Project Backgrounder | 2016-17

Violent Extremism and Bangladesh

Setting Research Priorities & Closing the Data Gap on Violent Extremism

Context

In 2014, Bangladesh confronted its worst electoral violence in recent memory. Since then, the country has witnessed a rise in violent extremism. The spectacular attack on the Holey Artisan Bakery in the Bangladeshi capital of Dhaka in July 2016 ranks among the most serious incidents to date. It was, however, only one in a spate of deadly assaults over the last 18 months perpetrated by violent extremists against journalists, bloggers, Hindu religious leaders, and secular civil society activists in the wake of highly partisan electoral violence.

One of the world's most populous Muslim majority countries, Bangladesh ranks among the top 25 countries most highly impacted by terrorist attacks, according to the 2015 Global Terrorism Index. What little research to date has been conducted on trends giving rise to violent extremism has largely centered on perception polling data generated by Western survey teams with limited granularity and attention to the dynamic narratives that inform local conceptions of religious identity, citizenship, and governance. Publicly available data on these highly fluid local dynamics across all eight of the country's subnational political divisions, is missing, resulting in enormous gaps in understanding about how to respond effectively to the threats posed by extremism.

Project Scope and Purpose

The RESOLVE Network plans to address this array of challenges and close the data gap by launching a major countrywide baseline survey on attitudes on religious identity, citizenship, and political legitimacy under the auspices of a collaborative network of local Bangladeshi researchers. Researchers recruited for the collaborative will be encouraged to collectively develop a research agenda that aligns with local priorities and incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data collection. An express goal of this effort is to enhance public education around the impact of violent extremism and support opportunities for Bangladeshi journalists, educators, and other thought leaders to engage on critical CVE related issues.

Goals and Activities

In partnership with the U.S. Department of State's Bureau for Conflict and Stabilization Operations and through a series of workshops and consultations led by subject matter experts in the field in partnership with RESOLVE Network partners, the Network Secretariat team will work to:

- Establish an interdisciplinary network of local researchers, practitioners, and policy experts to collaborate on multifaceted research on the drivers of violent social movements and extremism in Bangladesh.
- Design and implement both qualitative and quantitative research projects that examine the complex nexus of social, political, economic, and environmental factors that contribute to social divisions in Bangladesh.
- Expand the basis for empirically driven policies and practice by generating a locally driven evidence base and amplifying the voices of credible local researchers engaged in the Network.

These combined efforts will result in a robust, locally informed research agenda, several substantial research papers, and a dynamic and broad assessment of the major factors driving violent extremism in Bangladesh. Specifically, the mixed-methods study will attempt to capture nuanced information on community-government relations and the complexity of the politics of religion and identity.

Contact

For more information about the RESOLVE Network's work in Bangladesh and how to collaborate with or support the Network please contact our research coordination team at: research@resolvenet.org. Additional information about the RESOLVE Network and its partners can be found on our website: www.resolvenet.org.