Population-and-Housing-Census>

Population and Housing Census 2022: Preliminary Report, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Cited in- [https://sid.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/sid.portal.gov.bd/publications/01ad1ffe_cfef_4811_af97_594b6c64d7c3/PHC_Preliminary_Report_\(English\)_August_2022.pdf](https://sid.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/sid.portal.gov.bd/publications/01ad1ffe_cfef_4811_af97_594b6c64d7c3/PHC_Preliminary_Report_(English)_August_2022.pdf)

Table 2: Divisional segregation of incident numbers and rate per population

2013			2018			2023		
divisions	Incident number	Rate by population	Divisions	Incident number	Rate by population	Divisions	Incident number	Rate by population
Barishal	51	2.45	Rajshahi	82	1.77	Rajshahi	132	2.59
Khulna	40	1.02	Chattogram	128	1.76	Dhaka	204	1.85
Mymensingh	19	0.67	Barishal	27	1.30	Chattogram	147	1.77
Sylhet	16	0.65	Khulna	45	1.15	Khulna	71	1.63
Rangpur	24	0.61	Dhaka	131	1.05	Barishal	30	1.32
Rajshahi	27	0.58	Sylhet	22	0.90	Sylhet	34	1.23
Chattogram	28	0.38	Rangpur	23	0.58	Rangpur	46	1.04
Dhaka	15	0.12	Mymensingh	9	0.32	Mymensingh	22	0.72

Besides the general discussion on the prominent features of the pre-election quarters, the next section will chart through some additional categories, which will give further insights into the trends.

Destruction of Property, Assaults, and clashes:

Previous analysis revealed that most of the violent incidents in the 2023 quarter fell into the destruction of property, assaults, and clash categories. As mentioned before, since the Bangladesh Nationalist Party declared the nationwide blockade on 30 October 2023, the number of violent and non-violent

incidents has gone higher (see Figure 2). According to a news report quoting the Fire service, 285 five vehicles were set on fire from 28 October 2023 till the third week of December 2023.¹⁶ Table 3 and Table 4 will show the major perpetrators and target groups, mainly those involved in assaults and destruction of property. Most of the arson attacks were carried out by unnamed miscreants.

Most of the clashes occurred in Dhaka and Chattogram, and the significant motives were inter- and intra-party tensions. Also, in eight cases, Bangladesh police clashed with the BNP and its wings.

¹⁶ '285 vehicles set ablaze amid BNP blockades and hartals: fire service', *BDNews24*, 24 December 2023, available at <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/pzpl8xi16p>.

Perpetrator	Count
Goon/ Miscreant	79
Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and affiliated fronts, Jatyatabadi Chhattra Dal	67
Awami League, Awami League (AL) and affiliated fronts, Bangladesh Chhatro League, Bangladesh Jubo League, Bangladesh Sramik League, Bangladesh Swechchasebak League	43
Bangladesh Police	10
Unknown	10
Jamaat-e-Islami, Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and affiliated fronts, Islami Chhattro Shibir	6
Drug Peddler	4
United Peoples Democratic Front	4
Man	3
Abductor/Kidnapper	2
Supporters of union parishad chairman	2
Unspecified	2
Bangladesh Nationalist Front	1
Local Political Leader	1
Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (MN Larma)	1
Public	1
Teen Gang	1

Target	Count
Awami League, Awami League (AL) and affiliated fronts, Bangladesh Chhatro League, Bangladesh Jubo League, Bangladesh Sramik League, Bangladesh Swechchasebak League	51
Vehicle	32
Other private property	28
Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and affiliated fronts, Jatiyatabadi Sechchasebak Dal, Jatyatabadi Chhattra Dal, Jatyatabadi Jubo Dal	27
Public	26
Other public property	16
Bangladesh Police	9
Media Worker/ Personality	8
Public building/facility	8
Driver	3
Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Chhattro Shibir	3
Man	3
Businessman	2
Left-Wing Parties	2
Occupational group/organization	2
Public Space	2
Ethnic and religious Minority Groups	1
Ethnic minorities	1

In conclusion, the trend analysis conducted on pre-election political violence in Bangladesh from 2013 to 2023 reveals several noteworthy patterns within the dataset. The data indicates a consistent rise in violent and non-violent incidents associated with political motives across the three pre-election periods under examination. Notably, the 2023 quarter exhibited a substantial increase compared to 2013 and 2018.

Throughout the timeframe, certain forms of violence, such as clashes, assaults, and property destruction, maintained high levels, with a noticeable escalation observed in 2023. Injuries, deaths, and arrests also experienced a significant spike in 2023 compared to preceding years. Geographically, regions like Dhaka, Chattogram, and Rajshahi consistently emerged as hotspots of violence, contrasting with a more even distribution in 2013.

The identified perpetrators and targets point towards partisan tensions between BNP and AL activists and supporters as primary catalysts for unrest. However, a

considerable portion of recorded incidents involves unnamed "miscreants," underscoring the prevalence of political violence orchestrated by unaffiliated or anonymous actors or media using the term taking sides of one party or the other. In most instances, it involves taking sides of opposition parties against the ruling party or the state.

In a broader context, the escalating rates of pre-election violence underscore persistent divisions and unresolved conflicts between Bangladesh's major political parties. While this analysis primarily focuses on quantifying available data related to pre-election incidents, it is crucial to acknowledge that broader qualitative factors also play a role in influencing political violence. A more comprehensive study, incorporating additional evidence such as expert perspectives, could provide deeper insights into the intricate social, historical, and institutional dynamics at play. Nevertheless, the presented data offers a fact-based depiction of the evolution of election-related violence in recent electoral cycles.

Comparative Analysis of Electoral Violence in South Asia

Syed Irfan Hasan¹⁷

Introduction

Electoral violence is a widespread phenomenon in the political system. Except for several Western and a few non-Western countries, most of the countries in the world frequently face electoral violence, although the level of violence varies. According to a report, 54% percent of national elections had some form of violence in 2020.¹⁸ Violent incidents during electoral processes jeopardize the democratic and peaceful development of many nations. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) reported that political violence in 2022 rose by roughly 27% compared to 2021.¹⁹ The evidence indicates that violent incidents during electoral processes are rising at comparable levels across the globe, irrespective of the regime type, democracy, or non-democracy.

Electoral violence in South Asian countries is an integral part of their political culture. South Asia is a region of diverse and vibrant democracies but also of persistent and pervasive challenges and threats to the quality and integrity of elections and human rights. Among these challenges and threats is political actors' use of violence and disinformation to influence voters and undermine the democratic process. South Asia faced many anti-state rebellions in the early 2000s,

from separatists and revolutionaries in India to the Pakistani Taliban, the Maoists in Nepal, the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, and the Islamist militants in Bangladesh.²⁰ Some are worried that these insurgencies could lead to state collapse. However, by 2020, the state had regained control in most cases. India's insurgencies declined, Pakistan's Taliban weakened, Sri Lanka's Tigers were eliminated, Nepal's Maoists were integrated, and Bangladesh's anti-state violence was reduced. The state has regained its dominance and stability in the region but at the cost of democracy and human rights.

Electoral violence is a phenomenon that involves the application of physical force, coercion, or intimidation to influence the outcome of an election or deter voters from engaging in the electoral process.²¹ It manifests in various forms, such as assaults, vandalism, arson, and homicide.²² Electoral violence can also serve as a means to reduce voter turnout, manipulate voter registration, obstruct candidates from competing for office, aggravate societal cleavages, or even delay an election or cancel it altogether. Violent incidents during electoral processes erode the

¹⁷ Research Data Analyst, Centre for Alternatives.

¹⁸ Clayton Besaw, Election violence spiked worldwide in 2020 – will this year be better? *The Conversation* (February 28, 2021).

¹⁹ ACLED, "ACLED Year in Review: Global Disorder in 2022," *ACLED* (January 31, 2023).

²⁰ Paul Staniland, "Political Violence in South Asia: The Triumph of the State?" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (September 3, 2020).

²¹ USIP, "Electoral Violence," *United States Institute of Peace*.

²² *Ibid.*

credibility of a nation's political system.²³ They diminish the electorate's trust in the possibility of a peaceful and democratic transfer of power, which may lead to a gradual adoption of more autocratic forms of governance.

The write-up aims to compare and contrast the electoral violence during the last elections in five South Asian countries: Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. The study examines the different forms and degrees of electoral violence against political or ideological opposition and religious or ethnic minorities and the similar patterns of disinformation and manipulation through social media. This write-up will compare and contrast three aspects of political violence based on the last elections in five South Asian countries: Bangladesh (2018), India (2019), Pakistan (2018), Nepal (2022), and Sri Lanka (2020).

1. Politically motivated violence
2. Violence against religious minorities
3. Social Media Disinformation and Election

I. Violence against Political/Ideological Opposition

Violence against political and ideological opposition pervades South Asia, where democratic institutions

and processes are often unstable, disputed, and compromised. This phenomenon reveals the entrenched social, economic, and political disparities and resentments that afflict the region and the scarcity of trust and tolerance among diverse groups and actors.

Bangladesh

There was significant electoral violence in the 2018 General Election in Bangladesh, mostly against opposition parties. Just before the election, the convoy of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Secretary General, Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, was attacked in Thakurgaon while he was arriving in the district to canvass for the 2018 parliamentary elections.²⁴ Five to six vehicles were vandalized and broken severely.²⁵

A motorcade of prominent jurist and leader of Jatiya Oikyafront, Dr Kamal Hossain, was attacked, and 25 were injured in the attack carried out allegedly by the ruling party.²⁶ According to the residents, most assailants belonged to the local branches of the Swechchasebak League and Chatro League.²⁷

²³ Clayton Besaw, "Election violence spiked worldwide in 2020 – will this year be better?" *The Conversation* (February 28, 2021).

²⁴ Zakir Mostafiz Milu, "Fakhrul's motorcade attacked in Thakurgaon," *Dhaka Tribune* (December 11, 2018).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Correspondent "Motorcade of Dr. Kamal attacked," *The Daily Star* (December 26, 2018).

²⁷ Ibid.



Source: *Just News BD*, Awami League men attack Dr Kamal Hossain's motorcade

A conflict erupted between the supporters of Awami League and BNP in Sonaimuri upazila of Noakhali when the ruling party members obstructed a rally of BNP leaders and supporters in the bypass area.²⁸ The confrontation resulted in a series of pursuits and escapes by both parties.²⁹ Khokon, a candidate of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party for the Noakhali-I electoral district, sustained a rubber bullet injury.³⁰

India

The most recent Indian election occurred from April 11 to May 19, 2019. During this period, incidents

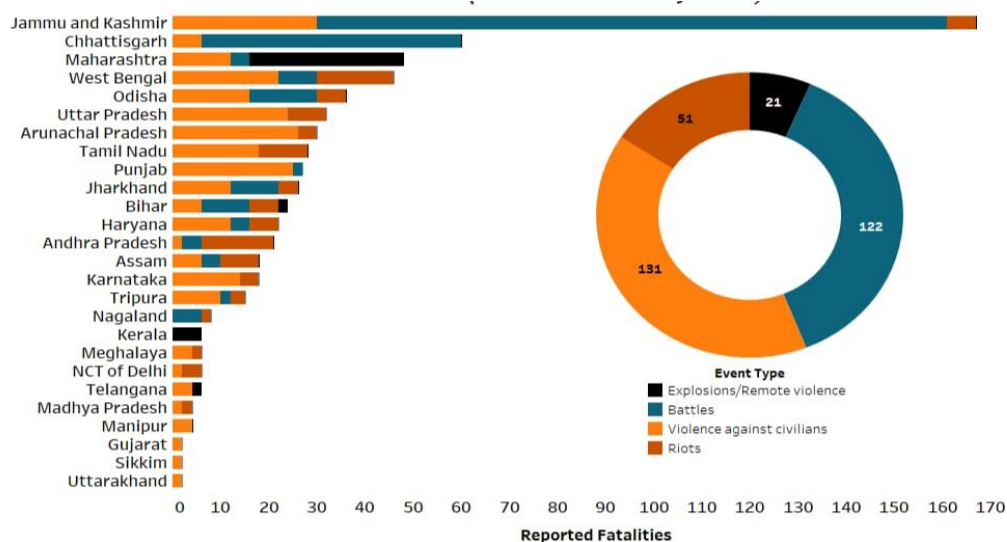
ranged from minor attacks on the opposition to terrorist acts. On May 12, 2019, violent clashes erupted between BJP and TMC supporters in West Bengal, resulting in the tragic death of a BJP worker and injuries to several individuals. The violence not only disrupted the voting process but also led to the destruction of vehicles and polling booths. Additionally, on April 18, 2019, a BJP lawmaker and four security personnel lost their lives in a landmine explosion in Chhattisgarh.³¹

²⁸ Correspondent, "No respite from attacks," *The Daily Star* (December 16, 1018).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰

³¹ Rashmi Drolia and Aarti Tikoo Singh, "Chhattisgarh: BJP MLA, four cops killed in Maoist attack ahead of Bastar Polling," *The Times of India* (April 10, 2019).



Source: ACLED, *Number of reported fatalities by states and events type during the general election in India (10 March- 25 May 2019)*

The Maoist insurgents of Chhattisgarh, who resisted the idea of the Indian state, executed the blast. In 2019, a grenade attack injured three security personnel and two civilians near a polling station in Jammu and Kashmir.³² The attack was claimed by the Hizbul Mujahideen, a militant group that opposes Indian rule in the region.³³

Pakistan

The last election in Pakistan was held on July 25, 2018. Several extreme events of violence, including suicide bombings, occurred in the previous election in Pakistan. A suicide bomber targeted a rally of the

Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) in Mastung on 25 July 2018. The attack, which was claimed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), killed 149 people and wounded over 180.³⁴ Nawabzada Siraj Raisani, the BAP candidate for the Balochistan Assembly, was one of the fatalities.

A suicide bomber affiliated with the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) targeted the election rally of Awami National Party (ANP) leader Haroon Bilour in Peshawar on 13 July 2018.³⁵ The attack killed Bilour and 20 others and wounded 63. Bilour was the son of Bashir Bilour, another senior ANP leader who had also died in a suicide attack in 2012.

³² The Guardian, “Grenade attack injures 18 in restive Kashmir region”, *The Guardian* (March 7, 2019).

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ VOA, “128 Killed in IS Suicide Bombing of Pakistan Election Rally,” *Voice of America* (July 13, 2018).

³⁵ DAWN, “Blast targets convoy of JUI-F leader Akram Khan Durrani in Bannu, 4 killed”, *DAWN* (13 June 2018).



Source: *The Express Tribune*, Suicide attack on Awami National Party (ANP)

A suicide bomber detonated himself near the car of PTI candidate for constituency PK-99 Ikramullah Gandapur and his driver in Dera Ismail Khan on 22 July 2018.³⁶ The blast killed Gandapur and his driver. Gandapur was a former provincial minister and a close associate of PTI leader Imran Khan.³⁷

Nepal

The last election in Nepal was held on November 25, 2022. Although the intensity of electoral violence was not too high in Nepal, it was still significant. A violent incident occurred at a polling station in Nateshwari Basic School of Tribeni Municipality, Bajura, resulting

in one death.³⁸ The police reported that they shot a 24-year-old male after a clash between two factions, which took place after the voting was concluded.³⁹ Meanwhile, a minor blast disrupted the voting process for 30 minutes at a polling station in Sharda Secondary School, Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan City, Kailali. According to the authorities, the explosion did not cause any injuries or damages.⁴⁰

Sri Lanka

The last election in Sri Lanka was held on August 5, 2020, and this election is considered to have the

³⁶ DAWN, "PTI candidate Ikramullah Gandapur killed in a suicide attack in DI Khan," *DAWN* (July 22, 2018).

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Sneha Swaminathan, "Nepal elections 2022: Current political scenario, electoral violence and road ahead", *WION* (November 21, 2022).

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

lowest electoral violence in Sri Lankan history. As domestic election observers reported, the campaign was generally peaceful, but some assaults occurred.⁴¹ These incidents seemed to be sporadic and did not trigger a violent outbreak. The Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) indicated that the frequency of election-related violence was lower than in past elections.⁴²

Analyzing the Violence

All five countries—Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka—faced violence against political and ideological opposition during their separate election periods, although the intensity and frequency differed. Analyzing the findings, it is apparent that some countries, such as Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, experienced more frequent and severe incidents of violence against political opposition compared to Nepal and Sri Lanka. Among all five, Sri Lanka faced the least violence, as the Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) assessed this election, which included the lowest violence rate in Sri Lanka's parliamentary election history.

Pakistan and India faced more sophisticated and deadly forms of violence, such as suicide bombings and landmine explosions, which are often linked to terrorist or insurgent groups. In contrast, others, such as Bangladesh and Nepal, witnessed more conventional and spontaneous forms of violence, such as stone-throwing and fist-fighting. Pakistan was the only country to face three suicide bombings during its last election, including a terrorist attack. India also faced a terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir. India's other

unique violence was the Maoist insurgent's landmine attack in Chhattisgarh.

The frequency or level of violence may differ from country to country, but violence against political or ideological opposition more or less exists in these five South Asian countries. Sri Lanka gained a significant achievement regarding violent incidents in its last election, although not entirely. However, critics are suspicious about sustaining the same trend in the future.

2. Violence against Religious/Ethnic Minorities

The historical and contemporary factors that shape the identity and politics of each country and region, such as colonialism, partition, nationalism, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture, influence the occurrence and intensity of violence against religious or ethnic minorities in South Asia. The electoral context aggravates this violence, as political parties and leaders employ divisive and inflammatory rhetoric and strategies to mobilize their supporters and marginalize their opponents, often along communal lines.

Bangladesh

A Hindu village in Thakurgaon district was subjected to an armed attack on December 20, 2018, which caused the damage and burning of around 30 houses.⁴³ The assailants also plundered belongings and attacked the villagers. The reason for the attack was ambiguous, but some residents alleged that it was connected to the election.⁴⁴

⁴¹ ANFREL, "The 2020 Sri Lankan Parliamentary Elections: Defending Democracy Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic", Asian Network for Free Election (2020).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Correspondent, "14 Hindu temples vandalised in Bangladesh to 'create unrest'", *Independent* (2018).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

India

A Hindu man attacked a Muslim man, Mohammad Barkat, in Gurugram, Haryana, on 12 May 2019.⁴⁵ The assailant compelled him to take off his skullcap and recite 'Jai Shri Ram,' a Hindu religious slogan. He also physically and verbally abused him for his religious identity. The police filed a case against the assailant but subsequently dismissed the charges of religious offense.

Several incidents of violence and harassment against Muslims by Hindu mobs were reported in different states of India. For example, a Hindu mob lynched a Muslim man, Tabrez Ansari, in Jharkhand state and coerced him to recite 'Jai Shri Ram,' a Hindu religious slogan, while they assaulted him for hours. He succumbed to his injuries at the hospital on June 22, 2019.



Source: *The Print*, In Jharkhand, lynching spares no religion, and police and government think it's 'routine

Similarly, a group of men in West Bengal state threw a Muslim teacher, Hafeez Mohammed Haldar, out of a train while chanting 'Jai Shri Ram' and pushing him. He escaped with minor injuries. On June 27, a Muslim cab driver, Faizal Usman Khan, was attacked by a group of men in Maharashtra state, who demanded he chant 'Jai

Shri Ram' as they beat him. He sustained a broken arm and bruises.

Pakistan

On the election day of 25 July 2018, a group of people assaulted a polling station in Quetta, where the Hazara Shia community members were voting.⁴⁶ The assailants

⁴⁵ Pavneet Singh Chadha, "Muslim man wearing skull cap assaulted, forced to chant 'Jai Shri Ram' in Gurugram", *Hindustan Times* (May 27, 2019).

⁴⁶ CBS News, Polling station attack marks bloody election day in Pakistan, *CBS News* (July 25, 2018).

labeled the Hazaras as “infidels” and “Iranian agents” and attempted to prevent them from voting.⁴⁷ The police interfered and scattered the group, but several people were wounded in the process.

Sri Lanka

Any significant case of violence against religious minorities was not seen in Sri Lanka’s 2020 parliamentary election. However, there was violence against religious minorities in the 2019 Sri Lanka presidential election. In the northwest town of Puttalam, gunmen opened fire on buses carrying Muslim voters for the presidential election, sparking concerns that minority groups are being intimidated to prevent them from voting.⁴⁸

Nepal

Religious minorities faced no significant violence in Nepal’s 2022 National election.

Analyzing the Violence

Violence against religious or ethnic minorities varies in frequency and intensity, depending on the context and history of each country. Some countries, such as India and Pakistan, have a long and bloody history of communal violence. In contrast, others, such as Sri Lanka and Nepal, have relatively less frequent and severe incidents of violence. Although former East Pakistan, present-day Bangladesh, got independence in 1947 on a communal line, Bangladesh hardly faced such attacks after independence. However, electoral violence against religious minorities has increased

significantly since religion-based politics was reintroduced.

The situation in India dramatically shifted after the BJP’s rise in Indian politics. The attack against Muslims has become a widespread phenomenon in Indian politics. During Modi’s first term as the prime minister of India, there was a sharp increase in hate crimes against Muslims; according to data, about 90% of religious hate crimes in the past decade took place after Modi assumed office.⁴⁹ During the 2019 election, the vote bank interests of the BJP increased the frequency of violence against religious minorities. In Pakistan, the Hazara community, a spiritual as well as an ethnic minority, was attacked in Balochistan. Some countries, such as India and Pakistan, seem to have a biased legal system that fails to prevent, prosecute, or punish the perpetrators of violence. In Bangladesh, religious minorities are regarded as a particular party’s vote bank, and others attack them. Comparing five countries’ last elections, the violence against religious minorities during elections is undoubtedly a heated issue, ignoring some exceptions. The severity of violence may differ, but this issue of religious or ethnic minorities has become a primary political tool in any election in South Asia.

3. Social Media Disinformation and Election

Social media is crucial in political communication, mobilization, and persuasion. Still, it also poses a threat to electoral integrity and democratic values by facilitating the spread of disinformation, misinformation, and hate speech. Disinformation is the

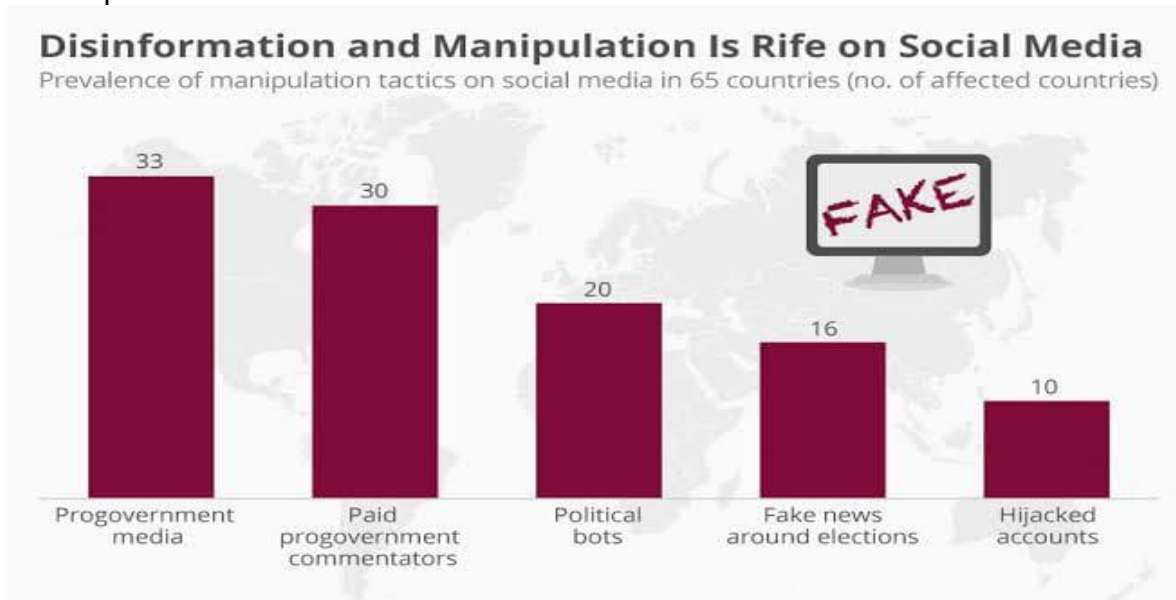
⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Hannah Elis-Petersen, “Sri Lanka presidential election: buses carrying Muslim voters attacked,” *The Guardian* (November 16, 2019).

⁴⁹ Rana Ayyub, “What a Rising Tide of Violence Against Muslims in India Says About Modi’s Second Term,” *Time* (June 28, 2019).

intentional production and distribution of false or misleading information, usually to influence public opinion, manipulate voters, or disrupt the electoral process. Disinformation can also lead to hate speech, which is the expression of hatred or violence towards

a person or group based on their identity or characteristics. The crisis of social media disinformation in South Asia, especially during the election period, has recently become a big challenge.



Source: *statista.com, Manipulation-tactics-on-social-media*

Bangladesh

Before the Bangladesh national elections in 2018, Facebook took down several fake news sites that disseminate false information in Bangladesh.⁵⁰ One of the fabricated posts claimed that Khaleda Zia, the leading opposition figure in the country, had dismissed the general secretary of her Bangladesh Nationalist Party.⁵¹ The post, on the counterfeit version of *bdnews24.com*, stated that Khaleda Zia had issued the

dismissal in a video message from jail. Another story on the bogus BBC site wrongly portrayed deep rifts within the BNP. Fake news is not exclusive to pro-government sites.

In November, police arrested a Bangladeshi student who was studying in South Korea for his alleged role in creating 22 fake news portals that spread anti-government propaganda.⁵² Police said the student

⁵⁰ Correspondent, “Facebook shuts down fake Bangladeshi news sites ahead of the vote,” *The Daily Star* (December 22, 2018).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

belonged to Islami Chhatra Shibir, the student branch of the Jamaat-e-Islami party, a prominent ally of BNP.⁵³

India

A fabricated narrative circulated extensively on online platforms asserted that Sonia Gandhi, the leader of the Congress party, possessed more wealth than the British queen.⁵⁴ However, this narrative can be traced back to newspaper reports from 2012 and also debunked in 2017.⁵⁵

INDIA

AA

Sonia Gandhi is richer than British Queen Elizabeth II: Huffington Post

TNN | Updated: Dec 2, 2013, 01:57PM IST



With \$2 billion wealth, Gandhi is believed to be richer than the British queen Elizabeth II, Sultan of Oman Qaboos bin Said and Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad.

Source: Twitter

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ BBC News, “India election 2019: The debunked fake news that keeps coming back”, BBC News (April 19, 2019).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

The academic achievements of the current Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, are a subject of widespread discussion. A video clip propagated by the rival party seemingly captured Modi confessing that he had no schooling beyond grade 10.⁵⁶ However, the video clip was an incomplete portion of an old interview. Mr Modi clarified that he had obtained his higher education qualifications through external tests after leaving formal education.⁵⁷ Despite being exposed, the shortened, misleading video clip continues to circulate on online platforms.

Pakistan

Following the election that brought Imran Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) to power, some Twitter posts attributed hateful remarks about the Pashtun ethnic group, which is mainly located in areas adjacent to Afghanistan, to Federal Minister for Human Rights Shireen Mazari.⁵⁸ A circulated image on the social media platform claimed that Mazari stated: “There is no difference between Pashtuns and the Taliban. Pashtuns are (by nature) extremists.”⁵⁹ This derogatory statement against one of the largest ethnic groups in Pakistan threatened to exacerbate existing tensions, and Mazari promptly used her Twitter account to clarify the truth and protect her reputation. Dr Shireen Mazari denied making such a statement. She said it was a wholly fake/altered screenshot disseminated on social media and WhatsApp groups.

A conspiracy theory about Imran Khan emerged after the elections. An old photo of Khan’s children and his former wife in Mexico wearing ponchos circulated on Twitter with captions implying that it was taken near a

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Talal Raza, “Mapping Digital Disinformation around Elections: A Case Study of Pakistan’s 2018 General Elections,” CIMA (October 21, 2019).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Jewish worship place and that the ponchos were customary Jewish clothing. Khan's adversaries have persistently alleged that he is, in his words, a "Jewish agent" acting against Islam and Pakistan and used the photo as purported evidence to support their accusations.



6:55 AM · 03 Aug 18

323 Retweets 494 Likes

⁶⁰ The Himalayan, "Misinformation, disinformation present in election campaigning," *The Himalayan* (September 8, 2023).

⁶¹ Ibid.

← Post



Jemima Goldsmith ✓
@Jemima_Khan

Follow

...

This tweet is staggeringly ignorant and would be funny if it weren't dangerous. The photo is taken on a family holiday in Mexico (not Israel) and we are wearing ponchos (not Jewish religious dress) @GhinwaBhutto - shame on you.

غنة بوتو @GhinwaBhutto · Aug 5, 2018

Imran Khan's family on a visit to the apartheid state of #Israel . What does this mean to Pakistan? [twitter.com/MansurChauhan/..](https://twitter.com/MansurChauhan/)

6:28 AM · Aug 6, 2018

Source: Twitter

Nepal

During Nepal's election, there was no 'deep' fake information, only 'shallow' ones, where videos were edited to mislead the viewers.⁶⁰ Some also created fake online media outlets and used them to spread false news that real media never reported, which was very 'risky.' Another type of phony information was declaring the election winners before the votes were counted.⁶¹ For instance, During the May 2022 local elections in Dolakha district, a piece of fake news was spread that the election was canceled, and the news was later removed after the election commission requested Meta.⁶² In another incident, Nepalfactcheck.org debunked a screenshot that said the Nepali Congress had told its supporters not to

⁶² Anup Ojha, "Election Commission joins hands with social media giants to rein in misinformation," *The Kathmandu Post* (October 15, 2022).

vote for Maoist candidates, which was shared widely on social media.⁶³

Analyzing the Role of Social Media

The impact of social media on election-related issues is increasing day by day. From publicizing politicians to spreading hate speech, social media has become crucial. In Bangladesh, political parties were allegedly accused of spreading disinformation using various platforms. Similarly, political parties in India also manipulate voters by using fake news promoted by their IT cells. The same trend was also found in Pakistan, where politicians used Twitter to spread misinformation. Nepal had the same type of tendency as well. Although no particular incident of disinformation regarding Sri Lanka’s last election was found, the trend is the same as that of its other South

Asian neighbours. Regarding the role of social media disinformation in elections, these five South Asian countries have the same patterns. Social media disinformation has become an epidemic worldwide, especially during elections.

Comparative Analysis of Electoral Violence among South Asian Countries

Electoral violence in South Asia differs from country to country. Notwithstanding several dissimilarities, a few similar types of electoral violence are seen everywhere. Various kinds of assaults in election violence refer to attacks on the opposition to kill, injure, or terrify them. A clash denotes violent fighting among multiple groups. Two types of electoral violence were seen in almost five of these South Asian countries during their last general election.

Table 1: Types of electoral violence in five South Asian countries

Type of Electoral Violence		Bangladesh	India	Pakistan	Nepal	Sri Lanka
Political/Ideological Opposition	Similarities	Assault Clash	Assault Clash Terrorist attack	Assault Clash Terrorist attack	Assault Clash	Assault Clash
	Dissimilarities		Maoist attack	Suicide Bombing		
Religious/Ethnic Minorities	Similarities	Assault Hindu minority	Assault Muslim minority	Assault	No incidents found	Assault Muslim minority
	Dissimilarities			Shia (Hazara)		Muslim minority
Social Media Disinformation	Similarities	Fake news in online portal and social media	Fake news in online portal and social media	Fake news in online portal and social media	Fake news in online portal and social media	Fake news in online portal and social media
	Dissimilarities					

⁶³ Ibid.

The extreme violence during the election was seen in the cases of India and Pakistan. Both India and Pakistan faced violent terrorist attacks during their election periods. Islamic terrorist groups executed both of the attacks. The interesting part is that the Indian attack took place in Jammu and Kashmir, and the Pakistan attack took place in Balochistan. Both of these areas have been known for separatist movements for a long time. The most extreme type of electoral violence, suicide bombing, occurred in Pakistan. A suicide attack targeted the opposition party leaders. Suicide attacks have become a widespread phenomenon in Pakistan because of the emergence of various homegrown Islamic terrorist groups, including Teherik e Taleban, Jaish e Islam, and Laskar e Taiyeba. Following the trend, this type of violence has also entered electoral violence. The involvement of communists and insurgents is not seen in any other country except India. After Maoists' inclusion in Nepali politics, the violent activities of Maoists are usually only seen in India.

Violence against religious minorities has significantly increased in South Asian countries in the last decade. The rise of political Islam and Hindutva has played a significant role. Minorities are a particular target during the election period. In the case of Bangladesh, Hindu minority people are specially targeted. In both India and Sri Lanka, the Muslim minority is targeted in election periods as well as other times. Interestingly, the target was the Shia (Hazara) minority in Pakistan during their last election. Contrary to the other countries, violence against minorities was rarely present in the previous election of Nepal.

In the case of social media disinformation during the election period, all the countries face more or less the same type of challenges. Various fake news stories are

published in online portals and circulated on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc. Social media plays a significant role in spreading fake news. The opinions of voters are primarily shaped by social media nowadays. Considering this fact, the trend of spreading disinformation increases during the election period to manipulate public opinion.

Concluding Remarks

The write-up provides a comparative analysis of the political violence and disinformation that occurred during the last elections in five South Asian countries: Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. These countries share some common patterns of political and social conflict, such as the use of violence against political or ideological opposition, the targeting of religious or ethnic minorities, and the manipulation of social media to spread fake news and propaganda. Electoral violence in South Asia varies by country. Still, some common patterns are observed, such as assaults and clashes among political rivals, terrorist and insurgent attacks in conflict-prone areas, and violence against religious minorities, especially Hindus in Bangladesh, Muslims in India and Sri Lanka, and Shias in Pakistan. Nepal is an exception, as it witnessed less violence in its last election. Depending on their historical, cultural, and legal contexts, these countries also differ in the intensity, frequency, and form of violence and disinformation. Social media disinformation is another challenge affecting all countries, as fake news and propaganda are spread online to influence and manipulate public opinion. Various forms of electoral violence among these countries seriously threaten the quality and integrity of democracy and human rights in the region.

Violence Against Women During Elections

Mashiat Jafrin⁶⁴

Women have to face many challenges while exercising their political rights. The most alarming one is the violence against women in politics (VAWP), including violence against women in elections (VAWE). Gender-based violence in politics and elections ranges from intimidation, harassment, and sexual and physical violence against women to forced resignations and assassinations of women politicians in the most extreme cases. Violence against women in political life, including in and beyond elections, is any act of, or threat of, gender-based violence resulting in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women that prevents them from exercising and realizing their political rights, whether in public or private spaces, including the right to vote and hold public office, to vote in secret and to freely campaign, to associate and assemble, and to enjoy freedom of opinion and expression. Such violence can be perpetrated by a family member, community member, and by the State.⁶⁵ Following this definition of violence against women in politics, violence against women in elections (VAWE), then, is a form of violence against women intended to impact the realization of women's political

rights in an electoral context⁶⁶ This includes women's participation as candidates, voters, activists, party supporters, observers, election workers, or public officials.⁶⁷ However, there are very few studies on this despite its importance because of a lack of data and reporting, little understating, and stigma related to gender-based violence.

There are three types of VAWE according to the internationally agreed types of violence against women:

- **Psychological violence** includes abuse intended to humiliate, persecute, intimidate, and cause emotional damage with hostile behavior. Of all the forms of VAWE, psychological violence is the most diverse and subtle.⁶⁸ Overt threats of physical harm and rape, stalking, character assassination, and social boycotts are all examples of psychological violence. Psychological harm shatters the victim mentally by degrading, demoralizing, or shaming the victim. Threats of social exclusion, fear of rejection, and divorce discourage women from going to their offices or voting for /against their preferred candidate.

⁶⁴ Research Data Analyst, Centre for Alternatives.

⁶⁵ Summary of Preventing violence against women in elections: a programming guide; Available at chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/VAWE-Prog_Guide_Summary-WEB.pdf; Accessed on 29 Dec 2023.

⁶⁶ Preventing Violence Against Women In Elections; Available at: <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.ec-undp-electoralassistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/undp-contents-publications-preventing-violence-against-women.pdf>; Accessed on 29 Dec, 2023.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Summary of Preventing violence against women in elections: a programming guide; Available at chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/VAWE-Prog_Guide_Summary-WEB.pdf; Accessed on 29 Dec 2023.

Psychological violence can be seen happening in the home, the community, and in public, including online, often leading to physical violence. In mid-2016, the Muslim Ladies' Organization U.K. affirmed that Muslim male neighborhood councilors had strategically disrupted the reputation of female candidates by spreading rumors about them and scaring their relatives. At a party rally in 2015 in Uganda, a female opposition activist was stripped naked by the police. She was humiliated and devastated in front of her colleagues. In Bangladesh, men reportedly confiscated their wives' identity cards and went with them to the polls.⁶⁹

• **Physical violence** involves physical force inflicted on women to cause potential death, injury, or harm. This may include pushing, throwing, grasping, choking, shaking, slapping, punching, hitting, burning, and may even lead to domestic abuse, beating, abduction, and even assassination. Physical violence is seen to happen at all levels, including the home, the community, and in

public. In 2007, Asha Ali, A Kenyan women's rights activist, was brutally physically assaulted in front of her family members for standing as a candidate in the election.⁷⁰ During the 2004 elections in Afghanistan, women were intimidated to prevent them from registering to vote; a bus carrying female election workers was bombed, and threats were made against polling stations that had been set up to accommodate female voters.⁷¹

• **Sexual violence** comprises sexual acts and attempts at sexual acts by coercion, including unwelcome sexual comments or advances.⁷² It encompasses any non-consensual sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments, or advances, including sexual assault, abuse, harassment, and rape.⁷³ Both in private and public settings, sexual assault and threats may occur, often leading to rape. In early 2016, a 14-year-old girl was kidnapped from her bed late at night and raped as revenge for her mother's victory in local elections in India.⁷⁴

Perpetrators of VAWE⁷⁵

Political Actors	Societal Actors	State Actors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political party leaders • Election candidates • Political party members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voters • Family members • Intimate partners, spouses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police, armed forces • Government institutions • Election officials

⁶⁹ Krook, Mona Lena (2017). Violence against Women in Politics. *Journal of Democracy*, 28(1), 74–88. doi:10.1353/jod.2017.0007; Accessed on 29 Dec 2023.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Summary of Preventing violence against women in elections: a programming guide; Available at [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/VAWE-Prog_Guide_Summary-WEB.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/VAWE-Prog_Guide_Summary-WEB.pdf); Accessed on 29 Dec 2023.

⁷⁴ Krook, Mona Lena (2017). Violence against Women in Politics. *Journal of Democracy*, 28(1), 74–88. doi:10.1353/jod.2017.0007; Accessed on 29 Dec 2023.

⁷⁵ Summary of Preventing violence against women in elections: a programming guide; Available at: [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/VAWE-Prog_Guide_Summary-WEB.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/VAWE-Prog_Guide_Summary-WEB.pdf); Accessed on 29 Dec, 2023.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campaign workers • Party militia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community members • Religious leaders • Media • Employers and colleagues • Criminal elements • Youth groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State proxies (e.g. militia)
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Patterns of electoral violence⁷⁶

Electoral violence is of three types based on the timing: pre-electoral violence, election-time violence, and post-electoral violence.

Period of violence	Types of violence
Pre-Election Violence	Threat, forcing disruption of campaign rallies, assassination, intimidation,
Election Time Violence	looting, shooting, kidnapping, physical attacking, killing,
Post-Election Violence	Assassination, kidnapping, rape, murder, looting, shooting, destruction of property, displacement, rioting.

Violence During Elections in Bangladesh

Contemporary electoral violence in Bangladesh is widespread and multifaceted.⁷⁷ There have been experiences of electoral violence in each parliamentary election. Women have often been categorically targeted and used violence against them during the election period. Violence against women during elections is a grave issue with a long-lasting impact on women's participation in politics and public

life.⁷⁸ Electoral violence hinders the transfer of power in a peaceful manner.

One of the notable examples of VAWE is the rape incident of Purnima during the 2001 parliamentary election. Purnima Rani Shil was from Perba Delua in Ullapara Upazila, Sirajganj District. She was brutally gang raped and wounded by political rivals because she acted as a polling agent of the Awami League at the

⁷⁶ Noorana, Patterns of Electoral Violence in Bangladesh: A Study on Parliamentary Elections (1973-2008), Jagannath University Journal of Social Sciences, Vol. 3, No. 1-2, 2015, pp. 123-135, Available at: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://jnu.ac.bd/journal/assets/pdf/3_2_35.pdf, Accessed on 29 Dec, 2023.

⁷⁷ Chowdhury, Mahfuzul H. (2003). Violence, politics and the state in Bangladesh. Conflict, Security & Development, 3(2), 265–276. doi:10.1080/1467880032000126958; Accessed on 29 Dec, 2023.

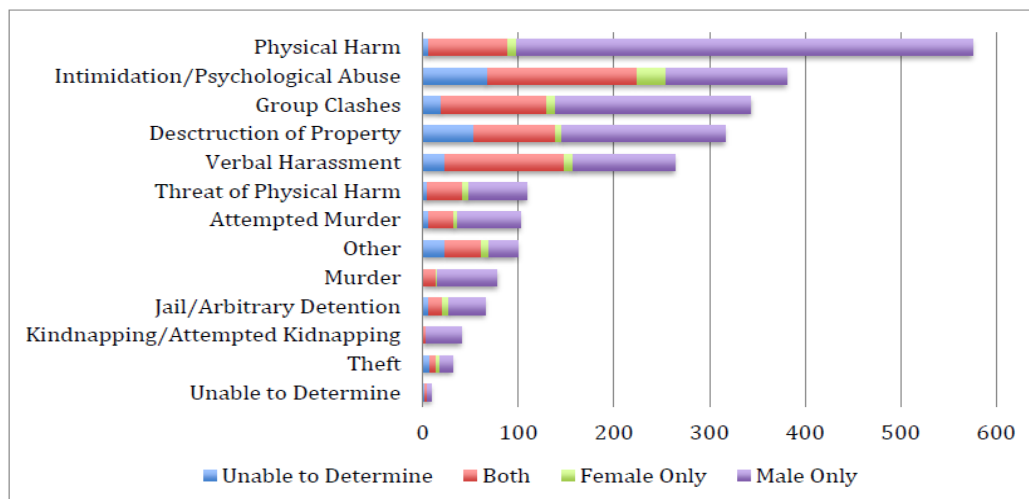
⁷⁸ Electoral violence against women, Women in Elections; Available at: <https://pakvoter.org/wie/wie-blogs/electoral-violence-against-women/>; Accessed 29 Dec 2023.

2001 general elections.⁷⁹ This incident was also identified as violence against the minorities as religious minorities were strategically targeted by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami activists.

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) developed a framework through the experiences of female candidates, voters, party leaders, and others. It allowed for inclusive programming in electoral technical assistance. It is reinforced through empirical research from seven projects in six countries where IFES' Electoral Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) Program collected data between 2006 and 2010 (Bangladesh, Burundi, Guyana, Guinea, Nepal, and Timor-Leste).

According to the EVER data, which documents direct and verifiable incidents of violence, women are most frequently victims of intimidation (32 percent of all violence types against women), verbal harassment (11 percent), and physical harm and group clashes (both 10 percent). In terms of victim types, women were most often identified as victims when associated with a public role (political party leaders, candidates, or supporters made up 48 percent of all women victim types). Voters were the second most commonly reported type of victim (22 percent).⁸⁰ According to the EVER data, women were victims of all possible kinds of electoral violence. They were primarily victims of intimidation, verbal harassment, group clashes, politically motivated theft, jail/arbitrary arrest, and intimidation/psychological abuse.

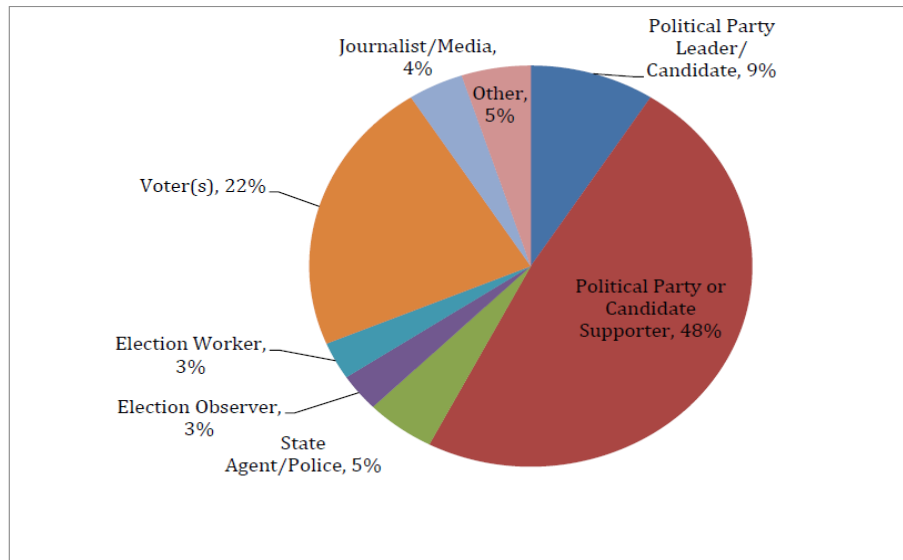
Figure I: Type of Violence Distributed by Victim Gender (Number of incidents involving each violence type)



⁷⁹ Humaira Ego, 2001 Post Poll Violence: Purnima is forgotten, Dhaka Tribune, 8 October 2021; Available at: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/260896/2001-post-poll-violence-purnima-is-forgotten>; Accessed on 29 Dec, 2023.

⁸⁰ Gabrielle Bardall, Breaking the Mold: Understanding Gender and Electoral Violence, IFES White Paper, December 2011; Available at: https://igualdad.ine.mx/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/gender_and_electoral_violence_2011.pdf; Accessed on 29 Dec 2023.

Figure 2: Distribution of Female Victims of Electoral violence (Percent of victim types)



From the figures, the role of female victims can be seen. The data shows that women in the case studies are most often victims in their roles as candidate/political party supporters and public citizens/voters.

Violence in South Asia

South Asia is home to one-fifth of the world's population, and it is estimated that one-third of South Asian women experience violence throughout their lives.⁸¹ VAW is established through family dynamics, more comprehensive social, cultural, and economic

frameworks, and religious traditions. Violence is a widely acknowledged method for controlling women.

Centre for Social Research, in collaboration with UN Women, conducted a study on the violence inhibiting women's political participation in Nepal, India, and Pakistan. According to the constitutions of the three countries, women have equal rights and the right to participate in elections. This sample represented the diverse stakeholders, including national/state/local actors.

Their study found that VAWP needs to be present in public discourse in all three countries. Its lack of

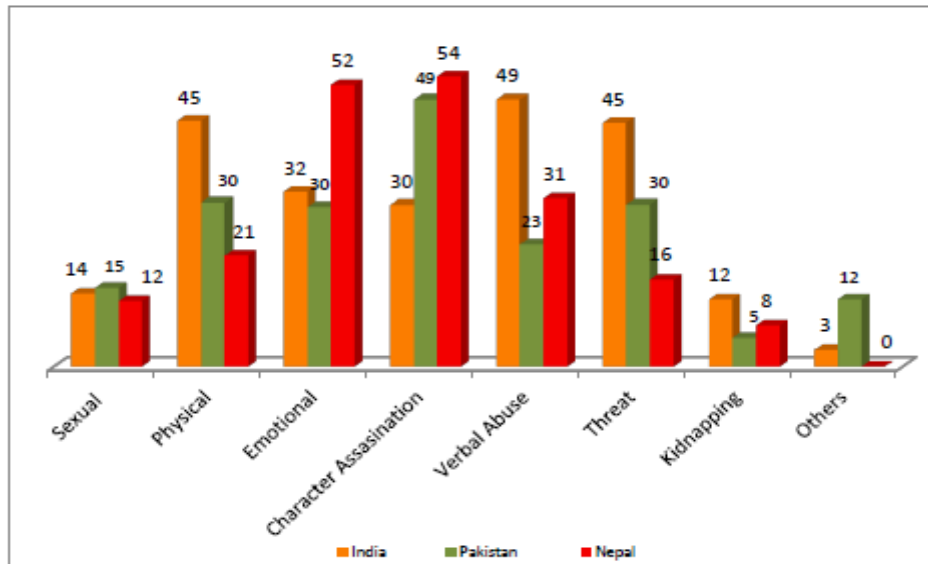
⁸¹ Violence against Women in Politics (A study conducted in India, Nepal, and Pakistan), Centre for Social Research, UN Women; Available at [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.](https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2014/Violence%20Against%20Women%20in%20Politics-Report.pdf)

[unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2014/Violence%20Against%20Women%20in%20Politics-Report.pdf](https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2014/Violence%20Against%20Women%20in%20Politics-Report.pdf); Accessed on 29 Dec 2023.

recognition results from the prevailing patriarchal mindset and the culture of silence within political parties, government agencies, and, more broadly, society.⁸² The political system does not recognize the existence of VAWP. Further, incidents of VAWP are not understood in their fullest dimensions in terms of

VAWP. Such incidents are often deliberately spared or telecast with propaganda by the media during elections. The study proves that the existing cycle of VAW is fuelled and accelerated by patriarchy and gender discrimination.

Figure 3: Survey Responses to Various Types of VAWP (in percentage)



Answers in each category may not add up to 100% due to multiple answers

From Figure 3, we can see how women are victims of various types of VAWP in the three concerned countries. Incidents related to physical violence, verbal abuse, and threats of violence are higher in India, while character assassination is seen as a more significant threat in Pakistan and Nepal. The participants in the qualitative survey in all three countries mentioned

other forms of violence like denial of the right to vote, denial of the right to contest elections, denial of education, especially political education, compelling to vote, etc. Among all of them, the denial of the right to vote was acknowledged as the most common form of VAWP experienced by women voters.

⁸² Ibid.

Examples Of Political Perpetrators Of VAWE:

• In **Nepal**, “women candidates were victimized by cadres of opposition parties. There were incidents of physical violence as well as threats against these women candidates during the electoral process.... There were several incidents where cadres of other parties attacked women candidates alongside their security personnel.”⁸³

• In **Pakistan**, prominent leaders of five major political parties signed formal agreements to declare that they would not allow women to file candidate nomination papers or cast their votes in elections based on local traditions. The signatories also threatened to launch a campaign to force female candidates who did file their nomination papers to withdraw. They warned civil society organizations to stop mobilizing and supporting women to participate in elections. They also issued several decrees and religious edicts from mosques, claiming that women’s participation is un-Islamic and declaring that they would stop women by force from going to polling stations. As a result, female candidates and their family members were harassed and pressured into withdrawing from contesting the elections.⁸⁴

The following table shows the percentage of elected women over total seats in three states of India in the 2009 general election. Many women wanted to

compete as candidates during the election, but the electorate decided to elect more men than women in parliament.

Table A: Percentage of elected women over total seats in three states of India in the 2009 general election

	No. of women contested	No. of women elected	No. of women deposit forfeited	% of elected women over total seats in state
India	556	59	441	2.5
NCT of Delhi	18	1	16	4.76
Karnataka	19	1	16	1.19
UP	100	13	76	5.42

⁸³ Preventing Violence Against Women In Election: A programming Guide; Available at chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.ec-undp-electoralassistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/undp-contents-publications-preventing-violence-against-women.pdf; Accessed on 29 Dec 2023.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Though many women did venture into electoral politics, the electorate chose to elect more men to the Parliament. In India, there has also been an increase in the percentage of women voters over votes polled, increasing from 53.64 percent in 2004 to 55.82 percent

in 2009.⁸⁵ In Pakistan, female voters and contestants have also increased in the past two elections. In its 2013 election, the voter turnout for women was an unprecedented 40 percent of all votes.⁸⁶

Table B: Comparison of women voters, contestants, and elected candidates in the past two elections in Pakistan

Year of Election	No. of women voters	No. of women contested	No. of women elected
2008	35,606,360	195	25
2013	37,597,415	448	16

Table B compares women voters, contestants, and elected candidates in Pakistan's past two elections. Although more women contested in 2013, the percentage of women who won fell from 12.8 percent in 2008 to a mere 3.75 percent in 2013.⁸⁷ However, the number of women elected has not increased, although there was an increase in voters and the number of women contested in the election.

Taking Action for the Prevention and Elimination of VAWE

The suggestions are offered to inform the work of UNDP, UN Women, or other UN agencies engaged in this work, as well as those partners involved in electoral support, the promotion of women's political empowerment, or ending violence against

women.⁸⁸ UN provided suggested programs and policies under the following six action points:

1. Mapping and measuring VAWE;
2. Integrating VAWE into election observation and violence monitoring;
3. Legal and policy reform to prevent and respond to VAWE;
4. Preventing and mitigating VAWE through electoral arrangements;
5. Working with political parties to prevent and reduce VAWE;
6. Raising awareness and changing norms.

It is crucial to address the issue of electoral violence to ensure that women have an equal opportunity to participate in the electoral process.⁸⁹ This is essential to build an inclusive and democratic society and to promote rights and empowerment.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Electoral violence against women, Women in Elections; Available at: <https://pakvoter.org/wie/wie-blogs/electoral-violence-against-women/>; Accessed 29 Dec 2023.

Annex

Some definitional clarification according to BPO Codebook.

Gunfight. Shootout between the law enforcement agencies and criminals, militants, or other irregular forces, including amongst the latter, that does not match the definition of a non-state armed group.

Clash. Two-sided violence between groups, outside of the context of war or insurgency. Example: supporters of rival political parties fight each other.

Assault. One-sided violence by an individual or small group against another individual or small group. Example: stabbing, shooting of someone by a perpetrator

Fight. Two-sided violence between individuals or small groups. Example: brawl between 3-4 people.

Sexual assault. One-sided sexual violence, such as rape or attempted rape, by an individual or small group against another individual or small group.

Destruction of property. One-sided violence perpetrated with the intent of damaging property. Examples: vandalism, arson.

Mob violence (large group assault). One-sided violence by a mob or large group against an individual or a comparatively small and/or defenseless group. Examples: lynching of a thief, looting of shops and houses owned by a religious minority



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