

Summary

India's ongoing election and the coming announcement of results on June 1 could prove to be a source of escalating electoral violence in the country. The election, which Prime-Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is forecasted to comfortably win, has sparked electoral violence and unrest also seen in 2019. Supporters and members of parties have clashed and rioted, particularly in rural villages. Such violence may spread to the capital, and big cities like Kolkata, where opposition parties enjoy strong support.

Recent events and developments

India's ongoing election, and its imminent result, could prove to be a source of electoral violence and unrest throughout the country, including in and around large urban centres such as New Delhi, Kolkata. India's 2019 election saw opposition parties allege voter fraud on part of the electoral commission (EC) and BJP. It was further marred by electoral violence and unrest, particularly in Kolkata, where clashes between BJP and Trinamool Congress (TMC) members resulted in over 40 deaths. 2024's election, which sees the BJP competing against numerous opposition parties, most notably the Indian National Congress (INC), has too seen instances of electoral violence and unrest. In rural areas around New Delhi, multiple instances have been reported. On May 10, unidentified assailants pelted stones at a Jannyak Janta Party convoy in Jind, 110km Northwest of New Delhi, causing multiple injuries. On April 23, members of the INC, and two other opposition parties clashed with each other in a town hall in Amroha city, 107km East of New Delhi. On April 20, BJP members forcefully stopped a car and assaulted the driver in Aligarh city, in a case of political rivalry. In Kolkata, on May 2, unknown assailants fired shots into a TMC office in Howrah, injuring an unknown number of people. On May 1, TMC members assaulted and injured BJP members, including a woman candidate in Basirhat as they were campaigning. On April 27, a woman affiliated with the BJP was assaulted by TMC members in central Kolkata, injuring her. On the same day, TMC members clashed in the Baguiati area, killing 1 person.

Impact assessment

As the Indian election closes in on its end date on June 1, politically motivated violence is likely to continue. Whilst violence has been largely localised in rural settlements outside of Delhi, it is not unthinkable that clashes between BJP and opposition party members will take place in the city itself, a city in which a strong majority support the opposition Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). Furthermore, the likelihood of such electoral violence is likely to rise as election result announcements are made from June 1, in an election where the BJP is forecasted to comfortably win. In Kolkata, where the TMC enjoys considerable support, continued clashes between TMC and BJP members are likely, especially if electoral results are alleged to have been rigged, as seen in the 2019 election. The most likely targets of politically motivated assaults are members, candidates, and offices of political parties. Additionally, attacks on polling stations have been reported throughout India, and such attacks could increase in frequency following the announcement of election results. In cases of violent unrest, Indian authorities may restrict access to internet and cellular services, as was seen in West Bengal, Rajasthan, and Kashmir during the 2019 elections. Furthermore, security forces are likely to crack down on cases of large protests and civil unrest, using dispersion measures such as water cannons and tear gas. Protests will most likely take place by polling stations, EC offices, government buildings, and in public squares. Organisations perceived to be connected to political parties, through relations or projects, may too be targeted for harassment or attacks.

Advice from Forth Global

- Advise staff traveling to India to undertake a several days long HEAT training prior to travel.
- Monitor local news and communicate with local partners to remain updated on developing events.
- Advise staff to avoid polling stations, party and government offices.
- Avoid expressing any and all opinions regarding the general election, publicly and online.
- Cooperate with Indian security forces and police.

Customized advice

Please contact us for specific advice:

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