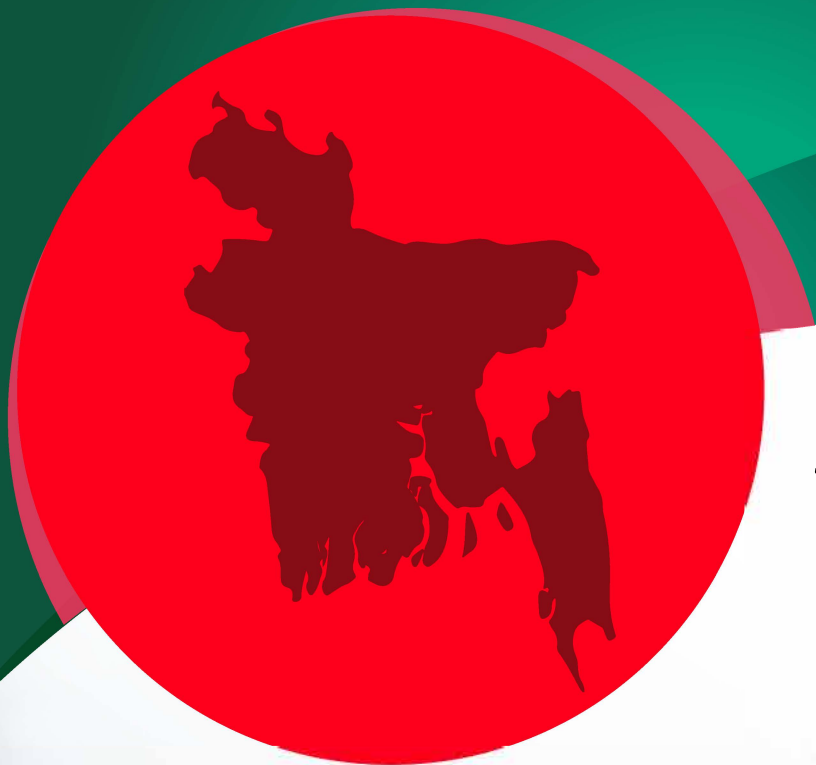


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# Digital Media and Violent Extremism in Bangladesh: Profiles and Narratives

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## Abstract

Despite the visible presence of violent extremist groups, and evidence of their connection with transnational groups such as Islamic State and Al-Qaeda, the number of empirical studies on this topic is limited in Bangladesh. There have been over 50 violent extremist attacks in Bangladesh in recent years (2013-2017) and digital media was used in different ways in most of these attacks. There appear to be no scholarly articles addressing this phenomenon in Bangladesh. To fill this gap, this project sheds light on the subject by analyzing life stories of Bangladeshi violent extremists. The data for this project was collected from content analysis of newspaper reports, Jihadi online magazines, and videos. Besides presenting current trends on how extremists are using digital media, this paper identifies challenges for counter-terrorism efforts in Bangladesh and provides suggestions to mitigate these challenges.

## 1 Introduction

Violent extremist organizations in Bangladesh, Islamist militant groups in particular, became visible beginning in the early 1990s, and increased exponentially in the first half of the 2000s. From 1999 to February 2005, at least thirty-four attacks killed 164 people and injured another 1,735 (Islam, 2011). After 2006, Bangladesh witnessed a lull in violent attacks, only to see a reemergence of extremist groups from 2013. The first generation of Islamist militants were the products of the Afghan war (1979- 1992) and their organization, Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami Bangladesh (Movement of Islamic Holy War, or HuJIB), is the fountainhead of Islamist militancy in Bangladesh. Later, violent extremists belonging to Jamaatul Mujahedeen Bangladesh (Party of the Mujahedeen, or JMB) and Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (Awake the Muslim People of Bangladesh, or JMJB) unleashed a reign of terror, and became infamous for their killings in north- western part of Bangladesh. In early 2000s, they conducted a number of suicide attacks, and 450 simultaneous bombings using homemade explosive devices. After the arrests and quick trials of JMB and HuJIB leaders, this wave of fanatical violence was somewhat diminished, and most of their activities went underground.

In recent years, Bangladesh has experienced a new wave of violent extremism. Some believe that the availability of new communication technologies, providing and cheap and easy access to digital media, has resulted in an increase in the frequency and lethality of violent extremist incidents in Bangladesh. In fact, law enforcement agencies claim that nearly 82% of extremists are radicalized through digital media in Bangladesh (Khan and Islam, 2017). In a research study conducted by

Bangladesh police involving arrested militant suspects, it has been found that a large number of individuals were radicalized through social media platforms (Khan and Islam, 2017). Although the study was conducted on suspected militants, and the percentage of the suspected militants radicalized “solely” through social media seems to be too high to be credible, the findings nonetheless point to the significance of digital media in contemporary extremism. In this new wave of violent extremism, induced and facilitated by digital media, extremist groups have reorganized and regrouped themselves, thereby reemerging as a crucial threat to the country since 2013.

According to an estimate, at least 40 pro-secular writers and activists, foreign nationals, and members of minority religious groups have been murdered by the violent extremists between 2013 and 2017 (Khan, 2017). Among the victims of these brutal, and increasingly brazen, killings were self-proclaimed atheist bloggers and publishers. Several of these attacks have been reportedly carried out by the followers of the Islamic State (IS) and Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS). They include the murder of foreign nationals, shootings and bomb blasts at Shiite gatherings, and attacks on shrines, churches, and other minority religious personalities.

Perhaps the most gruesome and well-known of these attacks was the Holey Artisan incident. On July 1, 2016, extremists stormed into Holey Artisan Bakery, a restaurant that was popular among expatriate residents in an upscale neighborhood in Dhaka. They stabbed to death 20 hostages, including Indian, Italian, Japanese, and US citizens. A twelve-hour siege ended with an operation by security forces, and two law enforcers and four militants were killed in the gunfight. Between 2001 and 2017, a steady increase in the number of violent incidents in

Bangladesh has been observed. These have led to 4,809 deaths and 197,018 injuries (Parvez, 2018). Domestic political turmoil, coupled with international developments, notably the rise of IS and AQIS, have made Bangladesh a target for violent extremist groups. In most of the recent attacks, extremists used digital media in several ways.

Notwithstanding the importance of digital media in the perpetration of violent extremism in Bangladesh, there is a lacuna in the existing literature on this matter. To fill this gap, this study examines what role digital media may have in breeding or nurturing extremism by analyzing the life stories of several Bangladeshi violent extremists involved in violent attacks. I argue that this type of extremism is a complex and multi-variable process, and can be understood by investigating three stages – involvement, engagement and disengagement – present in the lives of violent extremists. The objectives of this study are to examine whether digital media creates more opportunities in radicalization and attack phases, re-strengthens radical ideas, substitutes physical contact in the recruitment process of new members, and/or contributes to self- radicalization of an individual. Besides portraying current trends regarding how violent extremists are using digital media, this paper also addresses counterterrorism efforts in Bangladesh. Although this study acknowledges the role of the political parties, law enforcement agencies, Islamists and leftist groups in political violence, it restricts its scope to only Jihadist violent extremist groups.

## 2 Literature Review

Although studies on the role of digital media in violent extremism largely agree on the impact of new communication technologies in recruitment and propaganda, the extent of the influence is debated. Various scholars argue that digital media is an accelerator and driver of radicalization (Stenersen, 2008; Briggs and Strugnell, 2011). Some go even further and propose that face-to-face interactions have been replaced by digital media in the recruitment process (Sageman, 2008). Skepticism regarding the influence of digital media is also not uncommon. Proponents of this view contend that the role of digital media is overstated, and cannot be a replacement for person- to-person interactions (Bartlett, 2015; Rogan, 2006). A number of studies take a middle ground and argue that the internet plays an important facilitating role but does not entirely replace the physical world in recruiting and radicalizing terrorists (Von Behr, 2013 and Gill, 2015).

Scholars believe that radical narratives are well-designed and tailored to attract specific targets to justify their positions and increase the number of recruits (Pape,

2018). Hafez and Ingram's studies identify arguments that extremist groups employ to construct their narratives (Hafez, 2007 and Ingram, 2016). Hafez's study, in particular, describes three themes. The first theme depicts a crisis: "the unmerciful humiliation and suffering inflicted on Muslims in Iraq and throughout the world, suggesting that there is a conspiracy by the Western 'crusaders' to target Muslims and single them out for punishment" (Hafez, 2007, p. 96). The second theme underscores the limitations and unwillingness of current regimes in Muslim countries to act against the West. This theme claims that the existing regimes are simply puppets of their Western masters. The third and final theme draws a picture of optimism where Muslim saviors win against their enemies and establish a true and just society based on strict interpretations of Islam. Similarly, Ingram also argues that extremists construct their messages by fabricating crises and solutions. An example he gives is the message that "we are the champions and protectors of (appropriately aligned) Sunni Muslims..., everyone outside of this narrow category are enemies... responsible for the ummah's crises, so support us and our solutions..." (Ingram, 2016: p. 14).

## 3 Data and Method

The analysis begins by developing a profile dataset containing in-depth data on 15 Bangladeshi Jihadists. This dataset contains information on how digital media has delivered easier communication technologies, restrengthened radical Islamic ideologies, and provided opportunities for armed attacks. Jihadi online content and documents related to the life stories of the violent extremists were examined. The documents include local newspaper reports, confession statements, martyr biographies, online Jihadi magazines, and videos.

These 15 profiles were selected on the basis of the availability of information regarding their digital media usage. The first two extremists were killed in a gunfight with law enforcers during the Holey Artisan attack in 2016. The third one was also killed by elite forces in an anti-terrorism operation near Dhaka. The next nine captured extremists gave their confession statements before police after their arrests. Junnun Sikder, the extremist who is either dead or alive in Syria, last contacted his family in 2015. All of these 13 extremists were either killed or captured in the last two years, and most of them are affiliated with Islamic State or Ansar al-Islam. The last two violent extremists, who were top leaders of JMB, were executed in 2007 for their involvement in terrorist attacks that killed several government officials and civilians between 2001 and 2005. Newspapers have published short life histories and part of the confession statements of these extremists. Also, data has been gathered from the online Jihadi

magazines, such as *Dabiq*, *Inspire*, and *Rumiyah*. These magazines published short martyr biographies and reports on the strategies, goals and targets of the transnational armed radical groups in Bangladesh.

## 4 Findings

After analyzing the profiles of the aforementioned people, four important findings were observed. First, digital media creates more opportunities for extremists in their process of radicalization. Second, digital media works as an ‘echo-chamber’ by strengthening radical beliefs of these fanatics. Third, although digital media plays an important role, in-person contact is still essential in the recruitment and radicalization phase. In most of the cases, interaction through physical contact and digital media complement each other during the process of radicalization. Finally, this study has found that cases where only digital media contributes to radicalization, widely known as ‘self-radicalization’, are very rare in Bangladesh.

### 4.1 Digital Media Creates More Opportunities in the Radicalization and Attack Phases

This study finds that the Internet, in particular, creates opportunities for radicalization, because of the ease of access to this platform. It also increases the prospects for radicalization by enabling connection with like-minded individuals from across the world. For all the 15 profiles that have been analyzed, digital media was found to be a key source of communication, information, and propaganda to spread radical beliefs. It was noted as being useful for enthusiasts, aspirants, recruiters, and ideologues in the involvement phase to reach and influence their targets. For example, in the cases of Gazi Kamrus Salam Sohan and Suman Hossain Patwary, the use of social media plays a major role in their path towards radicalization. Sohan, as an enthusiast, joined a Facebook group to know more about Islamic laws. Later, through that group, he met Aminul, who was a key member of that Facebook group. Later, Aminul introduced Sohan to Ozaki, a Japanese-Bangladeshi militant. Ozaki sent Sohan a friend request on Facebook. Sohan accepted the request and was connected with Ozaki. According to Sohan’s confession statement, Ozaki and Aminul both strengthened his radical beliefs through their communication on social media. Thus, Facebook, in particular, made it easier for both the recruiters and aspirant violent extremists to communicate with each other.

Nibras Islam and Rohan Imtiaz, the two extremists who were killed in a gunfight with law enforcement

during the Holey Artisan attack in 2016 in Dhaka, were also believed to have become involved in violent extremism through social media (The Daily Star, 2016; Majumder, 2016). The case of Nibras Islam, one of the key assailants of the Holey Artisan Attack, is a good example. His tweets give an indication about his life before he became involved in extremism. They give us a peek into his life of parties, his fondness for Bollywood actresses, as well as his stomping grounds (Bhuiyan, 2018). Later, he starts to follow two conservative Islamist preachers and their tweets. He stops tweeting at the same time that he stops contacting his friends and family members. The father of another Jihadist, Rohan Imtiaz, claimed that his son was radicalized by online content. His Facebook profile was filled with posts that can be perceived as radical in nature. On the other hand, two others violent extremists, both members of JMB, were radicalized through only physical interactions with others. These leaders were executed in 2007 for their involvement in terrorist attacks in Bangladesh. Their reliance on in person interaction can be attributed to the fact that social media technology was not widely available in Bangladesh at the time they were radicalized.

### 4.2 Digital Media Strengthens Radical Ideas

The profiles studied also reveals that digital media acts as an ‘echo chamber’ for extremist beliefs. As it provides more opportunities to build a network with fellow Jihadists, it easily confirms and exacerbates existing radical views. Digital media reinforces radical beliefs by providing the opportunity for constant correspondence and by constructing a group identity. For example, after the initial phase of involvement as an enthusiast, Sohan became an aspirant violent extremist as a result of constant communication with his recruiters Aminul and Ozaki (Ahsan, 2017). In another instance, it has been observed that one Bangladeshi violent extremist developed radical beliefs because of online propagandists, which were later strengthened because of the creation of an in-group identity among his friends in Malaysia (The Daily Star, 2016). Similarly, social media created an echo-chamber in the process of radicalization of Suman Hossain Patwary when it allowed him to interact with like-minded people (Ahsan, 2016).

### 4.3 Digital Media and Physical Contact Complement Each Other

An analysis of the profiles examined shows that digital media does not replace the need for aspirant extremists to meet in person during their radicalization process. Rather, social media and physical contact often complement each other. The radicalization process of Suman Hossain Patwary shows how both in-person contact and digital

media play roles in the involvement phase of an individual's journey towards violent extremism. Suman Hossain Patwary first met a man named Kawsar at a mosque. They spent time together discussing religious scriptures. Later, Patwary met Yusuf, and through Yusuf he met Mahbub. Mahbub introduced him to Mehrnaz. Mehrnaz suggested that he open an ID on the website called *protectedtext.com*. After opening an account, Mehrnaz gradually started having online chats about Jihad with Patwary. Patwary also met Ashraf via Yusuf. Ashraf made Patwary open another ID named 'solo runner' and Patwary chatted with Ashraf using this nickname. Through these series of offline and online interactions with fellow extremists, Patwary turned into a Jihadist.

The case of Aslam Hossain Rashed<sup>1</sup> also shows how digital media can facilitate involvement in violent extremism. As an enthusiast, Rashed started watching online militant videos. He was especially interested in Ansarullah Bangla Team's spiritual leader Rahmani and Al-Qaeda leader Anwar al-Awlaki's sermons. According to his confession statement, Rashed was radicalized and became an aspirant armed fanatic after watching these specific online militant content. Later, Rashed contacted a fellow student at Rajshahi University and expressed his interest in joining Jihad. In some cases, violent extremists are first exposed to digital media contents and then they interact with a person following the cue they get from digital media. Exposure to online militant contents and interaction with a person can also occur separately and simultaneously. This is different from the case of Patwary, where he first interacted with someone in-person, and that person then directed him toward online interactions.

Although social media provides an important platform, the contribution of a person's social relations should not be ignored. Violent extremists have a tendency to expand their organization by recruiting relatives and family members. Also, friends, teachers and influential religious leaders are significant recruiters. For example, Ahmed Azwad Imtiaz Talukder aka Omi<sup>2</sup> was radicalized by his private tutor, Zilani, whom he met at a mosque. Also, evidence shows that Junnun Sikder was radicalized by a radical religious leader (Hasan, 2016).

#### 4.4 Case of Self-Radicalization is Very Rare in Bangladesh

The evidence shows that cases of self-radicalization in Bangladesh are almost nonexistent. Although in some instances, it has been argued that digital media has contributed to the development of self-radicalization, a careful analysis reveals otherwise. In all the cases that have been reviewed in this study, violent extremists had contact with other individuals, whether virtually or physically. Faizul Hasan Shafiqur, who attacked Prof.

Muhammed Zafar Iqbal at the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST), is often mentioned as a case of selfradicalization, as evidence shows that he does not belong to any group (Bdnews24, 2018). However, this claim does not consider the fact that Faizul Hasan had an accomplice named Sohag who motivated him to watch online videos which contributed to his process of radicalization (The Daily Star, 2018a). Thus, a seemingly self-radicalization case could also involve in-person contact with other fellow extremists or likeminded individuals.

### 5 Violent Extremist Narratives in Bangladesh

There is a plethora of online violent extremist content available on social media, websites, online videos, and online magazines. However, in this paper, only selective online content that specifically contains information regarding violent extremists' profiles have been examined. Among the online content, video statements and online magazine reports deserve more attention, as these materials are often directly attempt to breed or enhance extremism. For example, in three different cases, prominent violent extremists justified their actions in video statements (SITE, 2016). In a video statement from Raqqa, Syria, three Bangladeshi IS fighters called for Jihad. In the second video, machete-yielding attackers of Holey Artisan Bakery recorded a statement that was released after the attack. Finally, just before the Kallyanpur shootout with the security officials, the armed radicals streamed a recorded statement online. Online magazines such as *Dabiq*, *Rumiyah*, and *Inspire*, published several reports praising the acts of Bangladeshi terrorists. The second issue of *Rumiyah*<sup>3</sup> published a report on five assailants who participated in the Holey Artisan Attack. Two issues of *Dabiq*<sup>4</sup> published reports praising a young Bangladeshi IS fighter in Syria and attackers who targeted Bangladeshi secular bloggers. In all these cases, video statements and online magazine reports can be helpful in understanding their justification narrative of Jihad, use of violent methods, and how their use of electronic media enabled them to reach their audience, re-strengthen their beliefs, and increase the opportunities to attack their targets.

Upon examining the online militant content, it was found that primarily three types of logic are used to motivate aspirant extremists. The grand narrative presented points to problems, offers solutions and justifies violence as the only way to reach these solutions.<sup>5</sup> In an IS propaganda video shot in Syria, Tawsif Hossain, identified as a Bangladeshi, praised the Holey Artisan Bakery attack in Bangladesh. In his statement, he first blamed democracy, or "man-made laws", as the problem

and presented “Jihad” or armed struggle as the solution. In his words:

“If we look at the context/situation of Bangladesh today, [then we see how] in this territory, governments have replaced Allah’s [divine] diktats with men-made laws. That is why they have become taghut, they have become kafirs. And, Jihad as in armed/violent qital against them has become fard-e-ain.”<sup>6</sup>

He further justifies the Holey Artisan attack as revenge for the death of his Muslim brothers by “crusaders”:

“Why did the soldiers of the caliphate attack the Artisan restaurant in Dhaka? Because we have learnt from [our] prophet SW that the ummah is like a body – if one part of this body gets hurt, the pain is felt all over the body. That is why when the international crusader coalition attacks Sham [Syria], Iraq and Libya [with fighter jets], killing hundreds of Muslim women, men and children, that terrible imagery agitates and hurts our mujahidin brothers. And that is why, to avenge the blood of their Muslim brothers and sisters, they will kill the crusaders wherever they find them.” (SITE, 2016)

Such justification of violent Jihad is commonly found in online militant content. In an article published in online magazine *Rumaiya*, titled “The Shuhada of the Gulshan Attack”, one of the Holey Artisan Bakery attackers (Nibras Islam) was extolled for his bravery. The article mainly targeted the young, affluent Bangladeshi youth with similar background. Nibras himself came from an affluent family. It urges the Bangladeshi youths to reject the insignificant earthly life and join the path of martyrdom:

“Abu Muharib al-Bengali (Nibras Islam) was a young muwahhid who came from an affluent Bengali family and had the dunya at his feet. Although he was known for his lavish lifestyle among his peers before his return to his religion, he came to realize by the mercy of Allah that faith and guidance from Allah are the most important treasures for a believer in this world and not appearance, wealth, educational background, and other material criteria that people who are attached to this lowly world compete over, as the Prophet said, ‘Indeed Allah looks not at your appearances or wealth, but rather He looks at your hearts and deeds’”<sup>7</sup>

The above article also states that Nibras chose his Kunya (nom de guerre) to be “Abu Muharib” because of “his love and admiration” for the infamous Abu Muharib al-Muhajir, also known as “Jihadi John”. This also

indicates how Jihadi John’s gruesome online videos of slaughter inspired Nibras to idolize him. Also, throughout these online sources, rewards play an important role to motivate the violence. These rewards come in various forms: the glory of martyrdom, respect of fellow terrorists, achievement of fame and significance, and, finally, the securing of a place in heaven.

## 6 Counterterrorism (CT) Efforts and Challenges in Bangladesh<sup>8</sup>

With the retreat of IS forces from Syria and Iraq, and the relative dormancy of al-Qaeda, the number of terrorist attacks has decreased globally in the last two years. In 2018, the Government of Bangladesh took several important steps to curb terrorism in the country. The government has formed a new anti-terrorism unit and two special tribunals, and established a new system to ensure more control over religious institutions. Bangladesh’s recent CT efforts have been initiated mainly in response to the Holey Artisan attack, after which security officials conducted several raids and arrested a large number of violent extremists. Two high-profile committees—the 17-member National Committee on Militancy, Resistance and Prevention and the eight-member National Committee for Intelligence Coordination—oversee CT measures and coordinate the country’s law enforcement agencies.<sup>9</sup>

The Government of Bangladesh also formed a new anti-terrorism unit within the Dhaka Metropolitan Police in 2017. This specialized unit has a nationwide mandate and around 600 officials, headed by an additional Inspector General of Police (Bdnews24, 2017). Previously, in February 2016, Bangladesh established the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime Unit, which has since been carrying out operations outside the capital, Dhaka, under special arrangements (The Daily Star, 2017). The government set up two anti-terrorism special tribunals on April 5, 2018 through a statutory regulatory order. The tribunals are stationed in Dhaka and Chittagong and are intended to speed up trials of militancy and terrorism offences (Islam and Khan, 2018).

CT programs in Bangladesh are mainly based on hard power, including arresting, prosecuting or killing violent extremists. The Rapid Action Battalion and the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime Unit have played an important role in fighting terrorism, but they have been severely criticized by human rights organizations for their trigger-happy methods, illegal detentions, and extrajudicial killings.<sup>10</sup> Recently, the government has introduced some “soft” measures to create awareness and build social resilience against terrorism. One important measure includes the participation of religious leaders in CT programs. In 2017, around 100,000 clerics issued a

fatwa condemning all types of terrorist attacks, declaring that terrorist attacks are haram (forbidden) in Islam (Kabir and Banik, 2018). The government has also taken steps to counter extremist narratives by broadcasting anti-terror messages via posters, leaflets, television commercials, short films, documentaries, radio programs and newspaper advertisements. The main feature of this counter-narrative is that Islam promotes tolerance and peaceful coexistence and does not allow terrorism. In an effort to regulate the curricula of madrasahs, in 2018, the government introduced a new education system called Darul Arqum. The Islamic Foundation is expected to monitor this stream of religious education, in which a total of 1,010 madrasahs will be included (Mamun and Shaon, 2018). Currently, the government's education boards do not regulate Qawmi madrasahs, their curricula and their governing bodies. For years, some Qawmi madrasahs have been blamed for promoting radical and extremely conservative ideologies.

It is well known in Bangladesh that Islamic radicals have been using the cyber-sphere for psychological warfare, publicity, propaganda, data mining, recruitment, mobilization, networking, information sharing, planning, coordination and training. To monitor terrorist activity on social media, the government has established a National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre. In 2016, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police launched an app called Hello CT to seek information about violent extremists from the public. Similarly, the Bangladesh Police and Rapid Action Battalion launched two apps, BD Police Help Line and Report 2 RAB (Hasan, 2018).

Most recently, the government passed a Digital Security Act in October 2018. Under this Act, anyone who commits any crime or assists anyone else in committing crimes through cyberspace or any other electronic media will face a maximum of 14 years in jail, a fine of 2.5 million taka (US\$30,000), or both (The Daily Star, 2018b). The Act includes several controversial provisions, including allowing police officials to search or arrest anyone without any warrant. It was passed despite concerns of journalists, media owners and human rights activists that it may restrict freedom of thought, speech, and expression. Although the hard-power approach taken by the government has been effective at the operational and tactical levels in the short term, several reports suggest that a comprehensive counter-radicalization policy using a combination of soft and hard power can help ensure a sustainable long-term solution to radicalization.

The Bangladesh Government has also been criticized for the way it has been tackling the murders of bloggers, and for its continuous appeasement of the extremely conservative Islamist group Hefajat-e-Islam ("Safeguard of Islam"). The Section 57 of Bangladesh's Information and Communications Technology (ICT) act 2006 is

particularly criticized as people can face several years in jail for "hurting religious sentiments" and "publishing fake, obscene or defaming information in electronic form" or publishing information that 'prejudices the image of the State or person' (Hussain, 2017). These controversial pieces of legislation reduce the space for freedom of expression and create favorable ground for radicals to thrive underground and gain traction in society.

## 7 Concluding Remarks

Most CT initiatives in Bangladesh are being carried out on an ad hoc basis, without a long-term national strategy that would ensure effective coordination and information sharing. The home ministry drafted a national strategy on CT in 2012 but did not release it for further refinement allegedly due to the lack of a consensus among the security agencies. In addition, Bangladesh's CT measures are often centered in and around Dhaka, the capital city, without proper focus on more vulnerable regions, such as the northern and southeastern districts. Despite the active presence of terrorists in cyberspace, online radicalization is almost unexplored as a research area in Bangladesh. A lack of research, regulation and monitoring has made cyberspace an effective tool for extremists (Bashar, 2013). In addition, spaces that are vulnerable to radicalization, such as prisons and educational institutions, should be taken into particular consideration in deradicalization programs. Imprisoned violent extremists exploit the system to recruit and radicalize new operatives and strengthen the radical beliefs of fellow inmates. Without effective deradicalization programs during and after prison time, in-prison radicalization could turn into a major threat to CT efforts in Bangladesh. A crucial factor in ensuring long-term CT success will be the establishment of a consensus among Bangladeshi political parties to refrain from using CT efforts as a tool to oppress their political opposition.

The government should explore and utilize inherited practices prevalent among local communities to mitigate counter terrorism. Fortunately, this particular region has some factors that make it difficult for violent extremist groups to gain traction in the community. Islam came to the region with different variations and interpretations, most of which have a long history of tolerance and blending with existing pre-Islamic local traditions. Most people in the Muslim community vehemently oppose terrorism and the radical ideologies associated with it. The strong position of major religious institutions and scholars against terrorism, the presence of a vibrant civil society

and development sector (NGOs and INGOs), and the rigorous scrutiny of the law enforcement agencies have



made it difficult for violent extremist groups, such as AQIS and IS, to build a strong foothold in the region. Upholding a democratic political system and ensuring credible and fair national elections could encourage political stability, and, in turn, help to counter violent extremism in Bangladesh.

## Endnotes

1. Aslam Hossain Rashed gave his confession statement to law-enforcement agencies regarding his involvement in violent extremism (Labu, 2017).
2. According to Ahmed Azwad Imtiaz Talukder aka Omi's confession statement, he was radicalized by his private tutor and friend (Labu, 2017).
3. For more on this, see Rumiya, Issue 2, Muharram 1438. Available at <http://clarionproject.org/wp-content/uploads/Rumiya-ISIS-Magazine-2nd-issue.pdf>
4. Two issues are: Dabiq, "Just terror," Issue 12, 1437 Safar and "The Murtadd Brotherhood," Issue 14, 1437 Rajab.
5. For more on Bangladeshi violent extremist groups' narratives, see Parvez (2019a).
6. IS propaganda video shot in Syria (SITE, 2016).
7. See "The Shuhada of the Gulshan Attack". Rumiya, Issue 2, Muharram 1438, page-8-11. Available at <http://clarionproject.org/wp-content/uploads/Rumiya-ISIS-Magazine-2nd-issue.pdf>
8. An earlier version of this section has been published in ASPI Counterterrorism Yearbook 2019. See Parvez, S.(2019b, p. 41-49)
9. These two committees are headed by the Home Affairs Minister, the committee comprises the ministries of Home Affairs, Education, Information, Youth and Sports, and Culture, and security agencies such as the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence, National Security Intelligence, Police Headquarters, Rapid Action Battalion, Special Branch, and Border Guards Bangladesh.
10. Brad Adams, as quoted in Human Rights Watch, *Bangladesh: elite force tortures, kills detainees*, 14 December 2006, and Amnesty International, *Bangladesh: human rights under threat as election tensions intensify*, 9 January 2007.

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