





**VIOLENCE TREND AND CIVIC
SPACE ANALYSIS AMID
COVID-19 IN NEPAL**

A MONTHLY BRIEF: 16 FEBRUARY - 15 MARCH 2021

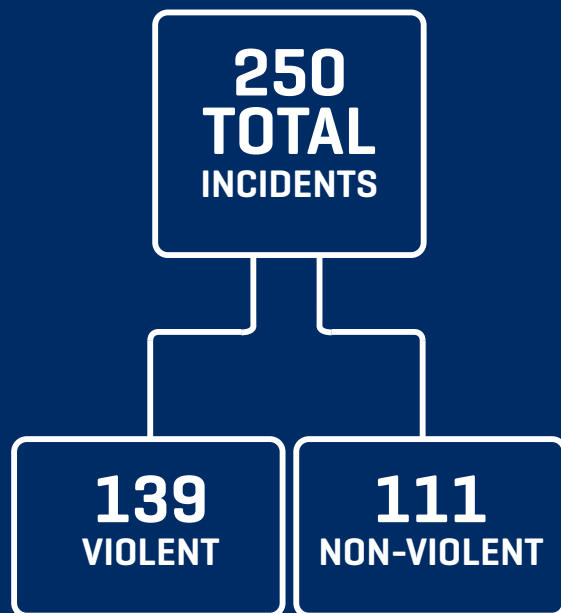


This report from Violence Monitoring and Shrinking Civic Space in Nepal amid Covid-19 [VMSCS] Project evaluates the trends of violent and non-violent contestation with the objective of presenting their impact on civic space in Nepal from 16 February to 15 March 2021. Data of violent and non-violent incidents are compiled from reports mapped by NepalMonitor.org, which uses a broad range of information from all major online news portals, national and local newspapers, Nepal Police, Civil Society Organizations [CSOs] working for human rights, and incident reports directly submitted to the Collective Campaign for Peace [COCAP].

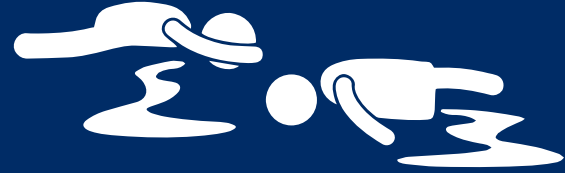


OVERVIEW OF INCIDENTS

From 16 February to 15 March 2021, a total of 250 incidents were recorded. Compared to the previous month [16 January - 15 February 2021 with 463 total incidents], there was a decrease of incidents by 46.004%. Of the total incidents reported, 111 incidents were non-violent in nature and 139 were violent incidents, which injured 70 and took the lives of 29 people.



29 KILLED



The **violent incidents** mainly involved group clash, sexual assault, violent demonstrations, arson, murder/attempted murder, vandalism, assault, violence against civilians, infanticide, remote violence [explosion of pressure cooker bombs in Parsa and Siraha], abduction and fight.

The **non-violent incidents** included demonstrations, sit-ins, road blocks, strikes, arrests, discrimination, black marketing, threat/intimidation and other forms of non-violent protests.

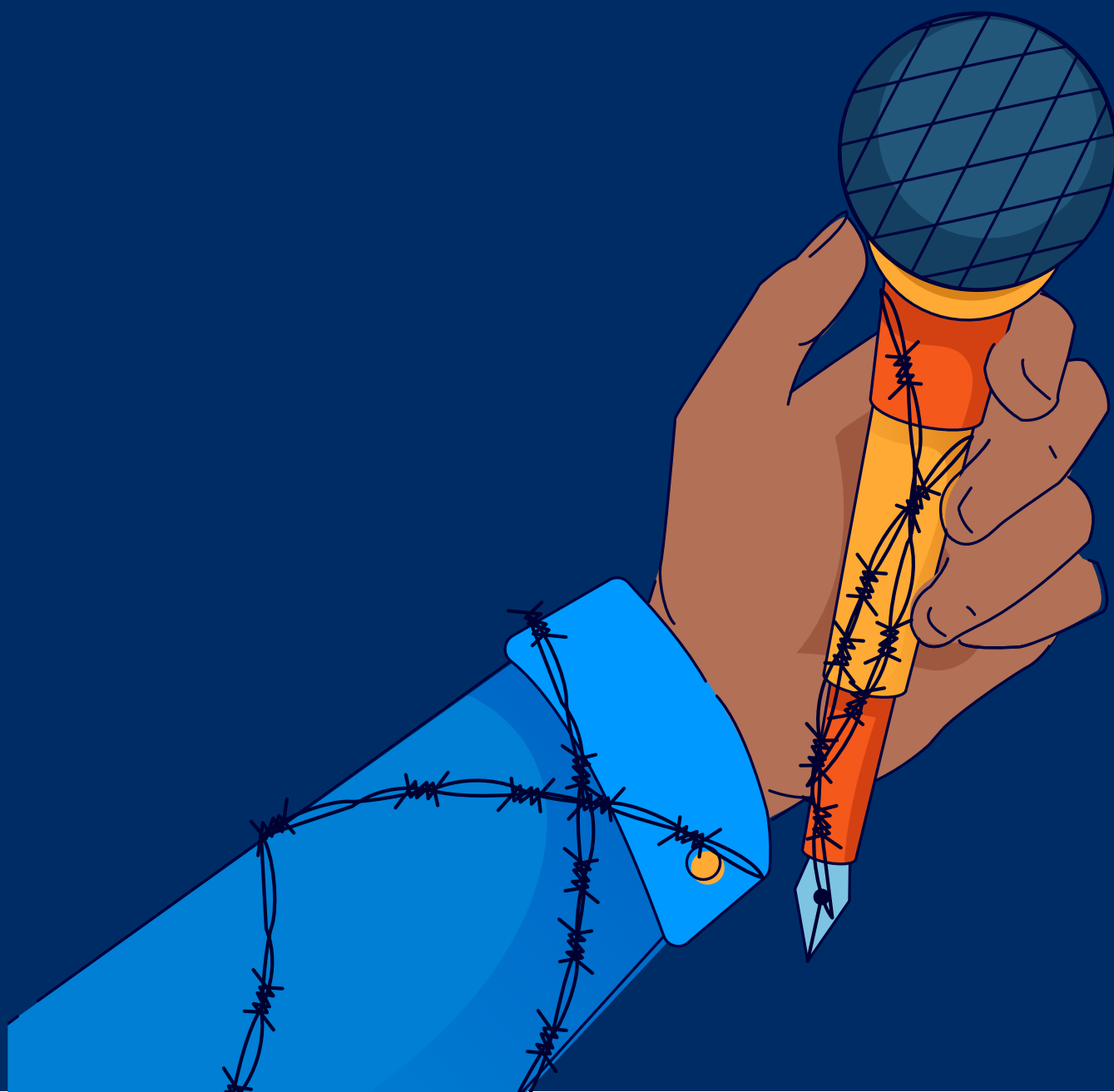
70
INJURED




CIVIC FREEDOM UNDER THREAT AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

While access to reliable information and freedom of expression are crucial in times of crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic has put ever stronger pressure on civic space, journalists and rights activists worldwide. Despite the Constitution of Nepal protecting the civic freedoms, it has continuously come under attack during the pandemic and violations of such rights have been witnessed more often. These violations include censorship of free speech, targeting of media outlets and detentions of journalists and the rights activists. The state has further continued to pass restrictive laws, bills, and directives, to control civil liberties.

Equally, civilians, journalists and human rights defenders (HRDs) have experienced threats, attacks, harassment and intimidation. The demonstrators are detained, protests are disrupted and excessive force is used by the state as a measure to disperse the crowd during peaceful protests. Consequently, the protestors, rights activists, media personnels and media houses are restrained from exercising their rights to freedom of speech, expression, association, and to assemble peacefully without any hindrance from the government and other state actors, despite the Constitution of Nepal protecting and guaranteeing these civic freedoms.



THREATS AND ATTACKS AGAINST JOURNALISTS AND HRDS

This month witnessed arrests of rights activists, detention, torture and arrests of journalists and civilians, and mistreatment towards the officials of National Human Rights Commission [NHRC] by the Secretary of Karnali Province Chief using police force to control the situation getting tense.

For instance, police arrested 6 right activists, who staged a symbolic protest demanding justice for Nirmala Pant, who was killed after being raped.¹ A journalist was detained and tortured, he was beaten for four hours straight on his way back to his residence, by the police on February 23. However, the police personnel involved in the violation have denied all accusations and said the journalist was called to interrogate due to the increase in theft cases in the district.²

On March 02, a Journalist was arrested by police while trying to meet the activists of the civil movement arrested on February 24, while protesting against the road expansion in Kathmandu, saying that Journalist was taken under control for taking the photos of the activists without permission. Police also arrested two other civilians demanding the release of the activists.³

Similarly, a Secretary of Karnali Province Chief mistreated the officials of the National Human Rights Commission [NHRC] while discussing the demands of the Badi community of Karnali, demanding food, cloth, and shelter and about the initiatives being taken by the Karnali state government. As the issue was being discussed, the secretary called the police and used force to get the NHRC - Nepalgunj chief out of the office.⁴

PROTESTS DURING THE TIME OF COVID-19

Despite the COVID restrictions in the country, people assembled, using creative and alternative forms of non-violence resistance, including online and socially distanced symbolic protests. These numerous instances of protests that have taken place in the course of COVID-19 pandemic, clearly depicts civic resilience, as the people have continued to take to the streets to demand their fundamental rights, even during a global health crisis. Nevertheless, demonstrations have been met with various forms of violations, including the detention of protesters, use of excessive force by security forces, and protests being disrupted.



POLICE INTERVENTION DURING THE PEACEFUL PROTESTS

On February 26, heritage conservationists and the civil society staged a protest demanding proper restoration of the centuries-old Kamal Pokhari located at the heart of the capital city. Activists attempted to break the concrete being used for reconstruction of the pond during the protest while police personnel walked towards them to prevent damage to the concrete.⁵ There have been a countable number of protests for the past few months, after the government came up with a plan to build a concrete lotus there, by destroying the natural pond.⁶

On February 28, police charged batons to the protesters of Badi community who were protesting against the government demanding their systematic settlement. However, the police claims to have only stopped the protestors from breaking into the Chief Minister's office and had refrained from using batons.⁷

On March 05, leaders and cadres of NC and NCP along with the locals of Sarlahi padlocked the rural municipality office and thousands vandalized the office after preparations were made to relocate the centre of the municipal office. The police used general force and fired 13 shells of tear gas in an effort to control the situation which injured a dozen locals and four policemen.⁸

On March 11, two Khuwalung Conservation activists were arrested on the complaint they lodged towards those operating boats on the Saptakoshi river. The Kirat Community was agitated after prime minister KP Oli announced the plan to demolish the Khuwalung stone that holds a cultural and mythical significance to them.⁹



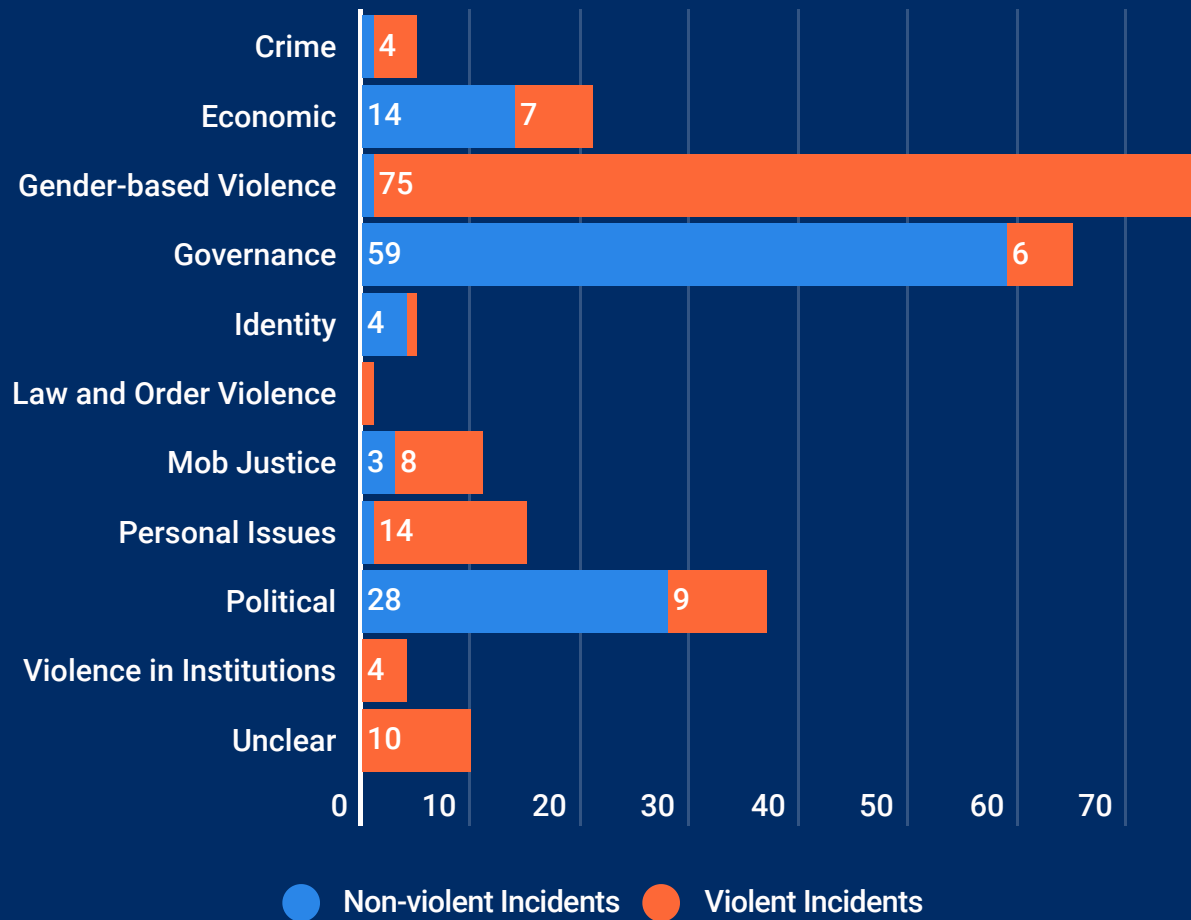
VIOLENCE AND CONTESTATION IN NEPAL

FIG. 1: PROVINCE-WISE DISAGGREGATION OF INCIDENTS



During this month Bagmati Province recorded the highest number of total incidents with 67 incidents. Gandaki Province recorded the least number of total incidents with 17 incidents. Gandaki Province also recorded the least number of non-violent incidents with 5 incidents, whereas, Karnali Province recorded the least number of violent incidents with 9 incidents. [See Fig 1]

FIG. 2: TRIGGERS OF VIOLENT AND NON-VIOLENT INCIDENTS



Looking at the top three trends of violence and contestation this month, GBV was the main trigger of incidents, with the majority of incidents involving violence. Following GBV, incidents related to governance were recorded the second highest. Then, incidents triggered by political issues were recorded the third highest, of which most incidents were non-violent in nature. [See Fig 2]



GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) RELATED INCIDENTS

From 16 February to 15 March 2021, 76 incidents related to GBV were recorded. The incidents included domestic violence, rape, sexual abuse, murder and manhandling. Out of the total number of incidents, 75 incidents were violent which injured 5 people and took the lives of 18 people. The victims of GBV include men and women of all age groups.

During this period, there were a total of 46 cases of rape and attempted rape. The youngest victims of rape were two 5 year old girls along with other minor girls aged 8 and 6 years who were raped by the same boy in Bardiya.¹⁰ Conversely, the oldest victim of rape was an 85 year old woman who was allegedly raped by an 18 year old boy in Kapilvastu.¹¹ Majority of the victims of rape are girls under the age of 12 years followed by teenage girls.

Incidents of rape also included a 23 year old differently-abled victim who was raped by a 65 year old man in West Palpa.¹² Additionally, on 20 February, a 14 year old girl was held captive for a week and raped in Gorkha.¹³

Other than rape, there were 10 incidents of sexual abuse whose youngest victim is a 4 year old boy who was abused by a 16 year old boy in Nawalparasi West.¹⁴ Other victims of sexual abuse included teenage and minor girls. 16 incidents of domestic violence were recorded whose victims were men, women, infants and the elderly. The incidents mostly include wives as the victims and husbands as the assaulter, although there were 2 incidents where the husbands were the victims.



75
CASES WERE
VIOLENT

76
GBV
RELATED



46
RAPE /
ATTEMPTED
RAPE



18
KILLED



GOVERNANCE RELATED INCIDENTS

Out of the 65 incidents related to governance, 59 incidents were non-violent and 6 incidents were violent. The incidents mostly involved demonstrations, sit-ins, assault, group clash, strike/bandh, threat/intimidation and other forms of both violent and non-violent protests. These incidents were prompted by issues related to civil rights, legal action, access to justice, commodity availability, quality of public services and other governance issues.

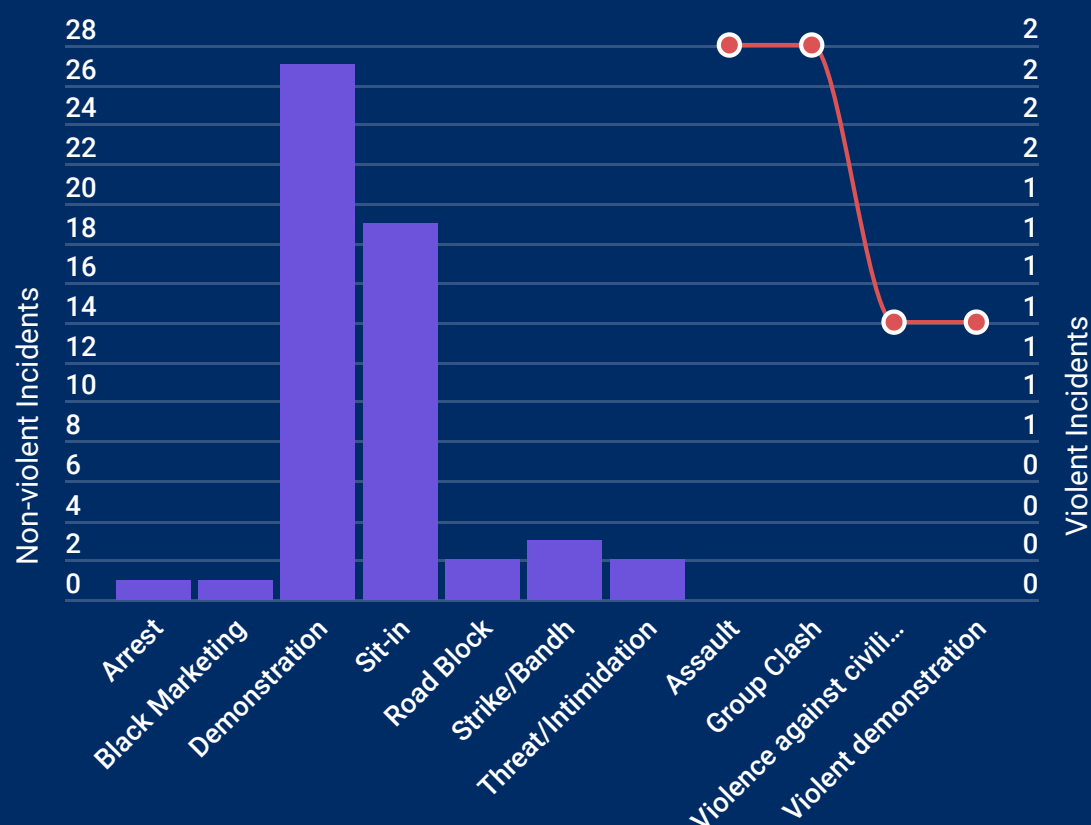
The non-violent incidents included arrests, black marketing, demonstrations, sit-ins, road blocks, strike/bandh and threat/intimidation, whereas, the violent incidents included assault, group clash, violence against civilians and violent demonstration which injured nine people.

Most of the protests were related to access to justice. Protests demanding justice for Bhagirathi and Nirmala, two young girls who were raped and murdered, continued in different parts of the country. The increase in violence against women has provoked concern and agitations. There have been multiple cases of injustice to victims due to the perceived incompetence of the government for which the people chose to fight against through various forms of demonstrations and protests.

A clash between locals took place in Jumla over the death of a boy injuring six people when police used batons and tear gas to disperse the crowd.¹⁵ Another clash between locals and police took place in Simara while trying to open the lock of Jagadamba Steel Industry, which was padlocked on 23 February by the local ward.¹⁶

On March 04, hundreds of local Nepali people came together to protest against the highhandedness of Indian security personnel against Nepali citizens. A female SSB security guard mistreated a Nepali woman on the border of Siddharthnagar on 3 March. An agreement has been reached to take action against the accused.¹⁷

FIG. 3: FORMS OF GOVERNANCE RELATED INCIDENTS



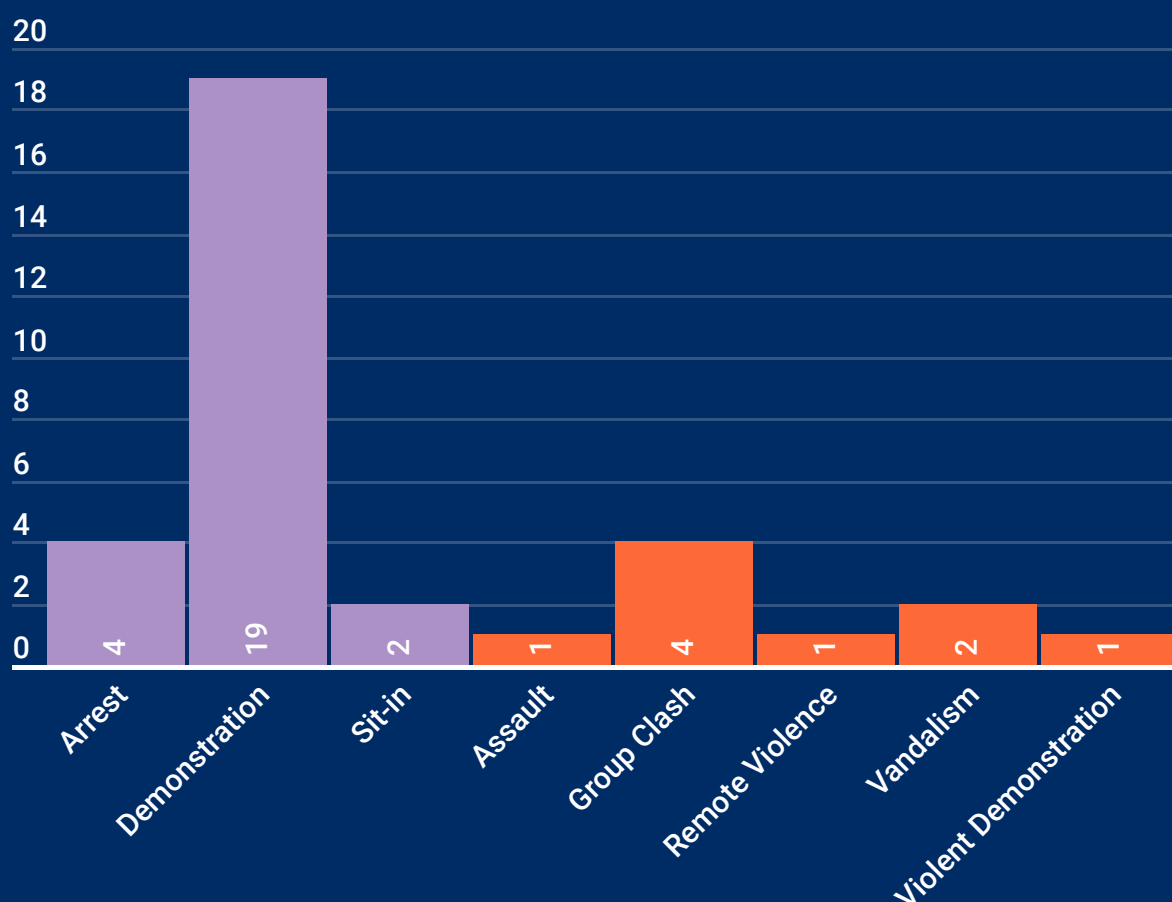
POLITICAL INCIDENTS

From 16 February to 15 March 2021, a total of 37 political incidents were recorded which marks a significant decrease of 82.46% in the total political incidents compared to the previous month [16 January to 15 February with 211 total political incidents]. Out of the total incidents, 28 incidents were non-violent and 9 incidents were violent which injured 22 people.

The incidents included group clash, vandalism, demonstration, sit-in, remote violence and politically motivated arrests. The political parties affiliated in the incidents include Nepal Communist Party (NCP) faction led by PM Oli, NCP faction led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) - Madhav Kumar Nepal, Janata Samajwadi Party, Bibeksheel Sajha Party and Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) led by Netra Bikram Chand.

Majority of the incidents were a continuation of the protests against PM Oli's decision regarding the dissolution of the House of Representatives in December 2020. Protests led by various political parties and unions took place, some of which were violent. Most violent incidents included clashes between supporters of the Oli faction and Prachanda-Nepal faction of NCP.

FIG. 4: FORMS OF POLITICAL INCIDENTS



In an interview, NCP's Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal expressed the intention that India would be comfortable if the Nepal Congress, Janata Samajwadi Party and Prachanda-Nepal led faction of NCP form a government together. This statement sparked protests led by students¹⁸ and cadres of ANNFSU closer to the PM Oli faction of NCP.¹⁹

On 19 February, A Broad Citizen's Movement staged a march rally against the dissolution of the House of Representatives as well as demanding the access of Tundikhel to the public, stating it as the symbol of democracy.²⁰ Furthermore, the Civil Society members staged a symbolic demonstration in favour of democracy on 07 March.²¹ Protests demanding the restoration of monarchy and redeclaring Nepal as a Hindu State took place in Nepalgunj²² and Kathmandu.²³

The Communist Party of Nepal [CPN] led by Netra Bikram Chand [Biplav] was involved in about 5 incidents in which 4 incidents were of politically motivated arrests of their cadres. On the night of 01 March, a pressure cooker bomb was exploded at Hulas Steel and Industries Pvt Ltd in Parsa. The bomb is suspected to have been planted by Biplav after the industry refused to oblige with and pay the donation amount of Rs. 1.5 million.²⁴

ENDNOTES

1. See: Six right activists demanding justice for Nirmala arrested in Kanchanpur
2. See: Journalist detained and tortured at police station in Surkhet
3. See: Journalist arrested on charge of reporting on arrested activists of civil movement
4. See: NHRC team mistreated by Karnali Chief Secretary
5. See: In Pictures: Heritage activists demand natural restoration of Kamal Pokhari
6. See: Activists break Kamalpokhari's concrete slab demanding preservation – OnlineKhabar English News
7. See: Police charged batons on the protestors of Badi community, some injured
8. See: Violent demonstration in Sarlahi over relocating the rural municipality's center
9. See: Khuwalung Conservation activists arrested
10. See: Complaint lodged against teenage boy on charge of raping four minor girls in Bardiya
11. See: Youth arrested for raping elderly woman in Kapilvastu
12. See: Elderly man arrested on charge of raping differently-abled woman in Palpa
13. See: Girl held captive for a week and raped in Gorkha
14. See: Boy accused of sexual abuse arrested in Nawalparasi West
15. See: Local clash with police over death of a boy in Jumla
16. See: Locals and police clash in Bara
17. See: Protest at Sunauli checkpoint after Nepali woman assaulted by SSB
18. See: Students in Kailali stage demonstration against Prachanda's Statement
19. See: ANNFSU stage demonstration in Kathmandu against Prachanda's statement
20. See: Comprehensive Civil Movement stage rally demanding opening of Tundikhel to public
21. See: In Pictures: Civil Society members demonstrate in support of democracy
22. See: Motorcycle and car rally taken in Nepalgunj demanding restoration of Hindu state and monarchy
23. See: Symbolic demonstration demanding restoration of Monarchy and Hindu State
24. See: <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/explosive-device-goes-off-at-hulas-steel>

VIOLENCE MONITORING AND SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE IN NEPAL AMID COVID-19 PROJECT

The Violence Monitoring and Shrinking Civic Space (VMSCS) is a joint initiative by Collective Campaign for Peace (COCAP) and Innovation for Change (I4C) - South Asia Hub. The project aims to focus on violence and contestation, with a view toward improving our understanding of, and response to, violence and shrinking civic-space incidents in Nepal amid Covid-19. The VMSCS also provides as an instrument to measure progress against Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Targets 5.2 (elimination of violence against women) and 16.1 (reduction of all forms of violence and related death rates) in Nepal.



