

The Dissolution of Jamaah Islamiyah as Collective Deradicalisation and Its Implications for Indonesia's National Security

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Abstract

Bangladesh's counter-terrorism architecture has undergone major changes since the Holey Artisan Bakery attack of 2016 and more recently, the proliferation of anti-violent extremism (AVE) groups, especially police and security forces, as well as the increasing cooperation between government agencies and non-governmental groups in tackling violent extremism. Throughout the study, a mixed-methods explanatory design is used. Institutional and documentary analysis focuses on the process of legal, organizational and operational reform as a result of the attack on Holey Artisan Bakery in 2016, and a cross sectional survey with 150 purposively selected respondents from various segments including police officers, NGO practitioners, community leaders, and residents in Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Sylhet divisions offers quantitative evidence on the perceived effectiveness of police-initiated actions and NGO-run preventive activities in reducing extremism. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression with two control variables (age and residence division) were used in analyzing survey data in SPSS version 26. Cronbach's α for the three composite scales was acceptable (ranging from .78 to .86). The regression model explains 66% of the variance in perceived reduction of extremism ($R^2 = .66$, adjusted $R^2 = .65$, $F(4, 145) = 70.31$, $p < .001$). The standardized coefficients show that the police efforts ($\beta = .52$, $p < .001$) and the preventive activities run by NGOs ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$) both significantly affect extremism, with the former having the greater effect. Institutional findings reveal the growing centralisation of specialist units, like the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) Unit and the Anti-Terrorism Unit (ATU), the enhanced inter-agency intelligence sharing and the slow progress in the implementation of community policing. The role of NGOs ranges from grassroots mobilisation, youth empowerment, counter-narrative development, to reintegration of formerly radicalised people. The results suggest a mixed approach of hard and soft counter-terrorism measures, with hard security measures complementing soft ones based on the community. But these gains are not sustainable due to ongoing human rights concerns, politicization of counter-terrorism legislation, inter-agency coordination issues and a lack of capacity to engage with digital and transnational threats. The paper suggests that Bangladesh needs to build its capability against large-scale attacks by establishing institutional accountability, formalizing police-NGO cooperation and institutional engagement with communities.

1. Introduction

Terrorism and violent extremism continue to be a dynamic threat to the national security, governance and social cohesion in South Asia. Bangladesh is a good example of intersectionality of transnational and

transnationalized ideologies with local socio-economic vulnerabilities due to its large population, high level of digitization and complicated political situation (S. E. Khan, 2017; Mostofa, 2021). In the past 20 years, the country has faced both religiously motivated and politically motivated militancy and more recently online radicalization (Amit et al., 2021; Riaz, 2016).

The Holey Artisan Bakery attack on 1 July 2016, which killed 22 people inside a fortified enclave in the city of Dhaka highlighted the critical lack of coordination among intelligence services, urban security and counter-radicalization (Islam, 2023; M. M. Khan, 2023). The profile of the attackers, educated, middle-class, Bangladeshi youth connected to Islamic State-affiliated Neo-Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (Neo-JMB), challenged official narratives which underplayed the militancy of the Islamists in Bangladesh (Fowler, 2019). To counter this, the Government of Bangladesh adopted a "zero tolerance" stance and increased the size of police special units, and over time took steps toward more institutional and preventative measures (S. E. Khan, 2017).

The contemporary thinking is that more than enforcement measures are required to tackle the multidimensional causes of extremism. For instance, human security, radicalisation theory and countering violent extremism (CVE) highlight socio-economic, political and psychological drivers that underpin the propagation of extremist ideas (Adebayo, 2021; Koehler, 2016). These are the concepts that form the basis of a global transition to whole-of-society approaches where state institutions collaborate with civil society, communities and international actors (Sitter & Parker, 2014). Bangladesh, which has one of the world's biggest NGO sectors, has a good chance to implement such cooperation (Husain, 2017).

A potential exists here, but the relationship between its structures and norms remains problematic. It has been reported that institutional fragmentation, poor inter-agency coordination, human rights issues and the politicization of counter-terrorism legislation are all issues (Riaz, 2016; Romaniuk & Thaddues Njoku, 2021). The security architecture (Ganaie, 2026) is however being challenged by the online radicalization of individuals, the recruitment of individuals from prisons, and emerging groups like Jamaatul Ansar Fil Hindal Sharqiya (JAHS).

The background of this is the purpose of the study that is pursued throughout the study, which is one integrated research. This study uses integrated mixed methods explanatory approach. The qualitative strand aims at analysing Bangladesh's counter-terrorism architecture by institutional analysis and documentary analysis, whereas the quantitative strand involves conducting a cross sectional survey among 150 respondents to analyse the effectiveness of the counter-terrorism action taken by the police and preventive activities done by NGOs in reducing extremism. The two strands are read in conjunction to understand the interaction of the roles of Police and NGOs within the changing counter-terrorism model in Bangladesh. This study will examine three research questions:

RQ1: What has been the changes in institutional structure of counter-terrorism efforts in Bangladesh since the Holey Artisan attack to 2026?

RQ2: How effective is the police's counter-terrorism efforts and NGOs' preventive efforts in reducing the threat of extremism?

RQ3: What are the remaining structural, legal and operational challenges that hinder the effectiveness of the police- NGO hybrid model?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework

The study is based on three converging theory traditions. In line with the state-centric security theory, state security institutions were given priority over other security institutions in terms of their coercive and institutional power, and this was emphasized by the centralized command of security forces, the use of intelligence in policing, and the establishment of special security units dedicated to counter-terrorism missions (Ganaie, 2026). In contrast, the human security paradigm emphasizes the security of the individual and community, adding the socio-economic, political and psychological aspects of insecurity (Adebayo, 2021). The traditions have been connected by CVE (focusing on structural grievances) and

resilience theory (which calls attention to the need to confront violent extremism through ideological narratives as well as other means) (Hettiarachchi, 2018; Koehler, 2016).

Police-NGO relations are conceptualized within this hybrid framing as a form of "networked" or "whole of society" governance where both state and non-state actors (Sitter & Parker, 2014) produce security. The conceptual contribution of the study is that the study empirically tested this hybrid model in the context of Bangladesh.

2.2. The Institutional Evolution of Counter-Terrorism in Bangladesh

There are emerging Bangladesh-specific documents that document the Bangladesh's CT trajectory. The initial process of religiously inspired militancy is described by (S. E. Khan, 2017) in the context of lack of coordination and political denial from the respective groups such as Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami and Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). (Bashar, 2017; Riaz, 2016) suggest that with the Holey Artisan attack, the paradigm of institutional reform and an open recognition of transnational linkages has shifted.

The Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) Unit, established in the Dhaka Metropolitan Police in February 2016, and further strengthened since the Holey Artisan attack (Islam, 2023), anchors the post-2016 architecture. The post-2016 architecture is anchored by the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) Unit established by the Dhaka Metropolitan Police in February 2016 and significantly expanded thereafter after the attack by Holey Artisan (Islam, 2023). The CTTC is divided into seven divisions, one of which is the Special Action Group which includes the SWAT, K9 and Bomb Disposal teams, and another is the CT-Cyber Crime Investigation division. The national Anti-Terrorism Unit (ATU) was established in 2017, which also has counter-terrorism responsibility outside of the Dhaka metropolitan area (Husain, 2017; Islam, 2023).

In comparative study of Holey Artisan and Easter attacks in Sri Lanka, (M. M. Khan, 2023; S. E. Khan, 2017) explores the shortcomings of the intelligence systems in Sri Lanka in terms of the lack of information flow and the political pressure that affected the failures. This is confirmed by (Mostofa, 2021) study, the pyramid root cause analysis of Bangladeshi militancy, which places emphasis on convergence of ideologic, structural and personal factors.

2.3. NGOs and Countering Violent Extremism in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has one of the largest and most institutionalized NGO sectors in the world, and has a long history of mobilizing in the community, educating, providing livelihoods and empowering women (Husain, 2017). Research on CVE in Bangladesh highlights the need for NGOs to successfully engage communities that are skeptical of the state security agencies (Amit et al., 2021; Romaniuk & Thaddues Njoku, 2021).

The literature highlights five programmatic areas: (a) community and grassroots mobilization through peace committees and interfaith dialogue; (b) socio-economic interventions on youth unemployment and vocational training; (c) religious re-education and counter-narrative development, involving moderate religious leaders and of reworking the curriculum of madrasa schools; (d) digital counter-extremism, online counter-narratives and media literacy (Amit et al., 2021); and (e) deradicalization and reintegration, for former militants and their families, (Hettiarachchi, 2018). Community-based organisations (CBOs) in North-East Nigeria have been dealing with similar pressures, and comparative analysis indicates they share some of the same issues in terms of methodological weakness, donor dependence and political interference (Lenshie et al., 2025).

2.4. Police-NGO cooperation in Bangladesh

Since 2016 there has been an increase in empirical literature related to the cooperation between the police and NGOs in Bangladesh. Research on community policing suggests that community-involving strategies are more enduring than force-based ones in preventing violent extremism and radicalism and stop individuals from engaging in terrorism (Arefin & Rahman, 2026). Canada-funded partnership between the Bangladesh Police's Anti-Terrorism Unit and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is an example of an internationally facilitated model that includes elements of research, training, women-led policing and rehabilitation (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2023). In total, over 100 officials

from the ATU and Community and Beat Policing units, civil society and media participants were engaged in the regional workshops, which took place in Rajshahi and Mymensingh in 2023.

Recent studies also show difficulties. In their paper, (Romaniuk & Thaddues Njoku, 2021) explain how anti-financing for terrorism laws can stymie legitimate civil society organizations in Bangladesh. Online communitarian appeals by religious leaders, as demonstrated by (Lyll et al., 2023), do appear to have a positive impact on reducing support for violent extremism, highlighting the importance of faith-based NGOs.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

The study is based on three converging theory traditions. In line with the state-centric security theory, state security institutions were given priority over other security institutions in terms of their coercive and institutional power, and this was emphasized by the centralized command of security forces, the use of intelligence in policing, and the establishment of special security units dedicated to counter-terrorism missions (Ganaie, 2026). In contrast, the human security paradigm emphasizes the security of the individual and community, adding the socio-economic, political and psychological aspects of insecurity (Adebayo, 2021). The traditions have been connected by CVE (focusing on structural grievances) and resilience theory (which calls attention to the need to confront violent extremism through ideological narratives as well as other means) (Hettiarachchi, 2018; Koehler, 2016).

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3.2. Study Locations

Data collection was carried out in four divisions that were relevant to counter-terrorism operations and prevention: Dhaka (where the CTTC is headquartered and where a major attack occurred in 2016 at Holey Artisan); Chittagong (a location of key CT operations, including a raid in 2017 on the village of Sitakunda in the area); Rajshahi (where UNODC-ATU held community policing workshops in 2023); and Sylhet (where there is evidence of militant activity and prevention programming).

3.3. Sampling Frame and Recruitment

A purposive sampling approach was adopted to ensure representation across four types of respondents: police officers serving in the CTTC, ATU, and Community and Beat Policing units, NGO practitioners involved in CVE or youth development or community resilience programs, and adults (aged 18 years or older) living in the four divisions who were community and religious leaders in their areas who had hosted CVE activities or experienced security operations. Within each stratum, Targeted snowball sampling was employed to access and approach the practitioners of the NGO and the community leaders not publicly listed.

The inclusion criteria were: age 18 years or older; (b) having lived in the selected division for at least two years; and (c) having at least one year's experience in a counter-terrorism, community policing or CVE-related position for police and NGO respondents, respectively. For ethical and security considerations, respondents in active operations deployments and people previously convicted for a terrorist-related offence were not included. A total of 150 subjects filled out a usable questionnaire (84.3% completed). Data was collected from June to September 2024.

3.4. Instrument and Variable Measurement

There were a total of 38 closed items divided into three composite scales and a block of demographic items within a structured questionnaire. Items of substance were rated on a 5 point Likert scale (1 =

strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). These three main variables were defined as follows: Initiated actions by police (independent variable) - Measured as how often respondents perceived police counter-terrorism efforts (such as specialized operations by the CTTC and ATU, intelligence-led policing, and community policing outreach), and how visible, professional, and active police counter-terrorism efforts were in the community. A 12 item scale was used.

Preventive activities (independent variable) - performed by NGO. Delivered as the perception of the respondents of the impact, relevance and effectiveness of NGO-based CVE programming in their community, such as youth empowerment, development of counter-narratives, faith-based dialogue, digital literacy and reintegration support. There were 11 items on the scale. Reduction in extremism (dependent variable) - Measured by the respondents' evaluations of the situation with respect to extremist propaganda, recruitment efforts, violent events, and community exposure in the past three years. There were 9 items on the scale.

Two control variables were entered: age of respondent (years) and division of residence (Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, or Sylhet). The questionnaire was designed in English and translated into Bangla by a certified translator and back-translated to make sure that it was equivalent in meaning. It was first tested with 15 respondents (not included in final sample) and then two ambiguous items were rephrased.

Table 1. Operational Definitions and Measurement of study variables

Variable	Role	Measurement
Police-initiated actions	Independent variable	12 Likert scale questions for perceived visibility, professionalism, intelligence led policing, CTTC/ATU activity, and community policing outreach.
NGO-run preventive activities	Independent variable	Perceptions of relevance and effectiveness of youth empowerment, counter-narratives, faith-based dialogue, digital literacy and reintegration support were measured using 11 Likert-scale items.
Perceived reduction in extremism	Dependent variable	9 items on a five-point Likert scale that assess how the respondents felt about the increase or decrease of extremist propaganda, recruitment, violent incidents, and community exposure during the last three years.
Age and residence division	Control variables	Age – in years, residence division – coded as Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, and Sylhet.

3.5. Reliability and Validity Checks

Content validity was judged by three subject-matter experts – one academic with expertise in the CVE field, one senior police officer and one NGO program manager – who evaluated the relevance and clarity of the items. Internal consistency was assessed with the Cronbach's alpha for each of the composite scales (see Section 4, Table 2). In addressing common-method bias, predictor and outcome items were separated from each other, respondents were anonymized, and some items within each scale were reverse coded. A Harman single factor test showed that there were no one dominant factor that exceeded 36% of the variance.

3.6. Analytical Strategy

The data was analysed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics reported the characteristics of the respondents and perceptions about the scales. The Pearson correlations were used to determine the bivariate correlations between the three composite variables. Contribution of police-initiated actions and NGO-run preventive activities to the perceived reduction of extremism was tested by multiple linear regression, with age and division of residence controlled. Standard diagnostics for assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity and no multicollinearity were performed; all variance inflation factors were less than 2.0.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to standard research ethical principles such as informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity and the right to withdraw. No personal information was kept and digital records were kept on a password protected device. Due to the nature of the content, it was ensured that the respondents' data would not be released to any operational agency.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

Table 1 shows the demographic and professional profile of 150 respondents. Four groups were included as the sample: police officers, NGO practitioners, community/religious leaders and adult residents. The largest group (30.0%) was made up of police officers, followed by NGO practitioners (26.7%), adult residents (23.3%), and community/religious leaders (20.0%). Sylhet (18.0%), Dhaka (36.0%) and Rajshahi (22.0%) were the top three divisions in terms of residence while Chittagong had the lowest number (24.0%). This means that the study included some variation in professional and regional backgrounds, with Dhaka the region with the greatest representation.

As it is seen in the table, the majority of the respondents were males (69.3%) and females (30.7%). Most respondents were aged between 30 and 39 years at 38.0%, followed by 40–49 years at 26.0%, 18–29 years at 25.3%, and 50 years and above at 10.7%. When asked about experience with CT/CVE, 40.7% answered 1-5 years of experience, 24.7% responded 6-10 years of experience, 11.3% responded >10 years of experience and 23.3% were residents with less than 1 year of experience. Overall the sample is representative of both professional and community viewpoints but is stronger in terms of the male and Dhaka centre.

Table 2. Demographic and Professional Characteristics of Respondents (N = 150)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Respondent category	Police officers	45	30.0
	NGO practitioners	40	26.7
	Community / religious leaders	30	20.0
	Adult residents	35	23.3
Division of residence	Dhaka	54	36.0
	Chittagong	36	24.0
	Rajshahi	33	22.0
	Sylhet	27	18.0
Sex	Male	104	69.3
	Female	46	30.7
Age (years)	18–29	38	25.3
	30–39	57	38.0
	40–49	39	26.0
	50 and above	16	10.7
	< 1 year (residents only)	35	23.3
Experience in CT / CVE role	1–5 years	61	40.7
	6–10 years	37	24.7
	> 10 years	17	11.3

Table 2 shows the reliability of the three composite scales that were employed in the study. All scales have Cronbach alpha scores greater than 0.70, the minimum threshold for acceptable to good internal consistency. The scale for police-initiated actions has the greatest reliability: 12 items, mean inter item correlation 0.42 and Cronbach's α 0.86. This indicates that the items assessing police actions are highly inter-correlated and assess the same underlying construct.

Mean inter item correlation for the scale of NGO preventive activities is 0.38, and Cronbach α is 0.82, indicating good reliability. Likewise, the scale of extremism shows an acceptable level of reliability, 0.78, and the mean inter-item correlation is 0.35. The overall results show that all three scales are reliable for

further statistical analysis. The results also indicate that the items of the questionnaires were internally consistent and appropriate for the assessment of the main variables of the study.

Table 3. The Reliability of Composite Scales

Scale	Number of items	Mean inter-item correlation	Cronbach's α
Police-initiated actions	12	.42	.86
NGO-run preventive activities	11	.38	.82
Reduction in extremism	9	.35	.78

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for the three composite variables measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The variables showed a generally higher mean score with the police-initiated actions being the highest with 3.84 and a standard deviation of 0.62, suggesting that the overall rating for police actions was favourable and responses were fairly consistent. The mean score for reduction in extremism was moderately high with a mean of 3.67 and a SD of 0.65, which meant that the respondents noticed a reduction in extremism. The mean score for NGO preventive activities was, on the other hand, 3.41 with a slightly higher SD of 0.71, suggesting a moderate level of agreement and variation in respondents' views.

The minimum and maximum values were used to determine the range of responses, ranging from low to high levels of agreement on all variables. Skewness ranged from -0.31 to -0.12 , which are near normal and slightly negatively skewed. The kurtosis values were between -0.27 and 0.18 , indicating that the distributions were not very peaked or flat. All values of skewness are within the range of -2 and $+2$ and all values of kurtosis are within the range of -7 and $+7$, indicating the data are considered to be normally distributed. Thus, these variables, are appropriate to be further analyzed statistically like correlation or regression.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for composites (N = 150)

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Police-initiated actions	3.84	0.62	2.10	5.00	-0.31	0.18
NGO-run preventive activities	3.41	0.71	1.80	4.90	-0.12	-0.27
Reduction in extremism	3.67	0.65	1.90	5.00	-0.24	0.05

The Pearson correlation matrix of the major study variables is shown in Figure 1. The findings indicate that there is a strong and positive correlation between police initiated actions and reduction in extremism ($r = .67, p < .01$). Thus, the more police action, the more the reduction in extremism is perceived. Similarly, NGO-run preventive activities also have a positive and significant relationship with reduction in extremism ($r = .58, p < .01$). This suggests that high NGO preventive efforts are also associated with a reduced extent of extremism. There is also a moderate correlation between police-initiated actions and NGO-run preventive actions ($r = .41, p < .01$), indicating a complementary relationship between these two preventive actions.

The variables that were considered in control did not reflect strong relationships with the main outcome variable. There is a small positive correlation between age and reduction in extremism ($r = .11$) and residency in Dhaka and reduction in extremism ($r = .10$). But, these relationships are not statistically significant. In general, the correlation results indicate that there is a correlation between the variables of police actions and NGO preventive actions and reducing extremism, whereas there is a low correlation between age and division of residence with the outcome variable.

The multiple linear regression results for predicting perceived reduction in extremism are shown in Figure 2. The overall model is statistically significant, $F(4, 145) = 70.31, p < .001$, and accounts for a considerable amount of variance in the dependent variable, $R^2 = .66$ and adjusted $R^2 = .65$. This indicates that, on average, 66% of the variance of the perceived reduction in extremism can be explained by the predictors in the model. The main predictors that appear to have a positive and significant impact are police-initiated actions ($B = 0.55, \beta = .52, p < .001$). This is a sign that an increase in police actions is correlated with an increase in the reduction of extremism. The standardized beta value indicates that police actions have the largest effect in the model.

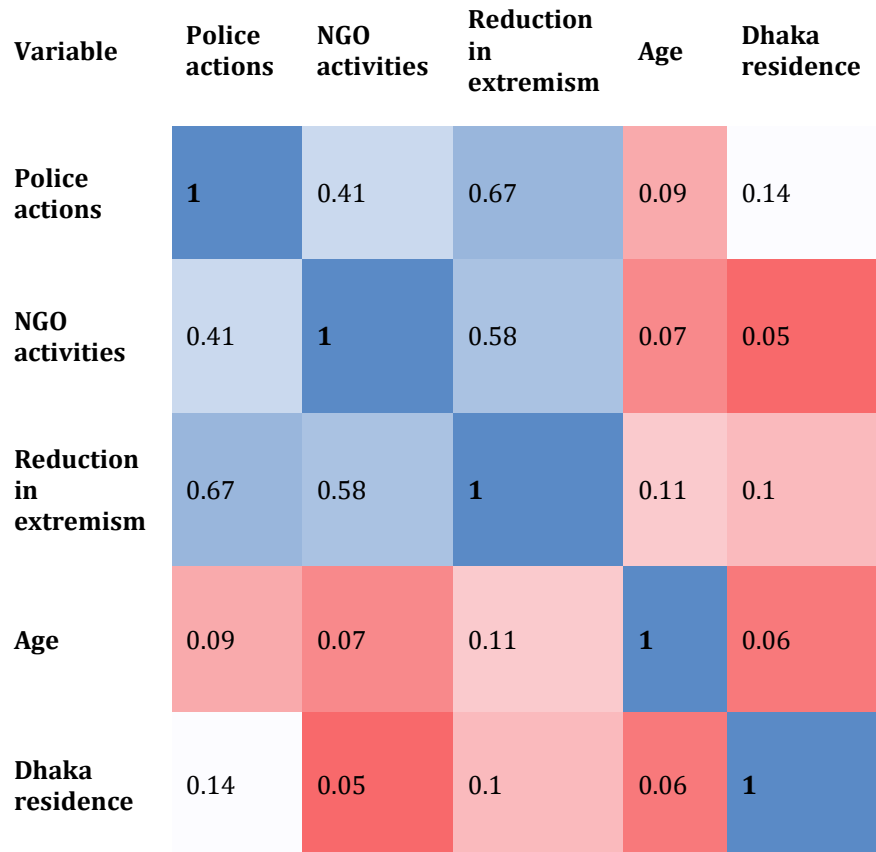


Figure 1. Correlation Heatmap of Main Study Variables

Similarly, NGO-run preventive activities also have a positive and significant effect on perceived reduction in extremism ($B = 0.35$, $\beta = .38$, $p < .001$). This means that NGO-led prevention activities are also effective, albeit less pronounced, at reducing extremism. The effect of age is small and positive ($p = .186$), but not significant. The division of residence also is not statistically significant, indicating that there is no meaningful difference between perceived reduction in extremism across divisions where other factors are held constant. All the values of VIF are near 1, indicating that there is no significant multicollinearity in the model. In general, the study indicates that the police's preventive action contributes to a reduction in extremism to a greater extent than the NGO's preventive action, while both types of preventive action are important in combating extremism.

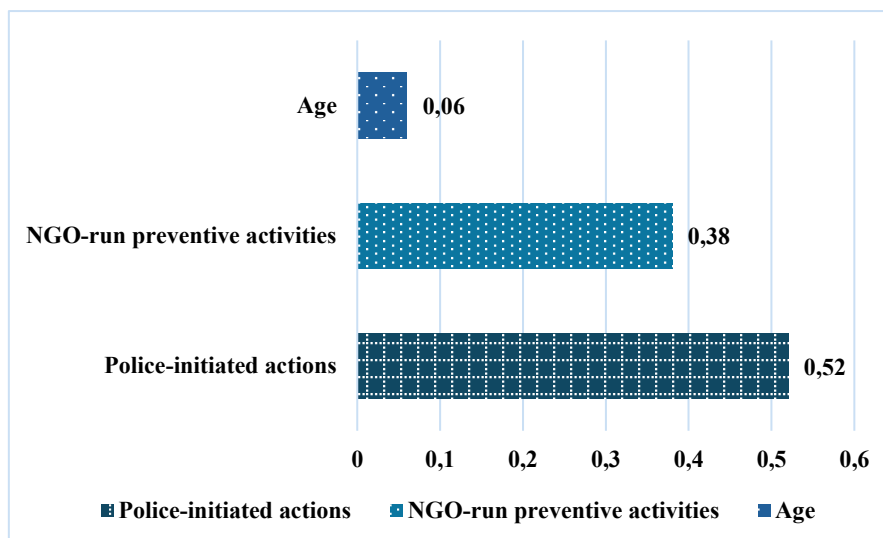


Figure 2. Standardized Regression Coefficients Predicting the Decrease in Extremism

4.2. Key Findings from the Survey

The survey results indicate that there are positive associations between police-initiated action and NGO-driven preventive activities and perceived reduction in extremism. There was a stronger standardized association with police-initiated actions, indicating respondents were very aware of the presence of specialised operations, intelligence-led policing and community outreach as key elements of counter-terrorism outcomes. Preventive activities by NGOs also contributed independently, highlighting the value of preventing, counter-narratives, youth engagement and community resilience. There was no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of the various age groups and residence divisions, suggesting that perceptions were fairly similar across the age groups and across the various locations.

4.3. Discussion

4.3.1. Interpretation of Survey Findings

For the overall regression model, the R^2 was .66, adjusted R^2 was .65 and the model had a strong explanatory association in a cross-sectional perception-based study. The police-initiated activities as well as the preventive activities of NGOs were statistically significant predictors of perceived reduction of extremism. Standardized coefficient for “Police actions” ($\beta = .52$, $p < .001$) indicates that, while controlling for NGO activities, age, and residence division, individuals who perceived higher levels of police action also perceived higher levels of a reduction in extremism. Likewise, the standardized coefficient of NGO preventive activities ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$) suggests that NGO activities was independently and positively related to the extent of perceived reduction in extremism.

Theoretically informative the relative magnitudes. This greater association seen in police-led actions correlates with the way the Police response was seen as visible and immediate following the Holey Artisan attack, where specialised operations and high-profile arrests have been seen to have a greater impact on public perceptions of counter-terrorism (Islam, 2023; M. M. Khan, 2023). The non-trivial effect of NGO-run preventive activities reinforces the core tenets of CVE and resilience theory that is, that there is an independent and significant role for prevention, counter-narratives, and community trust to explain a decline in extremism (Amit et al., 2021; Hettiarachchi, 2018; Koehler, 2016). Statistically, division of residence or respondent age were not significant; this indicates that the perceived impact was fairly similar across the sample of the four divisions and across the four age groups of the children.

4.3.2. The Evolution of the Institutions, Strategic Shift After 2016

The results of the survey can be interpreted in the context of the documented institutional change since 2016. The Holey Artisan attack marked a paradigm shift that shifted the law enforcement approach from a reactive and generalized law-enforcement to a proactive and institutionalized one, which is based on specialized units, increased intelligence sharing and community engagement (Islam, 2023; S. E. Khan, 2017). Table 4 provides a summary of the main strategic changes recorded in policy, legal and operational documents.

Table 5. Strategic Adjustment of the Counter-Terrorism Policies in Bangladesh (Pre- vs. Post-2016)

Strategic dimension	Pre-2016 approach	Post-2016 approach
Lead institutional actor	Common police and intelligence services	Specialized CTTC unit with national support from ATU
Operational posture	Responds to incidents, mostly in a reactive manner	Prevention and disruption, and intelligence-led operations. Enhanced cooperation in intelligence and operational relations with bilateral and multilateral partners. Bilateral and multilateral intelligence and operational cooperation.
International cooperation	Limited formal collaboration	Militant connections and operations are openly
Public and political discourse	A bias to underestimate the threat posed by extremists.	

Strategic dimension	Pre-2016 approach	Post-2016 approach
Legal and resource approach	General counter-terrorism legislation, scarce resources,	recognised as well as transnational connections. The State Government has dedicated investments, amended Anti-Terrorism Act and Cyber Security Act.

4.3.3. The CTTC, ATU, and Community Policing

The CTTC was created in the Dhaka Metropolitan Police in February 2016 and is the operational hub of the post-attack architecture, composed of some 600 staff members in seven divisions (Islam, 2023). It is designed to incorporate 'tactical capacity' (SWAT, K9, Bomb Disposal), 'special investigation' (CT-Cyber Crime Investigation) and 'operational capacity'. The complementary ATU is not limited to Dhaka and community policing has also been increasingly envisioned as a soft security means for trust-building and early warning (Arefin & Rahman, 2026).

Table 6. Organizational Structure of the Key CTTC Operational Divisions

Division / group	Primary function	Key sub-units / components
Special Action Group	Tactical and specialist response: specialist response	SWAT team, K9 unit, Bomb Disposal Unit
CT-Cyber Crime Investigation	Prevention and investigation of cyber-enabled terrorism.	Digital forensics, cyber threat monitoring
Intelligence and Investigation	Investigate and compile intelligence reports within the context of investigations	Investigating cases, monitoring and intelligence analysis
Other supporting divisions	Administration, training, logistics, coordination	Four further divisions (seven in total)

4.3.4. The NGO Contribution and Police-NGO Collaboration

The results are consistent with the literature on the role of the NGO sector in driving Bangladesh's community resilience (Husain, 2017). While grassroots mobilization through peace committees and interfaith dialogue, youth-focused vocational and leadership development initiatives, faith-based counter-narratives, online counter-extremism and post-release reintegration support are areas where NGOs are most active, they do not have the same reach in each of these subsectors (Amit et al., 2021; Hettiarachchi, 2018; Lyall et al., 2023). The Existing evidence indicates that appeals of religious and community origin might be connected with decreased help for violent extremism in certain community settings (Lyall et al., 2023).

Since 2016, formalised collaboration between police and NGOs has increased, sometimes with the support of international actors. This is demonstrated through the partnership between UNODC and ATU, which was funded by the Government of Canada, utilizing research, training, and women-led policing and rehabilitation support (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2023). The meetings in 2023 in Rajshahi and Mymensingh attracted over a hundred officials from the ATU and Community and Beat Policing units where gaps in training, communication and community engagement were identified and recommendations were made for further intervention.

Table 7. Overview of Police-NGO Collaborative Activities Reported Since 2016

Initiative / model	Lead actors	Primary activity	Key outcome / objective
Capacity building for community policing.	UNODC & Bangladesh Police (ATU)	Regional workshops (such as Rajshahi, Mymensingh)	Improve community and beat policing to ward off violent extremism
Multidimensional prevention approach	The UNDOc (Canada funded) & Bangladesh Police.	Research, training, co-ordination, women-led policing	Avoid radicalization, facilitate rehabilitation and reintegration

Initiative / model	Lead actors	Primary activity	Key outcome / objective
Academic-policy analysis of community policing.	Bangladesh (based) researchers and practitioners	Empirical study of community policing's role in preventing VERLT	Evidence for integrated and community engaged approaches
Faith-based counter-narrative collaboration	Faith Based NGOs and local police units	Mosque dialogue, communitarian online appeals	Develop a decrease in sympathy toward violent extremism within the target community

4.3.5. Persistent Constraints

4.3.5.1. Human Rights and Legal Concerns

Security concerns and human rights have been a constant issue in Bangladesh scholarship. Under post-2024 interim government, the Anti-Terrorism Act (2009) was used against political opponents, journalists and activists, as documented by (Riaz, 2016; Romaniuk & Thaddues Njoku, 2021). In 2021 the United States sanctioned the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) for allegations of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances. The Editors' Council and civil society monitoring organisations have condemned the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2025 and the Cyber Security Act of 2023, which were passed as amendments to the existing legislation, as further attempts to curtail freedom of the press and civil society monitoring. These fears are not incidental: They impact on community trust, which is a foundational pathway for police and NGO work in the areas of the survey that the present results reflect.

Table 8. Human Rights Issues and Their Implications on the Effectiveness of Counter-Terrorism

Concern	Specific manifestations	Effect on counter-terrorism effectiveness
Extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances	Complaints about the RAB, the CTTC and Detective Branch.	Ruptures citizens' trust in government, diminishes intelligence flow within the community, leads to external sanctions
Arbitrary or partisan retention of persons.	The Anti-Terrorism Act (2009) was used against political opponents, activists and journalists.	Wastes resources, constricts political space, upholds extreme ideologies of state oppression
Restrictive legal amendments	Amendments to the 2025 Anti-Terrorism Act; Cyber Security Act (2023).	Restricts civil society monitoring, curtails counter-narrative activity, restricts open reporting

4.3.5.2. Inter-Agency Coordination and Capacity Gaps Analysis

Fragmentation among the CTTC, ATU, RAB, intelligence agencies and Border Guard Bangladesh, which resulted in overlapping mandates and intelligence silos, is reflected in several studies conducted in Bangladesh (Bashar, 2017; M. M. Khan, 2023). Lack of a nationally agreed list of watchlists; lack of meaningful operational use of APIs and PNR systems and weaknesses in capacity to respond to threats through cyber-forensic and tactical training limit ability to act on emerging threats even for well-supported units. The challenges of prison-based radicalization are also identified in this context, where there are inadequate programs in place to deal with radicalized inmates (Hettiarachchi, 2018; Mostofa, 2021).

4.3.5.3. Politicization and Strategic Denial

Another limitation, as well highlighted in the Bangladesh literature, is the politicisation of counter-terrorism instruments as well as the historical practice of strategic denial of transnational linkages (Riaz, 2016). The use of counter-terrorism legislation against political enemies creates a skewed threat

assessment and diverts resources from a real threat. However, in turn, condemnations of links with groups like the Islamic State and al-Qa'ida (Fowler, 2019; Islam, 2023) have sometimes hampered regional and international cooperation.

4.3.5.4. Evolving Threats

Threat dynamics are ongoing and change over time. The existing capacities of the Rohingya refugee population, the security ramifications of the Rohingya refugee population, the emergence of groups like JAHS and its linkages with ethnic armed groups are all extended to online radicalization and prison-based recruitment (Amit et al., 2021; Ganaie, 2026). If the responses are merely "securitized" without taking into account the socio-political factors which play a role in vulnerabilities, they risk repeating the very vulnerabilities that they are meant to address.

4.3.6. Assessment of Integrated SWOT

On the basis of the institutional and survey evidence, the strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats of the counter-terrorism system in Bangladesh can be summarized as follows.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Specialized CT units (CTTC, ATU) set up after 2016.	Human rights issues that compromise the legitimacy of the system.
Increasing cross-border training and support programmes	Poor inter-agency coordination and lack of intelligence sharing is a chronic issue.
Legal framework based on the Anti-Terrorism Act (2009)	Politicisation of counter-terrorism measures and laws.
Building community policing and CVE programming.	Gaps in technology and resources (such as API/PNR, integrated watchlists)
Opportunities	Threats
UN human rights involvement after the MoU (2025)	Polarization of politics and instrumentalization of CT laws.
The digital intelligence management and sharing.	Radicalization campaigns through the Internet and AI-driven propaganda.
Radicalized inmates' prison reform and rehabilitation programs.	Militant Groups and linkages with the region and the cross-border terrorist groups
Increased CT regional and international cooperation	Youth unemployment and inequality (socio-economic drivers)

Figure 3. SWOT Synthesis of Bangladesh's Counter-terrorism Approach

4.3.7. Policy Implications

The findings imply four policy suggestions to enhance the police-NGO counter-terrorism model in Bangladesh. First, the formalisation of police-NGO partnership protocols in response to the increased contribution by police and NGOs strengthens the significance of such cooperation, which can be expressed through a national counter-terrorism strategy accessible to the public, outlining roles of state and non-state actors (Sitter & Parker, 2014; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2023). Second, there should be a reduction in the scope of discretion given to the Anti-Terrorism Act and Cyber Security Act, in order to ensure that the space for civil liberties and NGO operations is not limited (Riaz, 2016; Romaniuk & Thaddues Njoku, 2021). Finally, capacity building has to be considered as a whole-of-system approach including joint training of police and frontline staff from NGOs, decentralized capability training at the divisional level and dedicated cyber-forensic and prison based rehabilitation programmes (Hettiarachchi, 2018). Fourth, cooperation on the regional and international levels should be enhanced so as to safeguard and not stifle legitimate civil society engagement.

5. Conclusion

Development of CT architecture in Bangladesh and the involvement of other non-governmental institutions such as Bangladesh Police in the fight against extremism. The study used one explanatory design comprising of both institutional analysis and documentary analysis and quantitative evidence was gathered from a survey of 150 respondents in Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Sylhet, with mixed methods.

The results of the regression analysis indicate that the variance in the perceived reduction of extremism can be explained by both police-initiated action and NGO preventive action, with a combined R² of 66%. Police-initiated actions had the highest standardized association ($\beta = .52$) and there was also a meaningful, independent association between NGO-run preventive activities ($\beta = .38$). The results obtained should be understood as statistical association rather than causal relationships because the study adopted a cross sectional survey design.

Meanwhile, there are ongoing challenges that are highlighted in the analysis: issues of human rights, politicisation of counter-terrorism legislation, failure of inter-agency coordination and deficiencies in cyber and prison-based capacity. The institutional accountability, the formalised procedures for the partnership between the police and NGOs, and the building of trust within the community over time are all important restraints that indicate the fragility of recent improvements not only in terms of operational efficiency, but also institutional accountability, procedures for the police-NGO partnership and the development of community trust over time.

There are a number of limitations to this study. The cross-sectional design does not allow for causal inferences; the sample is diverse but not statistically representative of all Bangladeshi adults; and perceptions of counter-terrorism are important in and of themselves, but do not directly measure incidence. Longitudinal designs, larger representative samples, and program outputs and administrative data on incidents and prosecutions are areas that future research is welcome to explore.

In the boundaries of this study, the paper makes a valuable contribution to scholarship in Bangladesh, by quantifying the combined effect of the police and NGO efforts; by bringing this evidence into a clear institutional context; and by mapping the constraints that any future counter-terrorism reform must deal with.

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