

# A Review on Communicative Construction of Extremism in Bangladesh

Nishat Tarannum\*

Department of Mass Communication and Journalism Discipline, Khulna University, Khulna, Bangladesh

## Abstract

This paper investigates the intricate relationship between communication and the formation of extremist ideologies in Bangladesh. Beyond simply analyzing extremist content, it delves into the communicative processes that actively construct and perpetuate extremist narratives within Bangladeshi society. How extremist groups utilize specific language, symbols, and narratives to demonize opponents, justify violence, and create a sense of "us vs. them." The role of various communication channels, including online platforms, madrasas, and interpersonal networks, in disseminating extremist messaging and fostering echo chambers. The examination of how existing societal grievances, historical narratives, and economic inequalities are exploited by extremists to build a supportive base. The analysis draws upon diverse disciplines, including communication studies, sociology, political science, and religious studies, to provide a nuanced understanding of how communication shapes and shapes extremism in Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** Extremism • Communicative construction • Bangladesh • Media

## Introduction

Media plays a very important role in human life of the present world. It constitutes, shapes, improvises the life of human being to the largest extent. The relationship between extremism and the media depends very much, on what is considered as extremism and how it is being represented to construct the social reality. While some definitions focus on the physical act of violence, there are others who put stress on the centrality of the innocent or civilian target, the political nature of the act or the sub-state status of the extremists. But whatever the fact and wherever it moves on, the role played by the media especially the print and the electronic ones define the social reality which might play some important role to put an influence in promoting or countering extremism.

Extremism is a complex phenomenon, although its complexity is often hard to see. Most simply, it can be defined as activities like beliefs, attitudes, feelings, actions, strategies of a character far removed from the ordinary. In conflict settings it manifests as a severe form of conflict engagement. However, the labeling of activities, people, and groups as "extremist", and the defining of what is "ordinary" in any setting is always a subjective and political matter. Any discussion of extremism is mindful to sets of considerations or relativities.

Over the last 15 years, the world has experienced a terrifying, exponential increase in the number of terrorist attacks. For 2000, the Global Terrorism Database lists 3361 number of deaths from terrorism while the number and the figure has not yet been dropped for a single year till 2015. This appears to be a figure that has since consistently increased, reaching an all-time high at every year creating new milestone and records. The total number of casualties from terror attacks in the year 2014 has been 32,658 while it has recorded the largest increase as the number was 18,111 in 2013. So, it appears that the number has increased at a rate of ten multiplying since 2000. Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there has been over a nine-fold increase in the number of deaths from terrorism, rising from 3,329 in 2000 to 32,685 in 2014 [1].

International media coverage of terrorist/extremist incidents varies dramatically. As an example, if we consider the ongoing media hype surrounding terrorist strikes by the Boko Haram organization, mostly operating in Nigeria in one hand and on the other equally devastating and deadly displays of terrorism in Pakistan, Yemen, or the DR Congo, receive substantially less media attention in the Western world. Within 6 years (from 2009 to 2014), Boko Haram is estimated to have killed around 5,000 civilians. Pakistan reports 10,116 victims from terrorism between the years 2007 and 2012. Yemen and the DRC

**Address for Correspondence:** Nishat Tarannum, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism Discipline, Khulna University, Khulna, Bangladesh; E-mail: nishat.tarannumku@gmail.com

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combine for 4,339. Adding casualties in Somalia increases that number to 6,944. Why do some terrorist attacks draw large international media coverage and others do not? A common definition of terrorism states that "Terrorism's impact has been magnified by the capability of the media to disseminate news of such attacks instantaneously throughout the world." Krueger and Maleckova describe terrorism as "usually intended to influence an audience" and emphasis is put on "the intention of terrorists to cause fear and terror among a target audience rather than the harm caused to the immediate victims." "Terrorists are seeking publicity in order to make their cause widely known." Frey and Luechinger, and Frey et al. Moreover, Campos, writes down, "as the aim is to raise the profile of the cause, one main objective of terrorism is to maximize media exposure so as to further the atmosphere of fear." In short, the attention of the public is a fundamental objective and driver of terrorist activities, as the media serves as a platform to promote the terrorists' agenda [2].

However, beyond the devastating human consequences, any activities supporting extremism can hamper growth and alter investment decisions, in addition to carrying negative consequences for tourism, stock prices, and foreign trade. There are some really significant examples of these incidents. The September 11 attacks alone may have cost the United States US\$200 billion Mueller and the ensuing Global War on Terror is estimated to come with a price tag of up to US\$3.3 or US\$3.7 trillion in its entirety, corresponding to over 21 percent of annual GDP [3]. Usually, terrorist attacks are carried out to draw attention to a cause, such as promoting a religious agenda like the Taliban or Al-Qaeda or pushing for political goals like the Kurds' fight for an independent state. Catching people's attention is an important mechanism to promote the terrorists' goals [4].

Content is the end from where the audiences derive value. Thus, "content" can refer to the information provided through the medium, the way in which the information was presented, as well as the added features included in the medium in which that information was delivered. The medium however, provides little to no value to the end-user without the information and experiences that make up the content. Communication theory philosopher famously coined the phrase, "The medium is the message." In the case of content, the channel through which information is delivered, the "medium," affects how the end user perceives content, the "message." Content also leads to influencing other people in creating their own content, sometimes in a way that the original author didn't or couldn't plan or imagine. This feature adding the option of user innovation in a medium means user can develop their own content from existing content [5]. On social platforms brands and businesses are disturbing people's lives and competing with their friends and family. If the content offered is not meaningful or engaging, all too often, it can have the undesirable effect of having no engagement and instead drives the audiences away. For example, if people are bombarded with dizzying quantities of content it can be tiresome, frustrating and can push audience elsewhere. It's therefore imperative that content is valuable and comes in digestible amounts. By producing quality social media content, it becomes easier to find audiences that will organically promote

or advocate on behalf through engagement. Since engagement, it is the lifeblood of social media. Thus it's crucial that the content is the beating heart pumping. This entire information let this study to be conducted by analyzing the contents delivered by media of Bangladesh.

Extremism is any ideology which violates common moral standards. Extremism is often contrasted with moderation. The term extremism may be associated with person who have different view that are inconsistent with the existing norm(s). The term "extremism" is mostly used with reference to use or advocating violence against the will of society at large, hence it is also used to describe advocating/using violence to enforce the will of the social body e.g. a government or majority constituency. Those described as extremist would in general not accept that what they practice or advocate constitutes violence and would instead speak in terms of acts of "resistance" or militant action or the use of force [6].

## Literature Review

### Extamism

The term "extremism" is usually meant to be pejorative: To express (strong) disapproval, but it may also be meant in a more academic, purely descriptive, non-condemning sense. Violent extremism broadly speaking, refers to the process of taking radical views and putting them into violent action. While radical thinking is by no means a problem in itself, it becomes a threat to national security when citizens, residents or groups promote or engage in violence as a means of furthering their radical political, ideological or religious views. The motivations and drivers that inspire them towards violent action may be due to real or perceived grievances, for example, animal rights, white supremacy, A1 Qaida-inspired, environmentalism and anti-capitalism.

Extremist acts often employ violent means, although extremist groups will differ in their preference for violent vs. non-violent tactics, in the level of violence they employ, and in the preferred targets of their violence. Again, low power groups are more likely to employ direct, episodic forms of violence such as suicide bombings, whereas dominant groups tend to be associated with more structural or institutionalized forms. Although extremist individuals and groups are often viewed as cohesive and consistently evil, it is important to recognize that they may be conflicted or ambivalent psychologically as individuals, and/or contain a great deal of difference and conflict within their groups.

Typically, the same extremist act will be viewed by some as just and moral (pro-social "freedom fighting"), and by others as unjust and immoral (antisocial "terrorism") depending on the observer's values, politics, moral scope, and the nature of their relationship with the actor. In addition, one's sense of the moral or immoral nature of a given act of extremism, such as Nelson Mandela's use of guerilla war tactics against the South African Government may change as conditions like leadership, world opinion, crises, historical accounts, etc. change. Thus, the current and historical context of extremist acts shapes our view of them.

Power differences also matter when defining extremism. When in conflict, the activities of members of low power groups tend to be viewed as more extreme than similar activities committed by members of groups advocating the status quo. In addition, extreme acts are more likely to be employed by marginalized people and groups who view more normative forms of conflict engagement as blocked for them or biased. However, dominant groups also commonly employ extreme activities [7].

Ultimately, the core problem that extremism presents in situations of protracted conflict is less the severity of the activities but more so the closed, fixed, and intolerant nature of extremist attitudes, and their subsequent imperviousness to change.

### Communicative construction

How humans explain what is happening as they interact is important for understanding social conflict. Berger and Luckman see conflict as created socially by the conflict parties out of their everyday activity. This process of social creation happens as we first externalize what we believe is happening. For example, when we make a new friend or enemy, we create a relationship. We recreate it each time we interact with that friend or enemy. The new relationship is then objectified as it fits into the descriptive terminology and other parts of the objective order society already has in place to describe such interaction. We then internalize that new "objective reality," feeling that it fits our experience and we act accordingly. It thus becomes "reality" for us even though our perception may have little basis in fact. Each conflict becomes a clash of contending realities, with opponents convinced it is factually based. Getting conflict parties to question the objective reality of their conflict permits them to identify aspects of it truly in opposition from those that are not. Once they realize they are not in total conflict, they can begin to cooperate in turning the conflicting interests into a problem to be solved. If a conflict is a "reality" constructed by opponents, it can just as well be reconstructed by them into less costly or more cooperative forms. They reconceptualize reality as something they produce and can thus reconstruct toward cooperative relations. Enemy images are the most harmful and resistant form of constructed conflict reality. One believes and expects the worst of an enemy. Getting opponents to reconstruct their "enemy reality" has been the focus of several "enemy reality" reconstruction projects. For the communicative construction, the communicative world is shaped by conversations, conceived as patterns of joint activities. Thus, from birth, we have been included in patterns of social interaction. These patterns are started by ourselves, however, as time goes by, we find ourselves increasingly involved by them: they allow us to apprehend and construct the meanings of our surroundings. The subjects have the innate capacity of inserting themselves in these conversations or interaction guidelines. These activities structure themselves, according to certain norms. For a long time, Media can easily create this kind of reality with the help of its communicative structure or power. That's how they can communicatively construct reality about any object or issue in the mind of social human beings [8].

### Communicative construction of extremism in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has a long history of political and electoral violence that has shaped its political culture. Protests, boycotts, and intense oppositional politics are defining features of Bangladesh's authoritarian and democratic eras. Even, the emergence of the present Bangladesh from the very beginning of the history has travelled and visited the way of violence in various forms in different times. However, the radical character of different times shaping the country's politics adds an urgency to strengthen its institutions democratically and with sheer intelligence. Politics of exclusion and violence against oppositions strongly associated with religious politics outwardly makes the way of emerging extremism into a potential threat. The wheel of history and violent expression of extremists have run on parallel line since the very inception in this geographical area. Moreover, like the rest of the world media has turned out to be the long cherished silent monster being us with like shadows. The evolution of various expressions of extremism (sometime violent and sometime peaceful) has come to the focus line of the media now-a-days. The consent of mass people is being manufactured, shaped, designed and modified like almost all the other day to day aspects of life. None in Bangladesh is yet to come forward to scrutiny this approach on any specific area with enough data and analysis with logical explanation. It has been hooked on the dire need of time to go to the deepest possible root with a view to finding out the concrete perceptible recurring politics of reproducing violent extremism through media. This study will suffice to that thirst and fulfill the quest to divulge the communicative construction process played by the media regarding violent extremism in Bangladesh. The study intends to bring out results produced by analyzing the facts with evidence and the derived result will play crucial determining role in identifying the role of communicative construction fetching entirely new dimension among various aspects of media [9].

Since violent extremism is comparatively a new term Previous works on analyzing media attention devoted to extremist attacks have mostly been focusing on specific conflict zones. For example, Liebes and Kampf analyze the extensive "TV marathons" covering an ongoing series of attacks on Israel. Gentzkow and Shapiro discuss the relationship between the media and the US' image in the Muslim world. In a more general context, and closely related to the spirit of this paper, Rohner and Frey provide theoretical intuition for how terrorism and the media may be interacting. Their empirical evidence suggests that terrorism Granger causes media attention and vice versa, using monthly data on how often the word terrorism" appears in the New York Times. The following pages produce a systematic extension to that study, trying to pin down the exact media response to specie terror attacks and enriching the empirical analysis by including a variety of potential characteristics associated with media coverage of an attack. Another extension, related to the systematic analysis of terror attacks by day, lies in the sample size of over 24,500 observations, as opposed to the 87 monthly observations used by Rohner and Frey. Using the GTD database of 45,320 individual

terrorist attacks in non-US countries between 1998 and 2012 provides a comprehensive sample of terrorist attacks. Michael Jetter then used "the relative change of the number of country references from the day before attacks to the day after to proxy media attention devoted to attacks. Although this measurement of the attention dedicated to terrorist attacks can be noisy and at times confounded by other news about the country, it provides a generalized, consistent, and comparable measurement across time and countries. The derived results provide several insights. First, suicide attacks receive significantly more media attention than non-suicide attacks, everything else equal. This could be one reason why suicide attacks have gained popularity amongst terrorist groups, confirming Hoffman, who states that "they suicide bombings guarantee media coverage." Hoffman. In fact, media coverage of an attack appears as a positive and statistically significant predictor of future incidents, even after including numerous control variables. It seems as if terrorists just like any other humans."

Bangladesh, a country previously known for its strongly secular and syncretism culture, is an emerging breeding ground for extremism. Over the past year, at least five prominent bloggers have been gruesomely murdered. Each man was hacked to death by machete-wielding extremists for the secular critiques of religious fanaticism they posted online. These murders accompanied the startling news of ISIS recruiters arrested in Dhaka [10].

## Discussion

In Bangladesh, radicalization and institutional dysfunction are closely connected. The increasingly authoritarian secular state provides radical Islamists a compelling grievance around which to recruit and mobilize. Political and social alienation have combined with government repression to push marginalized groups to violence. Therefore, efforts to prevent political violence in Bangladesh must target its weak democratic institutions, which foster exclusion, radicalization, and extremism. This approach to opposing Islamist violence would dovetail with a nascent shift in the field from traditional counterterrorism to preventive approaches which moves emphasis from the reactive use of force, law enforcement, intelligence collection, and counter messaging to strengthening political and social institutions [11].

Extremism first captured attention in Bangladesh with a string of increasingly spectacular attacks throughout the early and mid-2000's. In 2001 and 2002, bomb blasts ripped through a Bengali new year's celebration, a communist party gathering, and four movie theaters. In 2004, terrorists hurled thirteen grenades into a crowded campaign event in a failed attempt to kill then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed. In August of 2005, nearly 500 homemade bombs exploded within a 30-minute period in 63 of Bangladesh's 64 districts. The attacks were carried out by Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), an indigenous extremist organization dedicated to creating a fundamentalist Islamist state in the country.

Though the synchronized explosions killed only two people, JMB's dramatic display of religious militancy quickly captured global attention. After a double suicide bombing three months later, the government banned JMB, Harkat-ul Jihad al-Islami, and other extremist

organizations. It also began aggressive counterterrorism activities that splintered and marginalized the major extremist groups. Despite this effort, the political ideology of Islamism has remained powerful.

Despite the ostensibly recent rise of religious extremism in Bangladesh, the violent contest over the Islamic character of the state is grounded in a long history. As part of Pakistan (1947–71), many ethnic Bengalis chafed under the control of a Punjabi-dominated, Urdu-speaking elite in the western half of the country. Bengalis constituted over half of Pakistan's population and produced most of its economic output but were treated as culturally and politically inferior. This festering resentment grew into a declaration of independence in 1971. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his political party, the Awami League, led Bangladesh's nationalist movement against Pakistan's army, which had invaded to put down the insurrection. Over the course of nine months, Pakistan's soldiers killed according to the highest estimate three million Bengalis, including the indiscriminate massacre of students and intellectuals. A mass rape campaign also brutalized approximately two hundred thousand women. The war came to a quick and decisive end two months after the intervention of India, which presided over Pakistan's surrender to the newly formed nation of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh's independence war is the genesis of the Secular-Islamic divide that still shapes the country's politics. The Awami League's secular nationalist movement was opposed by Jamaat-e-Islami, a religious political movement that favored a unified, Islamic Pakistan. Jamaat activists collaborated with the Pakistani army, forming paramilitary forces that were implicated in some of the worst atrocities in the war. After independence, Mujib, Bangladesh's first president, banned Jamaat, whose leadership had fled to Pakistan. Jamaat, however, would not last long in exile; Mujib was assassinated in 1975.

Mujib's successor Zia Rahman unbanned Jamaat and integrated its leadership into a political alliance led by his party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Mujib personifies the political division in Bangladesh today. The independence movement and his assassination are the two events that define the antagonism between the country's two main political parties. Currently, the Awami League is led by Mujib's daughter, Sheikh Hasina, and the BNP is headed by Zia's widow, Khaleda Zia. Political competition between these two women and their parties is quite literally a blood feud, which is destructively mapped onto the country's religious schism.

The renewal of extremism represented by the bloggers' killings is tied to the creeping secular authoritarianism of the Awami League. The BNP boycotted the most recent election in January 2024, which gave the Awami League an illegitimate victory amid widespread violence. The election typified the Awami League's rule since its election in 2008, which has been marked by controversial decisions that have stoked Secular-Islamic tension and bred radicalization.

Since the war of independence, many Bangladeshis have called for a war crimes tribunal to investigate the atrocities committed by West Pakistan sympathizers, primarily the current leaders of Jamaat. In 2009, the Awami League fulfilled its campaign pledge to begin organizing tribunals, which disproportionately targeted Jamaat leaders. Despite initial international support for the trials, a leaked U.S. State Department cable noted, "There is little doubt that hard-line elements within the ruling party (Awami League) believe that the time is right to crush Jamaat and other Islamic parties." Indeed, several prominent Jamaat leaders have been convicted and executed during the tribunal, prompting large protests by its supporters.

The perception of partisanship directed against the chief Islamic party and its current political sponsor creates a dangerous environment for radicalization. In 2011 the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute conducted a nationwide survey examining various dimensions of terrorism in Bangladesh BEI. The survey asked participants to explain the reasons a Bangladeshi might join a terrorist organization: Around 40 percent identified the use of Islam "to gain political ends;" another 20 percent said "lack of democracy."

Understanding the "communicative construction of extremism in Bangladesh" delves into how communication processes actively shape and promote extremist ideologies within the country. It goes beyond just analyzing extremist content and instead focuses on the mechanisms used to build and spread these harmful narratives. Extremist groups use specific language, symbols, and historical narratives to create a "us vs. them" mentality. They demonize opponents, justify violence, and build a sense of belonging and righteousness within their own group. Think of it like building a story where "we" are the righteous victims and "they" are the evil oppressors. Online platforms, social media, religious institutions, and even personal networks act as channels for spreading extremist messages. These channels create echo chambers where people are only exposed to information that reinforces their existing beliefs, making it harder to challenge extremist ideas. Existing societal grievances, historical narratives, and economic inequalities can be exploited by extremists to gain support. They might connect their ideology to addressing these issues, even if their solutions are harmful and violent. Examining how certain interpretations of religious texts and teachings are communicated and used to justify violence or intolerance within specific communities. It's important to remember that not all interpretations of any religion promote extremism, and focusing on specific groups and interpretations avoids harmful generalizations. Analyzing how political rhetoric and propaganda demonize opponents, sow distrust in democratic institutions, and justify violence. This can happen through traditional media, social media, and even informal conversations.

## Conclusion

Exploring how social and economic inequalities, marginalization, and a lack of opportunity can create fertile ground for extremist ideologies to take root. Addressing these underlying issues through communication and advocacy can be crucial in preventing extremism. By understanding the communicative construction of extremism, we can develop more effective counter-narratives and work towards a more peaceful and inclusive society in Bangladesh. This knowledge can empower individuals and communities to critically analyze information, challenge harmful narratives, and promote positive change.

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