

Can Community Policing Help Counter Violent Extremism in Bangladesh?

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Executive Summary

Community policing in Bangladesh is a potentially effective vehicle to improve security and complement the fight against violent extremism. The Bangladesh police have developed a structure for involving local communities in initiatives to prevent crime and improve security. Program implementation, however, has been experimental, haphazard, and under-resourced. Reports of police abuses and a widespread perception of a lack of accountability amid escalating clashes between police and suspected extremists exacerbate the situation. These factors have combined to limit the effectiveness of community policing as a tool to contain the extremist threat.

Despite these challenges, local communities in Bangladesh are concerned about the problem of violent extremism, and many want to help the police. The Bangladesh police need to reconsider their top-down approach to community engagement. Police need to adopt stronger policies to ensure closer alignment of strategies to bolster citizen support for rule of law and tactics to address local violence. They need to work harder to build trust with citizens, including minorities who are often the victims of violent extremism. Community policing needs to be understood not as a formula for the political cooptation of powerful local elites, but as a means to erase the trust deficit between the police and the public at large.

A successful community policing approach to countering violent extremism relies on making police responsible for coordinating with the community when conducting police work, building strong partnerships with a broad cross-section of the public, and having an orientation that emphasizes non-emergency services and surveillance. Since 2008, Bangladesh's police have declared community policing to be an "essential part" of initiatives to reduce crime, increase public safety, ensure road safety, and improve community relations. There is a gap, however,

KEY FINDINGS

- The widening trust deficit between police and local communities presents a significant security challenge for Bangladesh.
- Community policing could enhance cooperation to address violent extremism at the local level.
- Community members are concerned about violent extremism and have conflicting views about their role in community policing and the role of youth.
- Community policing policy and practice should include guidance on addressing violent extremism, enhanced training, and coordination with government and local institutions.

between the theory and practice of community policing in Bangladesh. “Walking the beat” and conducting public outreach are often relegated to part-time jobs for regular officers. Police engagement is often structured around numerous ceremonial events. To be effective in preventing and counteracting violent extremism, community policing needs to move from the periphery to the center of an integrated strategy for law enforcement.

Evidence indicates that community policing does work in Bangladesh and that those participating in more active and energized groups see its potential to contribute to countering violent extremism. Community Policing Forums, which facilitate communication between community members and the police, as well as increase community involvement in law enforcement efforts to address crime, have already been mobilized to address gang violence. More than just gang violence, however, participants in Community Policing Forums are also concerned about rising extremism. Suggestions from the local level exist regarding how to improve these structures to better address new threats through recruiting new members to these Forums.

If the Bangladesh police are to improve community policing and make it more effective in the fight against violent extremists, then significant changes are needed. Reducing rivalries and promoting cooperation among law enforcement agencies within different police units and bureaus will enhance coordination. Strategy and policy documents, such as the police counterterrorism and community policing plans, need to acknowledge the respective roles of agencies and outline how and under what circumstances they could work together.

The status of community policing as a law enforcement tool needs to be elevated within the police structure and in the national government. Community policing needs to become more action-oriented and interactive and less passive and ceremonial. Community Policing Forums need to better reflect the diversity of local areas. All of these reforms require better education and training for police and local community partners, as well as increased resources devoted to these improvements. The continuing support of the international community is essential to implement such ongoing reforms.

Introduction

As Bangladesh grapples with new threats from homegrown militants, questions are starting to surface regarding how this phenomenon can be explained and how emerging trends in politics and society might influence violent extremism.¹ The July 2016 attacks on an upscale restaurant in Dhaka and during Eid prayers in Kishoreganj put pressure on law enforcement agencies and security forces to respond.² Led by the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime Unit (CTTC) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) and the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), authorities have increased their efforts by cracking down on suspected terrorist units throughout the country. However, the effectiveness of current security sector approaches in addressing violent extremism in Bangladesh is under debate.³

As part of the Police Reform Programme that began in January 2005, increasing attention has been given to enhancing security in Bangladesh through a sustainable police-citizen partnership.⁴ Since 2009, Bangladesh police have been committed to a reform program that includes the promotion of community policing.⁵ From 2009 to 2012, the Bangladesh police worked to institutionalize community policing in each police station; a community police officer was assigned to monitor the activities of Community Policing Forums and conduct occasional open house days in collaboration with the local communities. These Forums are drawn from the inhabitants of local districts or metropolitan areas. The Forums serve as focal points to facilitate healthier public-police interaction and strengthen community involvement in crime reduction. The 2010 community policing strategy that framed this approach focuses on helping “the police and community to work closely together in new ways to solve the problems of crime, fear of crime, physical and social disorder, and neighborhood decay.”⁶ The strategy does not mention terrorism or extremism.

When it came to power in 2009, the Awami League (AL) government gave the RAB the task of combating terrorism.⁷ Then, in early 2016, the national Bangladesh police force formed a specialized unit to address violent extremism. The Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit was tasked with preventing the rise of violent extremism, including attacks on bloggers, publishers, foreigners, and minorities. After the July 2016 attacks, the CTTC proposed a nationwide expansion of its jurisdiction.⁸ In the year following the two attacks, by one count, authorities had killed ninety-three alleged terrorists.⁹

¹ Matthew Nelson and Seth Oldmixon, 2017. “Bangladesh on the Brink: Mapping the Evolving Social Geography of Political Violence,” RESOLVE Network *Bangladesh Research Report* No.1, September.

² See Julhas Alam, “Bangladesh Marks Anniversary of Café Attack That killed 22,” *Associated Press*, July 1, 2017; “Bangladesh Blast, Gun Battle Kills 4 during Eid Prayers,” *Associated Press*, July 7, 2016.

³ Nelson and Oldmixon, “Bangladesh on the Brink: Mapping the Evolving Social Geography of Political Violence,” 2017.

⁴ For background, see UNDP, Police Reform Programme (Phase II) project document, October 25, 2009.

⁵ Bangladesh Police, “Community Policing: National Strategy for Bangladesh,” 2010.

⁶ Bangladesh Police, “Community Policing: National Strategy for Bangladesh,” (DFID, 2010), 3.

⁷ See “About Us,” Rapid Action Battalion, www.rab.gov.bd/english/about-us.

⁸ Mohammad Jamil Khan and Shariful Islam, “Counterterrorism: Police To Get Complete Unit,” *The Daily Star*, April 30, 2017.

⁹ See: South Asian Terrorism Portal, *Fatalities-Islamist Terrorism in Bangladesh*, www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/data_base/Fatalities-Islamist%20Terrorism%202010.htm (accessed June 19, 2017).

This research brief examines how those involved in community policing understand countering violent extremism and the extent to which a community policing approach might play a role in addressing violent extremism. The brief primarily considers two major urban areas in Dhaka City Corporation that are proximate to major educational institutions and have a large youth population: Chawkbazar in Dhaka South, where Community Policing Forums are no longer active; and Uttara in Dhaka North, where the Forums are active.

Chawkbazar, a densely populated neighborhood in the southern part of the capital of Dhaka known as the “Old City,” is home to a renowned 400-year-old market. Although the area is predominantly Muslim, it contains a large cross-section of Hindus and a smattering of other religious minorities. Light industry devoted to the production of garments and plastics forms the center of economic life. There are few examples of shared cultural activities or community activity. An older, pre-independence form of community organization called *panchayet* still exists, but prominent community members focused more of their attention on their mercantile activities.

Uttara is a satellite town built in the 1990s with more clearly defined sectors. Social welfare associations dominated by local landlords provide neighborhood security, coordinate, garbage collection, and organize festivities on national days. The leadership of the local associations is elected. As such, when community police came to Uttara, there was already a ready-made set of local leaders to involve in the Community Policing Forums. Uttara is a particularly useful case study because police have worked with community networks to deal with issues associated with youth gangs. Community Policing Forum members have been directly involved in helping to address this gang-related law enforcement challenge.

The scope of this brief has several limitations. It is primarily based on key informant interviews with serving police officers and community members in Chawkbazar and Uttara. Neither of the areas has prominent minority community leadership and minority groups are not represented in the Community Policing Forums. Additionally, this brief does not examine the activities of the CTTC or RAB, with their special antiterrorism mandates, although both are an ever-present feature of law enforcement in Bangladesh.

It is hoped that this research will highlight some of the gaps in community policing practices and offer recommendations as to how this area of law enforcement could be better used to counter violent extremism in Bangladesh.

Community Policing Mandates, International Practices, and Local Standards

An atmosphere of mutual suspicion between police and local citizens has been a pervasive feature of law enforcement in Bangladesh for decades. Citizens have traditionally kept their distance from the police, often due to fear of abuses or fear of solicitation for bribes. Civil society groups have accused the police of being responsible for about one-third of extrajudicial killings following the declaration of a state of emergency in 2007.¹⁰ Female victims of sexual crimes have been reluctant to report those crimes to the police, fearing further harassment from officers.¹¹ Police have also been accused of standing by when organized attacks are directed against minorities such as Buddhist, Hindu, or indigenous groups.¹² The resulting distrust has led to an underreporting of crime and violence to local authorities and an inaccurate reflection of crime and violence in national statistics.¹³

Factors such as these precipitated recommendations to the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Bangladesh police that law enforcement reforms be developed to address perceptions of police corruption and inefficiency.¹⁴ The government's effort to take up these reforms in 2008, combined with an urgent need to bridge the trust deficit between police and the public, led to structural reforms in the security sector, including the introduction of community policing programs in 2009.

Community policing involves law enforcement officials having regular and direct contact with the public through informal interactions, structured consultations, and partnerships with community stakeholders.¹⁵ In what is a community-oriented and problem-solving approach, the open exchange of information is central to a nuanced understanding of the community-police relationship.¹⁶ A successful community policing approach to countering violent extremism relies on several factors:

- Assigning a community police officer to coordinate between communities and mainstream policing agencies,
- Establishing diverse policing teams,
- Engaging communities through broad outreach while developing transparent partnerships with the public, and
- Reorienting patrol activities to emphasize non-emergency services and surveillance.¹⁷

¹⁰ Submission of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) for the Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh, September 2008, 3.

¹¹ Summary prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to the Human Rights Council resolution 16/21, A/HRC/WG.6/16/BGD/3, January 29, 2013, 4.

¹² *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³ Baseline Survey on Personal Security and Police Performance in Bangladesh: Summary Report, Police Reform Programme, December 2011, 4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁵ Rick Sarre, "The State of Community Policing in Australia: Some Emerging Themes," in *Australian Policing: Contemporary Issues*, ed. Duncan Chappell and Paul Wilson, (North Ryde: Butterworths, 1996), 26–41.

¹⁶ Cameron Sumpter, *Community Policing to Counter Violent Extremism: Evident Potential and Challenging Realities*, (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, 2016), 13.

¹⁷ OSCE, *Preventing Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Community-Policing Approach*, (Warsaw: OSCE, 2014).

It is also recommended that mainstream counterterrorism efforts integrate community policing approaches to develop a community information hub informing law enforcement and crime prevention activities.¹⁸

The national Bangladesh police force is a highly bureaucratic organization built on a top-down structure, which, according to colonial era laws, is only accountable to political and civil administrative executives of the state.¹⁹ Since 2008, the Bangladesh police force has declared community policing to be an “essential part of its organization.”²⁰ The objectives of the 2010 National Strategy for Community Policing in Bangladesh are as follows:

- Reduce crime and victimization and thereby maintain public safety in local areas,
- Ensure road safety and traffic management in local areas, and
- Improve the quality of police service in consultation with locals.²¹

The Strategy does not suggest any specialized provisions regarding the role of community policing to counter violent extremism.

When the most recent phase of the Police Reform Programme began in 2010, one of the key challenges it faced was a low level of support among the mid-level and junior ranks. Some of those interviewed felt that community policing programs were donor-driven, but at the same time, there is said to be a high degree of national ownership at the police headquarters level. The source of existing challenges may be less about who funds the programs, and more about the ongoing communication gap between the center and the periphery of the police bureaucracy.²² When the community policing program began, many government agencies, business leaders, local communities, and nongovernmental organizations were not fully aware of the intentions of the Bangladesh police to reform itself.²³

The 2011 Community Policing Service Manual of Bangladesh sought to amend the country’s highly centralized model of policing by proposing that local communities and citizens hold local police accountable.²⁴ The Ministry of Home Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-supported Police Reform Programme have also stressed the importance of “consolidat[ing] community policing and crime prevention” through strengthening community-police relations.²⁵ Participants in Community Policing Forums that were interviewed for this study also saw potential in promoting information exchanges and bridging the divide between the communities and the police.²⁶

¹⁸ Martin Innes, “Policing Uncertainty: Countering Terror through Community Intelligence and Democratic Policing,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 605, no. 1, (2006): 222-41.

¹⁹ Government of Bangladesh, The Police Act (Act V of 1861), Dhaka: GoB, 1861, http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/pdf_part.php?id=12 (accessed September 6, 2017).

²⁰ Bangladesh Police, Strategic Plan 2012-14, 6.

²¹ Bangladesh Police, *Community Policing: National Strategy for Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Police Reform Programme, 2010), 3.

²² The Asia Foundation, “Community Policing Assessment: Progress and Opportunities in Bangladesh,” (March 2013), 4.

²³ UNDP, Police Reform Programme (Phase II) project document, October 25, 2009, 3-4.

²⁴ Bangladesh Police. *Community Policing Service Manual*, Dhaka, Bangladesh Police, 2011.

²⁵ UNDP, “Annual Report 2013,” Police Reform Programme II, (Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of Bangladesh, 2014).

²⁶ Author interview, Community Policing Forum members, Chawkbazar, May 30, 2017.

Strengthening oversight and accountability has been a key part of Bangladesh's decade-long police reform program. The case for legal reforms has been made for some time, including the case for the creation of a police complaints commission.²⁷ Community policing has been seen as an additional way to make officers more accountable to the public.²⁸ The fight against terrorism and violent extremism has continued to highlight a lack of accountability in Bangladesh, particularly regarding the excessive use of deadly force by authorities against suspected extremists. Beyond general statements regarding the value of community policing, however, as of yet, there are no publicly available policy documents that provide guidance on how the police, the RAB, or other law enforcement agencies might use community policing approaches in their counterterrorism and counter violent extremism operations.

²⁷ UNDP, Police Reform Programme (Phase II) project document, October 25, 2009, 4.

²⁸ Bangladesh Police, "Community Policing: National Strategy for Bangladesh," 2.

Community Policing Practices in Bangladesh

COMMUNITY POLICING FORUMS

In a 2011 baseline survey in Bangladesh, almost sixty percent of respondents said they did not know how to contact police if they needed to do so.²⁹ Community policing is regarded as a way to bridge such gaps between police officers and the people they are supposed to serve. In 2012, a new post was created at the Assistant Inspector General level to monitor the progress of community policing nationwide in Bangladesh.³⁰ Headquarters transmitted orders to appoint community police officers in every police station to strengthen the central command system.³¹

In collaboration with their superiors in each station, community police officers were instructed to select Community Policing Forum members and organize events, including monthly meetings and police open house days. In addition to their regular duties, community police officers are expected to oversee the Forums in their jurisdictions. These officers often lack the experience, time, and resources to properly coordinate all of the activities that they are ordered to complete.³² Moreover, the officers interviewed for this study hardly received any training on how to incorporate youth in community policing and in activities to counter violent extremism in their communities.³³

Police headquarters did not provide any formal guidelines to support the selection of Community Policing Forum members. Members are usually local political leaders or well-regarded local entrepreneurs. In Chawkbazar, police identified local elites on the basis of their societal reputations, political connections, and past records as community gatekeepers. In some places, this selection process has generated criticism among the elected representatives of local bodies; for example, the members of Upazila (subdistrict) and Union Parishads, felt that their authority over the police administration was being usurped by unelected Forum members. In fact, local political party leaders often opposed community policing as an unnecessary interference in their ties to local police.³⁴ No prominent minorities were represented in the two Forums examined in this research brief; however, in other parts of Dhaka that have a concentrated Hindu-minority population, it has been observed that Hindus have joined such groups and that their participation helps to improve community-police relations.

The judgment of police in selecting Forum members continues to be openly questioned. Police say they are selecting “clean” local political leaders.³⁵ However, in a May 2017 National Parliament debate, a ruling party member posed a question to the Home Minister

²⁹ Baseline Survey on Personal Security and Police Performance in Bangladesh: Summary Report, Police Reform Programme, December 2011, 15.

³⁰ UNDP, “Annual Report 2013,” 13.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Razzak Raza, “Community Policing: A Practical Strategy,” *The Daily Star*, April 11, 2008.

³³ Author interviews, community police officers, Uttara, May 15 and 17, 2017, and Chawkbazar, May 24, 2017.

³⁴ See M. N. H. Zaman, “Community Policing: Potentials and Impediments,” *The Financial Express*, March 30, 2013; International Crisis Group, “Bangladesh: Getting Police Reform on Track,” Asia Report no. 157, December 11, 2009.

³⁵ Author interview, community police officer, Chawkbazar, May 24, 2017.

about why station chiefs were selecting “drug peddlers, dishonest businessmen, and powerful local goons” for the Forums.³⁶ Although the minister defended the local police station’s control of the Community Policing Forums, this policy has continued to raise concern about the credibility of existing Forums, their growing partisan nature, and the ability of members to exploit them for personal or political advantage. This perception of credibility matters because of its impact on the strength of police-community relations.

YOUTH AND COMMUNITY POLICING

Community policing mandates in Bangladesh do not provide any guidelines to address specific issues related to youth. In two Community Policing Forums studied for this research, only three of twenty-four members were younger than thirty-five years of age.³⁷ In a country where there is a notable youth bulge, this pattern of exclusion could have negative implications, particularly given that those in this age group are most likely to engage in criminal activities and to emerge as the victims of crime.^{38, 39}

Forum members and community police officers interviewed for this study offered divergent responses about their understanding of the role of youth in community policing. They unanimously agreed on the need for the greater involvement of young people in community policing practices; however, their comments often revealed deep attitudinal and generational divides. They criticized young men and women for mixing in public; for using technology, including Internet-enabled smartphones; and for what they perceived to be a lack of pious behavior. These views also seemed at odds with the views expressed by young people themselves.⁴⁰ In some cases, it was noted that police focused on judging morality as much as they did on solving crime.⁴¹ One community police officer noted that:

Young people are exploiting the freedom that they received from their family. They have many friends and are spending unaccountable time with them. They do not show respect to the elders of the community. They smoke cigarettes openly in front of them. Young boys and girls walk together holding their hands on the street, and they do not care what the elders think about their behavior. A smart cell phone is another tool that spoils them. They spend so much time in the world of [the] Internet, and the parents are unable to monitor them. Some are addicted to illegal drug consumption and trade. We get information on *yaba* [a tablet mix of methamphetamine and caffeine], which is a big problem for the young people now these days.⁴²

³⁶ Author interview, Assistant Inspector General, Bangladesh Police, Dhaka, June 3, 2017.

³⁷ The National Youth Policy defines youth in Bangladesh as between 18-35 years. See Department of Youth Development, National Youth Policy 2015, (Dhaka: Government of Bangladesh, 2015).

³⁸ James Forman Jr., “Community Policing and Youth as Assets,” *The Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology* 95, no. 1 (2004), 1-48.

³⁹ Sally Atkinson-Sheppard, “The Gangs of Bangladesh: Exploring Organized Crime, Street Gangs, and ‘Illicit Child Labourers’ in Dhaka.” *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 16, no. 2, (2015), 233-49.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ RESOLVE-CGS (DU) interview, constable of Bangladesh Police, Rajshahi, May 4, 2017.

⁴² Author interview, community police officer, Uttara West, May 17, 2017.

Bangladesh has grown rapidly in the past two decades, become globalized, and developed new labor-intensive industries that have resulted in rapid urbanization. The intense rate of socioeconomic change has been amplified by the arrival of satellite television, the Internet, and social media apps. Others in the RESOLVE Network have also highlighted the need to study the effect of these changes.⁴³ Community Policing Forum members, most of whom are older in age, expressed concerns about the impact of these changes on the country's social fabric and on the morals of young people. As a member of a Community Policing Forum in Chawkbazar explained:

Our parents are unable to bring up their children properly. They provide everything to their children whatever they have wanted, (but) need to be more careful about what their children are doing. We from the outside of the family cannot offer a proper solution if the family is not proactive in preventing these problems. Now, young people are spending a good amount of time online. They close their doors and spend the whole night on the laptop. Do the parents know what they are doing online?⁴⁴

Not all Forum members shared this view of the country's young people. Some acknowledged that contemporary youth are actually more educated and tech-savvy, more creative and, in general, more interested in becoming educated and building their careers.⁴⁵ Police had some positive views of youth as well; one officer stationed near a university observed that students from rural areas were often engaged in mitigating social disputes and promoting sports and cultural activities.⁴⁶

Community Policing Forum members understood their role as the eyes and ears of the police, but saw their own capacities as limited. "Spoilers" engaged in organized criminal activities and youth engaged in faith-based extremist activities require extra attention. Families, schools, and universities were thought to have a role in monitoring such "spoilers," but, as one interviewee noted, "Authorities of educational institutions in Uttara are reluctant to cooperate with the Forum to figure out an effective strategy to observe the activities of youth."⁴⁷ This narrow "us versus them" perspective views issues associated with youth as a problem that is worth discussing, but does not acknowledge how young people might be involved in community policing or how mechanisms could be set up to support that involvement. The Forums need to become inclusionary groups, where youth as well as religious and ethnic minorities can participate and feel welcomed.

⁴³ Nelson and Oldmixon, "Bangladesh on the Brink: Mapping the Evolving Social Geography of Political Violence," 2017.

⁴⁴ Author interview, Community Policing Forum member, Chawkbazar, May 28, 2017.

⁴⁵ Author interview, Community Policing Forum member, Uttara West, May 17, 2017.

⁴⁶ RESOLVE-CGS (DU) interview, constable, Bangladesh Police, Sylhet, May 8, 2017.

⁴⁷ Author interview, President, Community Policing Forum, Uttara West, May 17, 2017.

GROWING CONCERNS ABOUT EXTREMISM

The Community Policing Forum members interviewed for this study expressed concerns about growing extremism in Bangladesh, but they had differing views about whether they had role in countering it. In Chawkbazar, where the Forum has not been functioning well, members claimed that they had received no specific instructions from local or central police authorities on how to address violent extremism after the July 2016 terrorist incidents. The police on duty were alert to the threat, but none of the community police officers interviewed saw any role for their civilian counterparts. One community police officer stated:

The Forums cannot take responsibility to curb down the threat of present-day extremism. The community policing approach cannot tackle the immediate threats. They may be used to take some preventive measures, but who will provide their security? Contemporary terrorism is an international network. To address such issues, we need to better coordinate within the departments of the police. Community policing can play an initial role; however, it is not effective in executing the actual task of curbing violent extremism.⁴⁸

From this interviewee's perspective, community policing may be useful for society-wide efforts to prevent terrorism, but committed terrorists need to be "properly handled" by the law enforcement agencies. Efforts to confront violent extremism, he felt, required a focus on police-centric surveillance mechanisms.⁴⁹

A more collaborative approach to community policing is possible, however, and may provide a new model for dealing with violent extremism. Where Forums are active and engaged, such as in Uttara, the police feel they get positive results from collaborating with local communities. In 2016, for instance, the combined efforts of Uttara's sector welfare associations and its Community Policing Forums contributed to successfully stopping serious gang-based conflicts among school-aged youth.⁵⁰ Police have requested that Forum members provide information about any residents who are already engaged in or could potentially become involved in any suspicious activities in their communities. Forum members have welcomed such requests. During interviews, one Community Policing Forum official expressed that:

Jongibad [extremism] is like cancer and it is spreading from within the society. We have many things to do from the Forum. Terrorists are living in our building premises and within our community. In 2016, the police raided a terrorist hideout in Ashkona, which is very close to Uttara. It was the landlord of the household who informed the local guard and the news was transmitted to the police. It is important that we strengthen our own surveillance system to support the police.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Author interview, community police officer, Chawkbazar, May 24, 2017.

⁴⁹ Author interview, community police officer, Chawkbazar, May 24, 2017.

⁵⁰ Author interview, additional police Superintendent, Uttara Zone, May 11, 2017. For more details on gang war in Uttara, see: Golam Mortuza Dhrubo, "'Gang Rivalry' behind Murder of Schoolboy Adnan Kabir in Uttara," *Bdnews24.com*, January 8, 2017.

⁵¹ Author interview, President, Community Policing Forum, Uttara, May 17, 2017.

Police in Uttara appreciated the benefit of an alliance with the community to address violent extremism. “It is difficult to conclude that traditional policing can wipe off terrorism from its root without the help of the community. People of the community are feeling threatened due to the rise of faith-based extremism,” said one officer.⁵² This community-police relationship offers practical benefits. Police do not have direct access to all apartment buildings, and Forum members have much wider contacts for gathering and exchanging information. In Uttara, the police were able to act on the information they received from local security patrols regarding drug dealers.

The philosophy of community policing views everyone as a possible partner in developing and executing public security measures. Local residents have a vested interest in enhancing the security of their own neighborhoods, and police need to build trust and actively engage them in improving public safety.⁵³ In Uttara, police have been more active in organizing members of the Forums and have identified an active local welfare association to facilitate them. Some members share multiple portfolios in local government, political parties, and community forums. There is an active civic life within which the Community Policing Forums are able to connect.⁵⁴ In Chawkbazar, however, the relationship between the Forum and the local government is weaker, and interactions are more limited and, often, ceremonial. Forum members rarely work together to improve the safety and security of the community.⁵⁵ Interviewees stressed that the behavior of the police is an important variable in improving police-community relations. However, field level officers—such as constables, assistant subinspectors, and subinspectors—are often regarded as rude and uncivil in their day-to-day interactions with local residents. When this happens, the possibility of a strong and effective community-police partnership is placed in jeopardy.

Pre-existing government and community structures can improve the viability of community policing. Local political activists have long been important sources of information about criminal activities and social disputes.⁵⁶ However, it is important to remember that this information has the potential to be biased or politically motivated to serve the vested interest of local political leaders. In some cases, older community structures coexist with new Community Policing Forums. In the older neighborhood of Chawkbazar, for example, each ward has a *panchayet* or local council. “We are involved in resolving local crises—family or social issues—that are brought by the citizens of the community,” noted one *panchayet* member. “We often refer cases to police stations that are beyond our jurisdiction. People come to us and inform what is happening in their neighborhood.”⁵⁷

⁵² Author interview, community police officer, Uttara, May 17, 2017.

⁵³ See: International Association of Chiefs of Police, *Using Community Policing to Counter Violent Extremism: 5 Key Principles for Law Enforcement*. (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2014), 3-5.

⁵⁴ Author interview, Community Policing Forum member, Uttara, May 16, 2017.

⁵⁵ Author interview, Community Policing Forum member, Chawkbazar, May 30, 2017.

⁵⁶ Author interview, Community Policing Forum member, May 28, 2017.

⁵⁷ *Panchayet* is a committee formed with local gatekeepers and elite members of the community. *Panchayat* is not a common system in the urban or rural local governance of Bangladesh. This was initially practiced in some areas of the older part of Dhaka. In some of these areas, it is still used to conduct alternative dispute resolution. However, these areas also have formal local government authorities.

Given the different purposes they serve, it is unclear whether it is always desirable to institutionalize the relationship between local communities and the police. Community Policing Forums, which have some overlap of membership with existing community organizations, including *panchayets*, can become clearing houses for information related to the community. It is important that the goals, tasks, and responsibilities of these community groups vis-à-vis the police are clearly defined in any efforts to counter violent extremism.

Community Policing and Countering Violent Extremism: A Way Forward

A community policing approach alone cannot prevent violent extremism. Bangladeshi community police officers do not have the skills or the expertise of counterterrorism police. The use of community gatekeepers to conduct covert surveillance may risk stigmatizing leaders in a way that could be counterproductive in wider efforts to mobilize communities against extremism. However, the interviews from and brief case studies of community policing in Chawkbazar and Uttara examined in this research brief suggest that—with better interagency cooperation and less rivalry—community policing could be improved and could provide important information to law enforcement authorities.⁵⁸ This research brief identified a number of policy changes that the Bangladesh police could consider to better utilize community policing in their efforts to prevent and address violent extremism.

UPDATING STRATEGY AND POLICY DOCUMENTS

The National Strategy for Community Policing in Bangladesh and the Community Policing Service Manual both need to be updated with clear guidelines for Community Policing Forums and community police officers with respect to countering violent extremism. These policy documents need to clearly state how counterterrorism or other mainstream policing approaches relate to community policing. However, any clarification of this relationship cannot undermine the fundamental reasons that community policing is also beneficial for general security.

BUILDING TRUST WITH THE WIDER COMMUNITY

Police do not need to be selective in maintaining relationships with their communities. Courting elites or gatekeepers and marginalizing large parts of society can create distrust and misunderstanding, thereby undermining the goal and effectiveness of community policing. An improved approach would be to broaden communication to a larger number of community members and to move beyond formal community policing structures, such as the Forums. This process could include incorporating women, minorities, and young people into outreach and communications strategies. It is important that minority communities are actively invited to participate in these structures. Protecting minorities from extremist violence needs to be one of the objectives of a community policing strategy. Local police stations, in collaboration with the Forums, could explore ways to work with young people, perhaps through greater cooperation with educational institutions.

⁵⁸ “CTTC Contradicts RAB over Extremists,” *The New Age*, October 27, 2016.

IMPROVING THE MUTUAL EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION

Police could be more proactive in facilitating the engagement of their community policing structures in countering violent extremism. This process could involve improving the mutual exchange of information, rather than simply relying on the communities to provide ad hoc information. Police could use these formal networks to better explain policies, strategies, and approaches to countering violent extremism. They could develop written policies on counterterrorism tactics and terrorism alerts and share these materials with Forum members and local government representatives to increase public scrutiny of and confidence in law enforcement authorities. Forum members and community leaders could work to better connect police to pre-existing networks of neighborhood laborers who have a better understanding of community dynamics and trends, and who may be useful providers of information.

INCREASING THE RECOGNITION OF COMMUNITY POLICING

Community policing is given a low priority nationally, which results in few incentives for effective practice at local levels. Forum members and community police officers report that police headquarters and the Bangladeshi government do not recognize their contributions to security. There is no system of rewards or official recognition for the hard work of community police officers in their departments, nor is there for Forum members. Additionally, officers are discouraged from taking on the extra work that community policing requires. Forum members interviewed did not expect financial support, but they did want government recognition for their voluntary contributions. They also want the police to acknowledge the risks they take by cooperating with authorities and to be prepared to ensure their security, if required.

ENCOURAGING A REGULAR AND ACTION-ORIENTED RELATIONSHIP

Open house days and other social gatherings sponsored by the police need to be better organized and implemented more regularly. The Community Policing Forums, rather than the police alone, could be empowered to schedule such meetings. Forums need to be able to arrange more programs with different stakeholders and to exchange information on pressing issues related to extremism within communities. It is also important to formulate a clear working plan for community police officers and Forum members so that such meetings are more than opportunities for ceremonial briefings. Attendees should leave the meetings with a clear understanding of what was discussed and with concrete action points detailing how they can contribute to improving security in their neighborhoods.

BOOSTING INTERAGENCY COORDINATION AND COOPERATION

The CTTC unit and Community Policing Desk need to jointly formulate a strategy to counter violent extremism. Such a protocol could demarcate the respective roles and responsibilities in investigations related to violent extremism as well as explain how

community-oriented and intelligence-led policing approaches interact. The relationship between community policing and the RAB units that take the lead on counterterrorism actions needs to be delineated. Coordination on addressing violent extremism moving forward should also include institutions in addition to law enforcement agencies. School and university representatives could be asked to join Community Policing Forums. These educational institutions can make valuable contributions to public security, and their inclusion could boost their cooperation with law enforcement agencies.

IMPROVING THE TRAINING OF COMMUNITY POLICING ACTORS

It is important that Community Policing Forum members receive training on basic community policing approaches. Such training needs to be institutionalized and coordinated across the nation to avoid misunderstandings and improve effectiveness. Community police officers need basic training on national and international standards of human rights, on gender sensitivity, on the threat posed by extremism, and on the counterextremism approaches used by national level agencies. Counterterrorism and Transnational Crime Unit officers need training on community-oriented counterterrorism measures and human rights principles, as well as the application of these in their operational responsibilities. The Bangladesh police need to implement a long-term plan to train all field-level officers so that they share a basic understanding of the community policing approach.

Future Research Agenda

The challenges raised in this research brief illuminate gaps and specific areas for future inquiry for international and domestic policymakers and practitioners.

- It is important to study the level of trust between communities and the police, exploring how this level evolves, particularly in light of heavy-handed police tactics. It is also important to track community attitudes that perceive the police as partisan or corrupt.
- The role of community policing in protecting women and minorities, such as Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Shia, and the Ahmadiyya from extremist violence is relatively unexplored and merits further consideration.
- More work is needed to help domestic policymakers find a balance between an aggressive response to an imminent threat of violent extremism and a long-term initiative of proactive community-level policing to counter the foundations or drivers of extremist ideology.

Conclusions

Community policing has been a feature of Bangladesh's security environment for some years. While often inconsistently applied in practice, it is integral to the work of the Bangladesh police. With the rise of new forms of violent extremism, questions are being asked about how this people-focused approach to crime prevention interacts with and can potentially complement more forceful approaches used to deal with violent extremists. Other countries dealing with extremist threats see a role for community policing in dealing with these new challenges. In Bangladesh, however, a gap remains in policy and practice between police working with local communities and law enforcement agencies addressing violent extremism.

A close examination of how community policing actually works in Bangladesh shows the potential for combining community policing and efforts to counter violent extremism, but the approach is experimental and evolving slowly. In contrast, the threat from violent extremism is moving quickly. Bangladesh police need to update their policies, strategies, and tactical documents. Community policing needs to be understood as an approach for the whole community, including youth and educational institutions, not only those who formally participate in designated Forums and events.

Fundamental to progress is a change in those mindsets that view communities as sources of intelligence for the police to those that views communities as active and trusted partners with whom to share information on goals and objectives. Those who take part in community policing activities need proper recognition of their contributions and protection from retaliation. To be effective, community policing needs to be less focused on ceremonial functions and more focused on results. The community police apparatus also needs to be better integrated with other security agencies that are more directly engaged with countering violent extremism.

Accomplishing all of this requires additional education and training for the Bangladesh police and their partners in communities, as well as the dedication of resources to facilitate progress and constant monitoring through rigorous research.

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