

## Religion as a Source of Violence: Contending the Narrative of Political Violence Perpetrated in the Name of Islam in Bangladesh

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### ABSTRACT

Since Bangladesh emerged as an independent country, violence has become a part of its political process and activism. This paper challenges a dominant narrative that has been discursively constructed and promoted by secularist communities, civil societies, political parties (including the ruling party), and groups in Bangladesh throughout the years. A dominant narrative about religious violence claims Islamists are primarily responsible for political violence in Bangladesh. However, based on a robust analysis of thirty years of data on violence and other of credible sources, I have found that the dominant narrative is not backed by factual and quantitative evidence or a popular mandate but is constructed primarily to support and legitimize political persecution in the politics of Bangladesh. This paper offers a counter-narrative and argues that in Bangladesh, violence has become a political tool for opposition groups to acquire power and for incumbent regimes to retain power. Moreover, it states that religious parties are less violent than secular groups in Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** Religion; Islam; violence; politics; Bangladesh

### Introduction

Political violence is a common issue in third-world politics. Ethnic and communal riots, for example, are evident in Sri Lanka or Pakistan, like communal and caste problems in India. Bangladesh is not an exception to the violence compared to other developing countries. Despite the absence of severe crisis of communal violence in Bangladesh, there is a dire political crisis in Bangladesh. The tolerance shown in this country towards people of different religions or castes is absent to show in the case of people of different political opinions or ideologies. Bangladesh has been firmly clinging to this unique position since its independence. The lack of tolerance among the main political parties, and, on the other hand, among their own party rivals is one of this country's most critical post-independence problems (Jahan, 2015).

Disagreement, constructive problems or excitement from the opposition is part of politics. The dissident voice expresses the ideology and style of democratic governance. Voting, competition, maneuvering, and moral struggle to maneuvering ideology are natural processes in politics. This is the heart of politics. The beauty of democratic politics is the etiquette of mutual respect and sympathy despite differences in policy choices and opinions (Burroughs, 2018).

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In most cases, the political parties of Bangladesh stick to their ideology and are intolerant of dissenting voices. An untainted politician's job is to support the positive aspects of dissent and criticize the negative aspects. Nevertheless, in Bangladesh, criticism is practiced in politics. The war of words of the spokespeople of the major parties is regularly published in the media. This blind practice of criticism is one of the reasons behind the establishment of anti-politics sentiment among the young generations in Bangladesh. Thus, political disagreement and political violence play substantial roles in Bangladesh. Thus, political violence in the context of Bangladesh is an important determining factor. Toppling an incumbent regime from power or retaining power, political violence plays a challenging role (Hoque, 2014). Without political violence, power transfer from one regime to another is somewhat impossible in Bangladesh.

Two major forces in Bangladesh are the secularist Bangladesh Awami League (AL) and the nationalist Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). The main issue of rivalry between Awami League and BNP is a question of nationalism. AL attempts to position itself as a secular defender safeguarding the interest of the war of liberation supporters (Amin, 2018). Besides, it mocks the competing BNP as having a "pro-Pakistan" mentality. By doing so, it hopes to appeal to the section of the Bangladeshi people that is more concerned with preserving their sense of "Bengali culture." It does not deny the "Islamic" identity; instead, it occasionally supports it and forms alliances with Islamists when it believes such actions are essential to obtain support in elections (Ahmed, 2016).

On the other hand, the BNP portrays itself as a champion of national sovereignty, distinctive Bangladeshi culture, and progressive Islamic ideals while labeling the Awami League as "pro-Indian." Ideological and other factors incited violence between pro-Islamist and secularist forces in Bangladesh. There is widespread intolerance in the political culture of the country, according to Jahan (2014), as evidenced in the number and types of visible acts of political violence committed by workers and supporters of the country's largest political parties. The Bangladesh Awami League activists and Jamaat e Islami workers, for example, were involved in intense violence that killed 12 people on 28th October 2006c (Al-Jazeera, 2006). The then president Iajuddin Ahmed resigned from the position. The conflict was very significant in the political history of Bangladesh. After that clash, many experts believed that a disguised military regime ruled the country for two years (Ahmed, 2016). The conflict between the conflicting identities of "Islam" and "Bengali culture" is not resolved by the acrimonious relationship between the two major parties. Instead of attracting support from the general public, each party has repeatedly focused on these identities (Parvez, 2019) and produced much of the violence in the last three decades in Bangladesh.

The reason is that Bengali nationalism focuses on Bengali language-based identity, which consists of particular collective sensibilities, devotional traditions and humanistic ideals that infused the delta's folk music and Baul mysticism as deeply as Rabindranath Tagore's poetry and Kazi Nazrul Islam's poetry as well. Moreover, it portrays an image of a bountiful landscape of green fields dotted with rustic, peaceful villages along a riverside, which was the favorite visual representation of the nation (Van Schendel, 2009). Against the Bengali language-based Bengali nationalism, a new idea called 'Bangladeshi nationalism' emerged in the mid-1970s after the killing of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman by a military coup that brought Ziaur Rahman, the founder of BNP, in state power. The basis of Bangladeshi nationalism includes three key concepts: increasing food production for pangs of hunger; inspiring people for a decent and economically solvent life; and attaining peace in the hereafter (G. Hossain, 1988). Thus, nationalism is one of the most controversial topics in Bangladesh today. There is a fundamental question regarding whether Bangladeshis are Bengalis or Muslims first.

Bangladeshis have seen the violence produced by Hefajat e Islam and other Islamist groups, as well as nationalists and secularist parties in Bangladesh. Political parties behave in a hostile

way in terms of political and electoral violence. When AL and BNP, for example, boycotted the parliament and protested in the streets against government policies and decisions, both groups became more aggressive. Political organizations frequently believe that resorting to violence is their only practical alternative in reaction to coercive state responses and a constricting political landscape (Parvez, 2019). Regarding political and religious violence, the dominant narrative about violence in Bangladesh is that Islamists perpetuated most of the violence, though other secular groups are mainly responsible. Civil society groups, media, think tanks, and intellectuals support this hypothesis, if not all. However, champions of that hypothesis have failed to provide substantial evidence to prove their demand. In this context, the current paper raises the fundamental question: Are Islamic parties and groups sources of political violence perpetrated in the name of religion in Bangladesh? In this paper, using secondary data from the Conflict Research Group, the Microgovernance and Research Initiative (MGR), Odhikar, and other sources, I assess that religious groups are less violent than secular groups or parties in Bangladesh.

### **Understanding Violence as a Perspective**

There is no largely accepted definition of what violence is in academic literature. Scholars on revolution and violence have defined the term from socio-cultural, political, and religious perspectives. Therefore, 'violence' is ambiguous because it is used in many different contexts and historical backgrounds. A widely recognized meaning of violence is that it hurts people or damages property for particular purposes using physical forces or other apparatus and practices. From this perspective, political violence, for example, can be seen as physical or mental attacks for political ends (Kleinfeld, 2021). However, this definition is narrowed and cannot help us to view violence from a broader perspective.

Violence can also be understood by pitting it against its antonym, peace. This implies that whatever may generate unpeace or antipeace is a form of violence. Hence, any active activity against violence is often called antiviolence. This idea, essentially, refers to Galtung's classical perspective on violence and peace (Galtung, 1969; McClymond, 2002). Meanwhile, Bufacchi (2007) defines violence from two fundamental conceptions. The first concept of violence is a physical act of force or the minimalist concept of violence (Bufacchi, 2007). From the minimalist perspective, the concept of violence cannot be understood apart from the concept of force, as Coady (1986) reminds us, which is typically understood to refer to interpersonal acts of force that typically involve the infliction of physical harm (Coady, 1986). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, violence is the use of physical force in order to harm someone or damage their property. This definition seems to support the strong association between the terms "violence" and "force."

The second approach to violence is that the broader idea of violence is based on various rights, which implies a violation of rights. The verb "to violate" (to infringe upon, transgress, or surpass a limit or norm) can also be used to conceptualize violence. Theoretically, violence is considerably more closely related to the idea of violation than it is to the idea of force, according to Newton Garver (1973).

While there is no agreed-upon definition of violence, it is crucial to understand what violence is and the contexts in which it happens when creating successful preventative tactics. The World Health Organization (WHO) offers a definition of violence in its 2002 World Report on Violence and Health that has subsequently spread to many international and South African organizations active in the field:

*The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either result in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation (Violence Prevention Alliance Approach, n.d.) (WHO, 2022).*

We can distinguish a few faces of violence from the definition presented by WHO. They are self-directed violence; interpersonal and collective violence. On the other hand, WHO provides four types of violence: physical violence; sexual violence; psychological violence; and neglect. Several elements distinguish one type of violence from others. Religious violence, for example, is unlike political or mental violence. Religious violence uses religious elements or sentiments to produce violence. On the other hand, political violence is caused by political actors for their political ends. In the next section, I will focus on religious violence, its aspects, and its actors.

### ***The Relation between Religion and Violence***

Violence in the name of religion is not a new phenomenon, but an old one (Meiksans et al., 2021; Zafar et al., 2021). Since the emergence of world religion, people have been involved in violence in the name of religion. Some princes produced violence using religion to conquer new lands and extend their power. Many rulers promote violence to legitimate their power by employing religion. On the other hand, opponents use religion to dismantle the existing power holders. Therefore, many valid reasons can produce religious violence in the contemporary world. However, since 9/11, when a group of Islamic fundamentalists carried out terrorist attacks on American soil, religious violence acquired a new dimension in academia. September 11 has been referred to as “the day the world changed.” That was unquestionably true regarding its effects, particularly the developing “war on terror” and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq (Heywood, 2014).

Some scholars blame religions for inspiring people or groups to perpetrate violence (Fox, 2007; Toft, Monica D., Daniel Philpott, 2011; Toft, 2007). According to them, it has become apparent that religion has a strange propensity to incite bloodshed (Fox, 2007). Charles Kimball, for example, argues that more wars have been fought, more people have been slain, and these days more evil is committed in the name of religion than by any other institutional force in human history. This statement may sound clichéd, but it is tragically true (Kimball, 2002). In the same way, Stern (2003) put his argument that the potential for bloodshed exists in all major religions. One of the cruelest civil wars in recent history involved Buddhists and Hindus, i.e., the clash between the government of Srilanka and the Tamil Tiger rebels. Christian doctrines inspire the Ku Klux Klan and numerous other white supremacist organizations in the US and Europe (Stern, 2004).

Mark Juergensmeyer immerses readers in the thoughts of persons who commit and encourage violence in the name of religion by drawing on extensive personal interviews. He explains the connections between religion and violence and how acts of religious terrorism are carried out not just for tactical purposes but also to serve symbolic purposes by identifying patterns within these violent societies (Juergensmeyer, 2017). Binding all the arguments together, according to the scholars who support the idea that the assumption about religion and violence is that religion has a strange propensity to encourage violence. They ask why this is the case and find that the answers typically fall into three categories that overlap: religion is absolutist, religion is polarizing, and religion is irrational (Cavanaugh, 2011).

However, this traditional scholarship on religion that produces violence has been challenged and severely criticized. In his seminal work *‘Is Secularism Less Violent than Religion?’* Jakobsen (2004) argued that the secular is more violent than the religious, not less. In comparison to religious customs, groups, or worldviews and commitments, it is a source of more substantial, passionate, and unrelenting violence. William T. Cavanaugh does correspond to Jacobson’s view (Cavanaugh, 2007). In his book, *The Myth of Religious Violence* (2009), the principal thesis that religions are not the critical factors of violence is presented. Cavanaugh (2014) maintains that religions are not the primary cause of political and religious violence (Cavanaugh, 2014).

Karen Armstrong provides a similar argument to Cavanaugh’s view. She challenges the traditional notion that religions and popular faiths cause the world’s bloodiest wars, conflicts,

and violence. Writing about the Crusade, for example, Armstrong argues that religious fervor undoubtedly motivated the Crusades but we cannot ignore its political aspects. She finds politics and religion in every sphere of human life. Before the modern era, Armstrong viewed religion as pervading all human endeavors, including economics, state-building, politics, and warfare, rather than being a specific activity hermetically sealed off from all others (Armstrong, 2014).

Suicide terrorism is considered one of the sources of violence. Scholars frequently argue that religions, particularly Islam and Muslims, are responsible for suicide terrorism that intensifies religious and political violence (Esposito, 2015; Nnam et al., 2018; Platteau, 2008; Triandis, 2013). To understand the scenario and the strategy of suicide terrorism, we might ask two crucial questions: first, what best explains the increase in suicide terrorism? Second, is the best way to interpret suicide attacks as the accomplishment of a religious quest?

We have seen suicide terrorism in the different historical trajectories of world history. Suicide terrorism has been observed to take place in domestic and international politics. Thus, suicide terrorism is not a new phenomenon but an old fashion that gained momentum in the early twenty-first century. During World War II, for example, kamikaze ('divine wind') attacks claimed the lives of 2,800 to 3,900 Japanese pilots. More than one hundred suicide attacks occurred, since 2000, up from an average of three attacks per year in the middle of the 1980s. For such rising incidents of suicide terrorism, many scholars blame religions, especially Islam, and its relevance to the attacks. They argued that the emergence of martyrdom motivated by religion, most demonstrated by Islamist organizations like al-Qaeda and Hezbollah, provokes fundamentalists involving suicide terrorism. In other words, suicide terrorism has long been seen as a manifestation of religious extremism.

However, Robert Pape's findings do not equate with the dominant argument that claims religions are responsible for suicide terrorism. In his 2005 book *Dying to Win*, Pape examines all 315 suicide terrorism incidents reported between 1980 and 2003. The suicide attacks, he argued, could not be explained by personal motives or ideologies, and he discovered little correlation between suicide detonation and religious beliefs. Instead, he offered a "causal logic of suicide terrorism," which maintains that such actions are a planned response to a democratic power's rule over other states. In contrast, nationalists or secularists are responsible for most suicide terrorism. For example, the Liberation of Tamil Tigers Eelam (LTTE), a nationalist movement that adheres to a secular ideology, is responsible for most suicide attacks. Pape concludes his argument: Foreign occupations provoke suicide terrorism, and the relationship between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism is not correlated (Pape, 2005, p. 2003).

Other studies confirm Pape's conclusions (Cronin, 2003; Raman, 2003). According to Tosini (2009), suicide terrorism is primarily influenced by the social structure and culture of the group involved, whereas rational decision-making and religion are supporting elements (Tosini, 2009). Even Muslims do not share the major part of worldwide political and religious violence. Many Muslim nations have recently experienced civil wars and faced political, economic, and other humanitarian crises. However, it does not indicate that conflicts and violence have increased in Muslim countries, rather it happened due to conflicts having declined in other non-Muslim countries (Gleditsch, P. N. & Rudolfson, 2016).

### **The Fallacy of Religious Violence in Bangladesh**

Conventional scholarships blame Islamists for producing violence in the name of religion (Islam) in Bangladesh (Fair & Patel, 2022; M. B. Hossain et al., 2019; Tasnim et al., 2021). They argue that Islamists are responsible for the violence. Fundamentalism, terrorism, and blogger killings, to name a few, have been done by Islamist groups. Mamun Al Mostofa, who teaches political science at Dhaka University, blames Jamat (Bangladesh Jamat e Islami, an Islamist political party in Bangladesh) for such communal violence before and after the independence of Bangladesh.

Mostofa argues that before the independence of Bangladesh, Jamat helped Pakistani-occupied armed forces to kill innocent people, intellectuals, and Hindus, particularly in the name of a unified Pakistan. After independence, Mostofa went further; most of the atrocities and attacks on minorities have been carried out by Jamat in the name of religion (Mostofa, 2014).

Jamat is involved in violence for many reasons. For as long as Mostofa continues, Jamaat endures its activities in Bangladesh, as long as they can prove that it is natural for them to attack people's lives and property, especially religious minorities, for no reason. Furthermore, they do this sometimes in the name of protecting Islam; sometimes in the name of protecting Islamic 'thinkers' or 'leaders' (Mostofa, 2014). Bangladeshi so-called secular narratives blame another Islamic organization called Hefajat e Islam. Hefajat e Islam Bangladesh is a 'non-political' organization based on the Qaumi Madrasah education system. Its journey started in Chittagong on January 19, 2010. Shah Ahmad Shafi, director of Hathazari Madrasah, was the organization's founder.

In 2011, the organization heavily criticized the 'Women Development Policy' that was announced to ensure equality between men and women. In 2013, after the murder of Ganajagran Manch activist Rajeew Haider, the organization again became a public discussion. The organization raised 13-point demands for establishing Islamic governance in the country. Several clauses of the demands opposed the constitution of Bangladesh. In order to implement the 13 points, the organization first called the Dhaka blockade on April 5, 2013, and the rally at Shapla Chatter on May 5, 2013 (Kollol, 2014). BNP-led 18-party alliance and Ershad-led Jatiya Party supported the rally. The assembly performed mass destruction at one period and insisted on toppling the government (Star & Alo, 2013). That night, the police, RAB, and BGB conducted a joint operation and dispersed the Hefazat leaders and workers. Controversy arose over the number of casualties in the operation (Riaz, 2017). According to Human Rights Group Odhikar, the combined force drive at Motijheel Shapla Chattar started on May 6 to chase Hefazat-e-Islam activists out of the city, resulting in the deaths of 61 people and many more injured (Dhaka Tribune, 2013).

**Table 1:**

*Taxonomy and political ideology of major political parties in Bangladesh: Compiled by the author based on Ali Riaz and Md Nazrul's classification of the political parties in Bangladesh.*

Party Name	Key Ideological Fact	Broad Ideological Group
Awami League (AL)	Centrist, supports Bengali nationalism, believes that the government has a role in the economy, limits the influence of religion in politics, and upholds liberal social ideals.	
Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	Bangladeshi nationalism is supported by the center-right, which also supports an open market economy and liberal social values.	
Jatiya Party (JP)	Same as BNP	Secular
Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB)	Socialists who support the command economy and who are quite liberal when it comes to social issues	
Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD)	Supports Bengali nationalism, is secularist, believes that the government should play a role in the economy, and upholds liberal social ideals.	
Socialist Party of Bangladesh	Same as CPB	

Party Name	Key Ideological Fact	Broad Ideological Group
Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami	Both modernist and revivalist, and have faith in modernists and revivalists	
Islami Oikya Jote	Supporter of Bangladeshi nationalism, orthodox Islamist, supporter of limited market economy, and a strong proponent of extremely traditional social values	Islamist
Bangladesh Islami Andolon	Same as Islami Oikya Jote	

This paper claims that religious groups are not mainly responsible for political and religious violence in Bangladesh. However, it does not indicate that Islamists are immune from producing and inciting violence. Different religious groups are responsible for generating political violence, but the amounts, dimensions, and tendencies are lower than secular ideologies and groups. This paper's arguments go against traditional scholarship and may strike the dominant narratives available in Bangladesh.

If we recheck the history of Bangladesh, we will learn that the leftist groups, movements, and parties produced much of the violence in the early period of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's regime. The first civil regime faced significant political challenges from different leftist groups. Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (National Socialist Party) also known as Jasad (JSD), which believes in scientific socialism, was one of them (Jahan, 2014). According to JSD and other leftist parties, the revolution that gave birth to independent Bangladesh in 1971 was unfinished. The reason was that India's last moment of intervention against occupied Pakistan armed forces and the captivating credit of the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971 impedes the formation of a people's democratic republic in Bangladesh. A political analyst, Maniruzzaman (1975), states the overall scenario of political violence in the following:

*The real threat to political and social stability has been the radical revolutionary parties who have been trying to bring about a second revolution in Bangladesh through a mass movement as well as armed struggle...these parties have been training armed cadres to overthrow the AL government through guerrilla warfare and have already started sabotaging communications and killing AL leaders and workers and other enemies of the revolution.*

However, the leftists' bloody movement, due to many socio-political reasons, failed to overthrow Mujib from power. In the meantime, a military coup ousted Mujib from power and killed his entire family members except for the current prime minister and her sister who were abroad in 1975. Since then, the two military dictators ruled the country for fifteen years until the dictator Ershad was overthrown in the very beginning of the 1990s. During this decade-and-a-half of military rule, scattered political violence can be seen in the history of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh started its journey toward a possible liberal democracy in the early 1990s. A non-partisan caretaker government system was introduced to arrange free and fair elections. The caretaker government system successfully organized four national elections between 1991 and 2008. Interestingly, nearly all the political parties in Bangladesh supported the caretaker government system when they were opposition parties in the parliament. In contrast, political parties did not support the caretaker government system when they were in power (Majumder, 2014). Thus, the caretaker government system was one of the key contentious issues of inter-party conflict and violence in Bangladesh. The next section of the paper would discuss the share of violence perpetuated by different actors in the political history of Bangladesh since the dawn of the 1990s.

### Share of Political Violence in Post-Military Bangladesh (1991-2020)

A few general trends and features of political violence can be seen in the contemporary political history of Bangladesh. There were ups and downs of violence perpetuated by various organizations. The very early years of the current century were the most violent prone. From 2001 to 2006, for example, more than three hundred and fifty violent events on average have been committed by different actors (*see table 2*). Then, there is a rising tendency for political violence in recent years, which is a sign of political unrest in Bangladesh. Then, extensive violence is seen to occur during both national and municipal elections. Additionally, the geographic distribution of violent events varies significantly. Next, Bangladesh's two most "highest" risk indicators, according to the Asia Foundation Report 2017 on the state of conflict and violence in Asia, are local political and electoral conflicts and national political conflicts. Finally, the rise in communal attacks is a prominent tendency in post-election violence.

**Table 2:**

*General tendency of political violence in Bangladesh (2001-2021). Compiled based on data from Odhikar's various years' report (2022).*

Year (s)	Killed	Injured	Total	Year (s)	Killed	Injured	Total
2001	656	25770	26426	2012	169	17161	17330
2002	420	8741	9161	2013	504	24176	24680
2003	436	6281	6717	2014	190	9429	9619
2004	526	6235	6761	2015	197	8312	8509
2005	310	8997	9307	2016	215	9053	9268
2006	374	21265	21639	2017	77	4635	4712
2007	79	2688	2767	2018	120	7051	7171
2008	50	3185	3235	2019	70	3467	3537
2009	251	15559	15810	2020	73	2883	2956
2010	220	13999	14219	2021	182	8558	8740
2011	135	11532	11667	-	-	-	-
<b>Total (2001-2021)</b>	<b>5254</b>	<b>218977</b>	<b>224231</b>				

A study on political violence in Bangladesh conducted by Aynul Islam showed that the Awami League was involved in 30.2 percent of political violence incidents from 1991 to 2018. Base on data, 37.7 percent of the people injured during this period were involved in these acts of violence. Similarly, 22.3 percent of the total deaths were due to Awami violence. On the other hand, BNP's share was slightly lower, at 25.2 percent. The ratio of injured to killed is also low, at 34.3 percent and 15.6 percent, respectively. Compared to the Awami League and BNP, Jamaat e Islami, the most prominent moderate Islamic party in Bangladesh, produced merely 2 percent, which is very low, of total violence in the last three decades in Bangladesh (*see table 3*). The table below shows that most of the violence has been produced by secular ideologies such as Bengali and Bangladeshi nationalism, which are the dominant players in the politics of Bangladesh. However, members of secular civil society, the media, intellectuals, and cultural activists established a secular narrative of violence claiming Islamists were mainly responsible for political and religious violence in Bangladesh. According to Table 2, if we gather all the groups mentioned here, the total percentage of violence of Islamic groups is slightly more than 10 percent, which is far less than that of secularist groups. It means secularist political parties and their student wings or organizations generated approximately 70 percent of the political violence; the rest of

the violence was produced by the state law enforcement agency.

**Table 3:**

*Share of violence (1991-2018) by different groups. Compiled based on data collected by Julian Kuttig, Bert Suykens, and Aynul Islam, 2020.*

Name of Actors	Events	Wounded	Casualties
Awami League (AI)	30.2%	37.7%	22.3%
Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	25.2%	34.3%	15.6%
Law Enforcer Agencies	18.0%	30.3%	33.1%
Bangladesh Student League	17.9%	14.7%	10.0%
Chhatrdal	11.5%	10.5%	6.0%
BNP centred alliance	9.7%	9.7%	5.3%
Islami Chhatrashibir	5.2%	5.8%	3.8%
Jubo League	4.9%	3.0%	7.1%
AL centered alliance	3.4%	7.2%	2.7%
Jamaat-e-Islami	2.1%	2.8%	2.0%
Jamaat centred alliance	3.2%	2.8%	4.8%
Insurgent Islamic groups	0.8%	1.6%	4.7%

Following the country's independence, 151 students were reportedly killed in the country's universities. There were 74 at Dhaka University, 29 at Rajshahi University, 19 at Chittagong University, 19 at Bangladesh Agricultural University, 7 at Jahangirnagar University, 2 at Islami University and Bangladesh University of Engineering (BUET), and 1 at Maulana Bhasani University of Science and Technology and Hazrat Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (Hasan, 2019). After coming into power with the ruling party Awami League, in the last six years (2014–2019), Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student wing of the incumbent government, had been involved in at least 432 clashes among themselves or with other organizations. At least 54 people were killed. In addition to the 39 members of its own organization, two of the remaining 15 are children, workers of the opposing organization, or ordinary people. More than 1500 people were injured in these clashes. During the last six years, 11 BCL leaders and activists have been killed by other student organizations (Prothom Alo, 2014).

Nevertheless, Islamist student organizations have also produced violence and killed opposition student members. In 2013, Jamaat e Islami, the largest Islamic party in Bangladesh, committed much violence and accounted for 33.6 percent of all violence. The proportion of violence produced by other fundamentalist Islamic groups also increased in 2013 (Kuttig et al., 2020). Despite this, the overall death toll and level of violence are negligible. Thus, secular student organizations were responsible for violence, killings, and harassment on university campuses. Even so, there was an allegation against secular student organizations for generating gender violence against female students. It was in 1998 that Jasim Uddin Manik, the then general secretary of the Jahangirnagar University Chhatra League, raised a storm of criticism throughout the country by celebrating the “rape century” (Tusar, 2020).

It has recently been brought to the attention of the public that the BCS has been accused of sexually exploiting female students. The statement that disturbed or horrified many the most, as newspapers reported, came from the organizing secretary of the Eden College unit in Dhaka. In a statement to the press, the organizing secretary alleged that unit leaders regularly sexually exploit junior activists and general students, especially attractive ones. They take obscene

photographs of “attractive” students and then use them to compel the girls to perform sexual favors for whomever the leaders send them to (The New Age, 2022). Thus, it can be said that secularist groups in Bangladesh experienced and produced most of the political, religious, gender, and other kinds of violence. Yet, secular narratives always state that Islamists are responsible for violence in Bangladesh, which is heavily disputed and lacks proper facts and documentation.

### **Demotivating Factors of Islamic Groups as Producers of Violence**

I argued that Islamic political parties and groups are less violent than other non-Islamic parties in Bangladesh. The important question is; what factors are responsible for generating less violence by the Islamists in Bangladesh? Multiple possible factors impede them to be involved in violence. In this section, I will argue some factors that demotivate Islamic groups to produce violence.

Firstly, in Bangladesh, few Islamic political parties are powerful enough to dominate the public sphere. There are a number of reasons why Islamic political parties and organizations are less likely to contribute to violence in Bangladesh. These include the fact that these parties and groups lack organizational capacity (Riaz, 2017), economic sufficiency, governmental activities, and cultural ties to the people of Bangladesh and society as a whole. As Islamic parties are not powerful, they cannot show their power in street politics and agitation.

Secondly, it is imperative to understand that there are different ideologies among Islamic parties and groups. It is also believed that a lack of cooperation and mistrust among Islamic political parties and organizations contributes to lower violence among Muslims (Hajjaj, 2022). In order to produce violence, parties require many factors, such as money, muscle, and human resources, all of which the Islamic parties in Bangladesh lack. There is a strong relationship between exercising power and violence. Sectarian division among the Islamic groups is predominant in Bangladesh. There are disputes among the Jamaat e Islami, Ahle Hadith (Salafi), Hanafi, Phirs (saint), Dewbondi (Qawmi), and extremist groups regarding various issues in Islam such as the political role of Islam, its nature and means of achieving its goals.

Thirdly, in Bangladesh, it has been found that violence is most often caused by either opposition parties or ruling parties, depending on the circumstances. There are two main political parties in Bangladesh, the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Since 1991 power has alternated between both parties. Due to this, other forces, whether they are Islamic parties or non-Islamic small parties, have produced low levels of violence due to the fact that they are not in power or in opposition roles.

Finally, despite Bangladesh being a predominantly Muslim country, the people in Bangladesh are largely liberal and non-communal in their outlook. Many Muslim speakers in Bangladesh are very popular among Bangladeshis in matters pertaining to their religion. In terms of politics, however, they are not supported by the majority of people. In Bangladeshi electoral politics, Islamic parties have never obtained an absolute majority. They never won more than 25 constituencies among 300 electoral seats in a single national election (Islam, 2022).

### **Conclusion**

Bangladesh has been plagued by political and other forms of violence since its independence. Each political party, regardless of whether they are secularists or Islamists, has produced violence for ideological, economic, and religious reasons. At the very beginning of Bangladesh's history as an independent nation, leftist political parties and groups generated violence to remove Mujib, the liberator of Bangladesh, from power. Leftists, however, failed to do that. Between 1975 and 1990, when two military regimes were in power, different ideological groups dominated in terms of producing violence. The fall of the Ershad regime created a chance for democratic governance

in Bangladesh. However, it had not happened; rather, violence before and after elections had become prominent in Bangladesh. Hundreds of people and party members have died from violence.

The dominant political narratives, backed by secular political parties, politicians, members of civil society, and the media, hide the nexus between violence and secular ideologies. In addition, they legitimize oppression by making claims that Islamists are violent. The political use of violence has become one of the weapons and tactics used during elections. Thus, there is no doubt that the political use of violence has become one of the biggest barriers to the advancement of democratic governance in Bangladesh in the past few years.

Despite the potential as producers of violence, Islamic parties and groups are not as violent as other non-Islamic parties in Bangladesh, particularly in cases of open violence in public space. This is, first, due to only a few Islamic political parties having enough power to dominate public space. Second, differences in ideology and opinions amid Islamic parties and groups may contribute to alleviating violence among the Muslim community in Bangladesh. Third, violence is often caused by the opposition or the ruling parties, depending on circumstances. The findings in this research may have implications on various studies pertaining to new relations between religion, politics, and violence, particularly in Muslim dominated third world countries.

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