

Trends of Violence and Contestation in Nepal

This is the second of a series of quarterly reports from the Nepal Peace Monitoring Project (PMP). The PMP uses a methodology similar to NepalMonitor.org's alert and mapping system, with a focus on gathering information on violence and political contestation. The PMP's goal is to improve our understanding of violence in Nepal to better respond to it and promote peace.

April-June, 2017



Executive Summary

On February 20, the Government of Nepal announced the first local level elections in 20 years, to be held on May 14, 2017. Campaigning, interparty competition, protests, and calls for boycotts led to a marked increase in the number of incidents recorded by PMP in quarter two. Roughly 50 percent of both violent and non-violent incidents recorded, as well as 60 percent of injuries (excluding injuries due to sexual violence), were related to the electoral process. 40 percent of electoral violence incidents involved assaults or clashes, 36 percent involved some form of Improvised Explosive Device (IED) or hoax bomb, and 19 percent of incidents involved vandalism or arson. Overall incidents peaked in the run-up to and during election day of phase I and II on May 14 and June 28 respectively. As the framework for the local elections remained contested, elections in provinces 1, 2, 5 and 7 were postponed and later held in a second phase on June 28. Elections for province 2 were again postponed on June 15 to a third phase scheduled for September 18. Despite the rise in number of incidents and injuries related to the elections, gender based violence (GBV) and personal issues remained the leading cause of fatal violence, as in the previous quarter.¹ Overall, PMP recorded 1088 incidents this quarter, 713 of them violent and 375 non-violent. This represents an increase of 44 percent in violent incidents and four percent in non-violent incidents over the previous quarter.

Political Violence Peaks Around Local Elections

While elections were initially intended to be held in one phase on May 14, elections in provinces encompassing districts of the Terai (provinces 1,2,5 and 7) were postponed on April 22 to a second phase - eventually held on June 28, due to protests from Madhes-based and other dissatisfied parties (Box 1). On June 15, elections for local bodies in province 2 were again postponed to a third phase scheduled for September 18. The postponements were meant to give the government space to negotiate with dissenting parties on outstanding issues and create a conducive environment for them to participate in the election.

¹ See: <https://www.nepalmonitor.org/blog/2017/05/02/trends-in-violence-and-contestation-in-nepal-first-quarterly-report/>

Issues Related to Local Elections

The initial announcement of the elections on February 20 - the first held under the new constitution - was met with great enthusiasm as well as disagreement between major political parties and other stakeholders. The United Democratic Madhesi Front (UDMF) and other parties were dissatisfied with the way the Local Body Restructuring Commission had delineated the new local units and were strongly opposed to the decision.² Since their long-standing demands of a constitutional amendment on federal demarcation and proportional representation had not been met, the opposing parties threatened to boycott and disrupt the election. The commencement of the CPN-UML's "Mechi-Mahakali National Campaign" further polarized the situation, as they were directly opposed to the UDMF's demands for a constitutional amendment.

On March 6, protests in the Terai region led to five deaths in police shootings in Maleth, Saptari after a clash between police and protesters of the UDMF at the sidelines of a CPN-UML campaign program. As a result, the UDMF withdrew its support for the government on March 15 and vowed to boycott and disrupt the election process. On April 22, the government announced that local elections would be held in two phases. The following day it negotiated with the Madhes-based parties in the hope of ensuring their participation in the elections, and agreed to pass the long debated constitutional amendment bill with some revisions. Following the completion of elections in phase I, the government announced on May 22 an increase in the number of local units in the Terai by 22 to address one of the Madhes-based parties' demands.³ However, on May 26 the decision was stayed by the Supreme Court.⁴ As the government had failed to increase the number of local units and could not muster a two-thirds majority needed to pass the amendment, six constituents of the UDMF - now united under the newly formed Rashtriya Janata Party - Nepal (RJP-N)⁵ - continued to oppose the elections. On June 11, RJP-N threatened to disrupt and boycott the elections and announced general strikes for four days starting from June 13 in the Terai region.⁶

Following these threats, the government decided to postpone the election in Province 2 on June 15, claiming that an understanding had been reached to that effect with leaders of the RJP-N.⁷ The RJP-N, however, denied that any such agreement had been reached and continued to call for the postponement of the election in all four remaining provinces. They also vowed to continue their protest, reiterating that they would not participate in elections unless their demands were addressed.⁸ On the eve of election day, the RJP-N announced they would continue their protest but would not resort to violence to disrupt the elections.⁹

² For more details see: <https://www.nepalmonitor.org/blog/2017/05/02/trends-in-violence-and-contestation-in-nepal-first-quarterly-report/>

³ See: <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/recently-increased-22-local-units-published-in-nepal-gazette/>

⁴ See: <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/supreme-court-stays-decision-add-local-units/>

⁵ Rastriya Janata Party Nepal (RJP-N) was formed on April 20, 2017 which include Six Madhes-based parties.

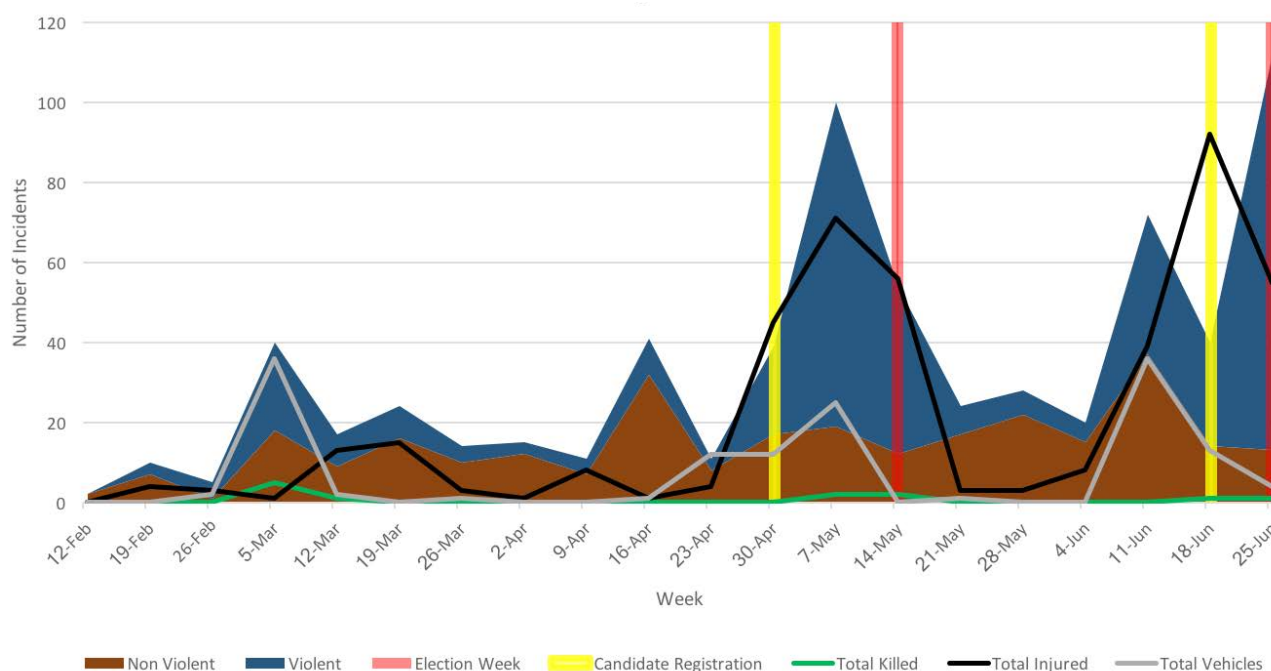
⁶ See: <http://www.myrepublica.com/news/21652/>

⁷ See: <http://www.myrepublica.com/news/21911/>

⁸ See: <https://www.nepalmonitor.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Analysis-Update-8.pdf>

⁹ See: <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2017-06-28/rjp-n-says-wont-resort-to-violence.html>

Between April and June, PMP recorded 568 election-related incidents, 343 of which were violent whereas 225 were non-violent protests or contestations (Graph 1). Election-related violence resulted in 386 people injured and six killed (Box 2). A total of 679 total incidents - 393 violent and 287 non-violent - which led to 425 injured and 12 killed, were recorded from the announcement of the election on Feb. 20 up to June 30.



Graph 1: Election-Related Incidents by Week, February - June 2017

Trends in Electoral Violence¹⁰

Incidents spike after Maleth incident. After the announcement of the elections on Feb. 20, election-related incidents first spiked following the Maleth incident on March 6, where five protesters were killed in police shootings (Graph 1).¹¹ In the aftermath of this incident, agitated protesters vandalized police vehicles, organized strikes, set fire to an Armed Police Force (APF) check post and local peace committee, hurled a petrol bomb at the Rastriya Banijya Bank, and vandalized a vehicle of the National Human Rights Commission in Saptari, amongst others. This prompted the district administration to impose a curfew in the district headquarters at Rajbiraj.¹²

¹⁰ See also our analysis updates: <https://www.nepalmonitor.org/blog/category/election-violence-monitoring/>

¹¹ The incident occurred at the sidelines of a UML program during their Mechi-Mahakali National campaign.

¹² See <https://www.nepalmonitor.org/blog/2017/03/28/impact-of-the-saptari-incident-on-the-electoral-environment/>

The week of March 19 saw another smaller spike in incidents after the UDMF withdrew their support from the government and vowed to boycott and disrupt the election unless the constitution was amended and the Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) opposed the Election Commission's decision to remove demands for constitutional monarchy and a Hindu state from RPP's statute.¹³ Protests by Madhes-based parties intensified again but remained mostly nonviolent in the week of April 16, prompting the government on April 22 to announce that elections would be held in two phases.

Lead up to elections

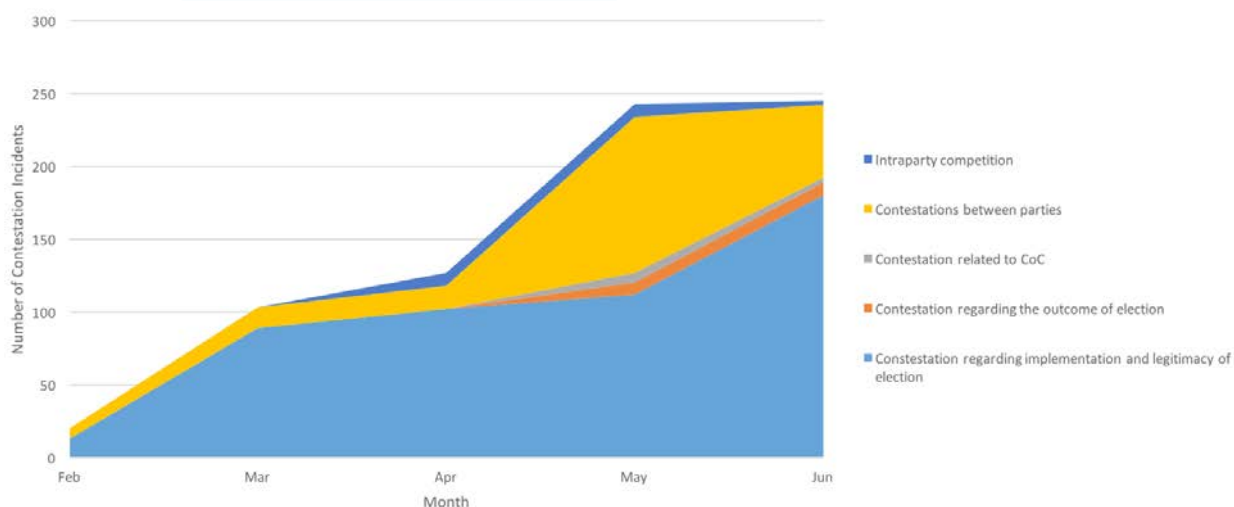
The campaign periods and lead-up to election days of phase I and II saw a significant increase in election-related violence and resulting injuries following candidate registration on May 2 and around the June 18 registration (indicated in Graph 1 by yellow lines).¹⁴ This increase was largely fuelled by competition between rival candidates and parties, resulting at times in clashes or assaults. At the same time, the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN), led by Netra Bikram Chand, stepped up its campaign to disrupt the election with general strikes announced on the days of candidate registration and in the lead-up to election day.

Drivers of contestation

Between the first and second phases of the election, the clearest differences lie in the types of contestation recorded and the motivations behind them. In phase I, there was a much greater share of political violence between rival candidates and their supporters. This manifested itself in an initial spike in injuries, resulting from an increase in inter party clashes. In the second phase, with the resumption of protest from the RJP-N and the intensification of IED bombings from groups such as CPN Chand, contestation regarding implementation and legitimacy of the election predominated, as seen in Graph 2. Inter party clashes during the campaign period of phase II were slightly lower compared to phase I. Despite the postponement of elections until September, province 2 still saw the highest number of election-related incidents of any province recorded in the second quarter (Map 1).

¹³ See also the spike in non-violent protests involving RPP in the week of March 26 in Graph 4. In addition to the RPP's protests against the Election Commission, the Naya Shakti Nepal Party (NSNP) and several other smaller parties conducted protests against the Election Commission beginning of April, demanding a single nationwide election symbol for their parties.

¹⁴ Candidate registration for the second phase of the election had been pushed back two days to June 18 following the announcement of a third phase of election in the hope it would allow candidates from RJP-N to still register. See <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/printedition/news/2017-06-16/nomination-deadline-pushed-to-sunday.html>



Graph 2: Specific Drivers of Election Related Contestation, February - June 2017

Box 2: Six Killed in Deadly Electoral Violence, April-June 2017

Electoral violence not only injured dozens but also took the lives of 6 people in PMP's second quarter, 3 of whom were killed in police shootings. The circumstances of the killings are explained below:

- On May 9, a clash between the cadres of CPN (UML) and CPN (Maoist Center) killed a UML supporter in Jugu of Dolakha district. The cadres clashed after stones were thrown on a group of Maoist Center cadres and leaders led by a former State Minister and Maoist Politburo member who had arrived in the village for electioneering.¹⁵
- On May 13, an unidentified group shot dead a person in Namo Buddha municipality of Kavre district.¹⁶ According to an eyewitness, the victim was shot by security personnel posted there to provide election security. Following the victim's death, elections in Namo Buddha municipality were postponed as the residents protested and refused to participate in the election.
- On May 14, a person was killed as police opened fire during a clash between the cadres of Nepali Congress and CPN-UML at a polling station in Melung rural municipality of Dolakha district.¹⁷
- On May 14, a ward chairman candidate from Rastriya Prajatantra Party in Naraharinath rural municipality of Kalikot district died after being hit by a bullet. Police had opened fire after cadres of Netra Bikram Chand-led CPN tried to capture ballot boxes.¹⁸
- On June 18, a UML cadre member died after being hit by a stone in his testicle during a clash with Nepali Congress cadres at Chededaha rural municipality-5 in Bajura district. The cadres of both parties threw stones at each other on their way to file nominations at the District Election Office.¹⁹
- On June 26, a cadre member of Netra Bikram Chand-led CPN died while trying to set off an IED on a road leading to the drinking water office in Dhangadi. He was carrying the explosive device with the objective of terrorizing potential voters.²⁰

¹⁵ See: <https://www.nepalmonitor.org/reports/view/14492>

¹⁶ See: <https://nepalmonitor.org/reports/view/14594>

¹⁷ See: <https://nepalmonitor.org/reports/view/14639>

¹⁸ See: <https://nepalmonitor.org/reports/view/14651>

¹⁹ See: <https://nepalmonitor.org/reports/view/15098>

²⁰ See: <https://nepalmonitor.org/reports/view/15248>

Campaign Period and Election Day Phase I: Clashes between Rival Candidates

From the candidate registration on May 2, to one week into the vote counting on May 21, PMP recorded 144 incidents of electoral violence. At least 63 of these incidents involved ward-level and mayoral candidates from the three major parties or their supporters. 17 incidents involved CPN led by Netra Bikram Chand, and in 55 incidents the perpetrator was unidentified, although often suspected of being affiliated with CPN (Graph 3). During phase I, a total of 4 people were killed, 172 were injured and 5 buildings and 37 vehicles were damaged as a result of electoral violence.

Incidents shift away from the Terai

The geographic focus of incidents during the first phase of elections shifted away from districts of the Terai to districts in provinces 3, 5 and 6 where elections were being held. Southern Dolakha emerged as one of the hotspots of rivalry between competing local candidates from CPN-UML and Nepal Congress (NC), with several clashes reported on May 10, May 12 and 14 that injured 13 and killed two (Box 2).

Incidents involving Madhes-based parties drastically decreased during this period as preparations for polling in the Terai provinces was halted until after the end of the first phase of elections. Madhes-based parties were also waiting to see if the major parties would honor the agreement to amend the constitution before the second phase of elections began.²¹

CPN attempts to disrupt elections

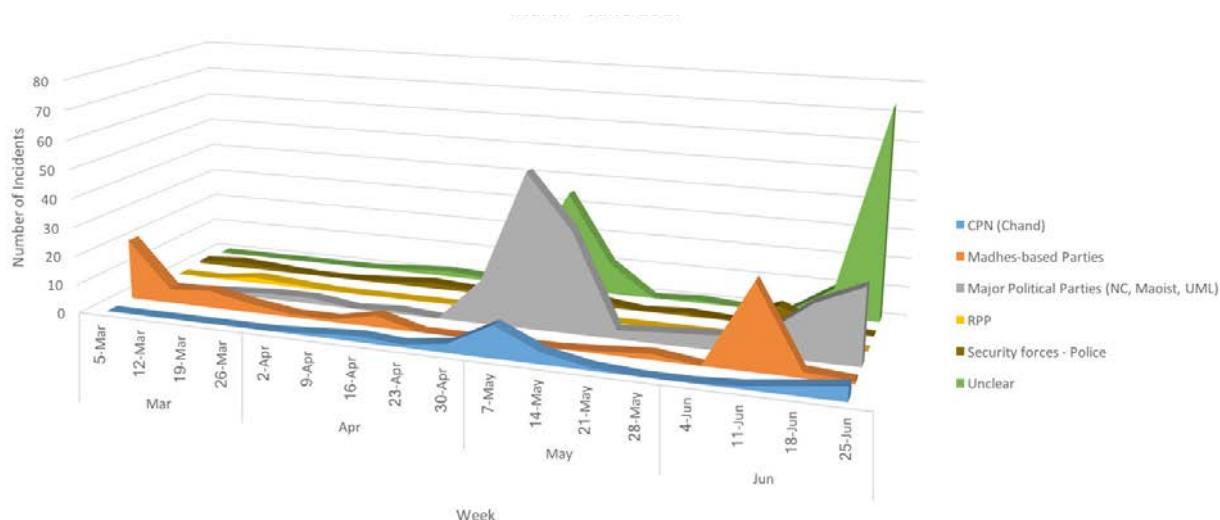
Cadres of the CPN - which fundamentally opposes the existing parliamentary system - intensified their activities particularly in the more rural areas of province 5 and 6 and were found to be involved in at least 101 incidents during the first phase. These activities included intimidation of candidates with the aim for them to withdraw their candidacies, obstruction of election campaigns, padlocking of rural municipality offices, arson, and attacks on candidates. On May 13, the day prior to the election, the CPN announced a general strike and their cadres were reported to have been involved in several instances of vandalism and arson attacks on vehicles. Additionally, 26 IEDs, suspicious devices, or hoax bombs were found during the strike and on the morning of election day. Some of these devices detonated while others were defused, but no injuries were reported.

Violence on polling day

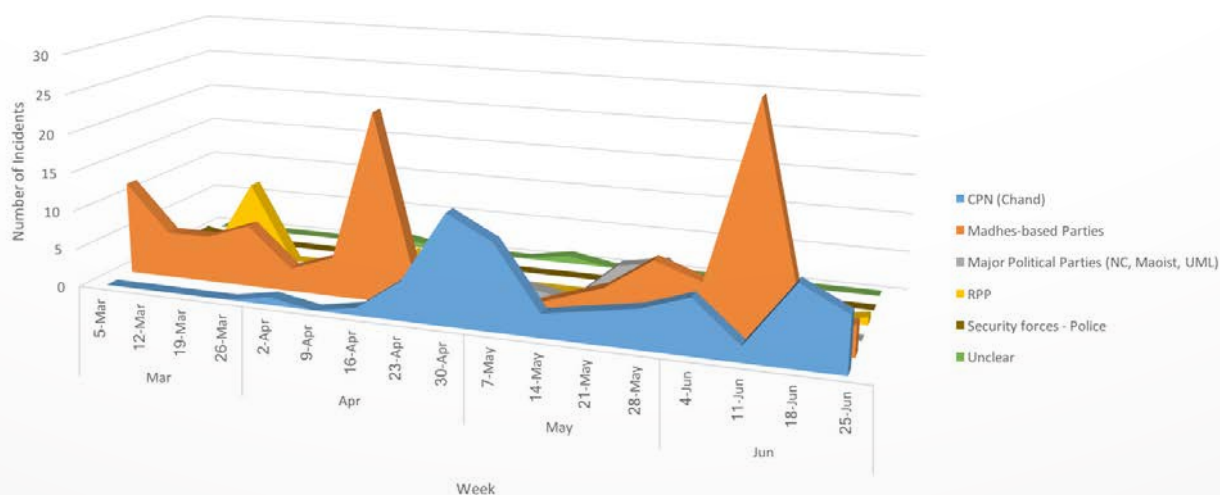
Election day of phase I saw sporadic violence with the most serious incidents reported in Dolakha and Kalikot districts, where one person was killed in each of two separate police shootings (for

²¹ For more details see: <https://www.nepalmonitor.org/blog/2017/05/11/incidents-during-campaign-period-before-may-14-elections/>

more details see Box 2). In general, voter turnout did not seem to be affected by such sporadic violence or the CPN bandha the day before. Despite previous apprehensions, the Election Commission noted that election day itself remained largely peaceful. During the vote counting period, the number of incidents significantly dropped with only a few incidents reported. In one high-profile case on May 28, representatives of CPN (Maoist Center), tore up ballot papers after it became likely that their candidate Renu Dahal, the daughter of CPN Maoist Center chairperson Pushpa Kamal Dahal, would be defeated in the mayoral election of Bharatpur Metropolitan City in Chitwan. This led to the suspension of the vote counting in ward 19, protests in several places, an inquiry by the Election Commission, and their decision to conduct re-polling in the affected ward, a decision that was later upheld by the Supreme Court.²²



Graph 3: Election Related Violent Incidents by Political Actors, March- June 2017



Graph 4: Election Related Non-Violent Incidents by Political Actors, March- June 2017

²² For more details see <https://www.nepalmonitor.org/blog/2017/06/16/incidents-prior-to-second-phase-june-28-local-elections/>

Elections Phase II: RJP-N Resumes Protests

From June 18 to July 5, PMP recorded 128 violent incidents for phase II of the local election. Cadres of major political parties were involved in at least 34 incidents of violence. Three incidents were led by supporters of Madhes-based parties and 8 incidents were identifiably activities of the CPN led by Netra Bikram Chand. In 84 instances, most of those involving IEDs or hoax bombs, the perpetrators were not identified. Violent incidents in the second phase resulted in 155 people injured and 2 killed, as well as 17 vehicles and 2 buildings being damaged. Incidents had already increased significantly in the run-up to the candidate registration after RJP-N announced general strikes in the Terai for four days starting June 13 (Box 1).

Use of IEDs increases

Following phase II candidate registration on June 18, RJP-N and CPN intensified their protests while candidates of other political parties engaged in their campaigns. In a number of districts, police resorted to preventative arrests of CPN cadres (indicated in Graph 4 as a spike in incidents involving CPN), and - in a few cases - of local RJP-N leaders. Forces opposed to the election intensified a campaign of planting bombs and IEDs at strategic places to disrupt the election process, resulting in several injuries and the death of a CPN cadre member who was killed when he accidentally set off an explosive that he was carrying (Box 2).²³

Despite a spike in incidents involving IEDs and hoax bombs, overall levels of violence on election day of phase II declined when compared to that of phase I. The last minute announcement by RJP-N not to resort to violence appeared to mitigate tensions at some of the potential flashpoints. Dissatisfaction with the delineation of local units led to only very localized boycotts in one ward of Sarawal in Nawalparasi and Tingla in Solukhumbu district.²⁴

Considerations for future elections

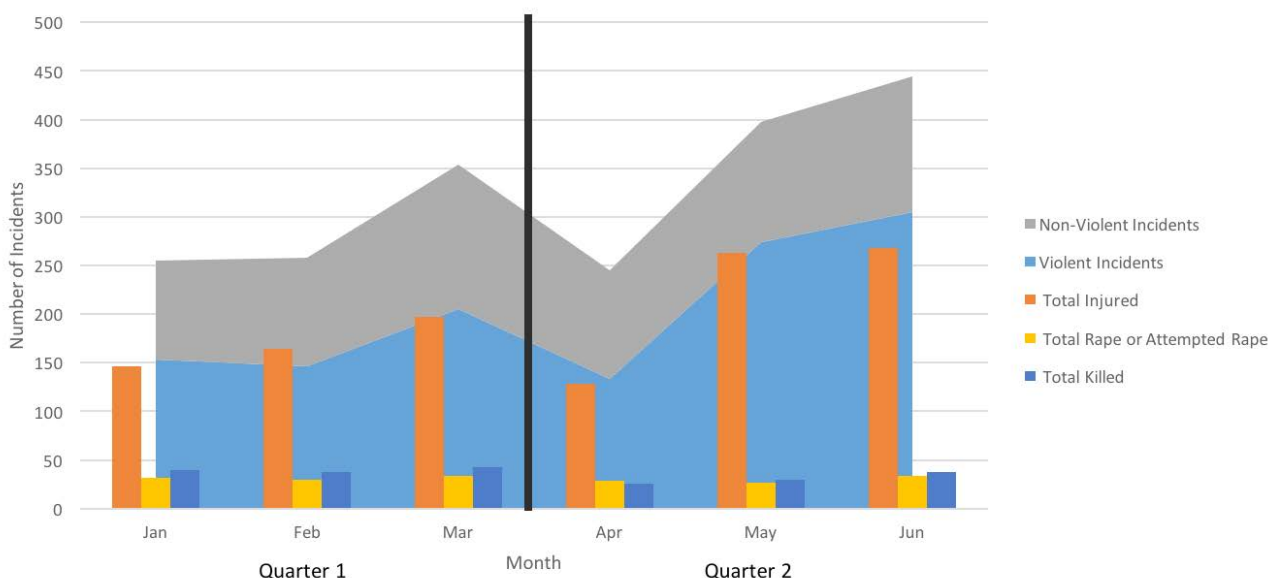
Considering that these are the first elections for local units in 20 years, and considering some of the apprehension surrounding the elections prior to their advent, the conduct of local elections in phase I and phase II was largely successful. However, the fact that a large part of the Madhesi parties have yet to be brought on board before elections in province 2 continues to be a matter of concern. The legal complexities notwithstanding, trust-building measures between the government and dissenting parties are of paramount importance for the success of September's third phase of local elections, as well as upcoming elections at the provincial and national level. This is not only important for mitigating potential violence, but also to ensure that all sections of the population in the Terai feel a sense of ownership when electing their representatives. It is also important to note, amid concerns for improved security, that 9 of the 12 people killed in election related violence since the announcement of elections on February 20 died as a result of police actions, highlighting the need for further training of police in crowd control situations.

²³ On June 18, an explosion near the election office of Kapilvastu district injured 9 people. On June 25, an explosion at a campaign rally of CPN-MC cadres in Nawalparasi district on June 25 injured seven. For details see <https://www.nepalmonitor.org/blog/2017/07/09/campaign-period-incidents-prior-to-second-phase-june-28-local-elections/>

²⁴ See: <https://www.nepalmonitor.org/blog/2017/06/30/factsheet-electoral-violence-and-contestation-during-nepals-local-elections-second-phase/>

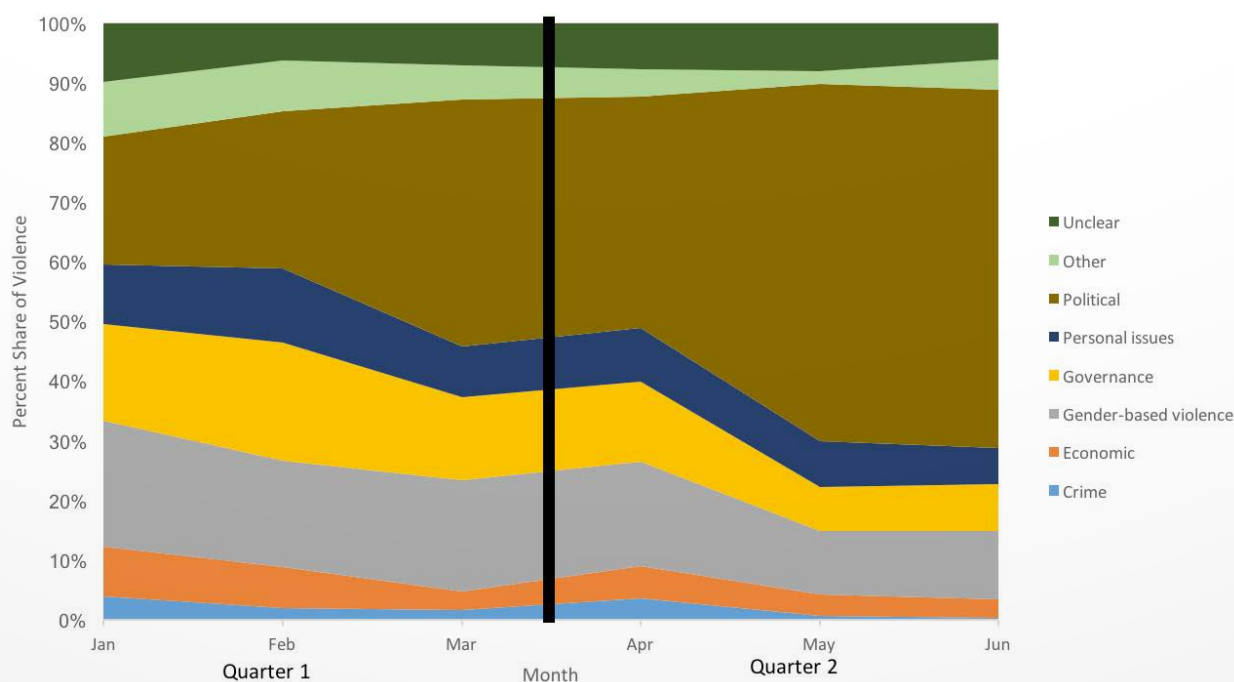
Levels of Violence Increase Compared to Previous Quarter

In comparison to the period of January to March, the period from April to June saw a 23 percent rise in total incidents (Graph 5). Violent incidents in particular spiked by 44 percent, leading to a total of 659 people injured and 94 deaths.



Graph 5: Incidents and their Impacts by Month, January - June 2017

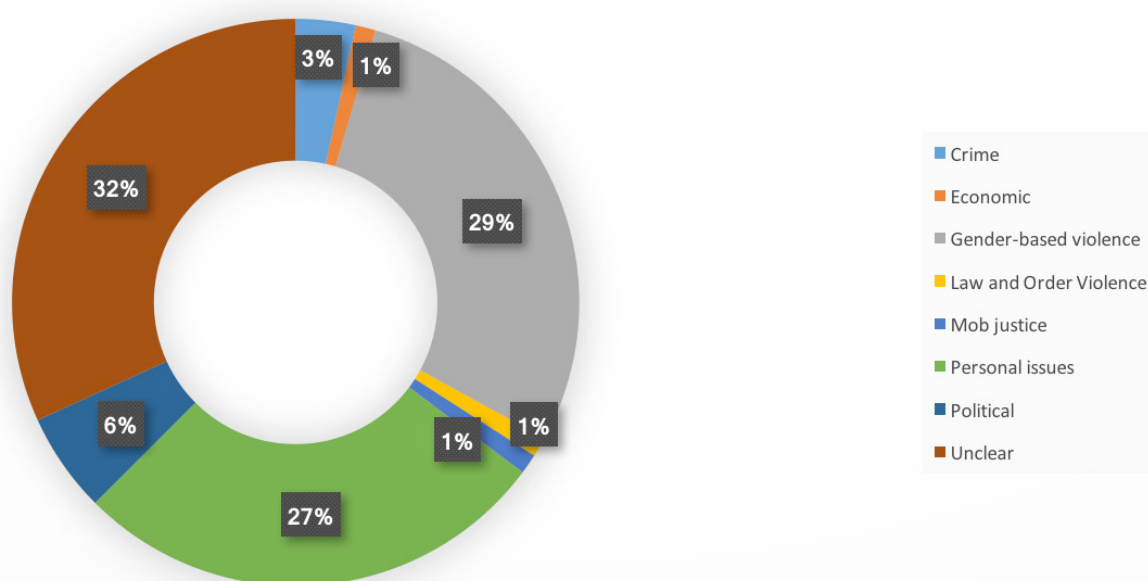
In Graph 6, the share of violent incidents stemming from political causes can be seen to account for nearly 50 percent of all violence in this quarter, compared to less than 30 percent during the previous one.



Graph 6: Drivers of Violent Incidents, January - June 2017

Personal Issues and Gender Based Violence Continue to be the Leading Causes of Death

Electoral violence led to the majority of violent incidents and injuries in this quarter, but GBV and personal issues were the leading identifiable causes of violent death (Graph 7). GBV resulted in 34 deaths, whereas disputes of a personal nature, including financial disputes, inheritance, debt and land disputes resulted in 24 deaths. These are in comparison to only six deaths due to electoral violence. Reported impacts of GBV by month dropped slightly from the first quarter, but the fact that it is still a leading cause of violent death indicates that this is an issue which merits increased attention along with commensurate efforts for prevention. It is also important to note that GBV remains an underreported section of crimes, as there is often a great deal of social stigma and family difficulties that can accompany the reporting of these incidents. Additionally, the focus of local news headlines on election-related issues may have resulted in more underreporting for GBV than usual. For those incidents reported, 88 women and girls were recorded as being victims of rape or attempted rape, over 80% of whom were 25 years of age or younger. The districts with the highest number of GBV incidents were Rupandehi with 11 incidents, and Saptari and Siraha each with 10 incidents (Map 3).



Graph 7: Causes of Violent Death, April - June 2017

The Nepal Peace Monitoring Project

The Nepal Peace Monitoring Project (PMP) is a joint initiative by Collective Campaign for Peace (COCAP)|NepalMonitor.org and The Asia Foundation, with the support of Canada's International Development Research Center (IDRC). Building on the Nepal- Monitor.org platform, the PMP focuses on violence and contestation, with a view toward improving our understanding of, and response to, violence and conflict in Nepal. The PMP also provides an instrument to measure progress against Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) targets 16.1 (reduction of all forms of violence and related death rates) and 5.2 (elimination of violence against women) in Nepal.

The PMP monitors:

Violence: any incident involving the intentional use of physical force against another person or group that results or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, or other forms of physical harm to persons or damage to property.

Non-violent contestation: demonstrations, protests or other types of non-violent events that involve collective action and may be of potential significance for violence dynamics in Nepal. This includes strikes (bandha), hunger strikes, padlocking and other forms of political protest. Incidents involving intimidation and threats but no direct physical violence are also tracked.

PMP uses a broad range of information sources, including national and district-level newspapers (from 25 districts), police reports, reports of human rights organizations, as well as reports by international agencies, civil society organizations and direct reports by citizens.

For each incident, the PMP collects detailed information on the following variables: time and location of the incident, form of the incident, weapons used, reported cause/motive of the incident (political competition, land dispute, communal tensions, crime etc.), affiliations of perpetrators and victims, human impacts (broken down by gender and age) and damage to property.

For more information on methodology, please refer to the coding handbook [here](#).
For a guide to how to download the database click [here](#).

Local Elections in Nepal 2017

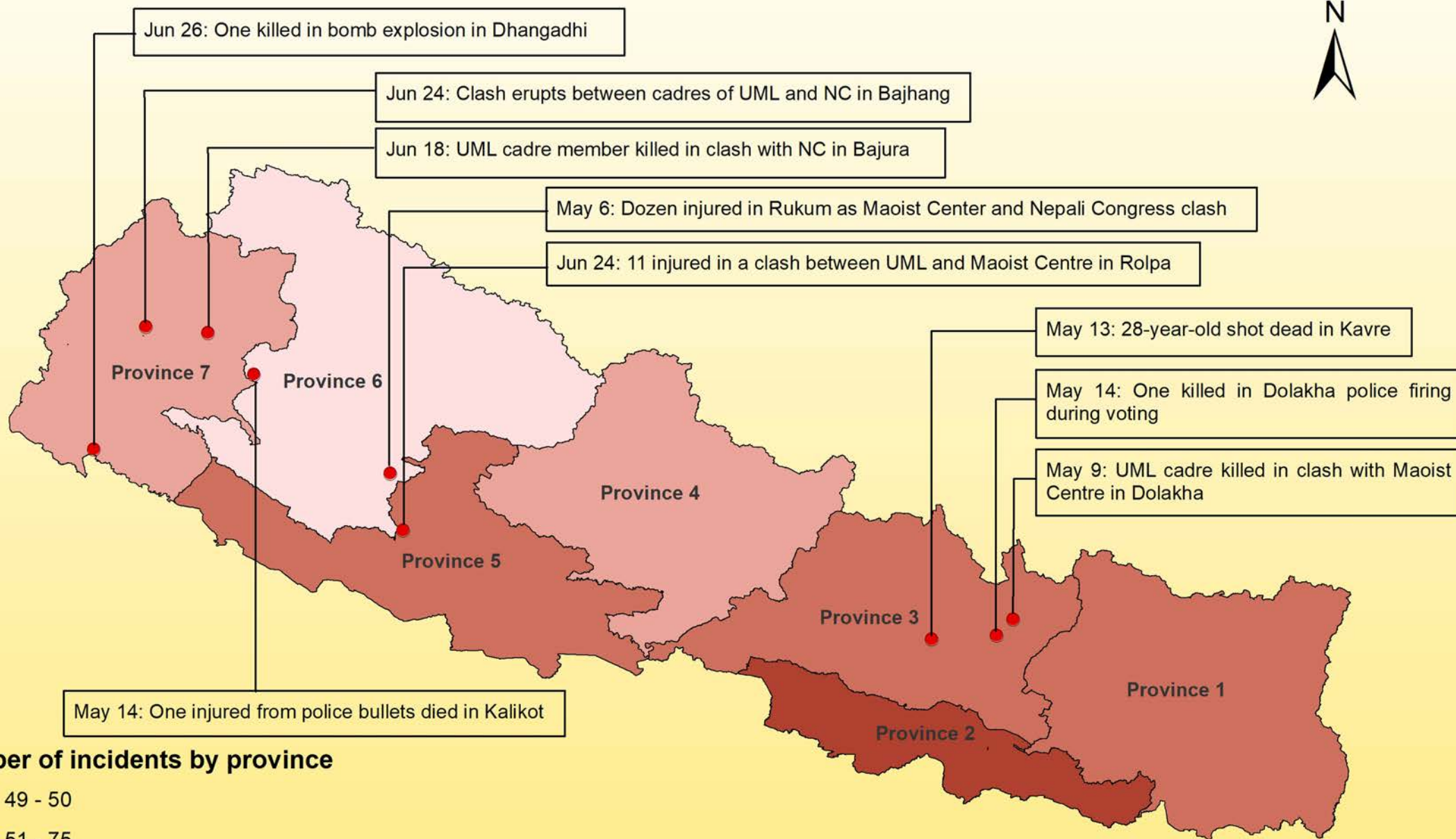
	Phase I (May 2 to May 21)*	Phase II (June 18 to July 5)*	Feb. 20 to June 30
Total Incidents	195	158	679
Violent Incidents	144	128	393
Forms of Electoral Violence			
Clashes/Assaults/Fights	69	37	153
IEDs/Hoax Bombs	40	79	122
Vandalism/Arson	28	10	97
Abductions	2	-	4
Other	4	1	16
Political Actors Involved in Electoral Violence			
Major Political Parties	63	34	116
Madhes-based Parties	-	3	86
CPN	17	8	32
Unclear	55	84	143
Other	15	3	26
Security Forces	2	2	22
Impacts			
Deaths	4	2	12
Injured	172	155	425
Vehicles damaged	37	17	145
Buildings damaged	5	2	30

* Includes incidents during the campaign period - starting with candidate registration, silence period and election day - and one week of vote counting.

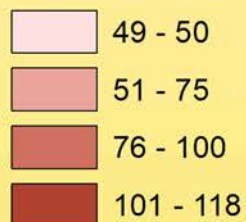
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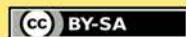
Map 1: Incidents Related to Local Elections, Phase I & II



Number of incidents by province



● Incident resulting deaths or more than 10 injured



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Map 2: Violent Incidents and Resulting Deaths, Apr-Jun 2017

