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# Regional Overview Asia-Pacific September 2023

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October 5, 2023

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## Afghanistan-Pakistan: Cross-border violence intensifies

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Violence across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border intensified in September. Taliban and Pakistani forces clashed following an attempt by the Taliban to build a security outpost along the Torkham border, leading to the closure of the border crossing for several days. During the month, it was reported that the Taliban had established more than 100 border observation posts along the Durand line in areas where the Pakistani government had previously objected to them being built.<sup>1</sup>[Barakatullah Hasand, 'Over 100 Afghan Security Outposts Built Along Durand Line,' TOLO News, 19 September 2023](#) Tensions along the disputed border area persist, as Pakistan sees border security as key to preventing militant activity.<sup>2</sup>[Frud Bezhan Daud Khattak, 'Pakistan Fences Off Afghanistan, Impacting Families And Fighters,' Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 5 February 2021](#) Such activity, notably by the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), continued in September as the group engaged Pakistan security forces in dozens of clashes across Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The violence is part of a longer-term increase in TTP activity in Pakistan. ACLED records over 400 political violence events involving the group thus far in 2023, more than double the events recorded in all of 2022. Notably, the TTP and Pakistan security forces clashed in the relatively inactive Chitral district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on 6 September, after the TTP announced that many of its members had entered the district.<sup>3</sup>[Abubakar Siddique, 'The Azadi Briefing: Border Clashes And Closures Mark Deteriorating Pakistan-Taliban Ties,' Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 8 September 2023](#) Two weeks after the clashes in Chitral district, the Taliban, which Pakistan has accused of harboring the TTP, hosted a high-level delegation from Pakistan in Kabul to discuss its efforts to crack down on the TTP. Pakistan officials present at the meeting said the Taliban claimed to have arrested 200 TTP militants who were reportedly returning from the attack.<sup>4</sup>[Ayaz Gul, 'Taliban: 200 Anti-Pakistan Militants Arrested in Afghanistan,' Voice of America, 27 September 2023](#)

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## China: Increased civilian targeting ahead of the Asian Games and National Day

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In September, police and unidentified perpetrators engaged in increased levels of civilian targeting in China. These events particularly affected petitioners filing complaints against local bureaucrats to the National Public Complaints and Proposals Administration, a government department designated to hear local grievances. Such complaints often stem from local officials failing to adequately address the petitioner's problems.<sup>5</sup>[Stella Chen, 'The CMP Dictionary: Petitioning,' China Media Project, 20 May 2022](#) While there are frequent delays in reporting on civilian targeting in China, ACLED records at least nine incidents of forced disappearances and attacks on petitioners in September, compared to three and zero documented events in July and August, respectively. The rise came as China launched the Asian Games on 23 September, and ahead of National Day on 1 October, which commemorates the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. With more foreign journalists present for the Asian Games, and local people off work during the week of National Day, the central administration announced their intention to 'maintain social stability.'<sup>6</sup>[Zhang Tian Pei, 'Deepen effects of the 'Summer Campaign,' Emphasis on Current Work on Security, Ensure Safety of Important Festivals and Major Events,' People Daily, 29 September 2023](#); [Shanghai Qingpu district government, 'Zhao Xiang town holds project meeting, strategising work on petitioning, maintaining social stability and safety during Hangzhou Asian Games and to "protect National Day, welcome China International Import Expo",' 26 September 2023](#) High-profile events often lead to spikes in civilian targeting in China (*for more, see [Violence Against Civilians by State Forces in Mainland China: 2018-2020](#)*).

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## **India: Uptick in clashes between state forces and militants in J&K**

There was an uptick in clashes between Indian security forces and militants in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) in September. Fighting was concentrated in Anantnag district, where security forces carried out a weeklong anti-militancy operation against the Pakistan-based militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and its offshoot, The Resistance Front (TRF). Five security personnel, including two officers and at least three militants, including one LeT commander, were killed during the clashes. The TRF claimed responsibility for the initial ambush on security personnel, calling it retaliation for the killing of a LeT militant inside a mosque in Pakistan-administered Azad Jammu & Kashmir by unidentified perpetrators earlier in the month.<sup>7</sup>[Mir Ehsan, 'Kashmir encounter: Two Lashkar militants "encircled" in Anantnag,' Hindustan Times, 14 September 2023](#) Since the beginning of the year, ACLED has recorded 12 political violence events involving the TRF in J&K, nearly equaling the 13 recorded in all of 2022. In January 2023, the TRF was designated as a 'terrorist' organization by the Indian government after a deadly attack targeting the Hindu community in the Jammu division.<sup>8</sup>[Vijaita Singh, 'Centre declares The Resistance Front a terrorist organisation,' The Hindu, 6 January 2023](#) Following the latest round of violence, the Indian government has deployed two additional Central Reserve Police Force battalions to J&K's Pir Panjal area, which serves as a militant hideout due to its

mountainous and forested terrain. This area has been the site of several recent deadly encounters between militants and security forces, as militants have shifted towards carrying out ambushes from forest hideouts rather than from village hideouts, which are now in short supply following the crackdown on militancy in the region.<sup>9</sup>[Sumit Bhargav, 'CAPF deployment bolstered in Rajouri, Poonch districts,' Greater Kashmir, 29 September 2023](#); [Safwat Zargar, 'Why Pir Panjal is now a staging ground for militant strikes, from Rajouri to Anantnag,' Scroll \(India\), 22 September 2023](#)

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## **Myanmar: PSLF/TNLA activity expands into Mandalay region**

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Fighting between the military and the Palaung State Liberation Front/Ta'ang National Liberation Army (PSLF/TNLA) nearly doubled in September, continuing an upward trend that began in July. While the majority of clashes occurred in northern Shan state where the PSLF/TNLA traditionally operate, they also extended into neighboring Mandalay region, specifically Mogoke township. More than a quarter of the battles between the military and the PSLF/TNLA during the month were reported in Mogoke township.<sup>10</sup>[Hein Htoo Zan, 'Resistance Forces Seize Myanmar Junta Outpost in Mandalay's Mogoke,' Irrawaddy, 27 September 2023](#) While sporadic clashes between the military and PSLF/TNLA have previously been reported in the township, the current fighting exceeds the past activity. Mogoke township sits at a strategic location leading into northern Shan state. Two battalions of the People's Defense Force (PDF) under the command of the National Unity Government (NUG) claimed to have fought alongside the PSLF/TNLA in some battles, reportedly as part of *Operation Moe Lone Hmine*, which began in the second week of September.<sup>11</sup>[Moe Oo and Myat Pan, 'Myanmar army's clashes with TNLA, PDF allies escalate in Mandalay Region, northern Shan State,' Myanmar Now, 28 September 2023](#) Clashes continued throughout the month, with the military carrying out airstrikes after reportedly suffering heavy losses, contributing in part to the increase in political violence in Mandalay region in September.

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## **Philippines: Red-tagging reported as martial law anniversary marked**

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Fighting between the communist New People's Army (NPA) and the military was increasingly lethal in September, with fatalities from battles between state forces and the NPA nearly doubling in September compared to August. Notably, six rebels were killed during successive clashes in Bohol province on 7 September.<sup>12</sup>[John Rey Saavedra and Mary Judaline Partlow, '6 alleged NPA rebels killed in Bohol encounter,' Philippine News Agency, 7 September 2023](#) Meanwhile, the government's alleged practice of staging fake

surrenders of NPA rebels was highlighted in a press conference on 19 September when two environmental activists – both of whom had been missing since 2 September – claimed that they had been abducted and were being coerced into presenting themselves as surrendering NPA rebels.<sup>13</sup>[Iya Gozum, “We were abducted’: Activists counter military account at NTF-ELCAC presser,’ Rappler, 19 September 2023;](#) [Raymund Villanueva, ‘2 environmental activists defy military, expose abduction,’ Bulatlat, 19 September 2023](#) Such red-tagging of activists – attempts by the government to label its critics communists – was among the issues highlighted in protests across the country on 21 September. The demonstrations were held to commemorate the declaration of Martial Law 51 years earlier by the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, Sr., the father of the current president.<sup>14</sup>[Rappler, ‘LOOK: Groups nationwide raise anti-terror law fear on 51st Martial Law commemoration,’ 21 September 2023;](#) [Abby Boiser, Krixia Subingsubing, and Vincent Cabreza, ‘Street outcry, Palace silence on martial law anniversary,’ Inquirer.net, 22 September 2023](#)

*For more on the communist insurgency in the Philippines and the government’s practice of red-tagging, see ACLED’s report: [The Communist Insurgency in the Philippines: A ‘Protracted People’s War’ Continues](#)*

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### Methodology

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See the [Codebook](#) and the [User Guide](#) for an overview of ACLED’s core methodology. For additional documentation, check the [Resource Library](#). Region-specific methodology briefs can be accessed below.

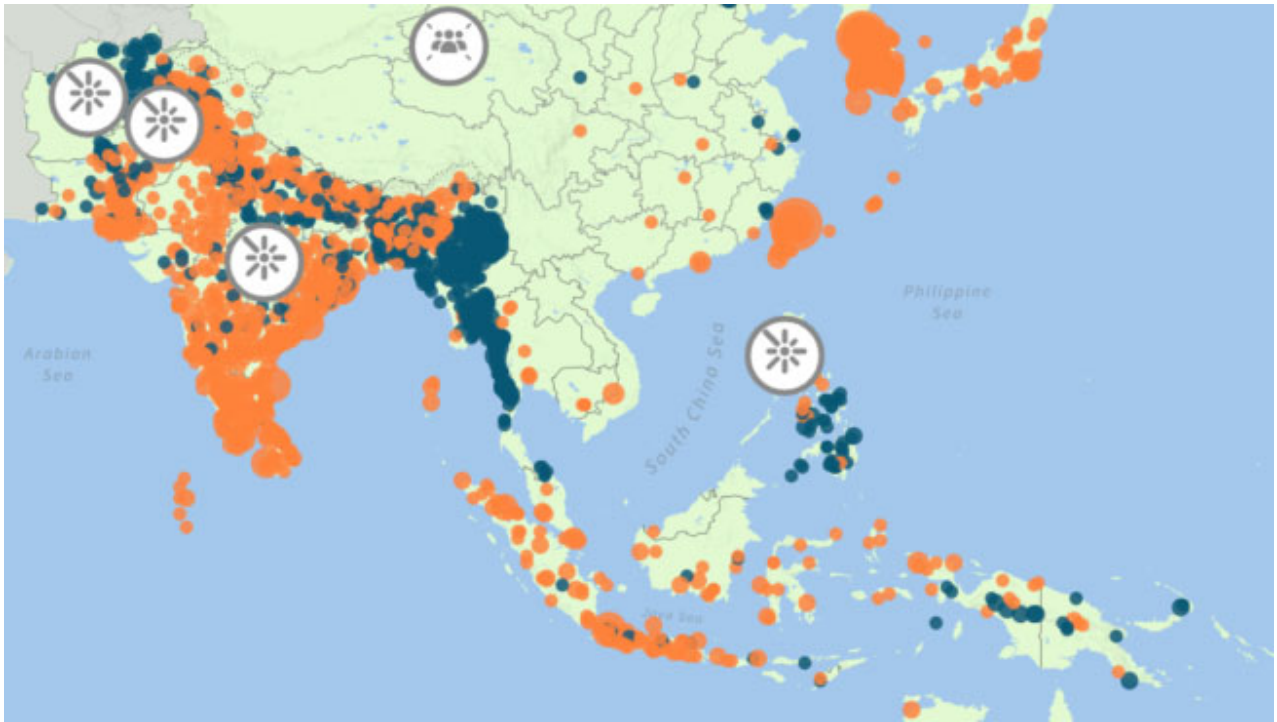
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- [Methodology and Coding Decisions for Political Violence and Demonstrations in China](#)
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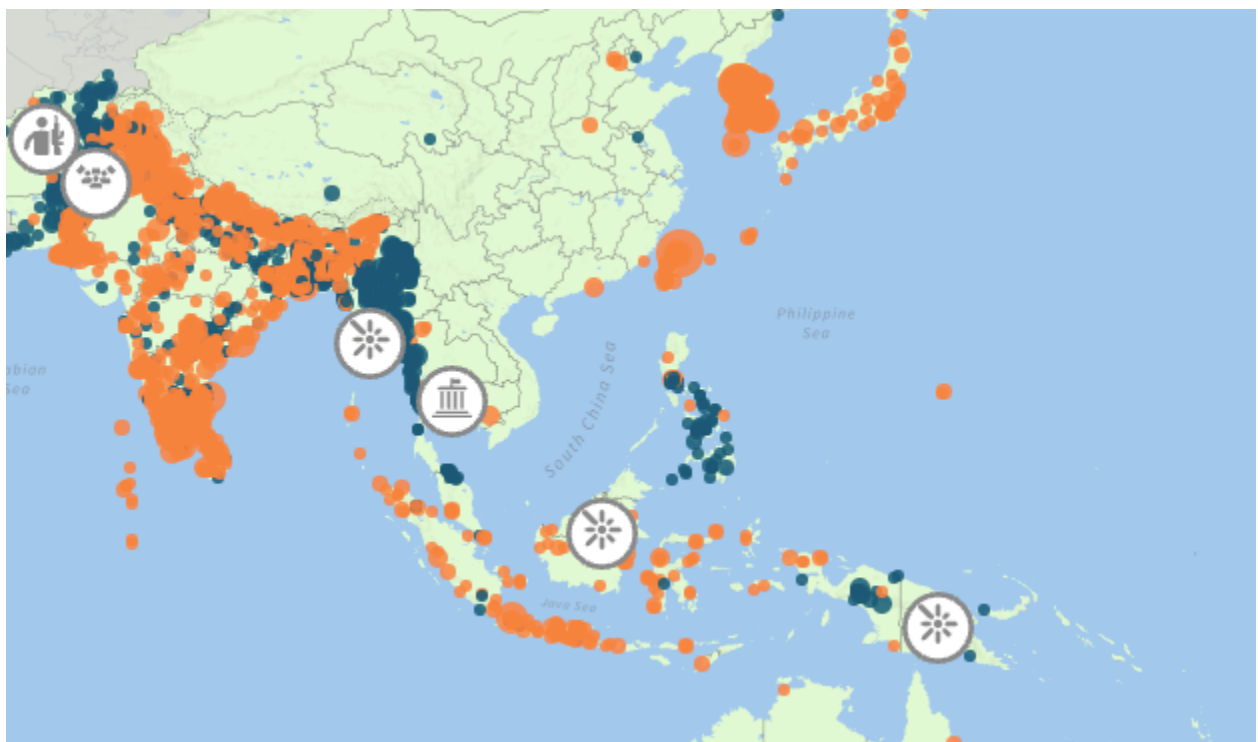


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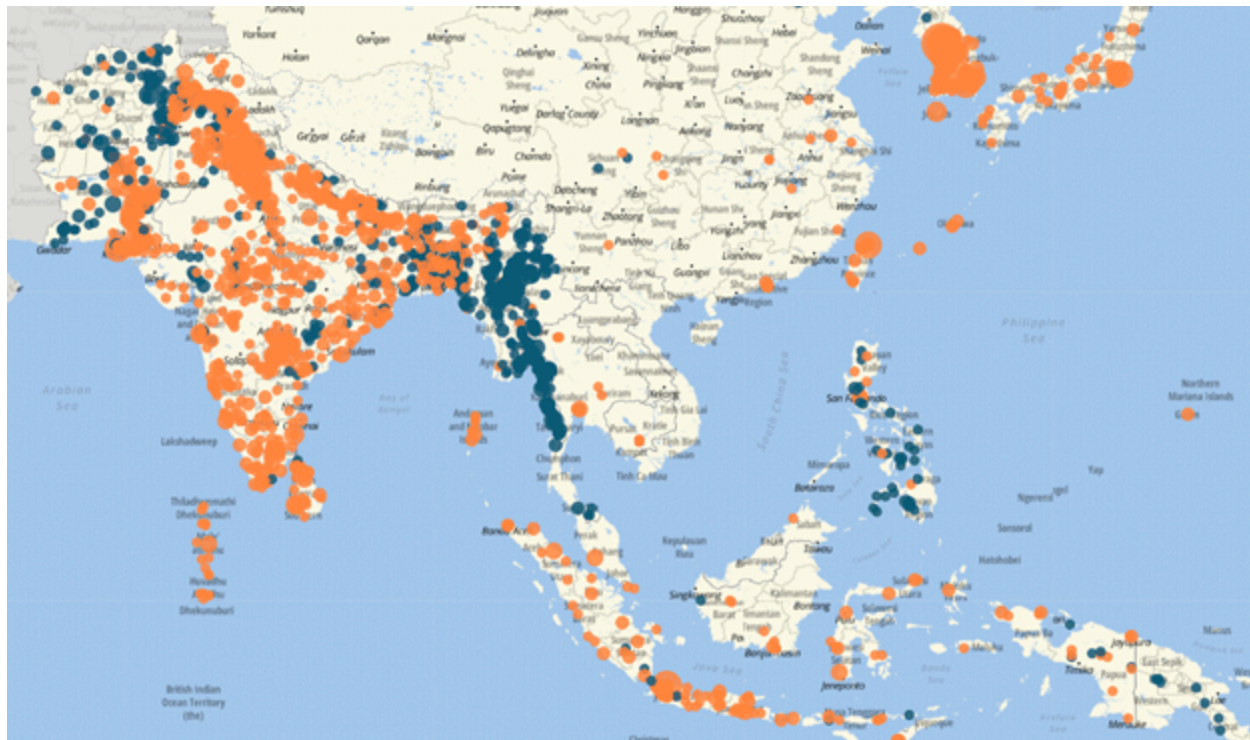


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