

CONFLICT TRENDS (NO. 5)

REAL-TIME ANALYSIS OF ASIAN POLITICAL VIOLENCE, SEPTEMBER 2016

Welcome to the second 2016 Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project’s Conflict Trend Report for Asia. This is the fifth report in the series. The analysis is based on ACLED real-time and historical data on political violence and protests from ten countries in South and Southeast Asia. Monthly data updates are published through our research partners at [Complex Emergencies and Political Stability in Asia \(CEPSA\)](#) and are also available on the [ACLED website](#).

Over the summer, ACLED-Asia has seen a decrease in politically violent events, a summer trend that was seen last year as well. ([ACLED Trend Report No. 3](#)) Much of this decrease is usually attributed to a decrease in events by the most politically violent countries, such as Pakistan and Bangladesh. Ramadan is a factor for this decrease, as Pakistan and Bangladesh are Muslim-majority countries.

However, the decrease in overall events is only slight.

India, the country with the largest event count, saw stable levels of politically violent events through the summer. At the same time, riots & protests in India increased. India averaged 617 riots & protests per month in the first five months of the year. Yet for the June-August period, India averaged 958 riots & protests per month. No other countries come close to this riots & protests event count.

This trend report focuses on event type increases and decreases throughout the summer through various trends. This report will discuss: the recent increase in **ISIS activity in Bangladesh** with a focus on the hostage crisis from July; **the large-scale protests by the Dalit caste occurring in India**; and an overview of data collected from the **disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir**. Special focus topics include analysis on the **electoral violence in West Bengal and Bangladesh**, as well as analysis on the **targeting of religious minorities in Pakistan**.

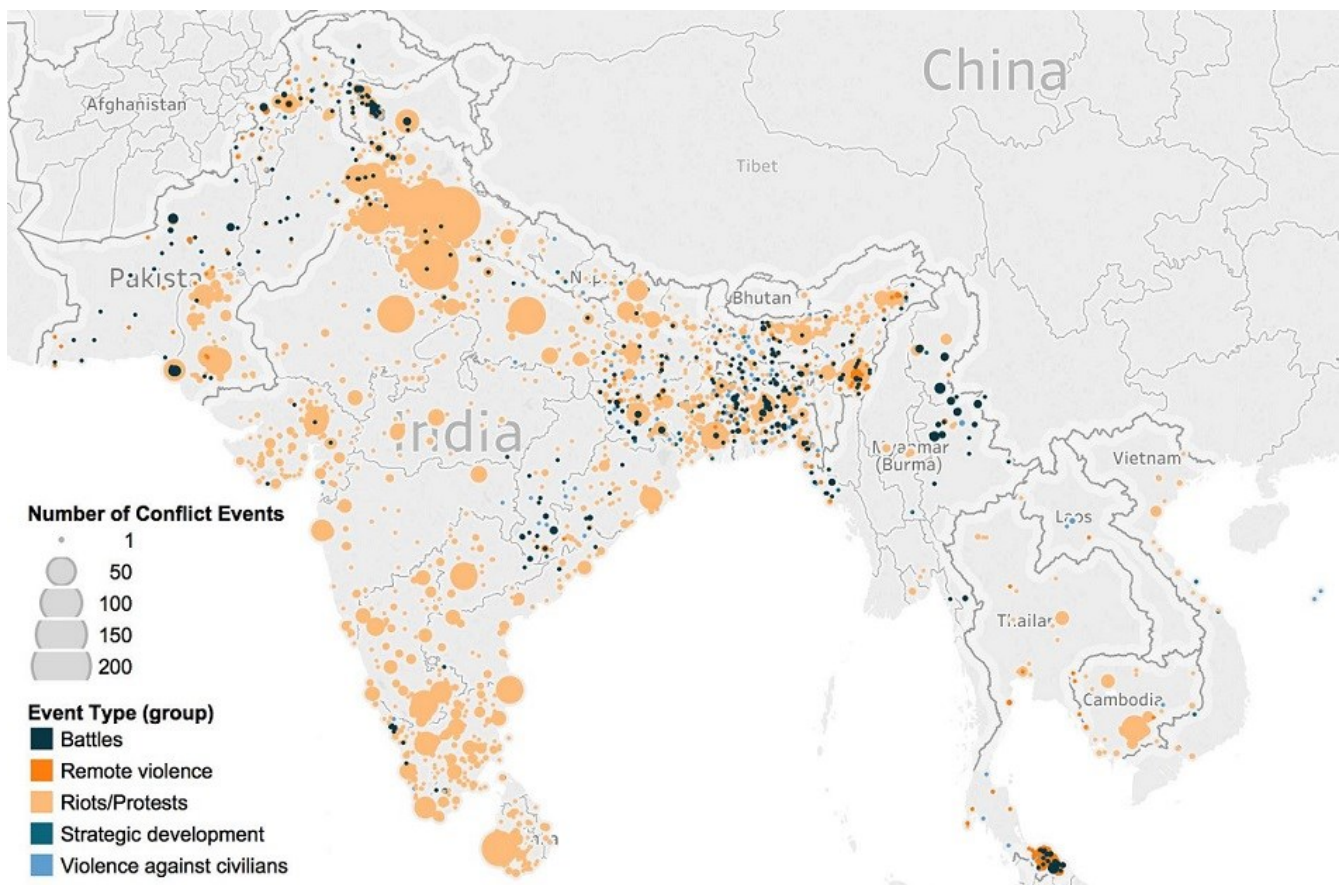


Figure 1: Political Violence and Protests in South and Southeast Asia, January-August 2016

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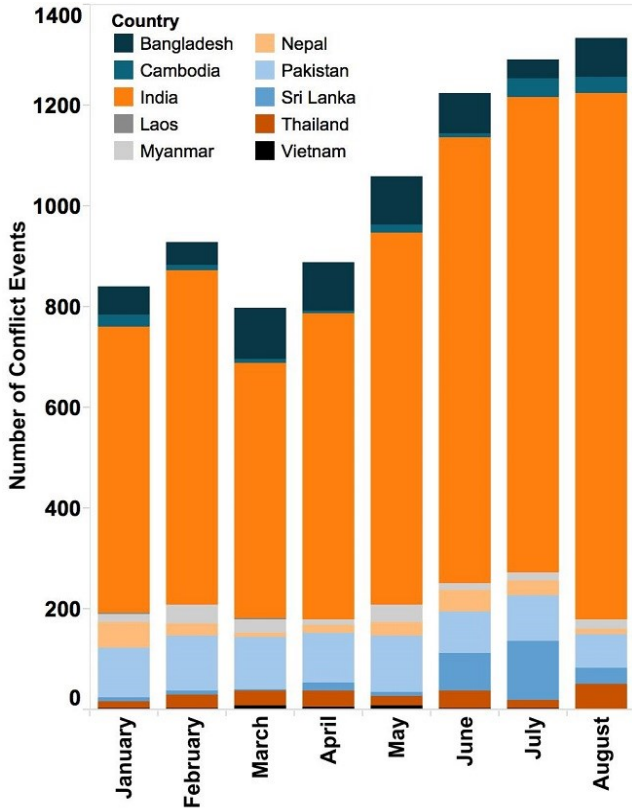


Figure 2: Events by Month and Country, 2016

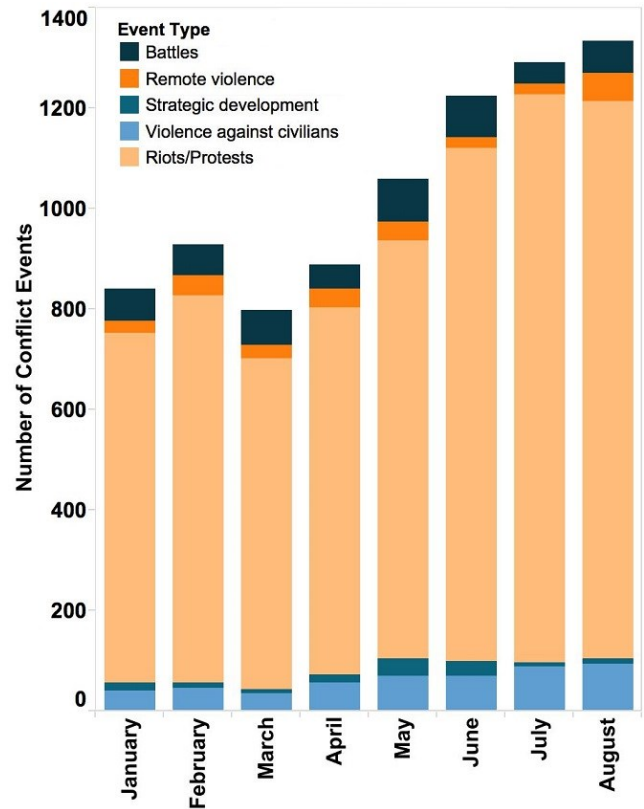


Figure 3: Events by Month and Event Type, 2016

ISIS in Bangladesh

ISIS activity in Southeast Asia escalated during the Dhaka hostage crisis in July. ACLED first recorded ISIS in Bangladesh in September 2015 for the killing of an Italian aid worker. Since then, there have been 17 more events by ISIS, culminating in the July killing of 20 hostages, most of which were foreigners. This recent event may be the catalyst for the Bangladeshi government to step up its efforts of combating Islamic radicalism in the region.

The Bangladeshi Government denies that ISIS is active in the country, stating that the attackers have been identified as members of both Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) ([Dhaka Tribune, July 2016](#)). Both of these groups are banned radical Islamic groups in Bangladesh. However, ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack through its affiliated Amaq News Agency, as well as posting videos and photos of both the attackers and hostages. ([SITE, July 2016](#))

Attacks by radical Islamic groups do not make up a large part of the political violence in Bangladesh. ACLED has recorded only 28 such events by radical Islamic groups in Bangladesh in the first 8 months of 2016 out of a total of

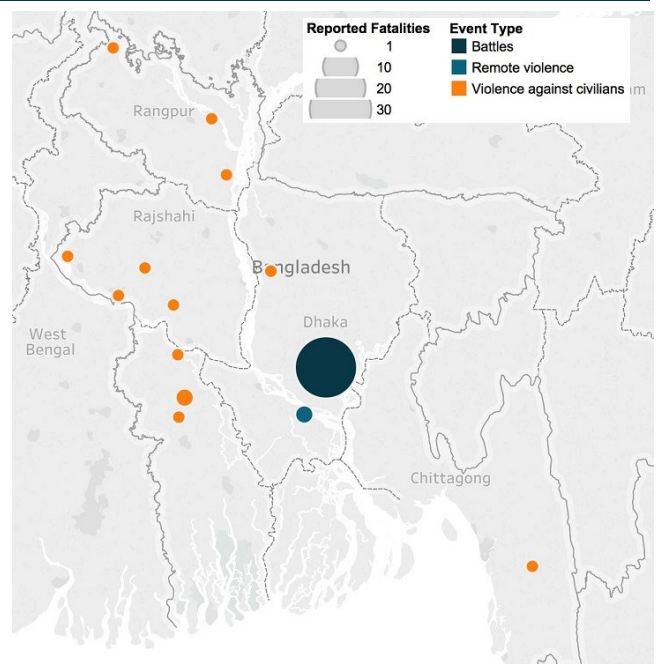


Figure 4: ISIS Events by Reported Fatalities & Event Type

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almost 600 events in that same time period. While Islamic radical groups are not extremely active in the country, ISIS makes up almost half of these events, with 12 recorded in the first 8 months of 2016. Most of the attacks by ISIS were the hacking to death of religious minorities, doctors, or professors. The hostage crisis in Dhaka and subsequent gunfight marked a departure from the norm, and led to the death of the 20 hostages, 6 attackers and 2 police officers.

The Bangladeshi government continues to deny any presence of ISIS in the country. The hacking to death of doctors and professors who have spoken against Islam, and of religious minorities, is an extension of the attacks on the previous 'Shahbag' movement. ([DW, July 2016](#); [New York Times, December 2015](#)) In 2013, many bloggers,

journalists, and writers protested against what they viewed as leniency against the previous regime's war crimes. Some pro-Islamic groups took this to be an attack on Islam. Many of the bloggers identified by these pro-Islamic groups were hacked to death. Very few attackers have been caught, and even fewer have been prosecuted. Government officials even went as far as to say that bloggers should "control their writing," in response to the onslaught of attacks on bloggers ([CNN, April 2016](#)).

The recent killing of 20 hostages, mostly foreigners, may cause Bangladesh to tighten its security. This attack is unlike the singular hacking to death of mostly Bangladeshi nationals and a few foreigners. This attack threatens foreign investment, foreign aid, and regime positioning in a way that previous attacks have not.

Caste Violence in India sparks Dalit Protests

July and August 2016 witnessed an unprecedented surge of Dalit protests against their systematic discrimination. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state of Gujarat experienced the bulk of the protests, which resulted in the resignation of Gujarat Chief Minister Anandiben Patel, along with the continued struggle of the the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) state government to restore confidence among the Dalit community ([Firstpost, 2016](#)).

The latest spate of violent protests in Gujarat is fueled by attacks on Dalit community members; these attacks are perpetrated by right-wing Hindu nationalist groups under the banner of cow protection. Overall, these events feed into a growing intolerance around religiously motivated issues within the Indian society since the BJP assumed power in 2014 (see ACLED's [Conflict Trend Report No. 4](#)). 'Gau rakshak' (cow protection) groups have characteristically targeted those involved in cow slaughter, especially Muslims, with the 2015 Dadri lynching of a Muslim man suspected of cow slaughter being the most prominent case ([Indian Express, 2015](#)). However, recent attacks point to an emerging trend of cow vigilantes targeting Dalits based on their traditional profession of disposing and skinning cow carcasses.

The targeting of the Dalit community received national public attention after a viral video showing cow vigilantes

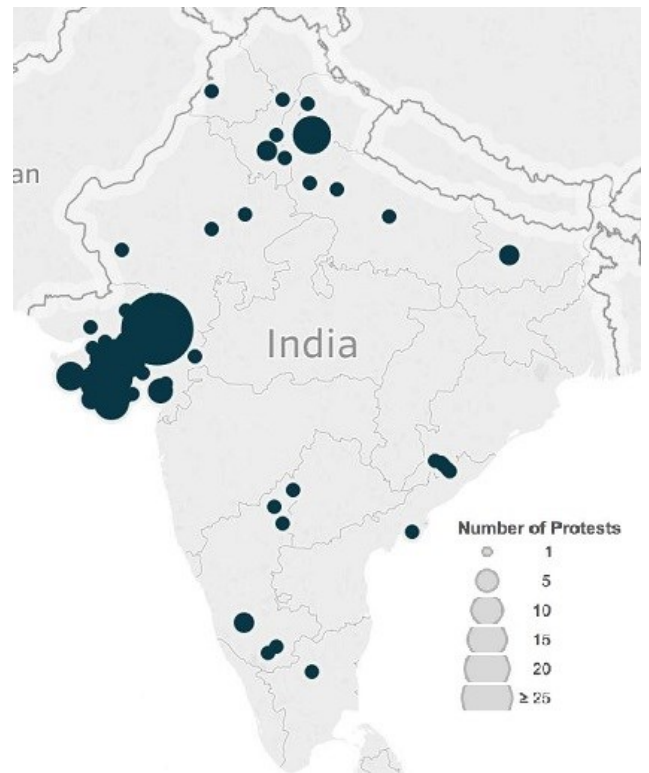


Figure 5: Dalit Protests throughout India, 2016

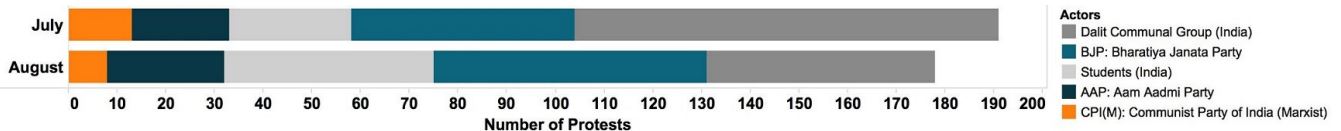


Figure 6: Riots & Protests Count by 5 Most Active Organizations in India, 2016

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publicly stripping and flogging four Dalit men for skinning a dead cow in Gujarat’s Una town on July 11 ([Hindustan Time, 2016](#)). The incident set off a storm of Dalit protests across Gujarat unprecedented in their scale and intensity ([Scroll, 2016](#)). The often violent demonstrations left one policeman dead ([Chandigarh Tribune, 2016](#)), many injured, and saw several Dalits attempting suicide in protest against upper caste violence ([BBC, 2016](#)). Dalit organizations called on their followers to defy traditional caste-roles by refusing to dispose of carcasses, even going as far as disposing dead cows on the streets ([Quartz India, 2016](#)). The incident also triggered further inter-caste violence with upper caste community members attacking Dalit protesters at a rally in Una on August 14 and 15 ([Hindustan Times, 2016](#)).

The Una flogging not only sparked outrage in Gujarat but also resonated across India. In Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, there were complaints of increased attacks on Dalit com-

munity members by cow vigilantes. Ten Dalit organizations decided to work together and form a statewide Dalit movement ([Times of India, 2016](#)). In Karnataka where Bajrang Dal members beat up five Dalit men for allegedly stealing and slaughtering a cow in on July 10 ([Indian Express, 2016](#)), Dalit organizations staged a protest in demand for a ban on the activities of cow protection groups in the country ([The Hindu, 2016](#)).

Upcoming elections in several states, including Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh, further politicized the issue with many opposition parties gearing up to compete for Dalit votes ([Indian Express, 2016](#)). Mounting political pressure forced Prime Minister Narendra Modi to publicly denounce the illegal activities of cow vigilantes during an August 6 speech in an attempt to appease the angry protesters ([The Hindu, 2016](#)). However, recent events have reinforced the notion of the BJP supporting right-wing Hindu nationalist groups at the expense of minority rights.

Jammu & Kashmir 2015

The territory of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is a unique context where many attributes of political violence differ in disputed territories. India administers J&K as a state under the federal government, while Pakistan- which refers to its section as Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK)- administers it as a self-governing state. The division of the region into Pakistan and Indian administered halves results in very different levels and types of violence depending on the location.

In 2015, ACLED recorded 481 events and 198 fatalities in the J&K region as a whole. Kashmir accounted for 76% (364) of these, while only 20% (97) occurred in Jammu, and only 4% (20) occurred in Pakistan-administered J&K (see **Figure 7**). The high contrast between the number of events in the Pakistan- and Indian-administered halves of the region speaks to many differences, including in political situations, levels of autonomy, and population sizes. Part of the difference is ACLED’s methodology, which depends on local sources: cross-border engagements are usually coded on the Indian-administered side of the Line of Control, due to more active reporting of these events in Indian sources focusing on the J&K region.

The distribution of events by city helps to further illustrate the diverse nature of violence in this region. The city of Srinagar saw the most events at 112, almost a quarter of the total. Poonch came in second due to incidents of cross-border firing between the Indian and Pakistan militaries. Sopore and Anantnag, the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> largest cities in the

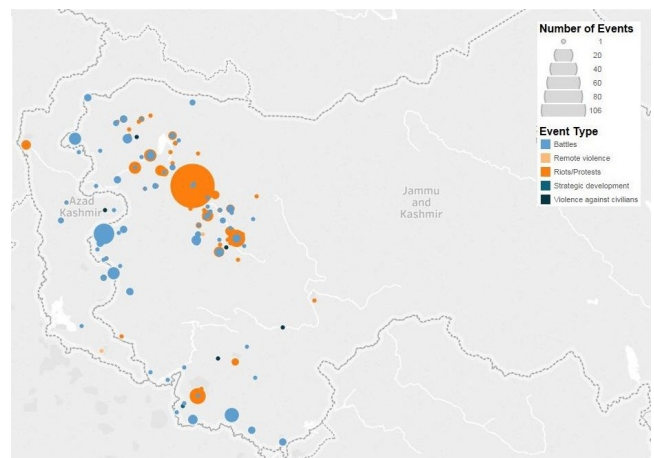


Figure 7: J&K Events by State, Event Type, & Count

J&K region respectively, were tied at 20 events each. Jammu, the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest city in the area, saw only 14 events (see **Figure 7**).

In 2015, 258 events (out of 481) were riots and protests; the majority of these events took place in Indian-administered Kashmir (see **Figure 7**); 169 battles -- primarily between security forces and militants as well as involving cross-border firing between the Indian and Pakistani militaries--were the most prevalent event type in Pakistan-administered J&K (see **Figure 7**). 8 instances of remote violence, divided roughly evenly between events involving shelling by the Indian and Pakistani militaries,

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and remote explosives, are recorded during this period; finally 9 significant strategic developments occurred, with

almost half of these involving unreturned cross-border firing by the Pakistan or Indian militaries.

Special Focus Topic: Electoral Violence in West Bengal and Bangladesh

Between March and June, local elections in Bangladesh and in West Bengal, India, led to a spike in political violence. Despite a long-standing history of electoral violence in both areas, the extent and pattern of violence, especially in Bangladesh, is considered unprecedented ([Gulf Times 2016](#)). Violent incidents during the elections doubled in Bangladesh and increased five times in West Bengal. While the ruling parties were heavily involved in the electoral violence in both places, the pattern and types of violence differed.

The Union Parishad (Local Government, UP) elections were held in Bangladesh between March 22 and June 4, 2016. During the elections, 263 events of political violence and protest are recorded, averaging 25 events per week. In comparison, an average of 12 events per week occurred before and after the election period (Figure 9). In India, the Legislative Assembly elections in the state of West Bengal were held between April 4 and May 5, 2016. In comparison, political violence increased in West Bengal during this period even more sharply than in Bangladesh; the level of violence was five times higher than the rest of

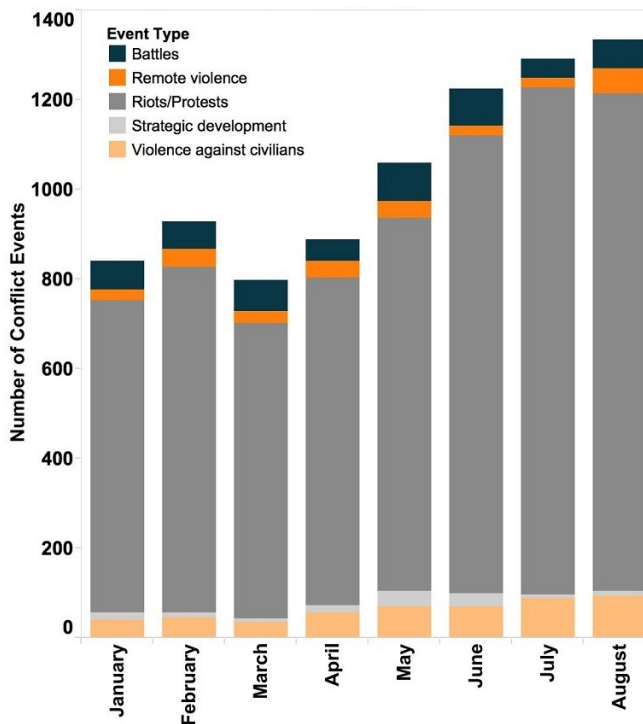


Figure 9: Electoral Violence in Bangladesh

the year, with 147 events of political violence, and an average of about 32 events per week. In contrast, the weekly average of events before and after the election period is 6 (Figure 8).

Both areas, Bangladesh and West Bengal have a long-standing history of electoral violence. In both regions, the ruling parties were by far the most heavily involved groups in the violence this year. In Bangladesh, competition between the two main parties, the Bangladesh Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) historically drives such violence. During the local elections this year, however, most of the violence took place between members of the same parties, and the majority within the AL.

For the first time, UP elections were held along party lines. As a result, supporters of AL rebel candidates clashed with supporters of ruling AL candidates, with “renegades [...] challenging regular party aspirants” ([The Times of India 2016](#)). ACLED data shows that the ruling AL is involved in 70 of the 263 events, while the main opposition party, the BNP, is involved in only 13 events. Only 6

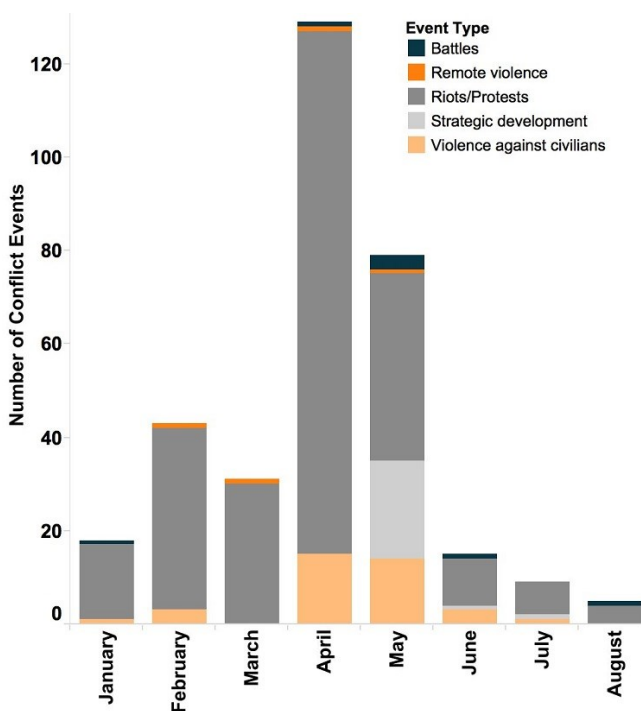


Figure 8: Electoral Violence in West Bengal

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of these events were clashes between the two main parties, AL and BNP, while 21 events were clashes between members of the ruling AL.

In West Bengal, a different picture emerges. The violence during the State Assembly elections is along party lines. Most of the violence occurred between the ruling All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) and the main opposition parties, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM) and the Indian National Congress (INC). While the CPM and the INC have historically been competitors during elections in West Bengal, for the first time, they formed an alliance in the hope to defeat the ruling AITC. Similar to Bangladesh, the ruling party is involved in the majority of events in West Bengal, with 101 out of 147 events. The main opposition parties, the INC and the CPM combined, are involved in 74 events only. Most of the clashes (58) were between supporters of AITC and supporters of the CPM-INC alliance. In contrast to the experiences in Bangladesh, none of the reported clashes are between members of the ruling party.

The violence during the election period was particularly high in the capital regions. Kolkata is located in the South-east of West Bengal, and has the highest share of violent events amongst all cities in the state (at almost 17%). In Bangladesh, the count in the capital city Dhaka is even

higher at 19%, while the violence is generally more spread out across the country.

In Bangladesh, *Riots and Protests* accounts for the majority of cases with a share of 65%, while *Battles, Violence against Civilians*, and *Remote Violence* account for only 18%, 16%, and 1% respectively ([The News Today 2016](#)). ACLED data suggest that at least 101 persons were killed during the violence ([The News Today 2016](#)). Similarly, in West Bengal, protests and riots accounted for the majority of cases. Yet, the share was much larger than in the case of Bangladesh. *Riots and Protests* accounted for 86% of all recorded violence, while *Violence against Civilians* accounted for 12% and *Battles* as well as *Remote Violence* for only 1% each. The violence was also less deadly in West Bengal than in Bangladesh, with 16 reported deaths in total.

Despite the widespread violence, the ruling parties in both regions were re-elected. In Bangladesh, the AL won more than 50% of the contested 4085 seats, while the main opposition party, the BNP won only 9% of all seats ([Union Parishad Election 2016: A Review](#)). In West Bengal, the Trinamool Congress secured almost 72% of the 294 seats, while the INC-CPM opposition alliance secured only 25% of all seats ([The Hindu 2016](#)).

Special Focus Topic: Targeting of Religious Minorities in Pakistan

Between January and July 2016, ACLED data recorded 83 fatalities among specific religious minority groups in Pakistan. The vast majority of those killed (72) are the result of a Jamaat-ul-Ahrar coordinated bomb-blast that took place in a Christian neighborhood of Lahore on Easter Sunday. This attack spurred government action to deal with the targeting of minorities.

On 27<sup>th</sup> March 2016, a militant belonging to Jamaat-ul-Ahrar--a Tehreek-e-Taliban break-off faction-- entered Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park with an explosive-laden vest. The park is one of Lahore's biggest, and the city's Christian population had gathered after the afternoon Easter church service to celebrate. The militant detonated his vest close to a children's play area and killed at least 72 people while injuring over 200 more ([Dawn, 29 March](#)

[2016](#)). While both Muslims and Christians were present at the park and people from both faiths were killed, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar stated that the bomb targeted the Christians present and vowed to carry out more such attacks ([Reuters, 28 March 2016](#)). Jamaat-ul-Ahrar was also responsible for an attack on two Lahore churches in March of 2015 ([Geo TV, 15 March 2015](#)).

Other fatalities are the result of individualized acts of violence often termed as 'targeted killings' by the Pakistani media. In the interior of Sindh (rural Sindh), Hindus were attacked for eating during fasting hours during the Muslim holy month of Ramazan ([The Express Tribune, 12 June 2016](#)). In Karachi, attacks against religious minorities appear to have largely secular motivations, with gunmen targeting prominent Shia Muslims. In Khyber-

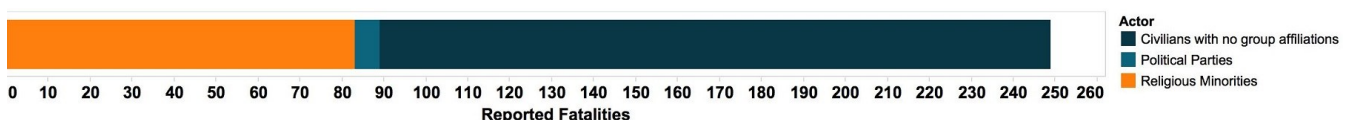


Figure 10: Reported Civilian Fatalities in Pakistan by Group, 2016

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Pukhtoonkhwa, while some attacks on Shias took place in Peshawar, the biggest semi-coordinated attack took place in the Dera Ismail Khan district with 4 Shia Muslims murdered in a single day ([The Friday Times, 13 May 2016](#)).

However, this year's Easter Sunday attack is notable for the significant response by the government, which shifted military strategy to address these threats. In the aftermath of the Easter Sunday bombing, the federal government has promised the strongest retribution for those involved, an expansion of the National Action Plan against terrorism, and a deployment of Rangers (federally administered paramilitary forces) throughout Punjab. This is the first instance that federal forces will be active in Punjab through this government, marking a sharp shift in policy for Pakistan ([Dawn, 29 March 2016](#)). Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, Sindh, and Balochistan have all had Ranger deployments under the National Action Plan. The deployment of the Rangers in Punjab resulted in over 200 overnight arrests, and a continued presence throughout the state ([BBC, 29 March 2016](#)). Since the attack, several militant commanders have been captured or killed in Punjab. Taking such measures following an attack on a minority group was a strong step to take by the state to show its commitment to protecting these groups.

However, while an attack against minorities on such a scale has not been repeated since the Easter Sunday attack, they are still far from secure in a country where lynching, targeted killings, and vigilantism has continued against non-Sunni religious groups. Attacks on sectarian grounds are also common in Pakistan. For example, during Ramadan, an octogenarian Hindu man and his relative were attacked on their own property for eating during fasting hours in Sindh. This case was remarkable as the attacker was a police officer, and while he was not acting on any official order, registering a case against the officer and pursuing it proved to be difficult for the victims ([Dawn, 12 June 2016](#)). As media attention gathered on the case and public outcry followed, the victims were enabled to further pursue the matter.

Different factions within Islam, ranging from Barelvi to

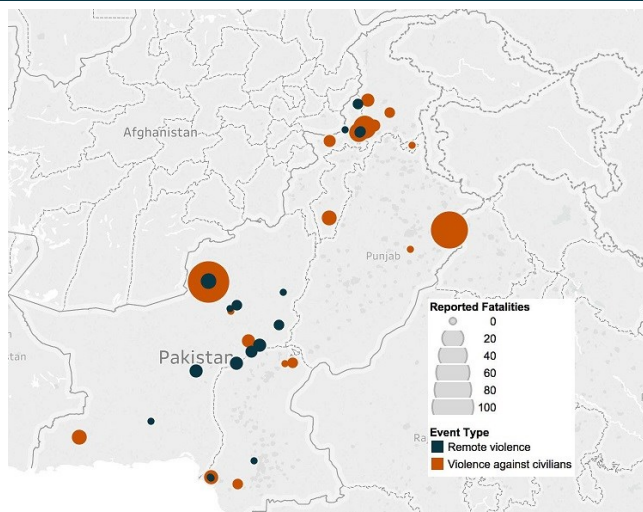


Figure 11: Reported Civilian Fatalities in Pakistan, 2016

Shia to Ahmedi, are also attacked. Those belonging to the Wahhabi-Sunni school of thought have targeted the Shia population. As Pakistan's largest minority, they are the most common victims of such attacks. Militant groups including Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Sipah-e-Sahaba and Ahle-Sunnat-Wal-Jamaat are known to openly engage in hate speech against Shias and have strong links to attacks on them. Often times these groups are believed to hire targeted killers to carry out the attacks, preventing direct links to themselves. The majority of Shias attacked in Pakistan between January and July 2016 were prominent figures in their communities, holding professions with strong community ties as well as steady incomes, such as journalists, religious figures, and lawyers. From Karachi in Sindh to Dera Ismail Khan in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, Shias working for the betterment of their communities were the target of these types of attacks.

Pakistan's founding was based largely on escaping persecution in Hindu-majority India, with Muslims concerned about being a minority on the sub-continent. However, with almost a hundred individuals from minority groups dead in over six months and several hundred more injured, Pakistan fails to protect religious minorities.

Support

This material is based upon work supported by, or in part by, the U.S. Army Research Office grant number W911NF-09-1-0077 under the Minerva Initiative of the U.S. Department of Defense.

Sources

*Conflict Trends* reports are compiled from ACLED data and draw on news sources, civil society reports, and academic and policy analyses. Details of sources and coding processes are available online on the [ACLED website](#).

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