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MUSLIM YOUTH IN BANGLADESH AND UK: IDENTIFYING VULNERABILITIES & INSIGHTS FOR COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Dr Shafi Md MOSTOFA

Charles Wallace Bangladesh Trust
Post-Doctoral Senior Visiting Fellow
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THIS PAPER EXAMINES THE DYNAMICS OF TERRORISM, ITS POLITICAL ECONOMY AND POLITICISATION, MUSLIM VICTIMISATION, LACK OF INCLUSIVITY, AND ISLAMOPHOBIA WHICH CONTRIBUTE SIGNIFICANTLY TO YOUTH SOCIAL ALIENATION, SUSCEPTIBILITY TO TERRORISM AND/OR RADICAL IDEOLOGIES. THE ROLE OF HISTORICAL AND ONGOING WESTERN MILITARY INTERVENTIONS IN MUSLIM-MAJORITY NATIONS IN FUELLING RADICALISATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND EXACERBATING A PERVASIVE SENSE OF MUSLIM VICTIMISATION, INTENSIFIED BY STATE-DIRECTED TERRORISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES ARE ALSO DISCUSSED. THESE FURTHER HEIGHTEN FEELINGS OF INJUSTICE AND GRIEVANCE AMONG MUSLIM YOUTH WORLDWIDE. FINALLY, STRATEGIES AIMED AT COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM ARE CRITIQUED, HIGHLIGHTING THEIR FAILURE TO ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES OF EXTREMISM.



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INTRODUCTION

Youth vulnerabilities represent critical challenges globally, impacting both developed and developing nations, leading to various societal issues. This paper examines the vulnerabilities faced by youth in Bangladesh and the United Kingdom, with a particular focus on countering violent extremism (CVE).

In Bangladesh, a country marked by political instability, governance challenges, poverty, and a burgeoning population, the youth are particularly susceptible to extremist ideologies. Economic disenfranchisement, limited educational opportunities and exposure to radical narratives contribute significantly to this vulnerability.¹ The socio-political landscape of Bangladesh, coupled with constrained youth prospects, fosters an environment ripe for extremist recruitment, underscoring the urgent need for effective CVE strategies.

Conversely, in the UK, youth vulnerabilities stem from distinct yet equally significant issues. The proliferation of online radicalisation, social isolation and identity crises among young individuals are prominent contributors to their susceptibility to extremist ideologies.² The multicultural fabric of the UK, while culturally rich and diverse, poses challenges in cultivating a cohesive national identity, rendering some youth more susceptible to extremist influence.

¹ S. M. Mostofa, *Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: A Pyramid Root Cause Model*, Cham: Springer Nature, 2021.

² P. Thomas, 'Youth, Terrorism and Education: Britain's Prevent Programme', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2016, pp 171–87.

Through a comparative analysis, this paper aims to provide insights and recommendations for developing robust CVE strategies tailored to the particular contexts of Bangladesh and the UK. Understanding youth vulnerabilities is crucial for evaluating the efficacy of existing CVE approaches in addressing the root causes that predispose young individuals to radical ideologies. By discerning the distinct and intersecting factors contributing to youth vulnerabilities, stakeholders can better address root causes and implement more effective interventions.³

Unique to this project is the selection of two countries representing different demographics, and levels of development. Bangladesh, a Muslim-majority developing nation, and the United Kingdom, where Muslims are a minority in a developed context, are chosen to examine if demographic or developmental factors significantly influence the experience of youth vulnerabilities. The research highlights that regardless of majority or minority status or levels of economic development, Muslim youth worldwide share similar crises of identity and feelings of marginalisation or devaluation.

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The research project is designed to address two primary research questions:

1. What are the common causes of youth dissatisfaction among Muslims in Bangladesh and the UK?
2. To what extent do existing CVE strategies effectively address these causes?

METHODOLOGY

This study employs an ethnographic approach to explore the vulnerability of Muslim youth to radical ideologies in the UK and Bangladesh. Over a period of one month, immersive fieldwork was conducted in various mosques across London, integrating participant observation and in-depth interviews. Ethnography was chosen for its strength in providing rich, contextualised insights into the lived experiences of individuals within specific cultural settings.⁴ By engaging with the mosque-going community, observing daily activities, religious practices, and informal discussions, a holistic view of the mosque environment and its influence on youth was formed.⁵ The study involved interviews with 60 Muslim youth aged 18 to 40 years — 30 from London (in the UK) and 30 from Dhaka and Rangpur (in Bangladesh). The open-ended, conversational interview style allowed participants to freely express their views and experiences, providing valuable insights into the complex and sensitive issue of radicalisation.⁶

³ D. Koehler (and J. Horgan), *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, Tools and Programs for Countering Violent Extremism*, London: Routledge, 2016.

⁴ M. Hammersley and P. Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, 3e, Abingdon: Routledge, 2007.

⁵ For details see R. M. Emerson, R. I. Fretz and L. L. Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

⁶ Mostofa, *Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh*.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on youth who regularly attend mosque activities, ensuring relevance to the research questions. Female participants were not included due to the mosque-based nature of the study which typically includes gender segregation, and sees higher male attendance and participation in many Muslim communities. For data collection, in most instances only one interviewee was chosen each day, and for a freer conversation, no notes were taken during the while interview (notes were written after interviews). Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and themes within the qualitative data. Ethical considerations were paramount, with participants informed of the research purpose, their rights, and assured confidentiality. This enabled a deep, contextualised understanding of the factors contributing to youth vulnerability to radicalisation, aiming to inform and enhance CVE strategies by making them more culturally and contextually relevant.

COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM: PURPOSES AND PRACTICES

The concept of addressing religiously inspired terrorism through both coercive and non-coercive measures emerged in response to evolving threats, particularly after 9/11. Initially, a predominant focus on coercive approaches, including military action and expanded policing powers, characterised counter-terrorism efforts. However, this emphasis on coercion failed to yield significant changes and, instead, Europe became a focal point for terrorist attacks in the mid-2000s, with the Madrid train bombing (2004) and the London 7/7 public transit attack in 2005. Noteworthy instances of large-scale arrests of jihadists such as ‘Operation Pendennis’ in Australia,⁷ the ‘Toronto 18’ in Canada,⁸ and the ‘Virginia Jihad Network’ in the US,⁹ underscored a crucial realisation: terrorism was not confined to the Middle East; in fact, it posed a significant threat to (and from within) Western societies. It became evident that combating terrorism solely through coercive means was inadequate, and there was a pressing need to address the ideological and sociological underpinnings of terrorism. The idea of CVE gained prominence in this context.

This paradigm shift — from traditional counter-terrorism approaches to CVE — was first visible in the UK, which led the way by introducing a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy in 2011, emphasising the prevention of individuals from engaging in or supporting terrorist activities.¹⁰ The European Union (EU) followed suit with its ‘Declaration of Competing Terrorism’ policy, and later the ‘EU Plan of Action on Combating Terrorism’ (both in 2004), highlighting the importance of addressing terrorism through non-coercive means.¹¹ Inspired by the UK’s prevention program, the United States also began to shift its focus

⁷ B. Schuurman, S. Harris-Hogan, P. Lentini and A. Zammit, ‘Operation Pendennis: A Case Study of an Australian Terrorist Plot’, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, vol. 8, 2014, pp 91–99.

⁸ M. D. Silber, ‘Operation Osage (Canada, 2006)’ in *idem*, *The Al Qaeda Factor: Plots Against the West*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011, pp 225–38.

⁹ J. P. Bjelopera and M. A. Randol, ‘American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating a Complex Threat’, 7 December 2010, Congressional Research Service, <https://www.fas.org/> (accessed on 9 January 2026).

¹⁰ HM Government, ‘Prevent Strategy: Government of the United Kingdom’, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a78966aed915d07d35b0dcc/prevent-strategy-review.pdf>, 2011 (accessed on 13 February 2026).

¹¹ R. Coolsaet, *What drives Europeans to Syria, and to IS? Insights from the Belgian Case*, Gent: Academia Press, 2015.

towards non-coercive approaches to addressing terrorism. In 2011, President Obama launched the 'National Strategy for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States', commonly referred to as the 'White House CVE Strategy', which was implemented through the 2011 White House CVE Implementation Plan (later upgraded to the 2016 White House CVE Implementation Plan).

Australia and Canada followed suit. Additionally, countries like France, Finland, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Spain, and Switzerland have also developed their own national strategies to combat terrorism, with a specific focus on preventing violent extremism and enhancing societal resilience in the face of terrorist threats.¹²

The influence of CVE and Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) strategies has also extended beyond national borders, influencing development aid and international cooperation efforts, particularly within US foreign policy. The commitment to CVE initiatives remains consistent, underscoring the increasing influence of CVE policies on both domestic and foreign policies, particularly in the US.

That said, terrorism evolved into a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, and it became evident that addressing violent extremism solely through coercive means was insufficient. Aly has argued that violent extremism poses not only a threat to public safety and national security but also undermines community integration and civil society, emphasising its social rather than just a threat to national security.¹³ Understanding the structural factors contributing to violent extremism is crucial. Sinai notes that violent extremism stems from various factors such as intolerance, social exclusion, bad governance, and political unrest.¹⁴ Mani emphasises the importance of scrutinising political, social and economic conditions as causal relationships to terrorism, emphasising the need to address these underlying issues to effectively combat violent extremism.¹⁵

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As mentioned earlier, CVE focuses on soft and non-coercive methods to mitigate violent extremism and terrorism.¹⁶ It engages with micro-level institutions (such as family members and religious authorities) as well as wider society to create counter-narratives against violent extremism.¹⁷ This multi-disciplinary approach

¹² S. Harris-Hogan, K. Barrelle and A. Zammit, 'What is Countering Violent Extremism? Exploring CVE Policy and Practice in Australia', *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, vol. 8, 2015, pp 1–19.

¹³ A. Aly, 'Finding Meaning for Countering Violent Extremism', *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, vol. 10, Issue 1, nos 1–2, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18335330.2015.1035554> (accessed 13 February 2026).

¹⁴ J. Sinai, 'New Trends in Terrorism Studies: Strengths and Weaknesses', in M. Ranstorp (ed.), *Mapping Terrorism Research: State of the Art, Gaps and Future Direction*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2007, pp 31–50.

¹⁵ R. Mani, 'The Root Causes of Terrorism and Conflict Prevention', in J. Boulden and T. Weiss (eds), *Terrorism and the UN: Before and After September 11*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004, pp 219–41.

¹⁶ W. McCants and C. Watts, 'U.S. Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism: An Assessment', Foreign Policy Research Institute E-Notes, 10 December 2012, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2012/12/u-s-strategy-for-countering-violent-extremism-an-assessment/> (accessed on 3 February 2026).

¹⁷ R. Briggs & S. Feve, 'Review of Programs to Counter Narratives of Violent Extremism', London: Institute of Strategic Dialogue, 2013, pp 1–68.

involves collaboration between government and non-government organisations, and civil societies,¹⁸ recognising the importance of preventive measures over reactive ones, addressing the root causes of violent extremism sustainably,¹⁹ and acknowledging the evolving nature of extremist ideologies and networks, necessitating adaptive strategies.²⁰ By integrating domestic and international policies, CVE responds to the global phenomenon of violent extremism²¹ while emphasising the need for contextualised approaches tailored to specific states and societies.

Constructivism offers a valuable lens through which to understand the development of violent extremism. Lindlof argues that individuals internalise the justification for violence based on their interpretation of reality, shaped by shared ideologies, values and norms.²² CVE challenges extremist ideologies by constructing counter-narratives and engaging communities,²³ representing a preventative approach to countering terrorism, addressing the root causes of extremism through community engagement and the construction of counter-narratives. As terrorism continues to evolve, CVE remains a dynamic and adaptive strategy to mitigate the threat of violent extremism effectively.

To effectively counter violent extremism, CVE implements its program in a multi-dimensional manner, utilising a variety of tools, policies and strategies. Following the public health model, CVE operates at three levels: primary, secondary and tertiary. This mirrors the classification system of disease prevention which also consists of the same three stages.²⁴ Primary prevention aims to reduce the incidence of new cases of violent extremism; the secondary stage focuses on minimising the impact of established cases, while tertiary intervention addresses existing instances of extremism.²⁵ Drawing upon a variety of strategies and frameworks, CVE efforts extend beyond traditional primary, secondary and tertiary prevention models, incorporating elements of education, community engagement, intervention, and ideological deconstruction.

¹⁸ See A. Z. Huq, 'Imagining Counterterrorism's Future', *World Policy Journal*, 2008, pp 31–39; Kokoda Foundation, 'Kokoda Trilogy Proceedings: Towards an Effective Strategy for Countering Islamist Terror', *Security Challenges*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2008, pp 165–79; and P. Wilkinson, 'Responses to Terrorism from the Toolbox of Liberal Democracies: Their Applicability to Other Types of Regimes', (unpublished) paper presented at 'Countering Terrorism through Enhanced International Cooperation', Courmayeur Mont Blanc, Italy, 22–24 September 2001.

¹⁹ A. N. Guiora, 'Not "By All Means Necessary": A Comparative Framework for Post-9/11 Approaches to Counterterrorism', *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*, no. 42, 2009, pp 273–87; O. P. Richmond, 'Realizing Hegemony? Symbolic Terrorism and the Roots of Conflict', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 26, 2003, 289–309; N. A. Pollard, 'Competing with Terrorists in Cyberspace: Opportunities and Hurdles', in M. Ranstorp (ed.), *Mapping Terrorism Research: State of the Art, Gaps and Future Direction*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2007, pp 236–51.

²⁰ B. M. Jenkins, *Countering al Qaeda: An Appreciation of the Situation and Suggestions for Strategy*, Santa Monica: RAND, 2002; J. L. Albin, 'Dealing With the Modern Terrorist: The Need for Changes in Strategies and Tactics in the New War on Terrorism', *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2001, pp. 255–81; S. Pickering, D. Wright-Neville, J. McCulloch and P. Lentini, *Counter-Terrorism Policing and Culturally Diverse Communities*, Victoria: Monash University and Victoria Police, 2007.

²¹ R. Crelinsten, *Counterterrorism*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009.

²² T. R. Lindlof, s.v. 'Constructivism', *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*, 2008, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781405186407.wbiecc129> (accessed on 29 January 2026).

²³ B. R. Bursleson and G. D. Bodie, 'Constructivism and Interpersonal Processes', *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*, 2008, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781405186407.wbiecc130> (accessed on 4 February 2026).

²⁴ R. Simeonsson, 'Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Prevention in Early Intervention', *Journal of Early Intervention*, vol. 15, 1991, pp 124–34.

²⁵ P. Mrazek and P. Haggerty, *Reducing Risks for Mental Disorders: Frontiers for Preventative Intervention Research*, Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1994; Harris-Hogan et al., 'What is Countering Violent Extremism?'

Education and Capacity Building: The primary stage of CVE emphasises preventive measures through education and building capacity. By educating individuals about violent extremism and providing training to community services (teachers, healthcare professionals, etc) CVE aims to enhance awareness and resilience within communities.²⁶

Community Engagement and Outreach: Initiatives such as Denmark's 'A Common and Safe Future' and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's National Security Youth Outreach Program demonstrate the importance of community engagement and outreach in CVE efforts. By fostering dialogue and collaboration with diverse stakeholders, these programs aim to build trust, resilience and understanding within communities.²⁷

Intervention and Support: Secondary prevention strategies focus on identifying and supporting individuals at risk of radicalisation or violent activity. Programs like Norway's 'Empower Conversation' and Denmark's 'Exit Talk' represent this approach by providing targeted interventions and support to vulnerable individuals, emphasising early intervention and community mobilisation.²⁸

Rehabilitation and Reintegration: Tertiary-level prevention aims to disengage and rehabilitate individuals already involved in extremist activities. Programs like Australia's Community Integration Support Program (CISP) offer alternatives to incarceration and provide support for disengagement and reintegration, addressing the root causes of radicalisation.

Ideological Deconstruction: Initiatives targeting ideological drivers of extremism seek to challenge extremist narratives and promote moderate interpretations of Islam. By engaging

religious leaders and promoting dialogue, these programs aim to undermine the appeal of violent extremism and foster critical thinking within communities.²⁹

Global Perspectives and Collaboration: The analysis acknowledges successful CVE programs internationally, highlighting the importance of global perspectives and collaboration in addressing violent extremism. Examples from countries like Norway, Australia and Saudi Arabia demonstrate the diverse approaches and strategies employed in CVE efforts.³⁰

By addressing diverse factors contributing to radicalisation and extremism, these programs aim to promote resilience, tolerance and peace within communities.

²⁶ Harris-Hogan *et al.*, 'What is Countering Violent Extremism?'.
²⁷ Government of Denmark, *A Common and Safe Future: An Action Plan to Prevent Extremist Views and Radicalization among Young People*, Copenhagen: Schultz Distribution, 2009.

²⁸ Danish Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration, 'Deradicalization Targeted Intervention: Introduction to a Pilot Project', Copenhagen: Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration, 2011.

²⁹ A. H. Cordesman, 'Winning the "War on Terrorism": A Fundamentally Different Strategy', *Middle East Policy*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2006, pp 101–8.

³⁰ T. Bjørge and I. Magnæs Gjelsvik, 'Status Report: Research on the Prevention of Radicalization and Violent Extremism', Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2015, pp 1–40; A. F. Ansary, 'Combating Extremism: A Brief Overview of Saudi Arabia's Approach', *Middle East Policy*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2008, pp 111–42.

Analysing specific case studies, such as the UK's CONTEST strategy (Figure 1) and Bangladesh's CVE efforts, provides valuable insights into the diverse approaches and challenges associated with countering violent extremism in different contexts.

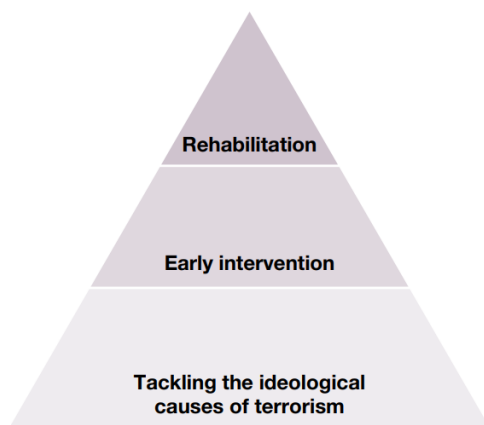


Figure 1: CVE Approach of the Government of the United Kingdom © HM Government, 'Prevent Duty Guidance: Guidance for Specified Authorities in England and Wales', 2023, p. 8.

CONTEST aims to mitigate the risk of terrorism to the UK, its citizens and its interests abroad, thereby allowing people to live freely and securely. It has four pillars: Prevent, Pursue, Protect, and Prepare.

Prevent: This focuses on preventing individuals from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism, as well as supporting the rehabilitation and disengagement of those already involved in terrorism. It involves a range of activities aimed at identifying and intervening with individuals susceptible to radicalisation. It requires various authorities, such as education, health, local government, and law enforcement agencies to collaborate and participate in efforts to prevent radicalisation.³¹

Pursue: The aim here is to stop terrorist attacks by disrupting and prosecuting terrorist plots and individuals involved in terrorism. It involves law enforcement agencies investigating and prosecuting individuals suspected of terrorist activity.³²

Protect: This seeks to strengthen the UK's protection against terrorist attacks by enhancing security measures and resilience in key areas such as infrastructure, transportation and public spaces. It involves working with partners to identify and mitigate potential vulnerabilities to terrorist attacks.³³

³¹ HM Government, 'Prevent Duty Guidance: Guidance for Specified Authorities in England and Wales', [Prevent duty guidance: Guidance for specified authorities in England and Wales](#), 2023 (accessed on 13 February 2026).

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

Prepare: The focus here is on mitigating the impact of a terrorist attack by ensuring effective emergency response and recovery capabilities. This includes training and exercising emergency response procedures and enhancing coordination among relevant agencies.³⁴

The Prevent component of CONTEST is particularly significant, aiming to address the root cause of terrorism, namely ‘ideology’, and intervene early to support individuals susceptible to radicalisation. It operates through a multi-agency approach, involving various sectors and professionals such as educators, healthcare providers and law enforcement personnel. The Prevent duty requires specific authorities to identify and refer individuals at risk of radicalisation, and to ensure they receive appropriate support and intervention.³⁵ It highlights the importance of tackling the ideological causes of terrorism and enabling the disengagement and rehabilitation of those already involved in terrorism. Activities include reducing the influence of radicalisers, providing tailored support to individuals at risk and delivering interventions to reduce offending risk among individuals with terrorist-related backgrounds.³⁶ Overall, the CONTEST strategy emphasises a comprehensive and integrated approach to counter-terrorism, addressing various aspects from prevention to response.

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Bangladesh has also faced significant challenges in combating violent extremism, particularly in the wake of high-profile attacks such as the Holey Artisan Café attack in 2016. Following such incidents, the government has been compelled to adopt measures to address the threat posed by militant groups, particularly those with Islamist ideologies.

The country’s CVE strategies have evolved over time, with various government agencies and stakeholders involved in implementing initiatives aimed at preventing radicalisation, raising awareness and countering extremist narratives (Figure 2). One notable initiative is the construction of the ‘Countering Terrorism and Prevention of International Crime Centre’, a project approved in 2018 with significant funding allocated for its implementation over five years.³⁷

³⁴ HM Government, ‘Prevent Duty Guidance’.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ S. M. Mostofa, ‘Countering Violent Extremism in Bangladesh’, *European Eye on Radicalization*, 2023, [Countering Violent Extremism in Bangladesh](#) (accessed on 12 February 2026).

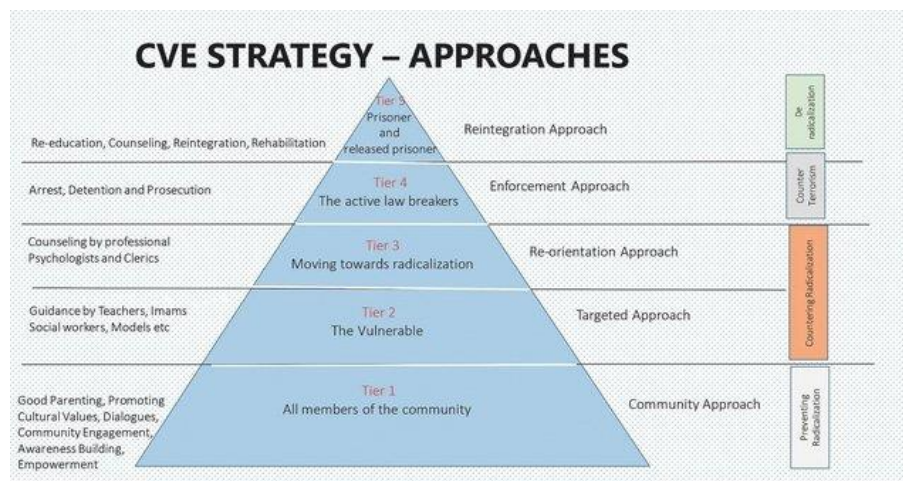


Figure 2: CVE Approach of Bangladesh Police © Mostofa, 'Countering Violent Extremism in Bangladesh', 2023, p. 2.

As part of this project, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) has spearheaded a four-phase CVE strategy:

Preventing Violent Extremism: The first phase emphasises a community-based approach to preventing radicalisation, focusing on raising awareness and building resilience within communities. Efforts have been made to engage various segments of society, including faith leaders, teachers, security forces and professionals through seminars, workshops and awareness programs conducted across different districts of Bangladesh. Additionally, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has undertaken projects to create anti-militancy awareness through nationwide publicity campaigns, leveraging Information and Communication Technology (ICT) platforms.³⁸

Countering Radicalisation: The second phase targets individuals vulnerable to radicalisation. Local *imams* (mosque leaders), teachers and community leaders are employed to provide counseling. However, these initiatives are yet to be fully implemented.

Countering Terrorism: The third phase involves kinetic responses by security forces to counter individuals actively engaged in violent activities.

Rehabilitation and Reintegration: The final phase targets individuals who have been arrested and imprisoned. The government has initiated programs to provide comprehensive counseling (religious, psychological, cultural, educational, and legal) to extremists who are sentenced to jail and are at risk. Those who complete the programs are reintegrated through vocational training and logistical support.³⁹

Despite these initiatives, Bangladesh's CVE efforts face several challenges and limitations. Some programs, such as pre-sermon speeches prepared by the Bangladesh Islamic Foundation (BIF) and media campaigns

³⁸ Mostofa, 'Countering Violent Extremism'.

³⁹ I. Ahmed, *Training Manual: Deradicalization and Rehabilitation of Violent Extremism Offenders in Bangladesh*, Tokyo: The Sasakawa Peace Foundation, 2003.

against militancy have not been consistently implemented or sustained over time. The discontinuation of certain initiatives, such as the distribution of educational materials and the engagement of *imams*, reflects the challenges of maintaining long-term impact and effectiveness in CVE efforts. Further, while efforts have been made to counter terrorism through aggressive security operations and law enforcement measures, the holistic approach needed for sustainable CVE outcomes, including addressing root causes and providing support for disengagement and rehabilitation, requires further development. Additionally, various security forces are running CVE programs without coordination, hindering the effectiveness of these initiatives. Most importantly, these activities are currently running on an ad-hoc basis, and their future is uncertain.

Bangladesh's CVE efforts represent a multifaceted approach involving various stakeholders and initiatives aimed at preventing radicalisation and countering violent extremism. While significant progress has been made, challenges persist in achieving sustained impact and effectiveness, highlighting the need for continued investment, coordination and innovation in Bangladesh's CVE strategies to address the complex and evolving threat landscape.

In summary, while both the UK and Bangladesh employ strategies to counter violent extremism, they differ in their approaches, resources and capacities. However, both countries' strategies embody a comprehensive and integrated approach, with a strong emphasis on prevention and deradicalisation through ideological deconstruction.

ISSUES OF YOUTH VULNERABILITIES

Issues of youth vulnerabilities are divided into five categories, as follows:

Politics of Terrorism or Political Economy of Terrorism

How politicians engage with incidents of terrorism, real or perceived, often intersects with broader political agendas and power dynamics. Some politicians exploit acts of terrorism or the fear of terrorism to consolidate power, utilising fear as a tool to strengthen their political positions.⁴⁰ Additionally, state-sponsored terrorism can involve governments supporting or utilising terrorist groups for geopolitical ends.⁴¹ Politicians may also engage with terrorism as a diversionary tactic during domestic crises. Ethnic or nationalist agendas can drive politicians to support terrorism to advance separatist goals, echoing insights from Gurr.⁴² Finally, Diego Gambetta's work highlights how politicians may have criminal connections, collaborating with terrorist networks for personal gain.⁴³ Each case underscores complex motivations and implications, shaping the intricate politics behind terrorism involving politicians.

⁴⁰ J. Mueller and M. G. Stewart, 'The Terrorism Delusion: America's Overwrought Response to September 11', *International Security*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2012, pp 81–110.

⁴¹ P. R. Pillar, *Terrorism and US Foreign Policy*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004.

⁴² T. R. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, New York: Routledge, 1970, rpt 2011.

⁴³ D. Gambetta (ed.), *Making Sense of Suicide Missions*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

In the aftermath of 9/11, some governments used the threat of terrorism to legitimise their authoritarian regimes, often receiving funding from the US, which inadvertently created a conducive environment for terrorist activities. This strategy involved a calculated cost-and-benefit analysis of Islamist terrorism, where some governments used extremist threats to demonstrate their importance as global security partners, bolstering their standing with Western countries. For example, in Bangladesh, there have been allegations that the government manipulated Islamist extremism as a tool, orchestrating operations — many considered to be staged — against militants to magnify the perceived threat for Western audiences. This narrative was amplified, for instance, by distrust towards political parties like the Bangladesh National Party (BNP)—Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (Jel), suspected of aligning with Islamists. Seventeen youth interviewed for this research mentioned that the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL) government of Sheikh Hasina had used the issue of militancy/extremism to gain Western support for their authoritarian domestic regime.

I have argued elsewhere that the presence and activities of Jel, an Islamist political party in Bangladesh, served a dual purpose for BAL.⁴⁴ First, Jel's prominence allowed BAL to portray Bangladesh as confronting a rising tide of fundamentalism, thereby positioning themselves as the primary solution and ally for Western countries concerned about extremism. And second, by associating Jel with the opposition BNP, particularly due to the former's controversial role in opposing Bangladesh's independence in 1971, BAL effectively delegitimised the politics of the BNP. This tactic leverages historical grievances and perceptions to undermine the credibility and standing of the BNP within Bangladesh's political landscape.

Similarly, in the UK, a Tanzanian UK resident viewed terrorism and Islamophobic incidents as politically motivated acts aimed at garnering political gains. Historically, electoral exploitation of fear has targeted different groups for political advantage — Blacks, then Indians, and now Muslims — for voting politics.⁴⁵ Another perspective, from a Pakistani Muslim living in the UK, suggested that terrorism and attacks served a political purpose, aimed at undermining the Islamic worldview while seeking political and economic benefits. He said:

'Look who is getting benefited out of this terrorism attacks [*sic*]. None of the IS [Islamic State] attackers are attacking Israel. Why are they attacking mostly Muslims? Don't you understand who is doing all these? If you analyse cost and benefit of Islamist terrorism, you will get answer. You don't need to become an expert.'⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Mostofa, 'Countering Violent Extremism in Bangladesh'.

⁴⁵ Interviewee no. 23, London, 22 April 2024.

⁴⁶ Interviewee no. 12, London, 11 April 2024.

Correlating with the statement of this interviewee, Reynié suggests that a majority (86.3 per cent) of Islamist terrorist attacks have occurred in Muslim countries;⁴⁷ the same was true of deaths resulting from Islamist terrorist attacks (88.9 per cent), also in Muslim countries.

These narratives reflect a complex intersection of geopolitics, authoritarian strategies and electoral calculus in the context of terrorism. Evidently, some youth of both countries assume that the 'Islamist militant saga' is a politically motivated phenomenon which has nothing to do with religion.

Invasion of Muslim Lands

The rise of Islamist terrorism is deeply intertwined with dissatisfaction among Muslim youth globally about military invasions and interventions in Muslim-majority regions and countries. Mueller and Stewart argue that

'what chiefly sets these guys off is not anything particularly theoretical but, rather, intense outrage at American and Israeli actions in the Middle East and a burning desire to seek revenge, to get back, to defend.'⁴⁸

Extremist ideas gained traction in the mid-1970s among Muslims when the Arab nationalist project, which aimed to promote Arab unity and Pan-Islamism, faltered in the face of defeats against Israel. This failure led to a shift towards more radical interpretations of Islam and an embrace of Islamist ideologies that emphasised resistance and retaliation.⁴⁹ For example, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) adopted a 10-point program in 1974 including the rejection of the state of Israel, and birth of Hezbollah in 1982 to drive Israel out of Lebanon.⁵⁰ The subsequent invasions of Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003) and Syria (2014) has not only complicated the situation further but also aggrieved Muslim youth across the world and created generations of militant Muslims.⁵¹

I have recently argued that the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate (1924) had profound long-term repercussions across the Muslim world, representing the end of a longstanding central Islamic authority.⁵² It left a significant void and sparked a quest among Muslims for new forms of political and religious expression, which ultimately gave birth to Political Islam. During colonial rule, some Muslim-majority regions endured European imperial domination, characterised by foreign governance, resource exploitation and the marginalisation of local identities and institutions. Colonial powers often imposed secular governance structures and undermined traditional religious authorities, fuelling disillusionment and resentment among

⁴⁷ D. Reynié, *Islamist Terrorist Attacks in the World 1979–2024*, Paris: Fondation pour l'innovation politique, 2024, [enquête-terrorisme_2021_gb_2024-09-30_w.pdf](#) (accessed on 28 July 2026).

⁴⁸ Mueller and Stewart, 'The Terrorism Delusion'.

⁴⁹ Mostofa, *Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh*.

⁵⁰ E. Azani, 'The Hybrid Terrorist Organization: Hezbollah as a Case Study', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 36, no. 11, 2013, pp 899–91.

⁵¹ S. M. Mostofa, 'Understanding Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, vol. 56, no. 8, 2021, pp 2036–51.

⁵² S. M. Mostofa, *Institutions of Political Islam in Bangladesh: Histories, Agendas, and Strategies*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2025, pp 1–120.

Muslim populations. Despite some Muslim states and nations being under colonial rule, the existence of the Ottoman Caliphate persisted, fostering a symbolic sense of unity and resistance against external influences. Notably, protests in British India advocating support for the Ottoman Caliphate underscored a collective attachment to Islamic governance.⁵³

Even though Political Islam emerged after the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate, the trajectory of Islamist extremism gained momentum only after the defeat of Arab forces in the Arab-Israel War (1973). The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979) provided a catalyst for the mobilisation of Islamist fighters, who were supported by anti-Soviet Western powers. This long-running conflict gave rise to militant groups like the Mujahideen, later morphing into the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, which would go on to shape global Islamist militancy. The subsequent US-led invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) further fuelled anti-Western sentiments and provided fertile ground for extremist ideologies to take root, and militant organisations like Islamic State to flourish. These military interventions, justified under the banner of combating terrorism and promoting democracy, led to widespread destabilisation, civilian casualties and the entrenchment of violent extremism across the region.

Global terrorism data indicates a notable increase in Islamist terrorist attacks since 1979, correlating with a pattern where more countries experienced Western military interventions, leading to a corresponding rise in terrorist attacks (Figure 3).

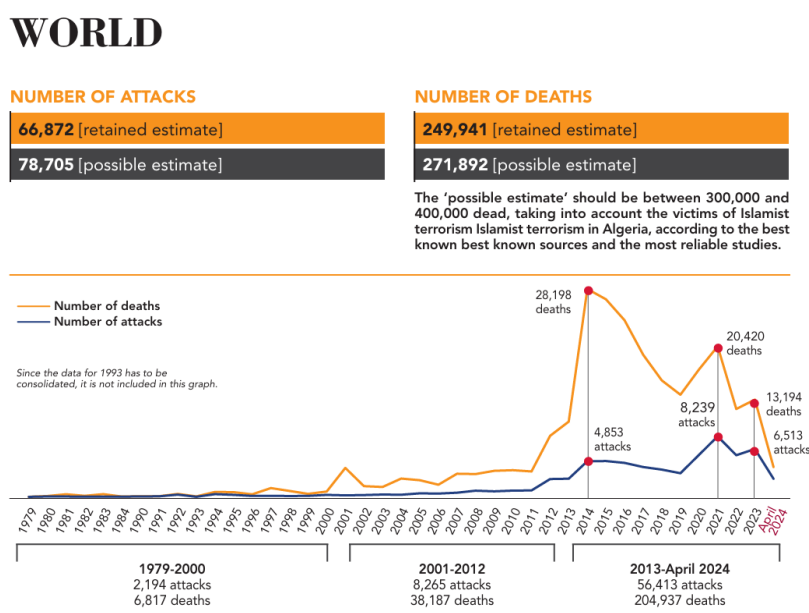


Figure 3: Islamist Terrorist Attacks and Deaths © D. Reynie, *Islamist Terrorist Attacks in the World*, Paris: Fondation pour l'innovation politique, 2024, p. 52.

⁵³ S. Ahmed, s.v. 'Khilafat Movement', *Banglapedia*, https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Khilafat_Movement (accessed on 24 July 2026).

In my fieldwork, I have observed that Muslims in mosques in the UK and Bangladesh regularly pray for Palestinian Muslims during times of conflict, particularly, for instance, when Gazans face bombardment by Israeli forces. This solidarity reflects a deep sense of brotherhood among Muslims drawing upon the strongly held belief that Muslims worldwide are part of a single community (or Ummah), where individuals express empathy and a feeling of ‘proxy victimisation’⁵⁴ for fellow Muslims enduring hardship. In my interactions, I have not encountered a single interviewee who did not express sympathy for Palestinian Muslims. Further, street protests in both the UK and Bangladesh denouncing Israeli actions in Gaza have been commonplace, underscoring the widespread sentiment of solidarity and opposition to perceived injustices. Many individuals I spoke with also attribute blame to Western powers for what they view as illegitimate military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. This perception highlights a broader narrative of discontent with Western foreign policies perceived as detrimental to Muslim-majority regions.

These observations underscore the depth of emotional and political engagement among Muslims in response to international events, reflecting a collective desire for justice, solidarity and opposition to what is perceived as unjust actions perpetrated against fellow Muslims.

Muslim Victimisation

Feelings of victimisation are strong among Muslims in both the UK and Bangladesh. In daily prayers, and especially during Friday prayers, Muslims prayed for their brethren in Palestine who were being bombed by Israel. One interviewee expressed this sentiment vividly, saying: ‘If one part of your body is injured, other parts of the body feel the same pain’.⁵⁵ Similar sentiments were expressed by almost all interviewees.

The pervasive feeling of victimisation among Muslims is very strong. Extremist groups exploit this narrative, claiming that Muslims are persecuted by Christians in Iraq, Jews in Palestine, Hindus in Kashmir, and Buddhists in Myanmar.⁵⁶

Muslims also appear to have become victims of state-directed activities over the decades. Varying types and levels of state-organised operations have resulted in thousands of deaths, injuries, intimidation, threats, disappearances, extra-judicial killings, genocide, and kidnappings by state agents and their proxies in places such as Bosnia, Chechnya, China, Congo, Darfur, Iraq, Kashmir, Myanmar, Palestine, Somalia, Syria, and Uzbekistan. Actions to counter terrorism have often turned into state terrorism by intentionally failing to distinguish between the innocent and the guilty thereby intimidating the wider population or specific targeted communities, especially after 9/11 and the consequent global war against terrorism.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Mostofa, *Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh*.

⁵⁵ Interviewee no 2, London, 3 April 2024 and Interviewee no. 4, London, 4 April 2024.

⁵⁶ Mostofa, *Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh*.

⁵⁷ R. Goodin, *What's Wrong with Terrorism?* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006, pp 69–73.

The number of deaths from such state activities has outnumbered those from non-state terrorist groups. According to Rummel, approximately 170–200 million civilians were killed in the 20th century alone by state-organised killings, mass murder, genocide, and terrorising of large populations.⁵⁸ Additionally, about 300,000 people have disappeared each year in the last two decades.⁵⁹ In comparison, deaths caused by various terrorist groups worldwide each year number a few hundred. Yet, despite its fatal characteristics, state terrorism is not acknowledged with significant attention in International Relations (IR), Security Studies or Terrorism studies.⁶⁰

The plight of Palestinians in Israel is a good example of such state terrorism. Western media often highlights countering terrorism and addressing Palestinian militant groups as security concerns for Israel. While Israeli civilians have the right to demand security, the Israeli government legitimises its policy and actions against Palestinians. In reality, Israel continuously instils fear, injuries, home demolitions, beatings, abuse, and torture on Palestinians.⁶¹ This state-organised suppression has continued since the birth of Israel in 1948 in Palestine.

The groundwork for displacing Arabs from their land began well before the creation of Israel. Early Zionist leaders viewed depopulating Arabs as a better solution than co-existence,⁶² like General Yigal Yadin's 'Plan D' (1948), which aimed at securing new Jewish settlements through village destruction and displacement of Arab residents.⁶³ This brutal framework persists, with Palestinians facing daily abuse and violence.⁶⁴

In India, Muslims have faced severe othering as a minority group in recent years. Despite India's ethnic diversity, Muslims have experienced marginalisation by state institutions, being portrayed as foreign invaders. The dominance of Hindu nationalism in nation-building by the current BJP government led by Narendra Modi has severely undermined the spirit of secularism that underwrites the *Constitution of India*. For instance, Kashmir faces state oppression every day, with over 70 killed and 7,000 injured by the Indian army in July 2016. The Babri Masjid demolition (1992) and the Gujarat riots (2002) highlight state-organised communal violence against Muslims;⁶⁵ the Citizenship Amendment Act (2019) and revoking Kashmir's semi-autonomous status (2019) have further squeezed rights of Muslims.⁶⁶

The Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar have faced genocide and ethnic cleansing over decades, intensified most recently in 2016–17. Denied civil rights and citizenship, they are labelled as illegal immigrants. The state's anti-Rohingya (Muslim) narrative by the military *junta*, from a Buddhist nationalist perspective, led to the 2016–17

⁵⁸ R. J. Rummel, *Death by Government*, Somerset, NJ: Transaction Books, 1994.

⁵⁹ J. Sluka, 'Introduction: State Terror and Anthropology', in *idem* (ed.), *Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000, pp 1–45.

⁶⁰ R. Jackson, 'An Argument for Terrorism', *Perspectives on Terrorism*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2008, pp 25–32; R. Blakeley, 'Bringing the State Back into Terrorism Studies', *European Political Science*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2007, pp 228–35.

⁶¹ R. Jackson, E. Murphy and S. Poynting (eds), *Contemporary State Terrorism: Theory and Practice*, London: Routledge, 2009.

⁶² B. Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

⁶³ I. Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Oxford: One World, 2006.

⁶⁴ Haq, 'Imagining Counterterrorism's Future'; MachsomWatch, 'A Counterinterview: Checkpoints 2004', [Report-E 1-112](#) (accessed on 3 February 2026).

⁶⁵ G. Shah, 'The BJP's Riddle in Gujarat: Caste, Factionalism and Hindutva', in T. Hansen and C. Jaffrelot (eds), *The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp 243–66.

⁶⁶ N. A. Kabir, 'Identity Politics in India: Gujarat and Delhi Riots', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2020, pp 395–409.

genocide by the Burmese army, with approximately 10,000 civilians killed and 100,000 deported to Bangladesh.

Bosnian Muslims faced similar atrocities by Bosnian Serb troops in 1995, resulting in 8,000 men being killed, and women raped and enslaved. Uyghur Muslims in China face severe state suppression, including restrictions on religious practices, forced assimilation and sterilisation.⁶⁷ The Middle East also remains vulnerable to conflicts (with superpowers like the US) and inter-religious sectarian violence.

Such consistent and widespread discrimination against Muslims worldwide creates a sense of grievance and injustice, leading to polarisation and violent activity within the community.

Lack of Inclusivity

The War on Terror following 9/11 significantly impacted Muslims, contributing to their marginalisation and social exclusion globally. Despite the constitutional frameworks of liberal democratic nations promoting equality and opportunity, the reality for many Muslims is marked by discrimination and unequal treatment. This dichotomy highlights the ongoing struggle between theoretical principles and practical realities, influenced by socio-economic factors, power dynamics and cultural prejudices. Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin emphasise the stigmatisation of Muslims post-9/11, warning against the ‘them vs us’ binary that has intensified divisions between Muslims and the West.⁶⁸ This perspective aligns with Said’s concept of ‘Orientalism’,⁶⁹ which outlines how Western societies construct and perpetuate notions of Eastern cultures as inferior and exotic. These entrenched perceptions have been solidified in recent years by the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict and US foreign policies, which have often portrayed Muslim identity as a monolithic and threatening entity.⁷⁰

The post-9/11 era has particularly intensified the ‘othering’ of Muslims, creating a ‘clash of civilizations’ in which, as Huntington posits, future global conflicts will be driven by cultural differences between Western and non-Western societies, thus framing Muslims as inherent threats to Western hegemony.⁷¹ Media representations have reinforced this narrative, often equating Islam with terrorism which Altheide argues has created a pervasive and damaging stereotype of Muslims as synonymous with violence.⁷² This stigmatisation has practical repercussions, as evident in the higher rates of unemployment and social exclusion faced by

⁶⁷ A. Hayes, ‘Explainer: Who are the Uyghurs and why is the Chinese government detaining them?’, *The Conversation*, 15 February 2019, <https://theconversation.com/explainerwho-are-the-uyghurs-and-why-is-the-chinese-g> (accessed on 16 February 2026); E. Graham-Harrison and L. Kuo, ‘Uighur Muslim Teacher tells of Forced Sterilisation in Xinjiang’, *The Guardian*, 4 September 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/04/muslim-minority-teacher-50-tells-of-forced-sterilisation-in-xinjiang-ch> (accessed on 4 February 2026).

⁶⁸ P. Morey and A. Yaqin, *Framing Muslims*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2011.

⁶⁹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

⁷⁰ L. A. Cainkar, ‘Homeland Insecurity: The Arab American and Muslim American Experience After 9/11’, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7758/9781610447683> (accessed on 13 February 2026).

⁷¹ S. P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1997.

⁷² D. L. Altheide, (2006). ‘Terrorism and the Politics of Fear’, *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, vol. 6, no. 4, 2006, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708605285733> (accessed on 13 February 2026).

Muslims in Western countries. In the UK, for instance, the 2011 Census shows that Muslims had the highest unemployment rate among all faith groups, with significant barriers to accessing managerial and professional roles.⁷³ Geographical segregation further compounds these disadvantages, with many Muslims living in impoverished areas with limited opportunities for quality education and employment.⁷⁴

The lived experiences of Muslims in Western societies highlights the pervasive nature of discrimination. One interviewee recounted an incident on public transport: ‘A non-white man was on the train. He was sitting right next to a white man. Then the white man left the place and was standing elsewhere in the public transport.’⁷⁵ This seemingly minor act of exclusion reflects deeper societal biases and discomfort towards Muslims. Another man working in a restaurant, said: ‘They do cleaning work by me mostly’ [*sic*], indicating that Muslims are often relegated to menial tasks despite their capabilities.⁷⁶

A young man from Sierra Leone who migrated to the UK 10 years ago described subtle but clear exclusionary behaviours: ‘They don’t do anything but through their sign and facial language they show that you are not welcome to their society.’⁷⁷ Such experiences underscore the silent but potent forms of discrimination that Muslims face daily. Another person working in a Turkish restaurant noted the disparity in job assignments: ‘I was promoted to the position of Waiter but I was never given a waiver from odd jobs, while newcomers from Turkey and British citizens were never given any odd jobs.’⁷⁸

Such personal testimonies vividly illustrate how systemic discrimination manifests in everyday interactions, reinforcing the broader trends of social exclusion and economic marginalisation, suggesting that cultural and religious identities continue to act as barriers to full participation in society, reflecting broader issues of inclusion and equity.

Further, corruption, nepotism and bad governance in countries like Bangladesh exacerbate the exclusion of ordinary Muslims by favouring élites and marginalising the broader population. Interviewees highlighted these issues, pointing out that the existing system is not inclusive and primarily benefits the élites. This adds another layer of complexity to the challenges faced by Muslims, both in their countries of origin and in diaspora communities.

That said, the marginalisation of Muslims is a multifaceted issue rooted in historical prejudices, socio-political dynamics and contemporary events. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of the interplay between identity, power and opportunity, as well as a concerted effort to promote genuine inclusion

⁷³ P. Hopkins and R. Gale (eds), *Muslims in Britain: Race, Place and Identities*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

⁷⁴ S. Khan, ‘Social Exclusion of Muslims in India and Britain’, *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2020, pp 56–77.

⁷⁵ Interviewee no. 5, London, 6 April 2024.

⁷⁶ Interviewee no. 27, London, 26 April 2024.

⁷⁷ Interviewee no. 14, London, 17 April 2024.

⁷⁸ Interviewee no. 21, London, 20 April 2024.

and equality in both policy and practice. The testimonies of those affected provide crucial insight into the lived reality of discrimination and underscore the urgent need for systemic change.

Islamophobia

Islamophobia manifests in various forms across different countries, often operating under the guise of secularism, security concerns or national unity. In France and India, for instance, the regulation of Muslim dress codes is a prominent example of state-sanctioned discrimination. France's ban on the *burqa* and *niqab* (face-covering), as well as restrictions on the *hijab* in public schools and government offices, are justified by the state as measures to uphold secularism and gender equality. However, these laws disproportionately target Muslim women, forcing them to choose between their religious beliefs and their ability to participate fully in public life. In France, the message that got conveyed was that Muslim identity was incompatible with French identity, reinforcing negative stereotypes and social stigmatisation.⁷⁹

In India, the ban on *hijab* in educational institutions in some states has similarly sparked controversy and protests. These policies are often enforced selectively against Muslim students and teachers, undermining their right to religious freedom and education.⁸⁰

The media also plays a significant role in perpetuating Islamophobia by consistently framing Muslims as terrorists or potential threats. High-profile cases involving terrorism charges against Muslims often receive extensive coverage emphasising the suspects' religion rather than evidence and due process. This selective amplification fosters a public perception that links Islam inherently with violence and extremism. For instance, media coverage of terrorist attacks in Western countries often includes detailed descriptions of the perpetrators' religious background if they are Muslim, while similar attacks by individuals of other faiths do not receive the same focus. This biased portrayal creates a climate of fear and suspicion towards the Muslim community, exacerbating social divisions and mistrust.⁸¹ This impression was mentioned by most of the interviewees in Bangladesh and UK. Bangladeshi youth described this situation as

'When a blogger is criticising our Prophet, maybe he is being arrested but not bringing them [*sic*] in front of media. But all Islamist militants are brought to the media. This is simply a media trial. Many of them were later proved to be innocent.'⁸²

Direct physical and verbal attacks against Muslims are also manifestations of Islamophobia. An Indian Muslim living in Ilford (in outer London) mentioned an incident that happened in his locality: a *hijab*-clad woman was attacked by white men, highlighting the everyday violence and harassment that Muslim women face due to

⁷⁹ J. Cesari, *Why the West Fears Islam: An Exploration of Muslims in Liberal Democracies*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

⁸⁰ S. M. Mostofa, 'Is Hijab-Wearing Alien or Indigenous to South Asian Culture?', *The Diplomat*, 15 March 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/03/is-hijab-wearing-alien-or-indigenous-to-south-asian-culture/> (accessed on 20 February 2026).

⁸¹ I. Awan, 'Islamophobia and Twitter: A Typology of Online Hate Against Muslims on Social Media', *Policy & Internet*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2014, pp 133–50.

⁸² Interviewee no. 34, Dhaka, 3 May 2024.

their visible religious identity. Such attacks are part of a broader pattern of hate crimes that target Muslims based on their appearance and beliefs.⁸³ In another disturbing incident shared by another interviewee, a dog was reportedly sent to attack some Muslim women, accompanied by derogatory remarks like 'Hey, smell my armpit'.⁸⁴ Such acts of violence not only dehumanise Muslims but also reflect the deep-seated hatred and prejudice that can lead to more severe forms of discrimination and aggression.

In Muslim-majority countries like Bangladesh, Islamophobia is often manifested through secular policies that marginalise Islamic practices and individuals associated with religious education. Students at the University of Dhaka faced backlash for organising a Qur'an recitation event on campus, with the Dean of the Faculty of Arts seeking their names and criticising the Chairman of the Department of Arabic. This incident was repeated by many interviewees who saw this as an attack on their faith. Another teacher at the university was bullied during his appointment for having studied at a madrasa, highlighting the prejudice against traditional Islamic education.⁸⁵ These biases contribute to the marginalisation of those who pursue Islamic studies, limiting their professional opportunities and social acceptance.

The prohibition of Islam-based democratic politics is another factor contributing to the radicalisation of some Muslims. When democratic avenues for expressing political and religious beliefs are closed, individuals may feel disenfranchised and turn to more extreme measures to voice their grievances.⁸⁶ Banning religiously oriented political parties can be seen as an attempt to suppress legitimate political dissent and diversity, undermining democratic principles and fuelling resentment.⁸⁷ This was mentioned by some interviewees who felt that some democratic Islamist political parties including Jel were marginalised in Bangladesh, which created an unhealthy environment for those who wanted an Islamic state through democratic means. Critically analysing these incidents shows that Islamophobia is deeply entrenched in various aspects of society, from legislation and media representation to personal interactions and institutional policies.

The vulnerabilities faced by Muslim youth, rooted in the politics of terrorism, the invasion of Muslim lands, Muslim victimisation, lack of inclusivity, and pervasive Islamophobia create fertile ground for the adoption of radical ideologies. The politics of terrorism often frames Muslims as inherent threats, leading to discriminatory policies and social ostracisation. This stigmatisation, compounded by the invasion of Muslim-majority regions by Western powers fosters a sense of collective grievance and historical injustice among young Muslims.⁸⁸ Moreover, the widespread victimisation of Muslims in conflict zones like Kashmir, Palestine and Myanmar, where systemic violence and human rights abuses are rampant, exacerbates feelings of helplessness and

⁸³ Interviewee no. 25, London, 24 April 2024.

⁸⁴ Interviewee no. 9, London, 8 April 2024.

⁸⁵ Interviewee no. 7, London, 7 April 2024.

⁸⁶ M. Hasan, 'Understanding Islam-based Politics: The Case of Bangladesh', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2011, pp 29–50.

⁸⁷ O. Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

⁸⁸ J. L. Esposito & I. Kalin (eds), *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

anger. The exclusion of Muslims from mainstream social, political and economic life further deepens their alienation, as they find themselves marginalised and voiceless in societies that often propagate narratives of Muslim inferiority or danger. Islamophobia, perpetuated through biased media representations, discriminatory laws such as dress code bans, and everyday acts of violence and harassment not only isolate young Muslims but also engenders a profound identity crisis. Such exclusion and hostility can drive youth toward radical ideologies that promise empowerment, retribution and a sense of belonging.⁸⁹ Extremist ideologies exploit these vulnerabilities, offering a narrative that explains their marginalisation and proposes violent extremism as a means of resistance and reclamation of dignity. The failure to address root causes in countering violent extremism initiatives risks perpetuating the cycle of radicalisation and violence, highlighting the urgent need for holistic approaches that tackle the underlying socio-political and economic injustices.⁹⁰

HEARTLESS CVE STRATEGIES: SHORTCOMINGS AND CHALLENGES

Despite having immense popularity in various countries, CVE has several shortcomings and, consequently, faces numerous challenges.

CVE lacks a universal definition or characteristics, with different organisations and entities defining its concept and goals differently. For example, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in the US focuses on the prevention and mitigation of terrorist activity, while the Department of State (also US government) aims to address the root causes of violent extremism through its CVE policy. A common, authoritative definition will allow smoother communication among different organisations; the lack of a clear and specific definition results in counter-productive programs and unsatisfactory outcomes.

Next, the study of terrorism, radicalisation and violent extremism is a central focus for social scientists and policymakers. Events like 9/11, the War on Terror, the rise of jihadists in Europe, and the conflicts in Iraq and Syria have made these studies more complex and challenging. To deal with the concepts of terrorism, violent extremism and radicalisation, it is crucial to understand who *defines* the problem.

As terrorism is a socially constructed concept, defining who is a terrorist is difficult. Historically, terrorising particular groups of people by states or powers has been closely related to ideological and political objectives. For instance, armed forces fighting for their goals may be seen as freedom fighters by some and terrorists by others. It is important to examine how changes after the War on Terror have influenced the field of extremism and its suppression. Religious zeal, jihadism and Salafi Islamism are often depicted as driving ideologies of violent extremism. Conversely, people in Palestine, Kashmir and Xinjiang face state terrorism, with state apparatuses consistently terrorising these victims.

⁸⁹ N. Lean, *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Fear of Muslims*, New York: Pluto Press, 2012.

⁹⁰ Awan, 'Islamophobia and Twitter'.

The rise of majoritarian nationalism, populism and authoritarianism shapes the ideas of terrorism and violent extremism. These concerns make the concept of violent extremism more complex, discouraging binary conclusions about terrorism and violent extremism. Given the ambivalent and socially constructed nature of terrorism and violent extremism, implementing and executing CVE programs is highly challenging.

Although CVE aims to counter and prevent violent extremism, it can inadvertently create violence. Violent extremism can emerge as a reaction to CVE efforts. De Figueiredo and Weingast argue that government intervention and crackdowns as part of CVE can radicalise moderate individuals.⁹¹ Borgu and Lake also suggest that terrorism can develop in response to counter-terrorism measures.⁹² These countering methods make terrorists more desperate, innovative and resourceful in their attacks.⁹³ Security efforts, paradoxically, flourish on the path of insecurity.⁹⁴ According to the security paradox, if the government attempts to counter violent extremism, it may inadvertently contribute to the terrorist agenda and objectives through counter-terrorism procedures.

The discourse of countering terrorism and violent extremism can be misused for oppression, suppression of opposition parties and erosion of civil liberties and human rights in the name of national security. Examples abound where counter-terrorism projects lead to excessive state surveillance on personal spaces, eroding civil liberties.⁹⁵ In the CVE framework, the Muslim community often feels discriminated against, stigmatised and treated unfairly, as these programs tend to view the entire Muslim community as suspect.⁹⁶ James notes that this framework has shifted focus from right-wing extremist groups to those associated with Islam, resulting in intervention in Muslim communities, which in turn has led to an identity crisis among Muslim youth.⁹⁷ These interventions can create tension, confusion, denunciation and grievance within society, leading to violent extremism.⁹⁸ Seyyed argues that post-9/11 Islamophobia has attacked Muslim identity and properties, with the media representing Islam as monolithic and homogenous, thereby constraining Muslim identity.⁹⁹

⁹¹ R. J. P. de Figueiredo and B. R. Weingast, 'Rationality of Fear: Political Opportunism and Ethnic Conflict' in B. F. Walter and J. Snyder (eds), *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, pp. 261–302.

⁹² A. Borgu, 'Understanding Terrorism: 20 Basic Facts', *Strategic Insights*, vol. 10, 2004, pp 1–12; D. A. Lake, 'Rational Extremism: Understanding Terrorism in the Twenty-first Century', *Dialogue IO*, Spring, 2002, pp 15–29.

⁹³ Borgu, *ibid*.

⁹⁴ O. Kessler and C. Daase, 'From Insecurity to Uncertainty: Risk and Paradox of Security Politics', *Alternatives*, vol. 33, 2008, pp 211–32.

⁹⁵ L. Amoores, 'Lines of Sight: On the Visualization of Unknown Futures', *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2009, pp 17–30; J. Coaffee, 'Morphing the Counter-Terrorist Response: Beating the Bombers in London's Financial Heart', *Knowledge, Technology & Policy*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2003, pp 63–83.

⁹⁶ R. Hassan, 'Social and Economic Conditions of Australian Muslims: Implications for Social Inclusion', (unpublished) Paper presented at 'Challenges to Social Inclusion in Australia: The Muslim Experience', NCEIS International Conference, University of Melbourne, 19–20 November 2008.

⁹⁷ S. James, 'The Policing of Right-Wing Violence in Australia', *Police Practice and Research*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2005, pp 103–19.

⁹⁸ A. Reilly, 'The Processes and Consequences of Counter-Terrorism Law Reform in Australia: 2001-2005', *Flinders Journal of Law Reform*, vol. 10, 2007, pp 81–103; B. van Ginkel and S. Westervelt, 'The Ethical Challenges of Implementing Counterterrorism Measures and the Role of the OSCE', *Security and Human Rights*, vol. 2, 2009, pp 123–42.

⁹⁹ A. Saeed, 'An Overview of Islamophobia as Othering', *Global Mass Communication Review*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2019, pp 1–9.

Analysing the shortcomings of the CVE model of the US government reveals a lack of empirical research and a disconnect between researchers' frameworks and government implementation. Researchers argue that CVE does not adequately address what leads people to turn to political violence. While government agencies recognise this issue, they do not act accordingly. CVE programs often assume they can identify terrorists without addressing the core problem. As a result, many CVE programs in the US focus on terrorism or extremism without addressing the underlying causes. Moreover, CVE programs rely on community partners, such as religious leaders, social workers and schools to identify vulnerable individuals. However, these partners often lack the capability to identify potential extremists; in fact, even state intelligence and trained law enforcement personnel struggle to predict who might become an extremist.

The danger of state 'soft surveillance' in the name of CVE is also important. CVE programs rely on personal information to identify potential extremists which can lead to misidentification and stigmatisation. Ensuring public safety becomes a challenge, as CVE programs may report large numbers of innocent people, diverting law enforcement resources from more effective pursuits.

Apart from these generic criticisms of CVE strategies, its approach also fails to address the root causes of extremism and prevent individuals from turning to violence because CVE does not address the core issues that lead to vulnerabilities among Muslim communities, which often results in extremist behaviour.

FAILURE TO ADDRESS THE POLITICS OF TERRORISM

CVE initiatives often fail to address the politics behind terrorism where governments engage in or support acts of terror to achieve political goals. For instance, the Israeli government's actions in Palestine, including home demolitions, civilian casualties and widespread fear and oppression is seen as state terrorism by many Muslim youth. Many interviewees also suggest that most of the militant issues in Bangladesh are fake and this was used by the then BAL government to seek legitimacy from the Western world (especially the US). Yet, CVE frameworks often exclude such state actions from their scope, focusing instead on non-state actors.¹⁰⁰ This selective focus undermines the credibility of CVE efforts by ignoring the broader context of violence and terror.

Similarly, the Indian government's actions in Kashmir, which include widespread human rights abuse such as arbitrary detention, torture and extrajudicial killings, are not typically addressed within CVE frameworks.¹⁰¹

The Chinese government's repression of Uyghur Muslims, which includes mass detention, forced sterilisation and severe restrictions on religious practices is another example of state terrorism that is often

¹⁰⁰ Jackson *et al.* (eds), *Contemporary State Terrorism*.

¹⁰¹ N. A. Kabir, *Young British Muslims: Identity, Culture, Politics and the Media*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.

unaddressed.¹⁰² These omissions suggest that CVE programs are politically selective, addressing terrorism only when it aligns with geopolitical interests.

HISTORICAL AND ONGOING MILITARY INTERVENTIONS IN MUSLIM LANDS

Western military interventions in Muslim-majority countries have played a significant role in fostering violent extremism. The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, for example, has led to long-term instability, civilian casualties and widespread destruction, and has fuelled anti-Western sentiments and radicalisation.¹⁰³ These interventions are often justified under the guise of counter-terrorism, yet they frequently exacerbate the very problem they aim to solve by creating power vacuums and breeding resentment.

Military interventions often result in the displacement of millions of people, the destruction of infrastructure and long-term socio-economic instability. These outcomes create fertile ground for extremist groups to recruit and operate.¹⁰⁴ For instance, the destabilisation of Iraq after the US-led invasion in 2003 led to the rise of ISIS, illustrating how such interventions can directly contribute to the proliferation of violent extremism. CVE programs that do not critically assess and address the impacts of these interventions fail to tackle one of the root causes of global terrorism.

INADEQUATE RESPONSE TO GLOBAL MUSLIM GRIEVANCES

CVE programs often fail to address the widespread victimisation of Muslims which fuels resentment and radicalisation. In places like Palestine, Kashmir, Myanmar and Xinjiang, Muslims face severe persecution and human rights abuses, yet these issues are not adequately addressed by CVE initiatives. This neglect can be seen as a significant shortcoming as these grievances are major drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism.¹⁰⁵ For example, the plight of Palestinians under Israeli occupation, the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar and the repression of Uyghur Muslims in China are typically overlooked by CVE programmes in both the UK and Bangladesh. This lack of attention to Muslim victimisation not only fails to address root causes but also alienates Muslim communities worldwide, reinforcing feelings of injustice and persecution.

STIGMATISATION OF MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

CVE programs frequently operate on the assumption that Muslim communities are inherently more prone to extremism, leading to disproportionate surveillance and stigmatisation. This assumption fosters a sense of

¹⁰² Human Rights Watch, 'Eradicating Ideological Viruses: China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims', 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/10/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs> (accessed on 23 January 2026).

¹⁰³ Goodin, *What's Wrong with Terrorism?*

¹⁰⁴ A. Majid, *Extremism in a Multifaceted Revolutionary Age*, Cham: Springer Nature, 2021.

¹⁰⁵ Mostofa, *Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh*; *idem*, 'Understanding Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh'; S. Shahreen and S. M. Mostofa, 'Female Radicalisation in Bangladesh: An Investigation of Its Scope, Extent and Key Motivations Behind', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2024, pp 1–23.

discrimination and alienation among Muslims, exacerbating feelings of injustice and victimisation¹⁰⁶ For example, Muslims in the UK and Bangladesh report feeling unfairly targeted and monitored, which deepens their sense of grievance and can contribute to radicalisation.¹⁰⁷

The focus on Muslims as primary suspects in CVE programs can backfire by reinforcing extremist narratives that portray the West as waging a war against Islam. This perception drives further radicalisation as individuals and communities feel compelled to defend their identity and beliefs against perceived existential threats.¹⁰⁸ The resultant Islamophobia, where Muslim identity is consistently under scrutiny and attack, only serves to deepen the divide and heighten tensions, potentially leading to more extremism. To address this, combating Islamophobia in the Western world needs to be prioritised and, in Muslim majority countries like Bangladesh, Muslim identity needs to be respected.

FALLING SHORT OF ADDRESSING INCLUSIVITY

CVE programs often disproportionately target Islamist extremism while neglecting other forms of violent extremism, such as other right-wing or nationalist extremism. This lack of inclusivity fails to address the full spectrum of threats and leads to the neglect of significant sources of violence, such as the rise of white supremacist movements.¹⁰⁹ For instance, the rise of far-right extremism in Europe and North America is a growing threat that is often overlooked in favour of focusing on Islamist terrorism. In the UK, Muslims often face societal exclusion and discrimination which limits their economic opportunities and subjects them to menial and undesirable jobs. Studies indicate that Muslims in the UK are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed compared to their non-Muslim counterparts, and they face significant barriers in the job market.¹¹⁰ This economic marginalisation contributes to feelings of disenfranchisement and can make extremist ideologies more appealing as a form of resistance against perceived systemic injustice.

In Bangladesh, while Muslims are the majority, they suffer from corruption and nepotism, which affects their socio-economic conditions.¹¹¹ The élite's control over resources and opportunities often marginalises the common people, leading to widespread dissatisfaction and frustration.¹¹² This environment of corruption and inequality can also drive individuals toward extremist ideologies as a means of expressing their grievances and seeking justice. Effective CVE requires the involvement of diverse community stakeholders to build trust and cooperation. However, many CVE programs do not engage meaningfully with the communities they aim to

¹⁰⁶ I. Zempi and I. Awan (eds), *The Routledge International Handbook of Islamophobia*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2019.

¹⁰⁷ For details see Esposito and Kalin (eds), *Islamophobia*.

¹⁰⁸ E. L. Hamdon, *Islamophobia and the Question of Muslim Identity: The Politics of Difference and Solidarity*, Winnipeg, MB: Fernwood Publishing, 2010.

¹⁰⁹ L. Amoore, *The Politics of Possibility: Risk and Security Beyond Probability*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.

¹¹⁰ Khan, 'Social Exclusion of Muslims in India and Britain'.

¹¹¹ S. M. Mostofa, *The Local Drivers of Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh*, Cham: Springer Nature, 2021.

¹¹² N. Hossain, 'The Significance of Unruly Politics in Bangladesh', in I. Basu, J. Devine and G. Wood (eds), *Politics and Governance in Bangladesh: Uncertain Landscapes*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2017, pp 143–67.

protect. Instead, they rely on superficial partnerships that lack depth and understanding, undermining the effectiveness of these initiatives. This superficial engagement often fails to address the real concerns and grievances of the communities, leading to ineffective or counter-productive outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The examination of youth vulnerabilities underscores the complex array of interconnected factors contributing to extremism and violence among today's youth. Examining politics, terrorism, victimisation, inclusivity, and Islamophobia reveals a nuanced landscape shaped by historical legacies, geopolitical intricacies and societal dynamics. It is clear that addressing the root causes of extremism demands a multifaceted strategy that transcends simplistic narratives. The pervasive sense of Muslim victimisation, compounded by state-directed terrorism and human rights abuses, calls for urgent action to rectify systemic injustices and ensure accountability. Simultaneously, combatting Islamophobia and promoting inclusivity are imperative to dismantle discriminatory attitudes and foster cohesive societies. However, the limitations of CVE strategies highlight the need for a recalibration of approaches.

Current CVE initiatives often overlook political aspects of terrorism, fail to engage meaningfully with affected communities and lack inclusivity, thereby undermining their effectiveness. To truly address youth vulnerabilities, policy-makers, practitioners and communities must adopt a holistic understanding of the underlying socio-political dynamics. By prioritising community engagement, addressing root causes and upholding human rights principles, we can cultivate more resilient and inclusive societies for future generations. Only through such concerted and coordinated efforts can we hope to counter extremism effectively and build a safer and more just world.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shafi Md Mostofa (PhD) is a theologian and security studies scholar with broad interests in political Islam, populism, securitisation, and social movements. He is Associate Professor of World Religions and Culture at the Faculty of Arts, Dhaka University, and Adjunct Lecturer at the University of New England, Australia, and

most recently, was Post-doctoral Research Fellow at the Democracy Institute of Central European University in Budapest, Hungary. Shafi is author of [*Institutions of Political Islam in Bangladesh: History, Agenda, and Strategy*](#) (2025), [*Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: A Pyramid Root Cause Model*](#) (2021) and [*Dynamics of Violent Extremism in South Asia: Nexus between State Fragility and Extremism*](#) (2023); and is a member of the Editorial Board of [*Journal of World Affairs*](#).

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South Asia Centre

The London School of Economics and Political Science
Houghton Street
London WC2A 2AE
United Kingdom

lse.ac.uk/south-asia-centre

+44 (0)20 7107 5330

southasiacentre@lse.ac.uk

  @SAsiaLSE  blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia  [facebook/SAsiaLSE](https://facebook.com/SAsiaLSE)   @southasia_lse
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