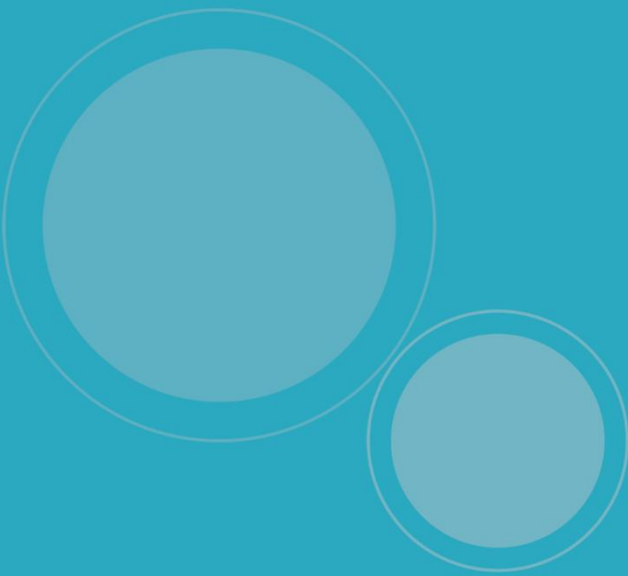


State of Peace 2025



Centre for

ALTERNATIVES

Since 2003

STATE OF PEACE 2025
an initiative of
BPO- Bangladesh Peace Observatory

BPO Advisory Board

Stop Violence Coalition
Bangladesh Police
National Defence College
ActionAid
Society for Environment and Human Development
The Daily Star
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Editor

Professor Imtiaz Ahmed

Editorial Board

Professor Amena Mohsin
Professor Delwar Hossain
Professor Niloy Ranjan Biswas

Research Associates

Mr. Humaun Kabir
Mr F. M. Arafat
Ms. Faizah Sultana
Mr Khandakar Tahmid Rejwan
Mr. Ashique Mahmud
Mr. Mahmud Reza
Mr Ashiq Iqbal Jishad
Mr Syed Irfan Hasan



Disclaimer:

Unless otherwise stated, authors are responsible for the views expressed in their respective papers and interviews.

Date of Publication:

April 2026

Table of Contents

From the Editor’s Desk.....	5
Bangladesh Peace Observatory: An Overview.....	19
Bangladesh Peace Observatory: Data Collection, Verification and Validation Method	8
Crime and Violence Update in Bangladesh: An Analysis from BPO (2012-2025).....	22
Gender-Based Violence: An overview of BPO data and Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence	42
AI and Violence Mapping.....	57
From Land to Sea: Mapping Rohingya Boat Migration and Human Security Risks	69
Annex.....	91

From the Editor's Desk

Elections are festive times in Bangladesh. Voters, male, female, and transgender, dressed in colourful and comfortable attire, line up for hours to cast their votes. Money, muscle, and *mantra*, too, have their roles, but on election day, the gaze is more on the voters than on the dubious forces. The February 2026 election is a critical one, not only from the standpoint of who is participating and who is not, but also from the standpoint of transparency, whether the voters will be able to participate and vote, free from intimidation and political engineering, as was the case with the last three national elections. More specifically, greater attention will be on Bangladesh's quest for stability: will the February 2026 election bring stability and make Bangladesh a developmental envy to many in the region and beyond? At the end of the year 2025, uncertainties certainly prevail.

Election in February 2026: Why the delay?

The delay in announcing the election date has always puzzled me. Not sure what the Interim Regime was hoping for, but critics, speaking from experience and looking at Bangladesh's political history, pointed out that exiting from governmental power has been as complicated as capturing it! This is primarily because the entry strategy, save one exception in 2001, never aligned with the exit strategy. The transfer of power was often accompanied by violence or occurred under violent circumstances. This time, it was more puzzling because those who came to power had always campaigned for a democratically elected government. Still, when the time came for them to decide on the election, they kept on delaying and had no qualms in remaining 'unelected' for nearly one and a half years now. The seat of power, the throne, seems to be laced with glue; whoever sits on it becomes stuck and is unable to free themselves! The fear of the public's wrath is always there, particularly when it is perceived as partisan or being wilfully supportive of one's own political agenda, or being vengeful when in power. But this fear is more private than public.

Three reasons were publicly flagged for the procrastination. Firstly, to carry out democratic reforms. Secondly, to build consensus among the political parties on implementing democratic reforms. Thirdly, to weed out 'fascist' members of the Awami League (AL) from governmental and non-governmental bodies, including security establishments. All three reasons were ill-thought-out. Take the case of the first one. The notion that non-politicians or civil society members, while in power, can reform politics is ill-founded. This is because, once in power, civil society members are no less political or partisan. To argue that the non-politicians have better knowledge of the public than the politicians and that the latter must abide by the formula provided by the non-politicians cannot be anything but hollow.

But more critically, since they are non-elected and often alienated from the public, they end up being groomed by external actors, mainly Western, to serve the latter's interests, if not their own. In fact, a sizable number of members of the Interim Regime come from civil society institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) funded by Western donors. The question that merits attention is, if they are so keen on serving and becoming part of the political society or government, why don't they join politics or become a member of a political party? It seems that such members from civil society institutions and NGOs want to have their cake and eat it too!

The second reason was even more bizarre, almost promoting a form of democratic totalitarianism. The concept of 'consensus' is deeply rooted in developed capitalist economies, which has worked wonders in promoting neoliberalism around the world. It has effectively blurred the distinction between 'position' and 'opposition,' as has been the case with liberals and conservatives in the West, both of whom hold and champion an identical economic goal. This has transformed the bulk of democracies into plutocracies, affecting both developed and developing economies. The only 'consensus' that is required from political parties is to remain tolerant of each other's views. Even putting an end to violent acts among its members remains under the purview of governance and rests with the law-and-order institutions. Put differently, political parties would cease to exist as distinct entities if they held identical views on all issues. Understandably, they would have different, often diverse, positions on politics, economics, and even international relations. Only the people through their chosen political parties, and not a minuscule section, have the power to chart the preferred path. In Bangladesh, the lack of consensus is not the problem. Instead, the *coercive means* of reaching or forcing a consensus, whether by political parties or non-political, even civil, entities, remain the central problem. Needless to say, the politics of mega-identities, as is the case with Bangladesh, can never be resolved through coercive means. Only consent, organised and reproduced voluntarily through socio-economic developments, can make a difference and contribute effectively to the civilisational aspirations of the people. Predictably, the collection of reforms designed and proposed by the Interim Regime, now to be put to a referendum, is likely to falter, with major political parties, save Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and National Citizen Party (NCP), showing little to no interest.

The policy responsible for the third reason had two immediate outcomes. Firstly, a large number of AL members, including the former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, fled the country and sought shelter in India, Canada, the USA, Europe, and the Middle East. Secondly, a good number of AL members were arrested and are now languishing in jail without being lawfully convicted. On the latter, one narrative has been that the Interim Regime cannot provide them security in the backdrop of having a shortage of police force, as many fled or were killed during the July-August 2024 uprising. Another, albeit more sinister, narrative blames economic and political corruption, ranging from extortion to seeking electoral support

in AL constituencies. Both outcomes will play a role and need to be addressed after the February 2026 election. However, one thing is sure: the objective of weeding out the AL has not been achieved. The immediate problem, however, lies not so much with the AL politicians as with the AL voters, which, according to some observers, account for 25 to 45 per cent of the voting population. Even the lowest percentage, if used collectively by voting for one party or the other, can swing the election's outcome. This, in turn, indicates the need for underhanded dealings with the AL, which only makes the aspirant parties suspicious of one another. Barring the AL from participating in the February 2026 election may prove 'justifiable' in the short term. However, it may prove costly in the long term, not only for members of the Interim Regime and those opposing their participation, but also for the country, as more AL-backed demonstrations take to the streets.

The unholy alliance between liberal and conservative forces

This puzzled many, too. How could the seemingly contradictory ideological forces join hands to overthrow the AL regime? What made them work together? Was AL authoritarianism or what has popularly been labelled as fascism so oppressive and ruthless that it became an existential threat to both liberal and conservative, primarily religio-fundamentalist, forces that joining hands remained the only option? Who was using whom? Given that the regime's power quickly shifted to the religio-conservative forces following the overthrow of AL, it seems the liberals forgot the age-old Chinese wisdom: "When the fox is friendly, put a double lock in the chicken barn!" The former could easily outwit the liberals and consolidate their position in administrative and security establishments. The liberals were doubly puzzled and somewhat shocked because the religio-conservative forces consolidated their power in the regime under the 'supervision' of the Chief Advisor and his cabinet, the membership of which consisted mainly of well-known liberals!

However, the puzzle in this case is not so difficult to demystify. Both liberal and religio-conservative forces were groomed, and as some reports later indicated, funded by the United States through both private and governmental channels or what has come to be called the Deep State. This is where the convergence of minds and actions between liberal and religio-conservative forces occurred. The liberals' relationship with the United States is not only ideological and political but also economic. This consists of supporting capitalism as much as the Western version of democracy and human rights. However, in practical terms, it also involves having an education in the West and having their children aspire to the 'American Dream' and join the Bangladeshi diaspora in the United States. More specifically, the liberal elite, both civil and military, are tuned toward the United States, which makes it easy for the latter to use them whenever it is required.

But then, what about the religio-conservative forces, particularly JI? What is their relationship with the United States? The relationship between the United States and JI is a historical one; it goes back to the pre-independence period, when both JI and the United States supported the Pakistan military in 1971, although the latter committed genocide and crimes against humanity against the people of erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. Nothing much has changed since then. This is because the United States sees the JI as a bulwark against communism. Also, the factor of the United States being more religious than secular, as one American official once confided in me, which makes sense when one sees the power of the Evangelicals and Christian Zionists in the United States. There appears to be a religious, more precisely, Abrahamic, if not socio-political, inclination for the United States to maintain a trustworthy relationship with the JI. However, so blinded is the United States against communism that it fails to see that its support for JI creates space for religio-extremist forces, some of which are violent and ironically profess an anti-Western agenda.

But can such an unholy alliance sustain, now in the absence of the AL threat? Time and again, history has shown that such an alliance flounders once the common enemy has been overthrown and made ineffective. This is where the ideological bankruptcy of the liberals gets unwittingly, if not foolishly, exposed. The burning and destruction of media houses, like *The Daily Star* and *Prothom Alo*, cultural institutions, like the *Chhayanaut*, and attacks on the syncretic forces, particularly the Bauls, and the minority (Hindu) community, are critical indications of the intolerance of the religio-conservative forces. Unless there is a political will on the part of the next elected government and a social consensus to use coercive measures and a justice system, it would become impossible for the state machinery to restore law and order and contain the violent extremism of the religio-conservative forces.

Two factors are likely to play a role in either reproducing or fracturing the unholy alliance. One is the role of the United States. It remains unclear what the United States' position will be on barring the AL from the national election. If the United States insists on AL participation or debarring them from active politics, and more so, after the February 2026 election, the liberals will be more vocal in fracturing the alliance and sheepishly siding with the AL. Two, the outcome of the February 2026 election. If the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) wins with an absolute majority, it will quickly distance itself from the JI and other religio-extremist forces. This would create space for the liberals to align more closely with the BNP. However, if the BNP gets a nominal majority and the JI has nearly an equal number of seats, the latter will insist on forming a national government, which the BNP, in all probability, will agree to, particularly in the backdrop of the uncertainty arising from barring AL from participating in the February 2026 election. In the backdrop of the above two factors, one thing can be said with some certainty: AL cadres and supporters will be more active in political agitation, not so much before the election as after.

Instability and the political economy of holding the election

The Interim Regime, despite being in place for over a year, has failed to stabilise the law-and-order situation in the country. Some critics went on to say that it had become difficult to know who is in charge! Making ‘students’ and ‘activists,’ including NGO executives, heads of ministries, was the worst decision. This has created an atmosphere of anti-scholarship and mis-governability, not to mention disrespect for seniors, which is destined to have a long-term impact on governance and knowledge production. However, what has most damaged the reputation of the Interim Regime in the last one and a half years is its failure to contain mobocracy, the power of mobs and dubious forces. There have been several variations of it.

Firstly, the looting of arms during the July-August 2024 uprising and immediately in the aftermath of the regime change. One estimate indicates that 5,763 firearms were looted, and as of 4 January 2026, only 4,428 were recovered. This means that as many as 1,335 are still in the hands of the dubious and most likely extremist forces. Moreover, out of 650,000 rounds of ammunition that were looted, over 250,000 rounds are still missing. The stolen and yet to be recovered firearms include sophisticated military-grade equipment such as Chinese rifles, submachine guns, light machine guns, 9mm pistols, and shotguns. This is an issue that the incoming elected government will have to address. Any shortcomings will only make the country less safe and less attractive to domestic and foreign investment.

Secondly, more than 2,200 inmates were either helped or found ways to escape from 17 different jails across the country during the July-August 2024 uprising. According to one source, this included approximately 70 high-profile violent extremists from proscribed militant groups like Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). However, what further proved alarming was when over 300 people accused of extremist or terrorist activities were released on bail within the first few months of the regime change and when the Interim Regime was in charge. Among those released were militants from banned groups such as JMB, Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), and Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT). The latter is alleged to be an Al-Qaeda-affiliated group. The post-regime change period also saw members from such banned outfits holding rallies and distributing political leaflets. This alarmed security establishments not only within Bangladesh but also outside, particularly neighbouring countries. Even Pakistan’s prominent newspaper, Dawn, flagged in December 2025 the recruitment of violent extremists from Bangladesh by multiple militant organisations in Pakistan, which included Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Tehreek-i-

Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), and Ittehad-ul-Mujahideen Pakistan (IMP), incidentally, to fight against the Pakistani government.

Thirdly, mob violence. The data from the Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) indicate that mob violence in the period following July 2024 increased significantly compared to the period before July 2024. In fact, when it comes to incidents, as many as 355 from 126 (182% rise); deaths as many as 338 from 83 (307% rise); and injuries as many as 851 from 236 (261% rise) in the sixteen months between August 2024 and November 2025. The annual data of Ain-O-Salish Kendra (ASK) also show a marked increase in mob violence. According to ASK, 128 people in 2024 and 198 people in 2025 died in mob lynchings, although the number of mob deaths was only 2 in 2023. This is a significant increase that only underscores the Interim Regime's failure to ensure public security.

The instability made Bangladesh economically unattractive. Except for military production and sales, the critical precondition for both domestic and foreign investments is stability. Only an economy based on military production, or what is referred to as the military-industrial complex (MIC), profits from instability and conflicts. During moments of conflict, there is a dire need for weapons, and the MIC wastes no time profiting from it. There was a significant, albeit naïve, expectation among members of civil society and those engaged in displacing the AL regime that the Chief Advisor, given his global reputation, particularly for receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, would be able to attract overnight economic investment. That did not work, mainly because investors, both foreign and local, required an elected regime on which they could depend for stability, a country relatively free from mob violence, and a legal guarantor of their investments.

There were notable attempts by the Interim Regime to attract foreign investment. One was to produce a White Paper on the corruption of the previous AL regime. Not only was the White Paper too weak and one-sided, almost suggesting that no development had taken place in the last sixteen years, which runs contrary to visible evidence, including the 2025 World Bank Report. In fact, the latter stated:

Since 2010, Bangladesh has achieved robust growth and social progress, though at a slower pace since 2016. Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) expanded at an annual average of 6.6 per cent between 2010 and 2022, nearly doubling GDP per capita. Poverty above the upper national line declined from 37.1 to 18.7 per cent, lifting around 25 million people out of poverty. In comparison,

extreme poverty fell from 12.2 to 5.6 per cent, reducing the number of extreme poor by about 9 million.

Multidimensional poverty also dropped sharply—from 46.8 to 21.3 per cent—meaning that nearly 34 million Bangladeshis experienced improvements in education, health, sanitation, housing, and access to electricity.

However, the corruption figure in the White Paper lacked a scientific basis and was primarily based on previous, unfounded calculations or perception surveys. This is not to suggest that no corruption took place. On the contrary, as in many developing and some developed countries, corruption did occur. However, the problem was not so much the corruption itself, which is challenging to eliminate in a capitalist economy, especially in developing countries with no access to ‘primitive accumulation’ like having colonies, but rather the transfer of unlawful wealth, often referred to as money laundering, to developed economies, mainly in the West. Not only did the White Paper fail to hold the latter accountable in a meaningful way, given its complicity in receiving and retaining the unlawful wealth, but it also provided no concrete suggestions or roadmap for recovering the money-laundered wealth.

Another effort to attract foreign investment was to hire a significant number of officials from the Bangladeshi diaspora, mainly those settled in the West, and with dual citizenship. This, too, did not work. Not only did it give the impression that the bureaucracy was at fault and local experts were not to be found, but it also slowed down much of the governmental work because the outsiders, the Bangladeshis residing abroad, had little to no knowledge of how things work in Bangladesh and what is required to transform a decision into action, mainly for remaining physically absent from the country for a protracted period of time. The bureaucracy, too, became lethargic and demotivated, particularly when they saw the Interim Regime unable to restrain the mobs while promoting inexperienced youngsters and outsiders.

Finally, an effort was also made to flag that the country’s foreign reserves were rising, indicating that the Interim Regime was doing something right, and investors should feel confident about investing in Bangladesh. One of the newspapers, openly supportive of the July-August 2024 regime change, published a bold headline on January 1, 2026, stating, “Bangladesh’s gross foreign reserves cross \$33 billion after three years,” suggesting that the economy is back on track and that investors should take note. The same report noted, “Forex reserves, which had crossed \$48 billion in August 2021, began to fall amid pent-up demand for imports following the removal of Covid restrictions and rising commodity prices in the global market after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.” However, by May 2024, the reserve stood

at \$24 billion, raising concerns about the country's capacity to meet international payment obligations. No mention was made of the several mega projects, including the Padma Bridge, initiated and completed by the previous AL regime. Now that the foreign reserves have surpassed \$33 billion, the report suggests that the economy has recovered and is performing well. Nothing could be so dumb-headed as this! Not only have remittances from migrant workers increased, mainly because the interest or returns from deposits in Bangladesh are relatively high, but also because the Interim Regime was unable to initiate any mega projects and spend the money. Put differently, the economic standstill allowed the reserves to increase without the economy or the people benefiting. In less than a week, on 5 January 2026, the same newspaper reported that inflation had reached 8.49% in December 2025, up from 8.29% in November and a 39-month low of 8.17% in October 2025. This is a good indicator that the economy is not performing well and that the majority of the population is either suffering or being affected by it.

The dismal economic situation has, in turn, created a compulsion for national elections. This has been flagged not only by politicians, particularly the BNP, which is now the largest party in the absence of AL, and is poised to win the election and form the next government, but also by key stakeholders, including the business community, both at home and abroad, and the regional and international actors. Any delay would not only harm the country's economy but also complicate the Interim Regime's exit strategy, particularly for its members. The Interim Regime, including the JI and NCP, would have preferred the election to be held even later, particularly after the suggested reforms had been implemented. However, this could have been made possible if the economy had experienced high growth and remained vibrant, despite the existing corruption. And, at the international level, particularly in the United States, if the Democrats, under Joe Biden or Kamala Harris, who are supporters and close friends of the Bangladesh Chief Advisor, were in power. But since that is not the case, the people of Bangladesh are looking forward to the February 2026 national election, hoping that an elected government will be able to turn things around and restart the country's journey towards peace and prosperity.

The geopolitical anxiety

In contemporary times, it is difficult to remain unaffected by what can be referred to as geopolitical anxiety. Much of it stems from the evolving nature of geopolitics, which is shifting from unipolarity to a more fluid multipolar world. The fluidity stems from both decolonisation and globalisation, which compel

each pole to interact with other polars, sometimes cooperatively, sometimes in conflict. In Bangladesh's case, despite the Deep State playing a formidable role in the regime change, as it is alleged, the country cannot help but cultivate relationships with multiple polars for commercial, developmental, and security reasons. In this context, when a section of the Interim Regime tried to befriend the United States and some Western donors, including the Secretary General of the United Nations, with the plan to establish a "humanitarian corridor" to help the Rohingyas residing in the Rakhine region, there was a public protest as to why Bangladesh's land would be used for this purpose. The public was apprehensive of the consequences, as it would put Bangladesh in a direct conflict or war-like situation with Myanmar. However, the ill-thought-out plan was finally put to an end when Bangladesh's military chief came out openly and remarked, "No to bloody corridor!"

The "humanitarian corridor" plan is one instance where geopolitical anxiety was visible, more so because China, India, and even Japan did not see any merit in the plan, as it was hardly a credible pathway to resolving the Rohingya crisis. However, such anxiety had more to do with the Interim Regime trying to gain political advantage from the United States, particularly in the backdrop of not having been elected but wishing to remain in power. This must have alarmed both China and India, as they quickly called for an elected government while making no effort to invest. The plan also became ineffective and lost its steam when the new administration of Donald Trump came to prevail, as the latter, unlike Joe Biden and the Democrats, had little interest in issues related to Myanmar, particularly in faulting the Myanmar military on human rights and lack of democracy. On the contrary, the Trump administration came to favour holding the national election in Bangladesh at the earliest possible time. Indeed, since the U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio's conversation with Bangladesh's Chief Advisor on 30 June 2025, the die was cast in the February 2026 election!

Following the July-August 2024 regime change, Bangladesh's relationship with India suffered the most, experiencing a severe decline, particularly on the political front. In fact, on the economic front, the consequences were mixed. It is true that since August 2024, imports from India have dropped by over 75,000 tonnes compared to the previous fiscal year. Still, Bangladesh's total exports reached \$1.76 billion in the 2024-2025 fiscal year, which is a 12.43% increase over the previous fiscal year. However, on the political front, the government-to-government relationship almost stalled, with both sides blaming the other. The reasons are not difficult to understand.

Four reasons could easily be identified. Firstly, India's partisan approach towards politics in Bangladesh. More specifically, aligning mainly with the AL and its diehard supporters, rather than with the people of Bangladesh or other political parties. This created space for anti-India politics, notably when the AL failed to deliver a credible national election three times in a row – January 2014, December 2018, and January 2024 – amid India's support for the AL, against the backdrop of international, mainly Western, disapproval and, with some, condemnation.

Secondly, post-2024 regime change saw AL politicians, including Sheikh Hasina and some members of her government, fleeing the country and taking shelter in India. The public, particularly those involved in the regime change, including members of the Interim Regime, detested this and wanted India to return Sheikh Hasina to face trial or, at the very least, prevent Hasina from engaging in Bangladeshi politics, which included, among other things, delivering speeches, giving interviews, and meeting people. India agreed on neither of them. Following global practice, India provided shelter to the Dalai Lama in 1959 when he sought it and has since allowed him to conduct his political and social activities. This did not stop India from cultivating a robust economic relationship with China, which is currently India's largest trading partner. Similarly, Britain's relationship with Bangladesh during the AL regime was not premised on the ground of Britain providing refuge to Bangladesh's dissenters, and there were several of them.

Thirdly, India raised its concern about minority bashing in Bangladesh following the July-August 2024 regime change. In December 2025, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs reported that over 2,900 incidents of violence against minorities, predominantly Hindus, had occurred in Bangladesh since the Interim Regime took power in August 2024. This had created resentment among the Hindu majority population of India, a sizeable number of them openly protested on the streets and wanted the Indian government to pressure the Government of Bangladesh to take measures to stop such incidents. In fact, the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council estimated that 82 Hindus were killed between August and November 2024.

This brings us to the final point. The Interim Regime and its members, without recognising the state of mobocracy and the vulnerability of the minorities, went on criticising India, flagging India's dismal communal situation. But two wrongs do not make one thing right! Instead of being self-critical, the Interim Regime attempted to strengthen its relatively weak position, both at home and abroad, by

focusing on Northeast India and the Indian government's failure to develop the region. The naivety of such a position was further compounded when the Chief Adviser, unwittingly, referred to Northeast India as a landlocked region and narrated, during a visit to China and in a conversation with President Xi Jinping on 28 March 2025, how China could link itself to Bangladesh and the Bay of Bengal through it. From India's perspective, the Chief Adviser's unsolicited remarks on the Northeast, a sensitive region, cross the line. India may have decided on that day not to make any effort to normalise its relationship with Bangladesh. Instead, it will wait for the outcome of Bangladesh's national election in February 2026 before taking any measures to foster relations with Bangladesh.

The geopolitical anxiety took another leap when Pakistan, immediately after the regime change in Bangladesh, attempted to woo the Interim Regime to its side, incidentally, more in relation to its conflict with India. This is a classic zero-sum game played out between India and Pakistan. The former, while adopting a Pakistan-centric foreign policy, the latter, on the other hand, adopts an India-centric foreign policy in the region. The Interim Regime indeed fell for it and quickly tried to develop its ties with Pakistan. However, in situations like this, two things are worth remembering. One, the relationship between two countries, positive or negative, should not be premised on one's relationship with a third country. Any policy that does not address this risk is likely to fail and cannot be sustained in the long term. Two, political willingness alone cannot reproduce and develop a robust relationship between two countries. Economic gains, from market access to business opportunities, are vital and often a precondition for any healthy relationship between two countries. Following the regime change, one can observe the political willingness between Bangladesh's Interim Regime and the Government of Pakistan; however, unless this can be translated into tangible benefits or profits for the business community in both Bangladesh and Pakistan, such political willingness on its own will not be able to bring the two countries closer.

A word or two on China. The latter has traditionally been hesitant, if not reluctant, to get involved in a country's domestic politics. Bangladesh was no exception. As during the AL regime, China welcomed the Interim Regime and sought to foster a friendly relationship between the two countries. In this context, it quickly interacted with all politically active parties, including JI and NCP, which helped China become familiar with them and understand China's interests in Bangladesh and the region. However, China was wary of the Chief Adviser's 'special' relationship with the United States, particularly with the Democrats, and of the alleged role the United States played in the regime change. Not surprisingly, when

it came to investments, China was cautious about signing new deals or initiating new projects with the Interim Regime. Since stability is a precondition for investment, China, like many other countries, also signalled the need for a national election and its preference for an elected government in Bangladesh.

Conclusion: Will the election bring stability?

Abul Fazl, the Grand Vizier of the Mughal Empire, when queried, warned Emperor Akbar that “Bengal is a *Bulghakkhana* (House of Turbulence). Stay away from it!” Akbar, in fact, never succeeded in fully taming Bengal and bringing the region under the Mughal Empire's suzerainty. It was only his grandson, Emperor Jahangir, who ultimately led an invasion under the able commander, Islam Khan Chisti, and defeated the fiercely independent and powerful *Baro-Bhuiyans* (twelve landlords), and brought Bengal into the Mughal Empire's fold in 1612. But then, not for long. It only lasted for 105 years. In 1717, the Mughal court recognised Murshid Quli Khan as the hereditary Nawab of Bengal, marking Bengal's transition to a virtually independent, semi-autonomous state, with only nominal allegiance to the Mughal Emperor. But that, too, did not last long. In 1757, some 40 years later, the British East India Company defeated the last independent Nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Daulah. Political instability otherwise was a critical hallmark of Bengal.

The reason for narrating this history is to impress upon readers that political instability in Bengal and, now, Bangladesh was not out of the ordinary but had become a critical hallmark of the people's resilience and the country's existence. Post-independent Bangladesh never had political stability. What it achieved for a while, from 2009 to 2014, was regime stability and not political stability. Therefore, expectations should not be high that the national election in February 2026 will bring political stability for all time to come and usher in a period that could be labelled, to caricature Francis Fukuyama, the end of history!

There are positive signs that a form of regime stability, if not political stability, is on the horizon. This comes not only from the respect that millions of Bangladeshis have shown to the departed soul of Begum Khaleda Zia, who passed away on 30 December 2025, but also, and more importantly, the return of his son, Tarique Rahman, now the chairperson of BNP, from exile after seventeen years, and the reception he got from his supporters and well-wishers, again, in millions, just five days before on 25 December 2025. Needless to say, both events will have a significant impact on the upcoming election, indeed, far beyond the expectations of some political analysts.

Following Tarique Rahman's arrival, there seems to be some desperation on the part of the Interim Regime, including one or two political parties closely aligned to it, like the JI and NCP. This is clear not only from the rat race to form an electoral alliance on the part of the latter two, but also from the Interim Regime's anxiety about the outcome of the referendum on the July Charter, scheduled for the February national election. Since politics in Bangladesh, as much as in most of the South Asian countries, including India and Pakistan, is reproduced not so much by "political parties" as by "political assemblies," it remains a truism that the greater the alliance, explicit or tacit, the easier it becomes to garner votes, often across political and social lines. However, the outcome of the July Charter has become uncertain, mainly because the BNP has pointed out the anomalies between what it signed and what was later published. This is, of course, aside from the legality of holding such a referendum, as some lawyers have already pointed out. The Interim Regime's desperation is what probably led the Bangladesh Bank to direct all banks to run campaigns supporting a 'Yes' vote in the upcoming referendum on the July Charter's constitutional provisions. Only political engineering can now save the July Charter from becoming redundant.

However, a negative vote on the referendum should not imply the end of the democratic process. The latter will evolve and shape governance in Bangladesh in its own indigenous ways, indeed through a sophisticated confluence among the politicians, the business community, and the people. What is required in both short and long terms is stability, stability, and stability. In the short term, whichever party is in power must refrain from engaging in revenge politics. Otherwise, it will drain its strength and creativity; in fact, it will fail to attract local and foreign investors, and, more importantly, will be unable to work effectively for the development and prosperity of its people. If anything, it was one of the fundamental weaknesses of the Interim Regime; it became trapped in displaying revenge politics, from which it was unable to free itself, making its exit strategy increasingly complex, and now only the post-election period can tell if the transition will be a smooth, peaceful one, particularly for its members.

Still, the February 2026 election remains marred by one significant issue: barring AL from participating. Even if we take the fact that the vote bank of AL has declined to some 25%, as indicated before, which many contend is not the correct figure and is much higher, as high as 45%, as indicated before, it remains a formidable political force, the support or non-support of which would be a factor in winning different constituencies around the country. At this stage, the AL will not engage in agitation, derailing, or stalling the February election, as this would only strengthen the bond among anti-AL political

forces. It will undoubtedly want the election held and may not disturb the elected government for the first six months, or what could be called the honeymoon period. However, after six months, AL's re-entry into politics, including agitation, will depend on the success of the elected government in containing mobocracy, attracting investments, bringing down inflation, and creating employment. Any economic downturn or deterioration of law-and-order will only hasten agitation on the streets, if not AL's return.

The election is only a month away. I cannot help but end my discussion with the words of Lao Tzu, "Those who have knowledge, don't predict. Those who predict don't have knowledge." Since I have shared considerable knowledge about 2025, including the February 2026 election, I, too, would like to follow Lao Tzu's wisdom and refrain from making any predictions. If, after reading this commentary, a reader traces a prediction or two, and if it gets materialised in the not-so-distant future, the ingenuity lies more with the reader in deciphering such predictions and not so much with the author!

13 January 2026

Bangladesh Peace Observatory: An Overview

Accessible at www.peaceobservatory-ca.org, BPO is a research facility established in 2016 and housed at the Centre for Alternatives (CA) in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). BPO is a component of UNDP's "Partnerships for a Tolerant, Inclusive Bangladesh" (PTIB) project. The BPO seeks to support government institutions, academia, civil society organisations, and the media in making better public policy decisions, tailored interventions and programming, enhanced research, and effective advocacy campaigns for social cohesion and peace, grounded in data, evidence, research, and critical analysis. The ongoing activities under BPO are:

Open Access Data: BPO consolidates, standardises, aggregates, and visualises and analyses data on violence in Bangladesh in a more user-friendly way. BPO brings together different streams of publicly available data on violence, analyses and visualises them practically and interactively for decision-makers, civil society, and media to understand, consume, and debate.

BPO offers a virtual open data platform equipped with GIS-based mapping and data analytics technology that informs users about the state of violence, crime, and related information, based on timelines, geographic distribution, and types of violence. Each administrative level (Division, District, and Upazila) has its own automatically generated profile page on violence, with click-throughs fed by BPO datasets. Users can view trends, rankings, agents, and the impact of violence on death, injury, arrests, and property damage. The data can be filtered and downloaded from the BPO and used in third-party tools to generate in-depth insights and visualisations on the incidence of violence.

Over time, BPO has evolved to include a more modern outlook, new search options, and advanced filtering features. These updates result from rigorous brainstorming, testing, and feedback from the advisory group and platform users. At present, BPO has thirteen (13) years of data on violence (2012-2025) classified under 26 categories, with a total of more than 224,400 incidents all over Bangladesh. These incidents are entered into an online dashboard and undergo a rigorous validation process before becoming publicly available.



CA Peace Report: As a part of the BPO initiative, CA publishes a Peace Report to provide an understanding of thematic situations. The Latest CA Peace Report focuses on Border Violence. Peacegraphics are published online on the BPO website to visually present monthly and weekly data on the violence situation in Bangladesh.



Crime and Violence Update in Bangladesh: An Analysis from BPO

Extortion: An analysis of BPO data

Contemporary Trends and Effects of Extortion and Violence Across the Globe



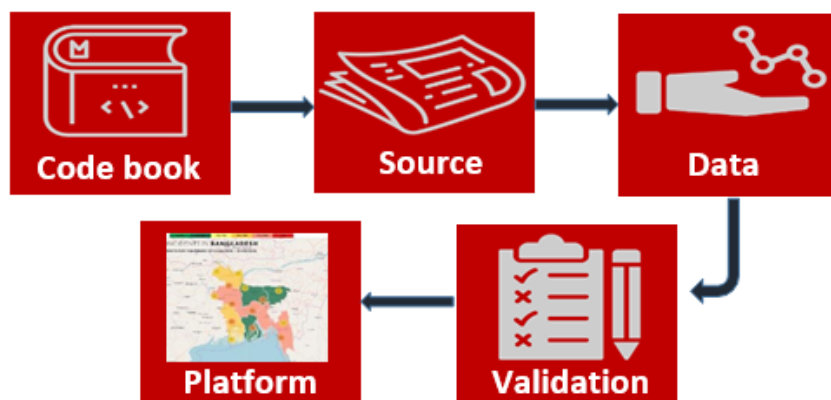
Border Violence in Bangladesh: An analysis of BPO Data

International Trends of Contemporary Border Violence

The Futures of Borders and Geopolitics in South Asia: Beyond Statist Discourse

Bangladesh Peace Observatory: Data Collection, Verification and Validation Method

BPO uses an online data collection platform developed by the website development organisation Zeteq



System. This online data collection system follows the BPO codebook to categorise and record incidents. After an incident is entered, the entry undergoes intensive validation in the backend and is published on the platform.

Since January 2018, BPO has expanded its data collection capacity and added new sources

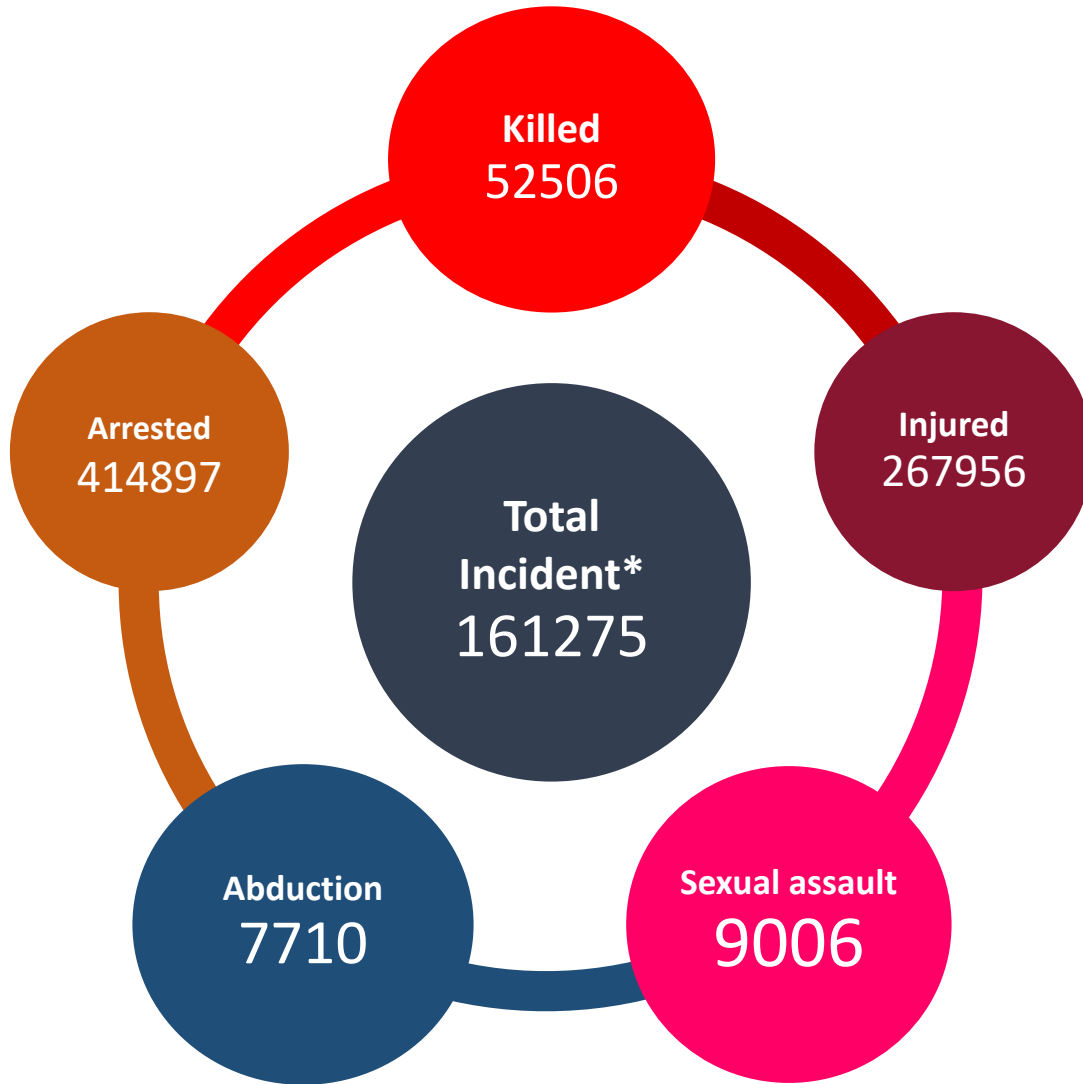
(*The Daily Purbokone* and *The Daily Karatoa*), along with the existing sources (*The Daily Star*, *The Daily Prothom Alo*, *The Daily Ittefaq*, *The Daily New Age*). By the end of 2018, the BPO platform contained data sourced from 13 daily newspapers, including *The Daily Bangladesh Observer*, *The Dainik Bangla*, *The Daily Bhorer Kagoj*, *The Daily Janakantha*, *The Daily Jugantar*, *The Daily Sylheter Dak* (Sylhet), and *The Daily Ajker Barta* (Barisal). The data collection method was also updated in 2018 with an elaborated description of the incident and actor-wise segregation of victims in violence, based on reported data. This is now available in the downloadable raw data on BPO. To ensure proper validation and avoid duplication, a new duplicate-identification feature was introduced in the back-end to mark incidents reported from different sources as duplicates. By the end of 2019, three more sources were added: *Ajker Mymensingh*, *Dainik Purbanchal* (Khulna), and *The Daily Samakal*. In 2020, BPO expanded its data sources to include 7 new sources, including 2 online newspapers. *The Independent*, *Cox's Bazar Journal*, *Cox's Bazar News*, *Teknaf News*, *Ukhiya News*, along with two online newspapers, *Bdnews24.com* and *Banglanews24.com*. Eight full-time Research Associates are now working for BPO to collect data from the aforementioned newspapers.

Crime and Violence Update in Bangladesh: An Analysis from BPO (2012-2025)

This section provides a complete picture of the types, scale, and effects of violence in Bangladesh from January 2012 to December 2025, using data from the Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO). The analysis categorises incidents into violent and non-violent groups and looks at their effects, such as deaths, injuries, arrests, gendered harms, and specific types of violence. The section goes into more detail about the main types of violence, such as political/partisan violence, gender-based violence, violence against minorities, cross-border incidents, mob violence, and abduction. It shows how these types of violence have changed over time, where they happen most often, and how they affect different people differently. The tables and figures together provide a solid, evidence-based framework for understanding how violence is created, addressed, and accepted in Bangladesh's social, political, and institutional settings.

The figures and tables below show that BPO reported 161,275 incidents, of which 56.87 per cent were violent. From 2012 onward, the number of incidents rises steadily, peaking around 2019–2020. After that, it drops sharply until 2022, but violence picks up again in 2024–2025. The human cost is high, with 52,506 deaths and 267,956 injuries, including a large number of deaths and injuries among women. The very high number of arrests (414,897), which far exceeds the total number of incidents, indicates that the response to unrest was more coercive and focused on enforcement than on prevention or de-escalation. In general, the trends suggest that violence in Bangladesh is cyclical and recurrent, and is closely linked to political, social, and governance dynamics rather than to one-time or unusual events.

Figure 1: Overview of the Violent Incidents in Bangladesh (January 2012- December 2025)



***Includes both violent and non-violent incidents.** According to BPO Codebook, “violent incidents” are those reported incidents that “involved the intentional use of physical force by an individual or group against another individual or group, in a manner that resulted or could have resulted in death, injury or any other form of physical harm to persons or property.”

Table 1: Yearly Segregation of the Incident (Violent + Non-Violent) and its consequences

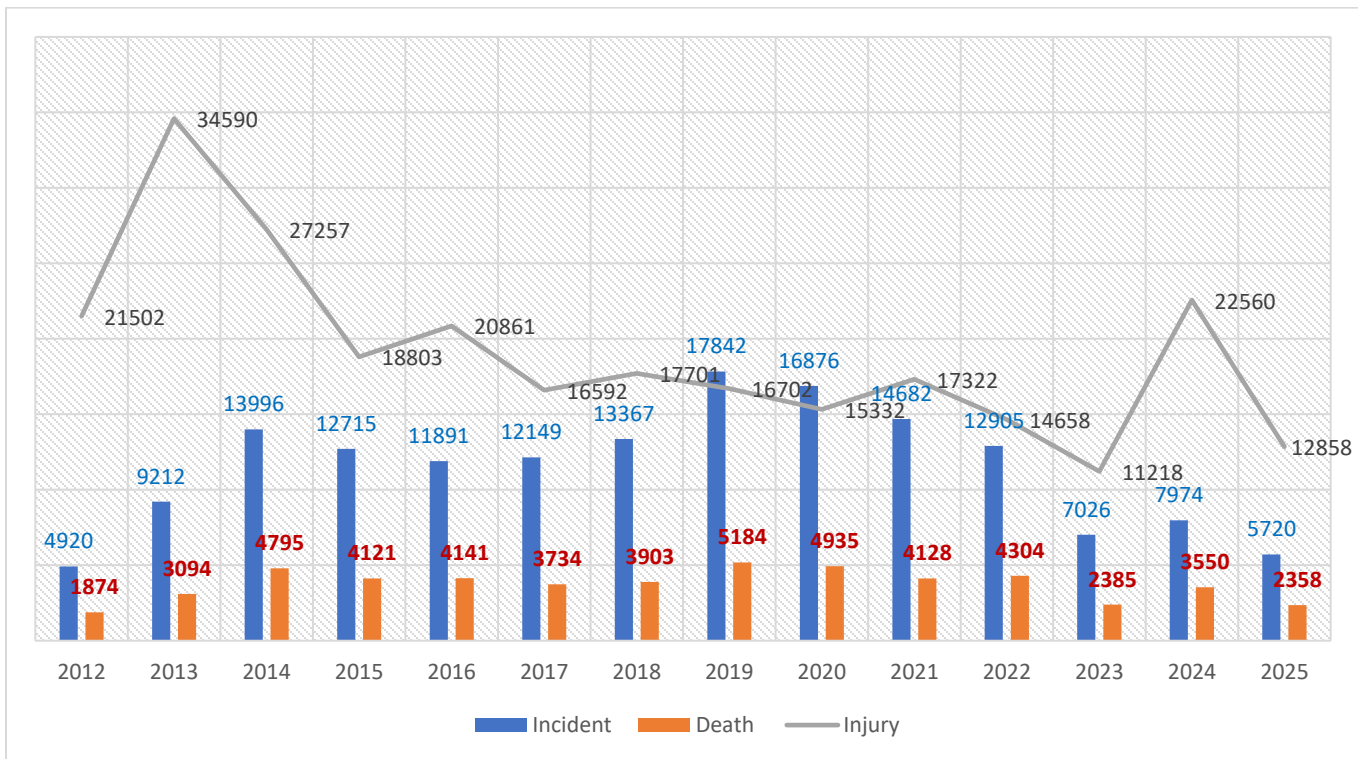
Year	Incident	Death	Female Death	Injury	Female Injury	Sexual Assault	Abduction	Arrest
2012	4920	1874	532	21502	592	108	615	9383
2013	9212	3094	744	34590	756	282	714	21644
2014	13996	4795	1465	27257	1191	444	1578	30448
2015	12715	4121	1187	18803	1016	547	750	34627
2016	11891	4141	1110	20861	1032	432	619	26342
2017	12149	3734	1183	16592	1415	774	766	31513
2018	13367	3903	1022	17701	1003	576	412	37438
2019	17842	5184	1611	16702	1730	1454	472	39238
2020	16876	4935	1713	15332	2277	1448	377	31348
2021	14682	4128	1513	17322	1947	1201	279	35687
2022	12905	4304	1523	14658	1265	794	226	31419
2023	7026	2385	685	11218	549	303	178	18910
2024	7974	3550	728	22560	658	213	375	24798
2025	5720	2358	581	12858	756	430	349	42102
Total	161275	52506	15597	267956	16187	9006	7710	414897

Table 2: Number and Percentage of Incidents

Year	Number of Incidents			Percentage of Incident Type	
	Non-violent	Violent	Total	Non-violent	Violent
2012	1432	3488	4920	29.11	70.89
2013	2840	6372	9212	30.83	69.17
2014	5187	8809	13996	37.06	62.94
2015	5699	7016	12715	44.82	55.18
2016	4938	6953	11891	41.53	58.47
2017	5400	6749	12149	44.45	55.55

2018	6398	6969	13367	47.86	52.14
2019	8489	9353	17842	47.58	52.42
2020	7983	8893	16876	47.30	52.70
2021	7075	7607	14682	48.19	51.81
2022	6157	6748	12905	47.71	52.29
2023	2973	4053	7026	42.31	57.69
2024	3292	4682	7974	41.28	58.72
2025	1689	4031	5720	29.53	70.47
Total	69552	91723	161275	43.13	56.87

Figure 2: Trends of the Violence incidents in Bangladesh (January 2012- December 2025)



Critical Analysis of 2024

The year 2024 represents a transitional phase in the overall trajectory of violence in Bangladesh. After the relatively low number of incidents recorded in 2023, total incidents increased to 7,974, indicating a partial rebound in violent activity. Additionally, the percentage of violent incidents increased to 58.7%, indicating that violent events rather than non-violent ones were the main cause of the increase.

The rapid increase in injuries in 2024, more than 22,500 cases, almost twice as many as the year before, was one of the most notable changes. This implies that the intensity and mortality of confrontations increased while the overall number of events remained mild. Increased street-level altercations (e.g., July protests), more combative protest dynamics, or growing tensions between political and social groupings could all contribute to the spike in injuries.

In 2024, there were 3,550 deaths, a significant rise from 2,385 in 2023. This rise suggests that violence worsened over the course of the year, which may reflect broader political uncertainty stemming from changes in government and increased popular mobilisation.

Arrests increased to 24,798 at the same time, indicating a stronger focus on security enforcement by government agencies. The rise in arrests shows that state authorities continued to rely largely on coercive control mechanisms rather than conflict mediation or preventive tactics, even though it may also be an indication of aggressive law enforcement responses to disturbance.

The resurgence of mob violence, which saw a sharp rise in fatalities, was another noteworthy topic in 2024. The unusually high death toll in mob incidents points to growing social volatility and the role of rumours, mistrust, and informal justice mechanisms in local communities. Such dynamics often emerge in contexts where public confidence in formal legal institutions is limited.

Violence against minorities also increased during this year, with 115 incidents recorded, the highest figure in several years. The persistence of such violence highlights continuing vulnerabilities faced by minority communities and underscores the role of identity-based tensions in shaping localised conflict patterns.

All things considered, 2024 can be seen as a year of increasing intensity rather than one of increased violence. The increase in fatalities, injuries, and intercommunal conflicts indicates that the

nation saw more severe and socially disruptive types of violence, even though the overall number of occurrences did not exceed previous peaks.

Critical Analysis of 2025

The year 2025 presents a more complex picture of violence in Bangladesh. On the surface, the total number of incidents declined significantly to 5,720, representing the lowest figure in the dataset since 2012. However, this reduction in overall incidents should not be interpreted as a clear improvement in the security situation.

Despite the decline in incidents, the proportion of violent incidents rose dramatically to 70.5 per cent, the highest level recorded during the entire study period. This indicates that while fewer incidents were documented, a greater share of them involved direct physical violence. In other words, violence in 2025 became less frequent but more concentrated and severe.

The number of deaths in 2025 declined compared with 2024 but remained high at 2,358 fatalities, while injuries reached 12,858 cases. These figures suggest that violence remained a significant threat to public safety, even though the overall number of incidents decreased.

One of the most remarkable developments in 2025 was the sharp increase in arrests, which exceeded 42,000 cases, the highest number recorded in any single year in the dataset. This dramatic rise indicates a substantial intensification of state enforcement activities. Such a pattern may reflect a strategy of pre-emptive policing or broader security operations aimed at controlling potential unrest.

Gender-based violence also showed concerning patterns during this year. While total incidents remained relatively stable, sexual assault cases increased significantly, signalling the persistence of structural gender inequalities and the continued vulnerability of women and children.

Mob violence remained highly volatile, with incidents increasing further compared with 2024. Although deaths declined from the unusually high level of the previous year, the number of mob-related incidents rose, suggesting that collective violence continues to function as an informal mechanism of social punishment in certain communities.

Cross-border incidents also increased significantly in 2025, particularly in arrests and injuries. This rise may reflect intensified border enforcement operations or recurring tensions in border regions involving smuggling, migration, or local disputes.

Taken together, the trends observed in 2025 reveal a paradoxical security environment: fewer incidents overall, yet a higher concentration of severe violence and stronger state enforcement responses. This pattern suggests that the reduction in incidents may partly reflect stronger policing or reporting dynamics rather than a fundamental reduction in the structural drivers of violence.

Political/Partisan Violence

The data and table show that political and partisan violence in Bangladesh is not just a one-time thing or limited to election times; it happens all the time and in many places. Trend data show that incidents have remained high throughout the period, with cyclical spikes indicating periods of political mobilisation, contestation, and regime consolidation. Divisional patterns show a strong bias toward urban and political centres. Dhaka and Chattogram accounted for the most incidents, deaths, injuries, and arrests, underscoring their importance in national power struggles. But many people in Rajshahi, Khulna, and Rangpur show that political violence is a significant part of regional party networks and local patronage systems. The high number of arrests in all divisions suggests a heavy-handed, coercive response. The fact that there are so many easily accessible and improvised weapons indicates that the violence is happening on the street rather than in an organised way. The data show that political violence is a standard way for different political groups to compete, and that both partisan mobilisation and a securitised approach to governance support this.

The trends shown in Figures 3 and 4 further confirm that political violence has remained persistent from 2012 to 2025. Although the number of incidents varied from year to year, the data show repeated increases during politically sensitive periods, such as elections, protest movements, and periods of intense political rivalry. These increases suggest that violence often occurs during political mobilisation, when rival groups try to show their strength and influence in public spaces. Even in years without major elections, incidents continued to occur, which indicates that political violence has become a regular part of political competition rather than an exceptional event.

Figure 3: Overview of Political Violence (2012-2025)

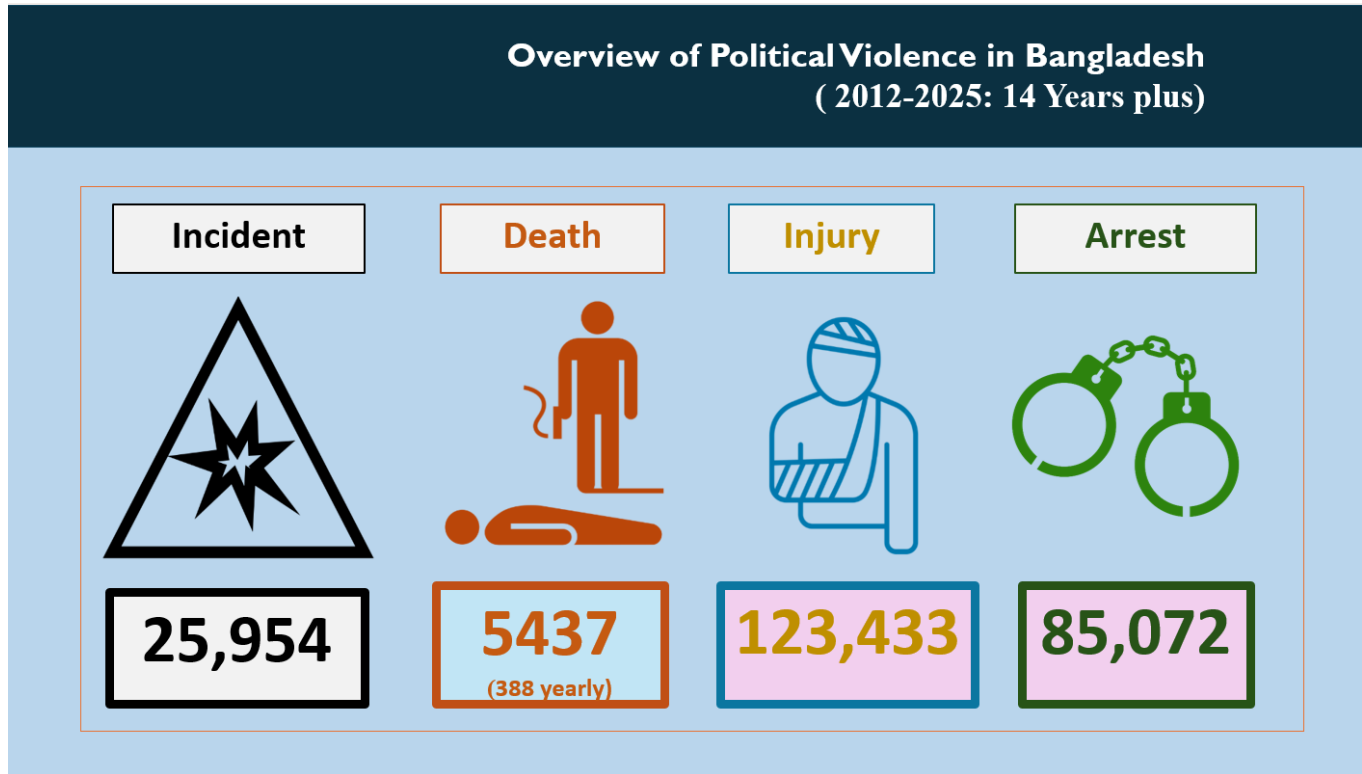
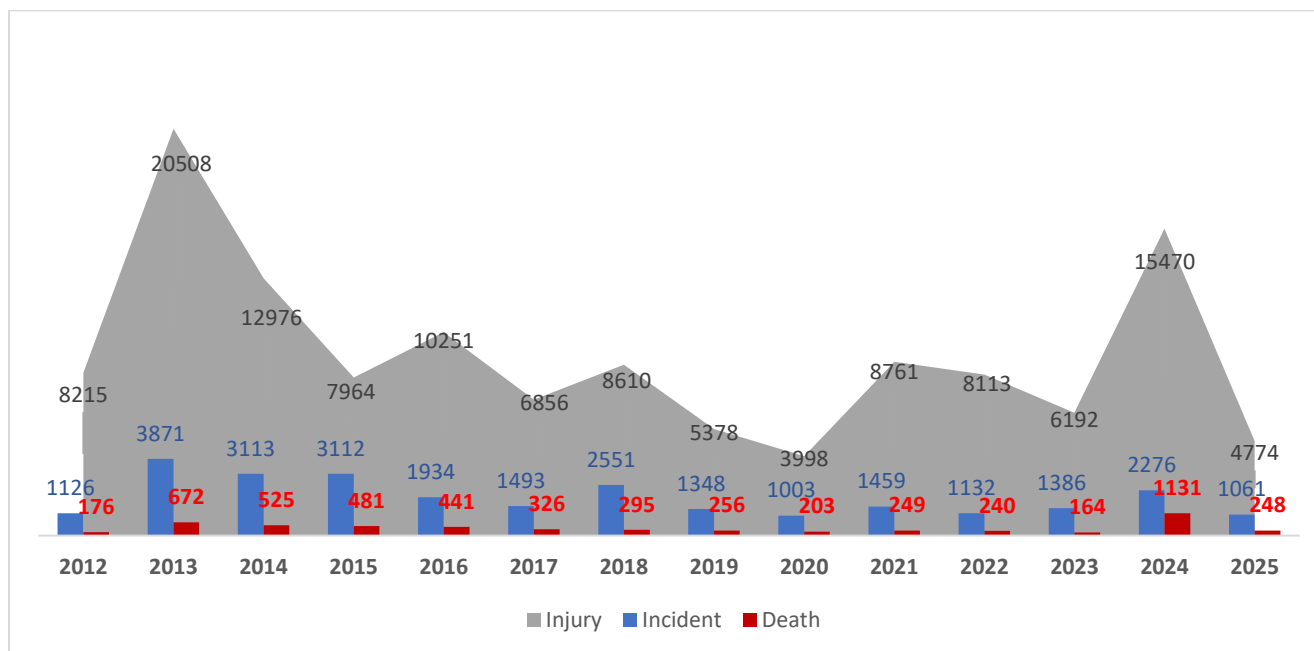


Figure 4: Trends of the Political Violence in Bangladesh (2012-2025)



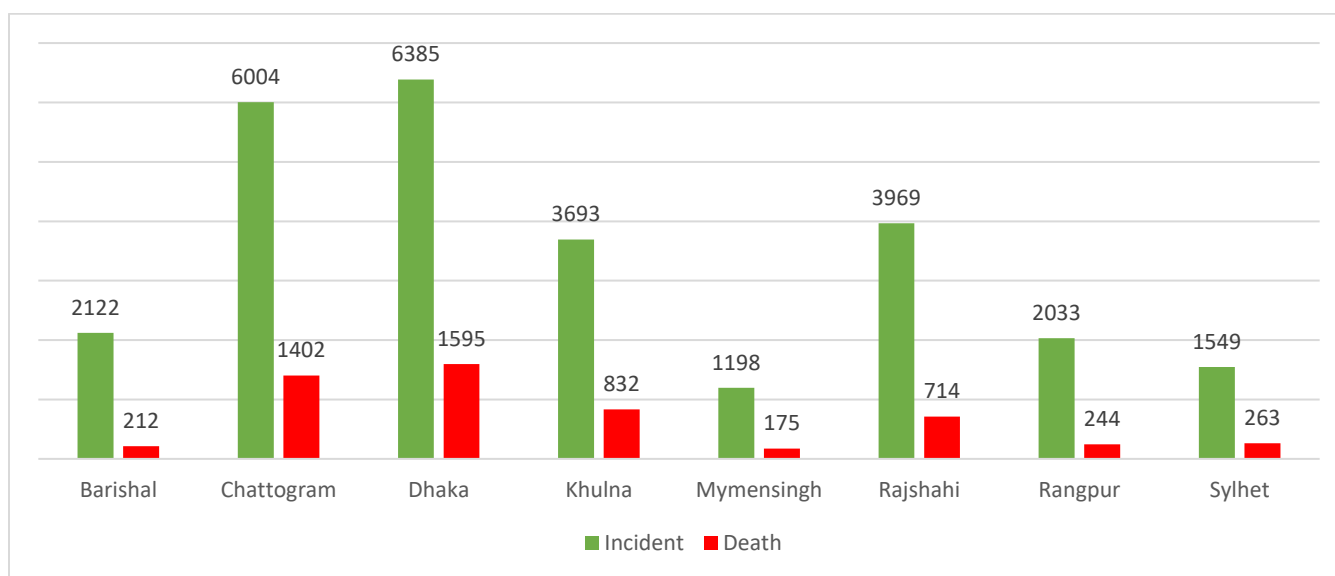
Source: BPO. See, <http://peaceobservatory-ca.org/#/>. Accessed on 03 January 2026.

Table 3: Divisional Segregation of the Political Violence (2012-2025)

Division	Incident	Death	Injury	Arrest
Barishal	2122	212	11600	3550
Chattogram	6004	1402	23743	17583
Dhaka	6385	1595	41180	24757
Khulna	3693	832	13330	12739
Mymensingh	1198	175	5559	2734
Rajshahi	3969	714	12610	10767
Rangpur	2033	244	7172	8842
Sylhet	1549	263	13239	4100

The divisional distribution presented in Table 3 and Figure 5 also shows important geographical patterns. Dhaka and Chattogram record the highest number of incidents, deaths, injuries, and arrests. This reflects their importance as major political and economic centres where political activities, protests, and rallies frequently take place. However, political violence is not limited to these large urban areas. Divisions such as Rajshahi, Khulna, and Rangpur also report significant numbers of incidents. In many of these regions, violence is linked to local political rivalries, factional competition within parties, and struggles for influence over local government and resources. This shows that political violence occurs both at the national and local levels.

Figure 5: Divisional Segregation of the Political Violence (2012-2025)



Source: BPO. See, <http://peaceobservatory-ca.org/#/>. Accessed on 03 January 2026.

Figure 6: Major Violence Types Related to Political Violence

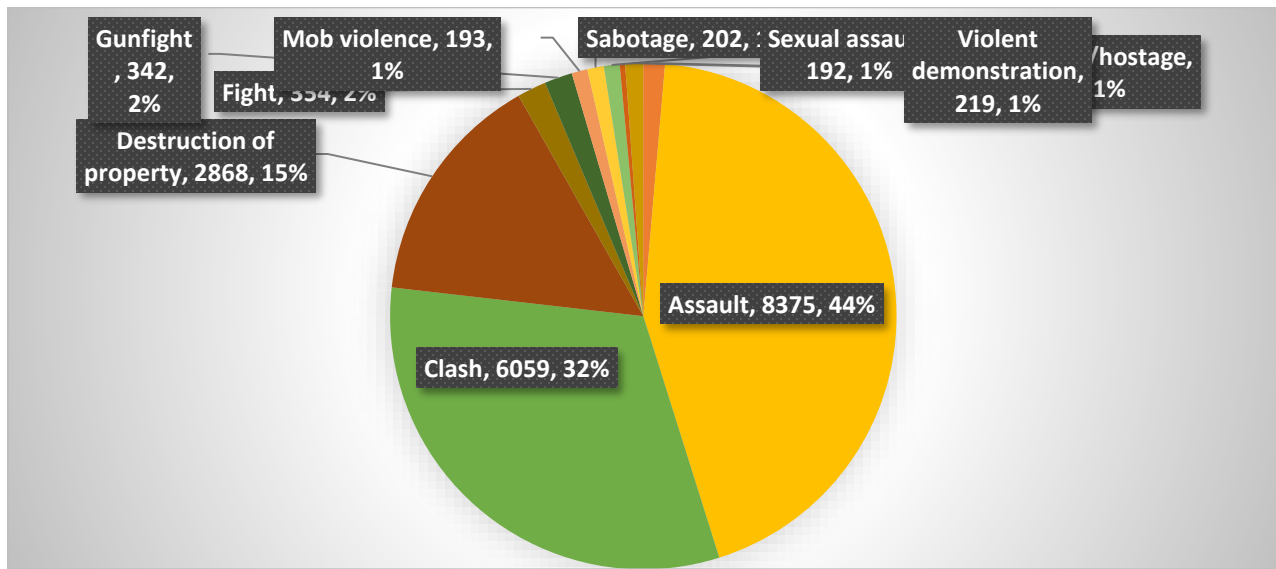
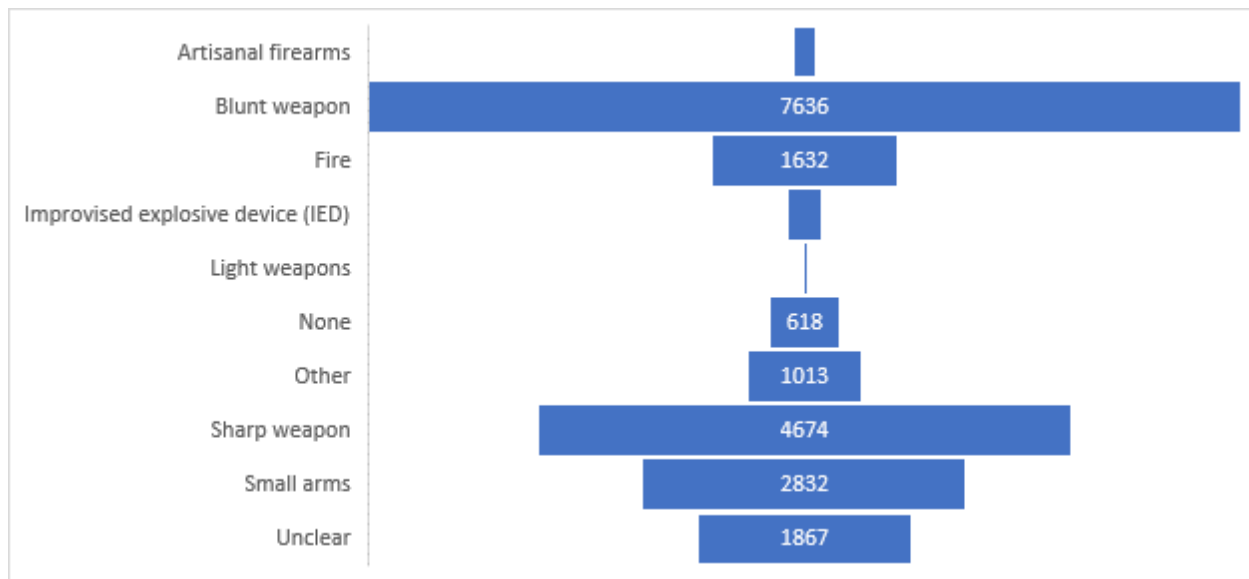


Figure 7: Weapons used in the Political Violence



The consequences of political violence also reveal its nature. Across most divisions, the number of injuries is much higher than the number of deaths. This suggests that many incidents involve clashes between groups rather than planned lethal attacks. Such clashes often happen during demonstrations, political rallies, strikes, or confrontations between rival supporters. Because these events involve large groups, they often result in many injuries, even when fatalities remain relatively low.

Figures 6 and 7 provide further insight into the forms of violence and the weapons used. The most common incidents include clashes between rival political groups, attacks on activists, vandalism, and confrontations with law enforcement during protests. The weapons used in these incidents are mostly simple and easily available, such as sticks, rods, bricks, and stones. This indicates that political violence in Bangladesh primarily occurs through street-level confrontations rather than organised armed conflict.

Finally, the high number of arrests across all divisions shows that the response to political violence is strongly enforcement-based. Arrest numbers are often higher than incident numbers, suggesting the use of preventive detention, police operations, and large-scale arrests during demonstrations or clashes. While these measures may temporarily control unrest, the continued occurrence of political violence suggests that enforcement alone has not solved the underlying political tensions. Instead, the data indicate that political violence remains a recurring feature of political competition and governance in Bangladesh.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

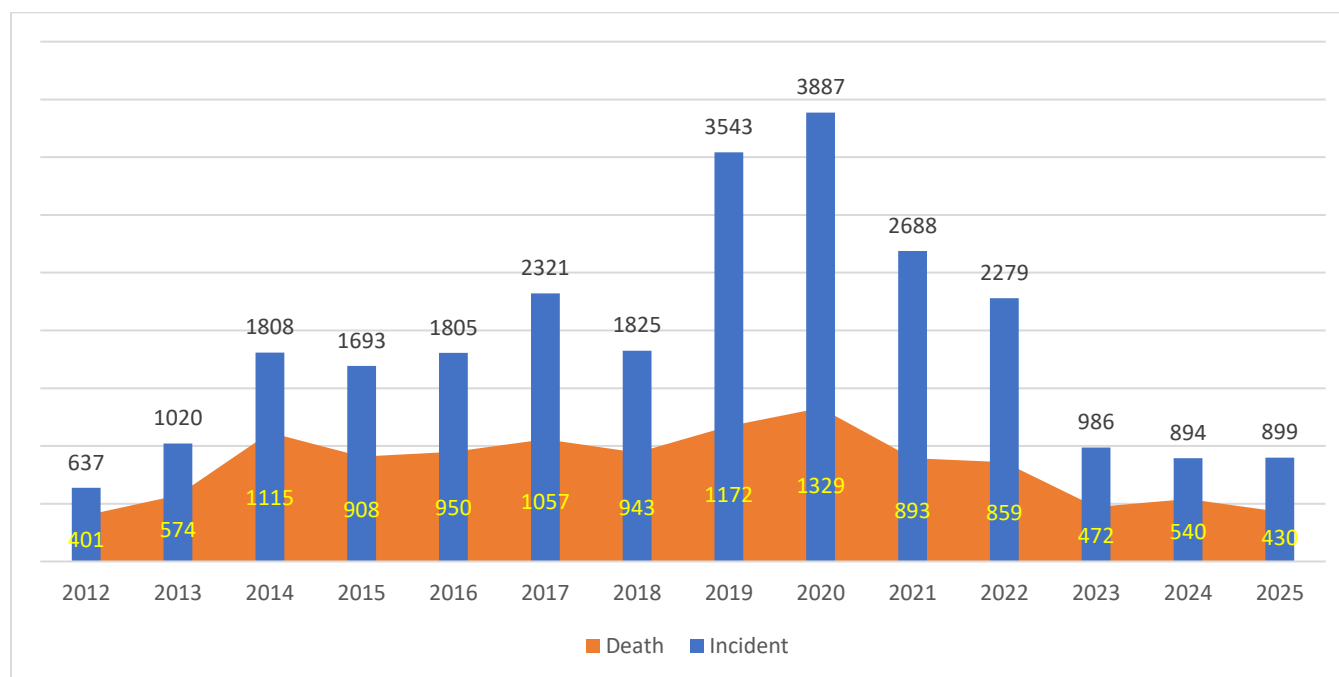
The data indicate that gender-based violence in Bangladesh is predominantly violent and enduring, with 85.2 per cent of the 26,248 reported incidents between 2012 and 2025 involving physical violence. Even though the total number of incidents goes up a lot from 2017 to 2019–2020, the fact that a high percentage of them are violent shows that GBV is not just a reporting problem; deeply rooted social and structural factors cause it. The effects are terrible: more than 11,600 deaths, 13,400 injuries, and almost 9,000 sexual assaults. This shows how many different ways women and girls are hurt. Geographically, GBV is primarily concentrated in major urban and industrial regions, especially Dhaka and Chattogram. However, notable fatalities in districts like Gazipur, Narayanganj, and Bogura indicate a potential spillover into peri-urban and semi-rural areas. Overall, the pattern shows that GBV is a systemic human security

crisis with a high death rate, a lot of injuries, and repeated sexual violence. Responses that rely heavily on enforcement have not provided long-term deterrence or protection.

Table 4: Number of incidents of Gender-Based Violence

Year	Number of Incidents			Percentage of Incident Type	
	Non-violent	Violent	Total	Non-violent	Violent
2012	47	590	637	7.4	92.6
2013	79	941	1020	7.7	92.3
2014	159	1649	1808	8.8	91.2
2015	140	1553	1693	8.3	91.7
2016	152	1653	1805	8.4	91.6
2017	294	2027	2321	12.7	87.3
2018	181	1644	1825	9.9	90.1
2019	685	2858	3543	19.3	80.7
2020	822	3065	3887	21.1	78.9
2021	442	2246	2688	16.4	83.6
2022	524	1755	2279	23.0	77.0
2023	160	826	986	16.2	83.8
2024	132	762	894	14.8	85.2
2025	69	830	899	7.7	92.3
Total	3886	22362	26248	14.8	85.2

Figure 8: Yearly trend of the incidents of Gender-Based Violence



The yearly trend shown in Table 4 and Figure 8 shows that incidents of gender-based violence increased during the middle of the aforementioned timeline and then declined in recent years. The number of reported incidents rose significantly from 2017, reaching a peak between 2019 and 2020, when more than 3,500 and 3,800 incidents were recorded. This increase may reflect both a real rise in violence and greater awareness and reporting during those years. However, the consistently high percentage of violent incidents, usually above 80 per cent, shows that GBV in Bangladesh mainly involves direct physical harm rather than non-violent harassment. Even though the number of incidents decreases after 2021, the high proportion of violent cases suggests that the deeper social causes of GBV remain largely unchanged.

Table 5 highlights the serious consequences of gender-based violence over time. Between 2012 and 2025, GBV caused more than 11,600 deaths and over 13,400 injuries. Sexual violence is also a major component of GBV, with almost 9,000 cases of sexual assault recorded during the period. The yearly

data show a sharp increase in sexual assaults between 2019 and 2020, when the number exceeded 1,400 cases per year. Although the numbers decline slightly after 2021, hundreds of cases still occur each year. This shows that sexual violence remains a persistent and serious problem.

The data also show that victims often experience more than one form of violence at the same time. Many incidents include combinations of physical violence, sexual assault, and abduction. Although abduction cases are fewer in number, they still occur regularly. This suggests that GBV is complex and often linked to other forms of insecurity, including organised crime, forced relationships, and coercion within families or communities.

The geographical distribution shown in Table 6 indicates that GBV incidents are concentrated in several divisions, particularly Dhaka and Chattogram. Dhaka records the highest number of incidents, deaths, injuries, and sexual assaults. Chattogram also records a high number of incidents, showing that GBV is a serious issue in major urban and industrial regions.

However, the data also show that GBV is not limited to large cities. Divisions such as Rajshahi, Khulna, and Rangpur also report significant numbers of incidents and casualties. In many rural or semi-urban communities, social norms, economic dependency, and limited access to legal protection may increase the vulnerability of women and girls.

Table 5: Yearly segregation of the consequences of Gender-Based Violence

Year	Death	Injury	Sexual Assault	Abduction	Arrest
2012	401	495	108	36	371
2013	574	577	282	48	595
2014	1115	1028	443	92	1051
2015	908	818	546	66	906
2016	950	776	430	56	883
2017	1057	1269	765	112	1450
2018	943	833	568	53	1228
2019	1172	1405	1445	111	2813

2020	1329	2139	1447	136	3331
2021	893	1612	1201	100	2383
2022	859	1140	791	66	2012
2023	472	415	303	21	802
2024	540	414	213	22	697
2025	430	521	427	17	799
Grand Total	11643	13442	8969	936	19321

Table 6: Divisional segregation of the consequences

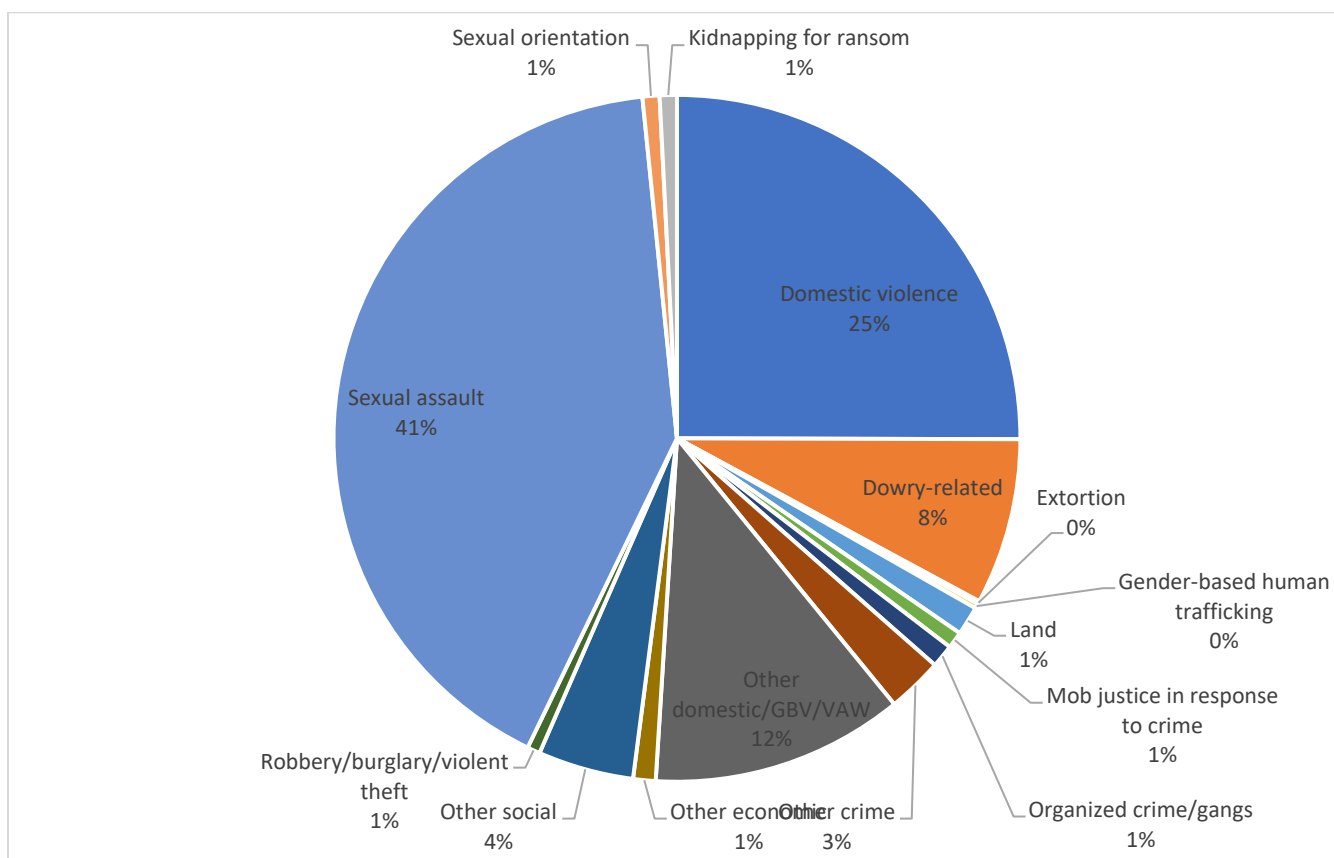
Division	Incident	Death	Injury	Sexual Assault
Barishal	2267	843	1263	775
Chattogram	4733	2027	2636	1601
Dhaka	7772	3564	4073	2892
Khulna	2585	1264	1127	783
Mymensingh	1546	728	797	502
Rajshahi	3720	1665	1653	1166
Rangpur	2348	995	1044	811
Sylhet	1314	557	849	439
Total	26285	11643	13442	8969

Table 7: Top 15 Districts in terms of Death

Rank	District	Incident	Death
1	Dhaka Zila	2792	1342
2	Chattogram Zila	1511	592
3	Gazipur Zila	1084	541
4	Narayanganj Zila	1192	392
5	Mymensingh Zila	751	375
6	Bogura Zila	984	346

7	Jashore Zila	645	289
8	Cumilla Zila	552	269
9	Barishal Zila	727	261
10	Sirajganj Zila	480	258
11	Pabna Zila	491	255
12	Cox's Bazar Zila	570	251
13	Dinajpur Zila	497	246
14	Rajshahi Zila	535	236
15	Noakhali Zila	541	217

Figure 9: Major motives of Gender-based Violence



District-level patterns in Table 7 provide further insight into where the most serious cases occur. Dhaka district records the highest number of deaths related to GBV, followed by Chattogram, Gazipur, and Narayanganj. These districts are densely populated and economically active, which may contribute to higher reporting and higher levels of conflict. At the same time, districts such as Bogura, Sirajganj, and Pabna also appear among the top areas for fatalities. This shows that severe GBV incidents are not limited to major metropolitan areas but also occur in smaller cities and semi-rural districts.

Figure 9, which presents the major motives behind gender-based violence, suggests that many incidents are linked to domestic disputes, relationship conflicts, dowry issues, and sexual exploitation.

These motives show that GBV is strongly connected to social and cultural factors. The persistence of these causes across the study period indicates that violence against women is closely linked to gender inequality, patriarchal norms, and power imbalances within families and communities.

Overall, the figures and tables show that gender-based violence in Bangladesh is widespread and persistent. The high number of violent incidents, along with significant deaths, injuries, and sexual assaults, indicates that GBV remains a major human security issue. Although law enforcement responses and arrests occur in many cases, long-term trends suggest that enforcement alone has not significantly reduced the problem. Addressing GBV, therefore, requires broader social, legal, and institutional efforts to strengthen protection systems and address the underlying causes of violence against women and girls.

Violence against Minorities (VAM)

The yearly pattern shown in Table 8 indicates that incidents of violence against minorities fluctuate over time but remain consistently violent in nature. The number of incidents rose sharply in 2013 and 2014, with 233 and 243 cases respectively, before declining in later years. A smaller peak appears again in 2021, followed by another increase in 2024. Despite these fluctuations in total numbers, the proportion of violent incidents remains high in most years, often above 80 per cent. This shows that violence against minorities is not only persistent but also severe in form. The temporary increase in non-violent incidents in 2021 and 2022, when the share of violent cases drops to 61.1 per cent and 53.4 per cent, respectively, suggests a short-term shift. However, this trend does not continue, as violent incidents again dominate from 2023 onward. Overall, the data confirm that minority communities continue to face direct physical threats rather than lower-level forms of discrimination alone.

Table 8: Number of incidents of Violence against Minorities

Year	Number of Incidents			Percentage of Incident Type	
	Non-violent	Violent	Total	Non-violent	Violent
2012	20	45	65	30.8	69.2

2013	24	209	233	10.3	89.7
2014	31	212	243	12.8	87.2
2015	12	90	102	11.8	88.2
2016	34	157	191	17.8	82.2
2017	33	98	131	25.2	74.8
2018	22	115	137	16.1	83.9
2019	14	63	77	18.2	81.8
2020	9	49	58	15.5	84.5
2021	56	88	144	38.9	61.1
2022	27	31	58	46.6	53.4
2023	6	37	43	14.0	86.0
2024	18	97	115	15.7	84.3
2025	9	37	46	19.6	80.4
Total	315	1328	1643	19.2	80.8

Figure 10: Yearly trend of consequences

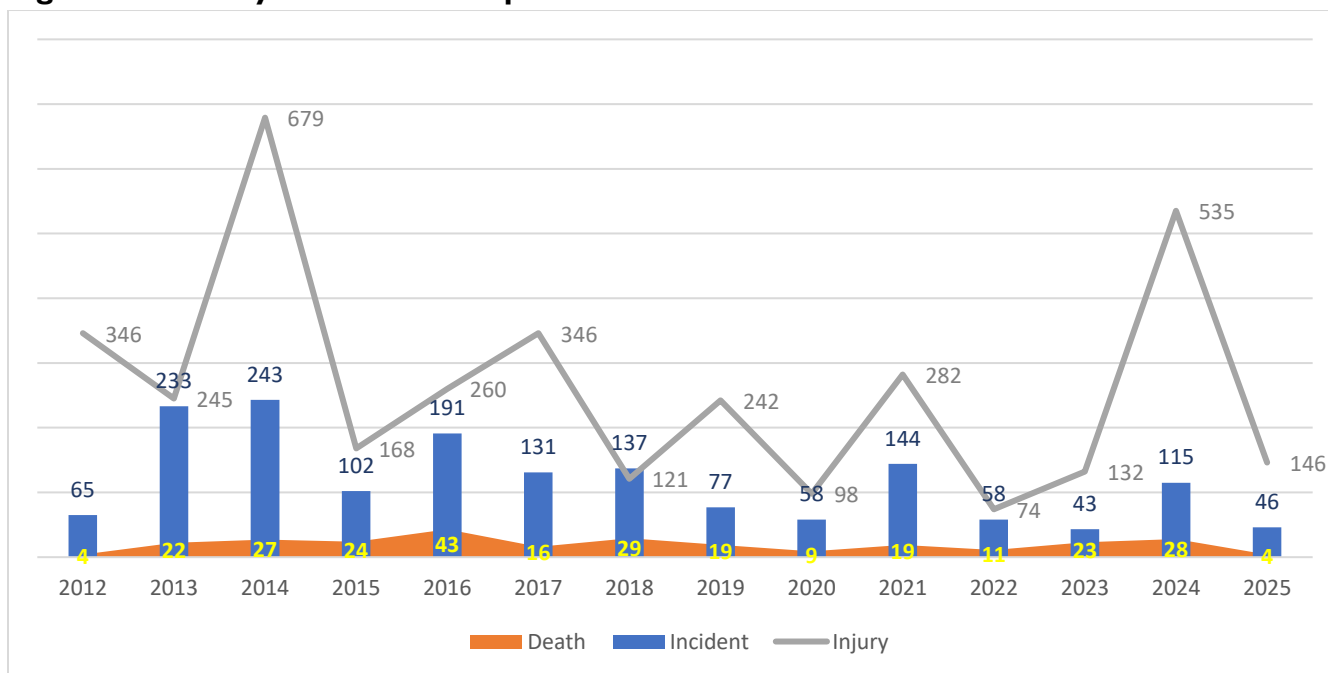


Figure 10 further illustrates the consequences of such violence, showing that incidents often result in both deaths and injuries. Although the total number of deaths (277) is lower compared to other forms of violence, the impact remains significant because these incidents are often targeted and community-specific. The number of injuries (over 3,600) suggests that many attacks involve group violence, where multiple individuals are affected in a single incident. This pattern indicates that violence against minorities often takes the form of collective attacks rather than isolated individual acts.

The types of violence shown in Figure 11 provide additional insight into how these incidents occur. Common forms include physical assault, attacks on homes or places of worship, and other forms of targeted aggression. These types of incidents suggest that identity-based tensions, communal disputes, or local conflicts often drive violence against minorities. The targeted nature of such attacks increases

their social impact, as they create fear and insecurity within entire communities rather than affecting only individuals.

The divisional distribution in Table 9 highlights clear regional patterns. Chattogram records the highest number of incidents (429), deaths (139), injuries (1,223), and arrests (1,467), making it the most affected division. Dhaka follows with 318 incidents, though it has fewer deaths than Chattogram. Rangpur and Rajshahi also report notable numbers of incidents and casualties, indicating that violence against minorities is not limited to one region but spreads across the country. However, the relatively higher number of deaths in Chattogram suggests that incidents in this region tend to be more severe.

Figure 11: Major types of Violence against Minorities (VAM)

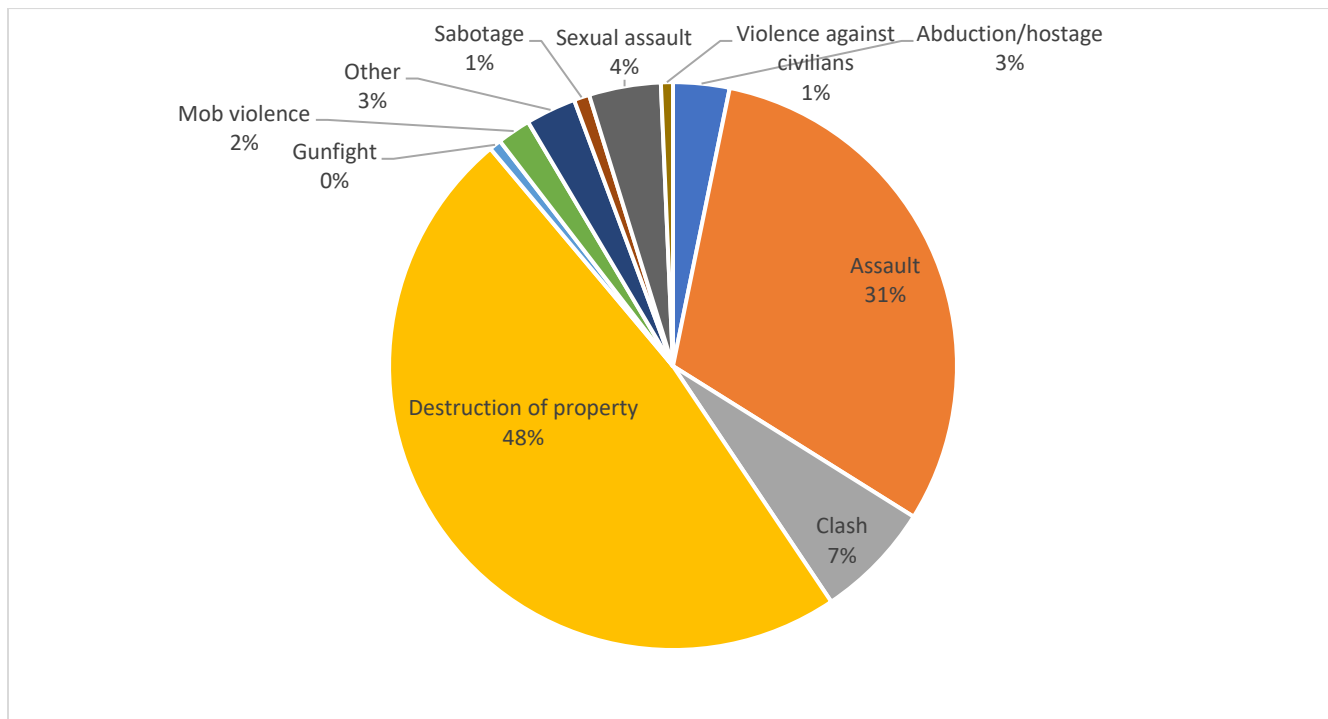


Table 9: Divisional segregation of incident

Division	Incident	Death	Injury	Arrest
Barishal	121	9	383	119
Chattogram	429	139	1223	1467
Dhaka	318	39	674	276
Khulna	146	14	170	195
Mymensingh	101	6	68	71
Rajshahi	232	30	272	208
Rangpur	210	30	463	386
Sylhet	80	10	410	163
Total	1637	277	3663	2885

Table 10: The Top fifteen districts in terms of death

Rank	District	Incident	Death	Injury
1	Bandarban Zila	49	33	45
2	Rangamati Zila	49	31	145
3	Khagrachhari Zila	45	25	175
4	Cox's Bazar Zila	54	20	154
5	Dhaka Zila	62	12	229
6	Dinajpur Zila	60	12	66
7	Chattogram Zila	73	11	111
8	Naogaon Zila	33	10	17
9	Chandpur Zila	15	7	241
10	Jhenaidah Zila	18	7	39
11	Noakhali Zila	47	7	197
12	Tangail Zila	30	7	8
13	Bogura Zila	55	5	88
14	Gazipur Zila	34	5	97
15	Narsingdi Zila	14	5	89

District-level data in Table 10 provides even deeper insight into the concentration of fatalities. The three Chittagong Hill Tracts districts, Bandarban, Rangamati, and Khagrachhari, rank highest in terms of deaths, despite having relatively fewer incidents compared to more populated districts. This indicates that violence in these areas is more lethal and possibly linked to long-standing ethnic tensions, land disputes, and local security challenges. Cox's Bazar also shows a high number of deaths, which may reflect its complex demographic and socio-political context. At the same time, districts such as Dhaka, Chattogram, and Dinajpur appear in the list, showing that serious incidents also occur in major urban and mixed-population areas.

Another important pattern is the relatively high number of arrests (2,885) compared to incidents. This suggests a strong law enforcement response to incidents of violence against minorities. However, the continued occurrence of such violence over time indicates that enforcement alone has not been sufficient to prevent recurrence. The persistence of these incidents points to deeper structural issues, including social tensions, weak protection mechanisms, and limited trust between communities and institutions.

Overall, the data show that violence against minorities in Bangladesh is targeted, often severe, and geographically uneven. While incidents occur across the country, certain regions, particularly Chattogram and the Chittagong Hill Tracts, experience more intense and deadly forms of violence. The consistently high proportion of violent incidents, combined with recurring patterns over time, suggests that this form of violence is rooted in structural and identity-based factors. Addressing it, therefore, requires not only enforcement measures but also broader efforts to reduce communal tensions, strengthen local governance, and improve protection for vulnerable communities.

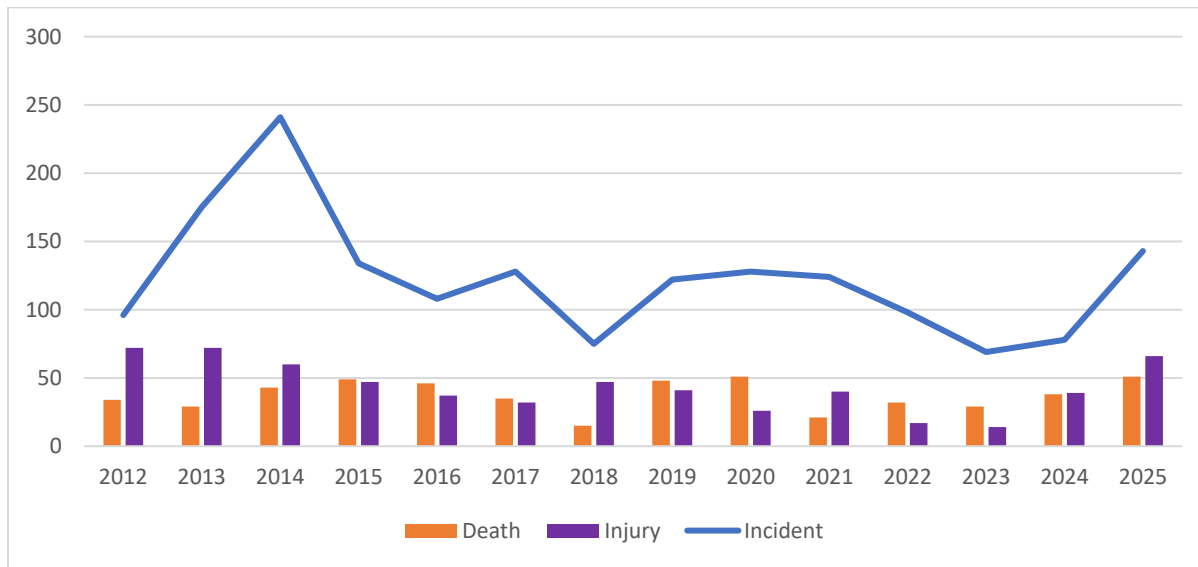
Cross-Border Issue

The yearly data presented in Table 11 and Figure 12 show that cross-border incidents in Bangladesh fluctuate over time rather than follow a steady trend. The number of incidents rises sharply in the early years, peaking in 2014 at 241, before declining in the following years. After 2014, incidents generally decreased, reaching a low point in 2023 with only 69 recorded cases. However, the increase again in 2025 to 143 incidents indicates that cross-border issues remain active and can escalate quickly. This pattern suggests that cross-border violence is not constant but occurs in waves, often linked to changing conditions along the borders.

Table 11: Yearly segregation of the consequences of cross-border

Year	Incident	Death	Injury	Arrest
2012	96	34	72	202
2013	175	29	72	671
2014	241	43	60	1163
2015	134	49	47	888
2016	108	46	37	285
2017	128	35	32	450
2018	75	15	47	287
2019	122	48	41	518
2020	128	51	26	305
2021	124	21	40	582
2022	98	32	17	455
2023	69	29	14	75
2024	78	38	39	139
2025	143	51	66	381
Grand Total	1719	521	610	6401

Figure 12: Yearly trend of the consequences of the Border Issue



The data on deaths and injuries further support this pattern of episodic escalation. Although the overall numbers remain relatively low compared to other forms of violence, certain years show noticeable increases. For example, deaths rose in 2015, 2019, 2020, and again in 2025, while injuries also fluctuated across the period. These spikes suggest that specific incidents or short-term tensions can lead to sudden increases in violence. However, the absence of consistently high numbers indicates that these are not sustained conflicts but rather isolated or localised confrontations.

Arrest figures provide important insight into how cross-border issues are managed. The number of arrests is consistently higher than the number of incidents, particularly in years such as 2013 and 2014, when arrests reached 671 and 1,163, respectively. Even in years with fewer incidents, arrests remain significant, indicating a strong enforcement-based approach. The sharp drop in arrests in 2023, followed by a rise again in 2025, suggests shifts in enforcement intensity or policy focus over time. Overall, the data show that state responses to cross-border incidents rely heavily on policing and control measures rather than long-term preventive strategies.

Figure 12 highlights the overall trend of consequences, showing that while incidents, deaths, and injuries vary over time, arrests remain a dominant feature of the response. This reinforces the view that cross-border management is largely securitised. The emphasis on arrests and enforcement suggests immediate control over activities at the border, such as smuggling, illegal crossings, and local disputes, rather than addressing the root causes of these issues.

Overall, the figures and tables indicate that cross-border issues in Bangladesh are recurring but not continuous. The pattern of periodic spikes, combined with relatively limited casualties and high arrest rates, suggests a situation characterised by low-intensity, but persistent, instability. The continued reliance on enforcement-based responses, without corresponding reductions in incidents over time, points to the need for more comprehensive approaches that include cooperation and improved border governance.

Mob Violence

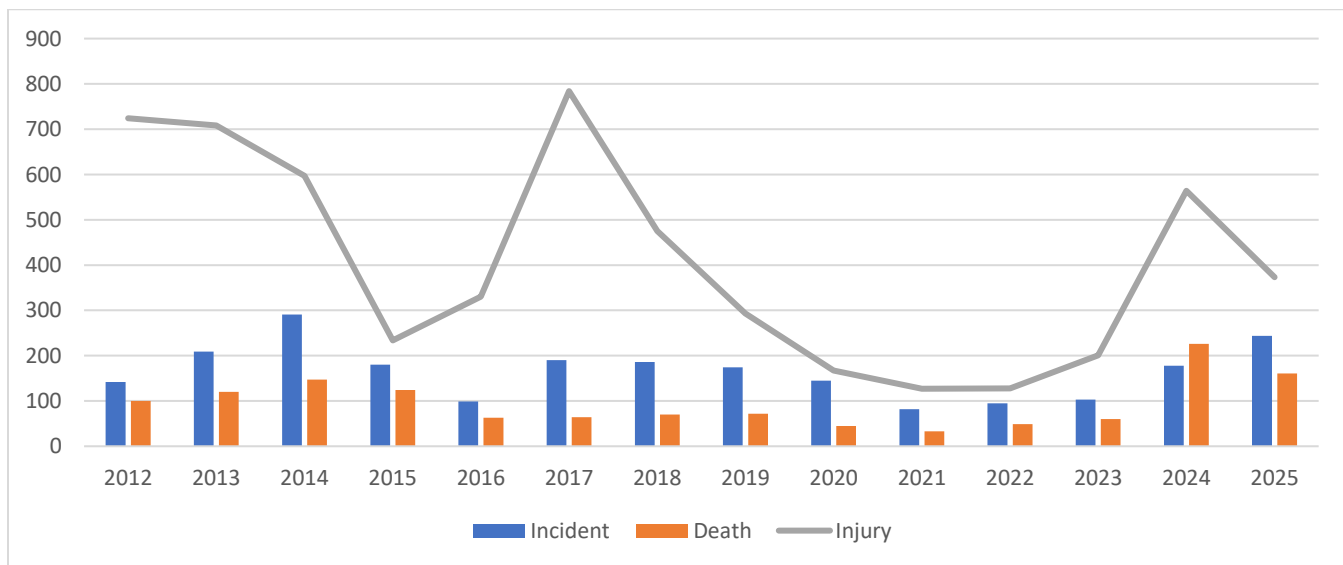
The yearly data in Table 12 and Figure 13 show that mob violence in Bangladesh is highly unstable and varies significantly from year to year. Incidents increase sharply in the early years, peaking in 2014 with 291 cases, before declining in the following years. The number of incidents drops to its lowest point in 2021 with only 82 cases, but then rises again in 2024 and 2025, reaching 178 and 244 incidents, respectively. This pattern confirms that mob violence is not constant but occurs in sudden waves, often triggered by specific events, rumours, or local tensions.

Table 12: Yearly segregation of the consequences of Mob Violence

Year	Incident	Death	Injury	Arrest
2012	142	100	724	273
2013	209	120	708	212
2014	291	147	597	274
2015	180	124	234	163
2016	99	63	330	114
2017	190	64	784	254

2018	186	70	475	148
2019	174	72	293	165
2020	145	45	167	187
2021	82	33	127	129
2022	95	49	128	115
2023	103	60	201	73
2024	178	226	564	115
2025	244	161	373	203
Grand Total	2318	1334	5705	2425

Figure 13: Yearly Trend of the Consequences of Mob Violence



The most striking feature of mob violence is its high level of lethality. Despite having fewer incidents compared to political violence, mob violence results in a disproportionately high number of deaths. For example, deaths remain consistently high in the early years and rise dramatically in 2024 to 226 cases, the highest in the dataset. Even in 2025, deaths remain very high at 161. This shows that mob violence is often extreme and brutal, with victims facing severe physical harm or death within a short

period of time. The high number of injuries (over 5,700 in total) also indicates that these incidents usually involve group attacks affecting multiple individuals.

The data also show that mob violence intensity can change quickly. For instance, while incidents declined between 2019 and 2021, both deaths and injuries remain significant. The sharp rise in both incidents and deaths in 2024 suggests a sudden increase in social tensions or the spread of rumours leading to collective violence. This reinforces the idea that mob violence is reactive and can escalate rapidly without warning.

The divisional distribution in Table 13 highlights where mob violence is most concentrated. Dhaka records the highest number of incidents (848), deaths (484), and injuries (2,389), making it the most affected division. Chattogram also shows high numbers, followed by Khulna and Rajshahi. This indicates that mob violence is more common in densely populated, socially active regions, where interactions between people are more frequent, and conflicts can spread quickly. However, all divisions report cases, showing that mob violence is a nationwide issue rather than limited to specific regions.

Table 13: Divisional segregation of incident

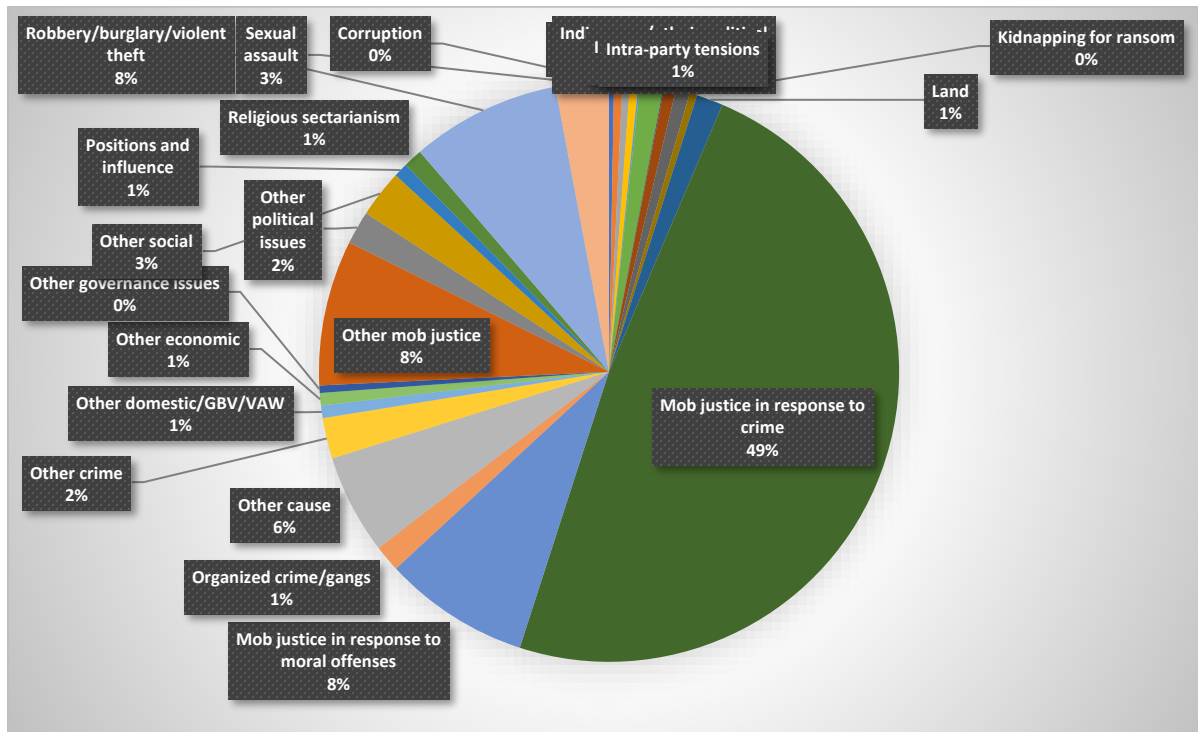
Division	Incident	Death	Injury	Arrest
Barishal	132	56	360	177
Chattogram	458	279	1001	506
Dhaka	848	484	2389	872
Khulna	259	191	466	247
Mymensingh	102	63	299	104
Rajshahi	269	148	467	246
Rangpur	138	67	181	174
Sylhet	112	46	542	99
Total	2318	1334	5705	2425

Figure 14, which presents the major motives behind mob violence, suggests that many incidents are driven by rumours, accusations of crime (such as theft or child abduction), moral policing, or disputes

within communities. These motives highlight the role of misinformation, fear, and lack of trust in formal legal systems. In many cases, people take the law into their own hands, leading to immediate and often violent collective action.

Another important observation is the relatively low number of arrests (2,425) given the severity of the incidents. While arrests do occur, they are not as high as in political or cross-border violence. This may suggest challenges in identifying perpetrators in large crowd situations or delays in law enforcement response. It also indicates that deterrence may be weak, allowing such incidents to recur.

Figure I4: Major motives of Mob Violence



Overall, the figures and tables show that mob violence in Bangladesh is unpredictable, highly lethal, and socially driven. Its strong link to rumours, misinformation, and community-level tensions makes it

particularly difficult to control. The combination of high death rates, sudden spikes, and widespread geographical presence suggests that mob violence is a serious human security concern. Addressing it requires not only law enforcement but also stronger community awareness, rapid response mechanisms, and efforts to build trust in formal justice systems.

Abduction

The yearly trend in Table 14 and Figure 15 shows that the number of abductions in Bangladesh has mostly gone down over time, but the pattern isn't always the same. The number of incidents rises quickly in the first few years, reaching a high of 734 in 2014, then slowly declines in the years that follow. After 2014, the number of incidents steadily dropped, reaching fairly low levels in 2023 and 2024. A small rise in 2025 indicates that, while abduction has decreased overall, it remains inadequately regulated. This pattern supports the idea that abductions are occurring less often, but it is still a common source of local insecurity.

Table 14: Yearly segregation of the consequences of Abduction

Year	Incident	Death	Injury	Sexual Assault	Abduction	Arrest
2012	189	47	168	7	615	185
2013	295	78	228	13	714	258
2014	734	141	192	22	1578	682
2015	378	103	146	20	750	369
2016	365	74	99	14	619	191
2017	398	101	83	30	766	309
2018	355	94	107	31	412	271
2019	474	60	152	77	472	534
2020	395	75	145	69	377	453
2021	285	43	95	62	279	375
2022	199	20	72	32	226	282
2023	133	39	58	10	178	178
2024	109	34	47	12	375	140

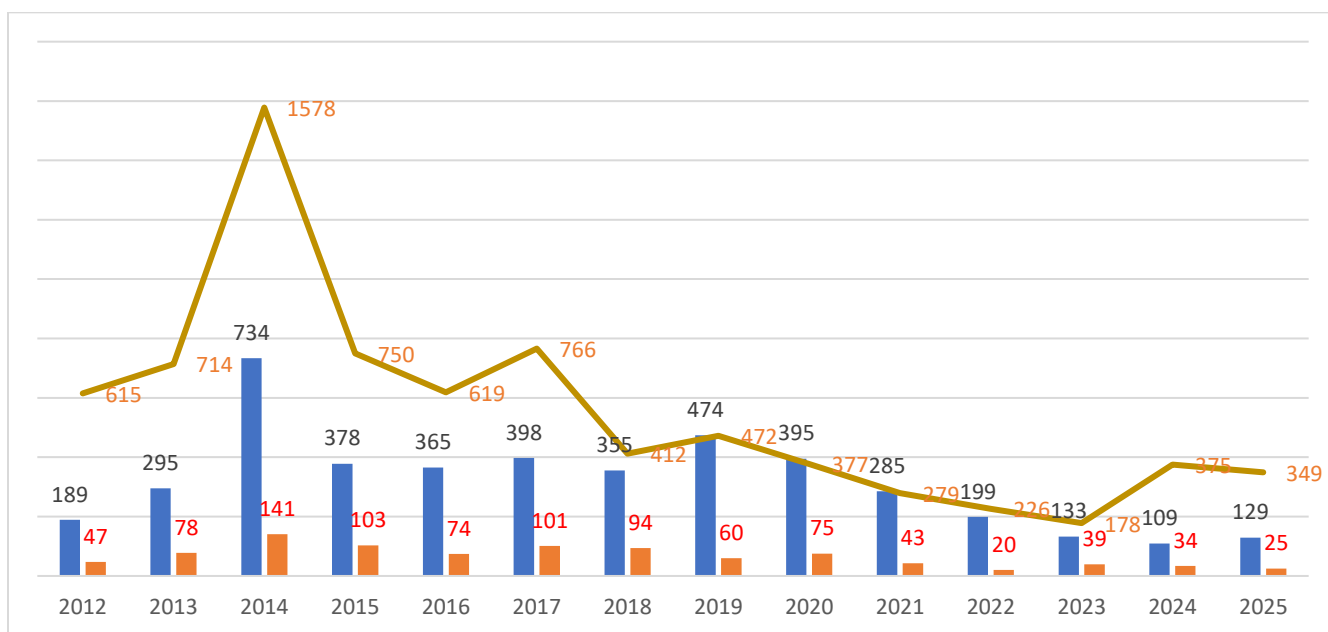
2025	129	25	77	11	349	134
Grand Total	4438	934	1669	410	7710	4361

The number of deaths and injuries shows how serious violence related to abduction is. From 2012 to 2025, abduction led to 934 deaths and more than 1,600 injuries. These numbers are lower than those for other types of violence, but they still show that abduction can have very impactful effects. Especially in 2014 and 2015, there were a lot of deaths, but they went down in the years that followed. But injuries keep happening, which means that victims are often hurt even when deaths are lower.

Another important part of abduction cases is sexual assault. The numbers show that sexual violence in abduction cases went up a lot between 2019 and 2021, with 77, 69, and 62 cases, respectively. After this period, the numbers go down, but sexual assault is still reported every year. This pattern shows a strong connection between abduction and gender-based violence, where victims, especially women and children, are abused in many ways. It also implies that abduction constitutes not merely a crime of confinement or disappearance, but frequently entails exploitation and coercion.

The number of cases related to abduction (as a category) also changes over time, with very high numbers in the early years, especially in 2014. This could be because there were more cases and better reporting during that time. In later years, the drop in these numbers may mean that crime is being better tracked or that criminals are changing their ways. However, the fact that cases are still occurring shows the problem persists.

Figure 15: Yearly Trend of the Consequences of Abduction



Arrest data provide important insight into law enforcement response. The number of arrests remains relatively stable across the years, even as incidents decline. For example, arrests remained high in 2019 and 2020 and continued at moderate levels afterwards. This suggests that law enforcement may have improved in identifying and apprehending offenders. However, the fact that abduction cases continue to occur despite these arrests indicates that deterrence remains limited. In other words, while detection and response may have improved, they have not been sufficient to prevent the crime from recurring.

Figure 15 further illustrates the overall trend, showing a gradual decline in incidents alongside continued consequences such as injury and sexual assault. This reinforces the idea that abduction is becoming less frequent but remains harmful and complex. The persistence of multiple forms of harm within abduction cases highlights its connection to broader issues such as organised crime, human trafficking, and gender-based violence.

Overall, the data suggest that abduction in Bangladesh is a declining but still significant security concern. Its patterns point to localised and often hidden forms of violence rather than large-scale or politically driven conflict. The continued presence of injuries, deaths, and sexual assault within these cases shows that abduction remains a serious threat to vulnerable groups. Addressing this issue, therefore, requires not only law enforcement efforts but also stronger preventive measures, victim protection systems, and interventions targeting the underlying social and criminal networks that sustain these crimes.

Overview of gender-based violence: update from BPO data

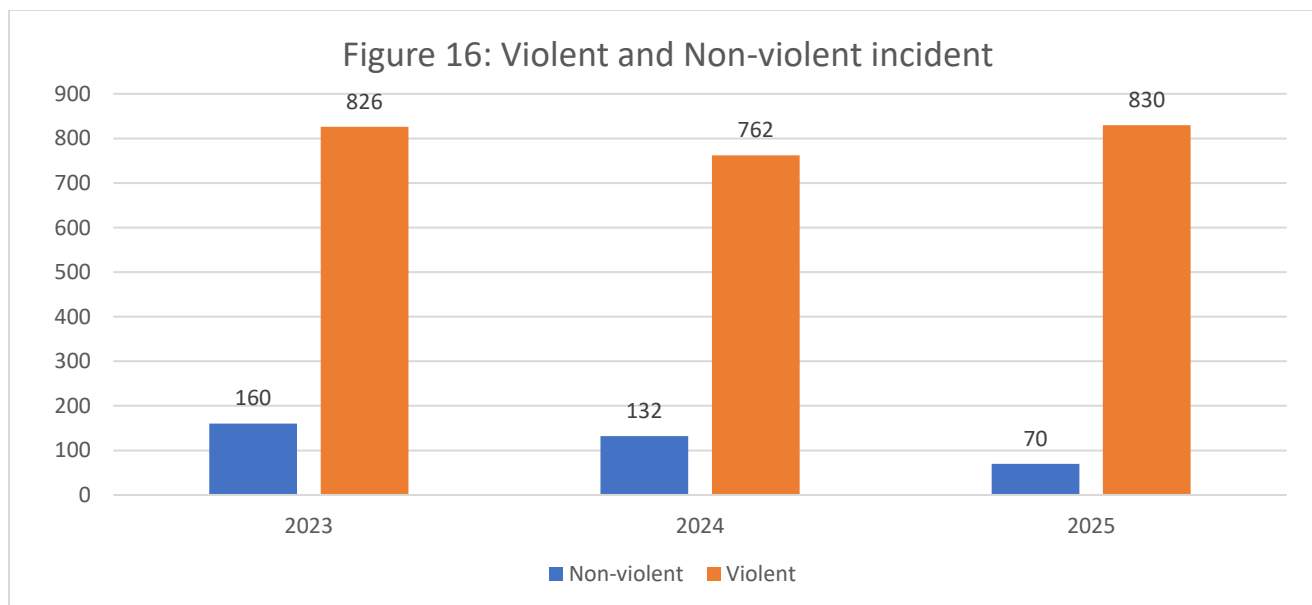
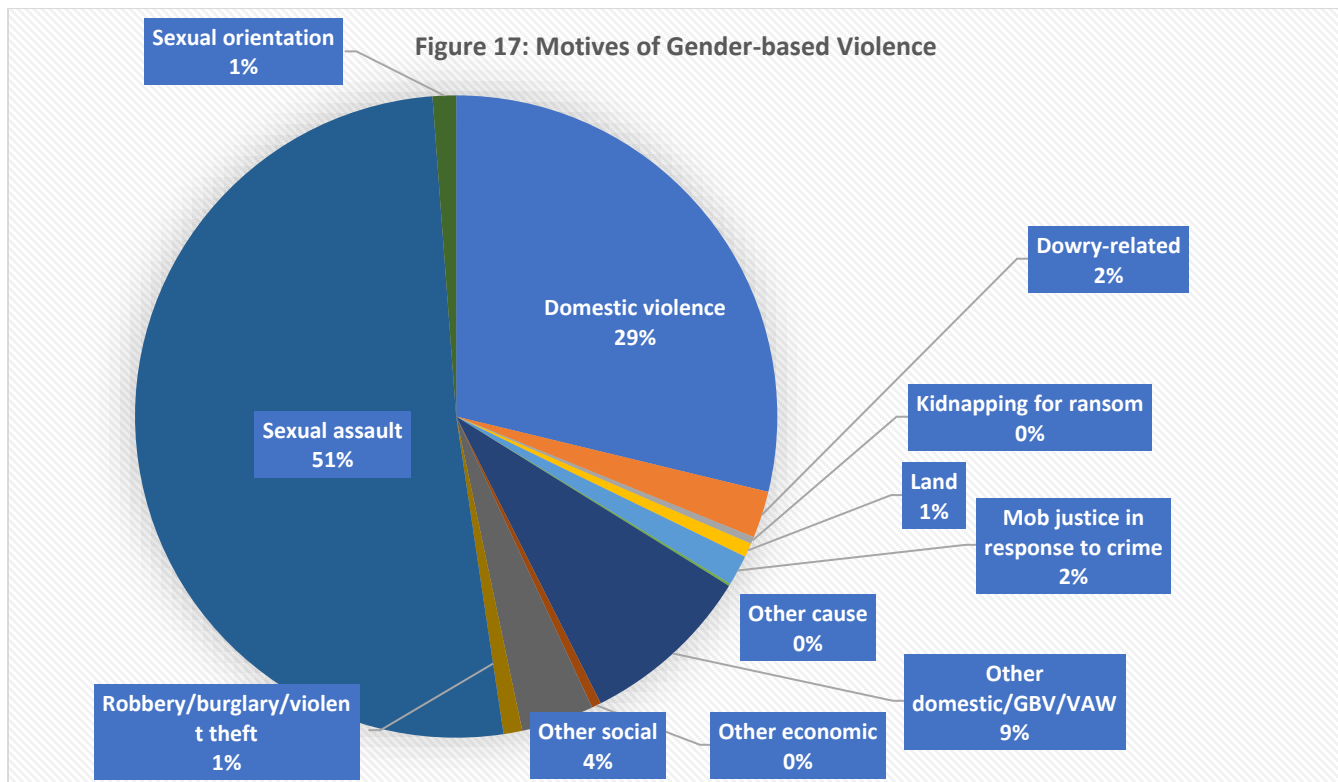


Figure 16 shows a comparison of violent and non-violent incidents related to gender-based violence recorded from 2023 to 2025, highlighting that violent incidents are consistently far higher than non-violent ones across all years. In 2023, there were 826 violent incidents compared to 160 non-violent incidents, followed by a decline in 2024 to 762 violent and 132 non-violent cases. In 2025, violent incidents increased again to 830, while non-violent incidents dropped sharply to just 70. Overall, the data indicate a steady decrease in non-violent incidents over time, whereas violent incidents remain persistently high, with only a temporary decline in 2024 before rising again.

Table 15: Consequences of gender-based violence-related incidents

Year	Incident	Death	Injury	Sexual Assault	Arrest
2023	986	472	415	303	802
2024	894	540	414	213	697
2025	900	430	521	427	799
Grand Total	2780	1442	1350	943	2298

Table 15 presents the consequences of gender-based violence–related incidents for the years 2023, 2024, and 2025 (till November), highlighting clear trends and critical concerns. Overall, a total of 2,742 incidents were recorded across the three years, resulting in 1,418 deaths, 1,332 injuries, 929 sexual assaults, and 2,267 arrests. In 2023, incidents were highest at 986, with notably high figures for arrests and sexual assaults. 2024 saw a slight decline in total incidents to 894, but deaths rose to 540, indicating greater severity despite fewer incidents. In 2025 (till November), total incidents further decreased to 862; however, injuries and sexual assaults rose sharply, with sexual assaults reaching their highest level across all years. Critically, while overall incidents show a downward trend, the persistence of high deaths, injuries, and the alarming rise in sexual assault cases—especially in 2025—underscore the increasing seriousness and impact of gender-based violence rather than a simple harm reduction.



The pie chart in Figure 17 illustrates the distribution of reported incidents by motive, highlighting a concentration in a few major categories. Sexual assault is the most dominant category, accounting for

51% of all cases, followed by domestic violence at 29%, highlighting that these two forms together make up nearly three-quarters of the total incidents. Domestic/GBV/VAW-related cases contribute 9%. Smaller proportions are seen in other social causes (3%), dowry-related cases (2%), mob justice in response to crime (2%), land-related disputes (1%), robbery/burglary/violent theft (1%), and sexual orientation-related cases (1%). Categories such as kidnapping for ransom, other causes and other economic causes are negligible at 0%. Overall, the chart underscores that sexual and domestic violence are the predominant drivers of reported incidents, while other forms occur at comparatively low levels.

Domestic Violence

The chart shows that domestic violence consequences increased in most categories from 2023 to 2024 and then declined in 2025. Reported incidents rose slightly from 447 in 2023 to 460 in 2024, then dropped to 323 in 2025. Deaths followed a similar pattern, increasing from 392 to 450 and then decreasing to 308, although the 2025 figure remains substantial. Injuries increased from 123 in 2023 to 153 in 2024 but fell sharply to 73 in 2025. Arrests, in contrast, show a steady decline over the three years, dropping from 214 in 2023 to 194 in 2024 and further to 181 in 2025. Overall, the data indicate a peak in 2024 and a notable reduction across all indicators in 2025.

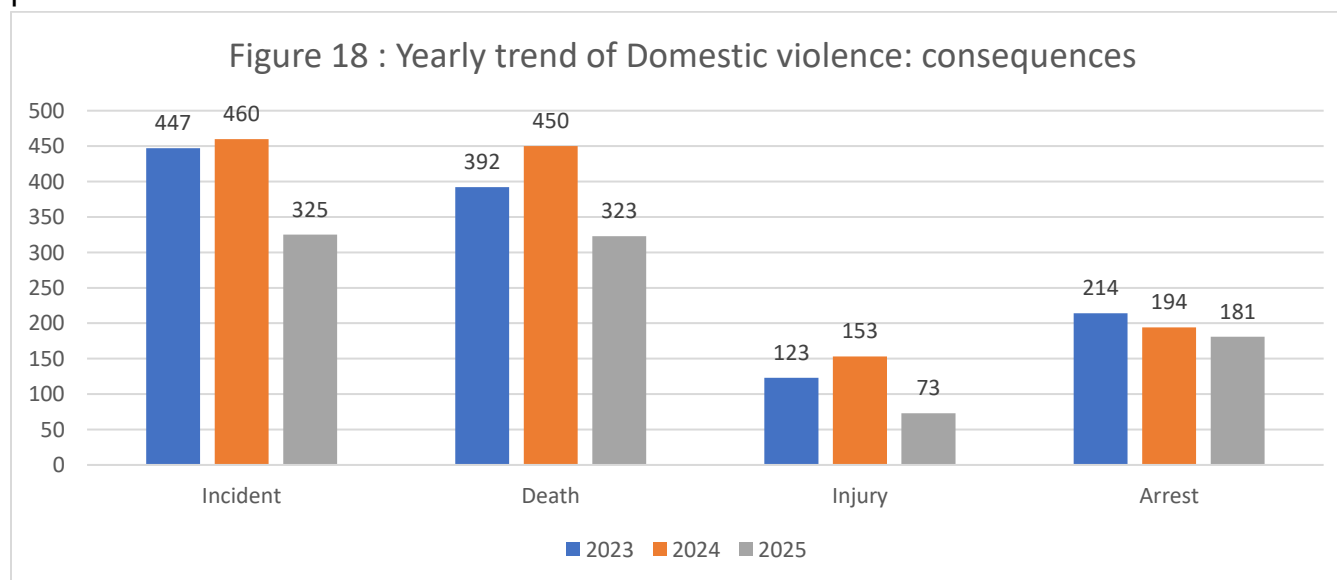


Table 16 summarises the top ten districts with the highest levels of domestic violence, ranked by overall severity. Chattogram ranks first, reporting the highest number of incidents, deaths, and injuries, indicating a complicated situation. Dhaka follows in second place with 29 incidents and 26 deaths, though injuries are comparatively low. Bogura and Gazipur rank third and fourth, both recording 13 deaths, with Bogura reporting more injuries than Gazipur. Cox’s Bazar, Khulna, and Jashore show moderate numbers of incidents and deaths, while injuries are minimal or absent in Khulna and Jashore. Mymensingh, Narayanganj, and Sirajganj complete the list, each reporting fewer than 10 incidents, though deaths remain relatively high in proportion to incidents in several districts. Overall, the table highlights significant geographic disparities, with some districts showing a high lethality of domestic violence despite lower incident counts.

Table 2: Top ten districts with the highest domestic violence

Rank	District	Incident	Death	Injury
1	Chattogram Zila	51	49	13
2	Dhaka Zila	29	26	2
3	Bogura Zila	11	13	7
4	Gazipur Zila	13	13	2
5	Cox's Bazar Zila	14	12	3
6	Khulna Zila	11	11	0
7	Jashore Zila	10	10	0
8	Mymensingh Zila	6	10	1
9	Narayanganj Zila	9	10	3
10	Sirajganj Zila	10	10	2

Suicide

In 2023, 153 incidents were reported, resulting in 148 deaths, 4 injuries, and 15 arrests. The situation worsened in 2024, with incidents increasing to 185 and deaths rising to 196, while injuries remained low at 5 and arrests declined sharply to 5. In 2025, the figures dropped markedly, with 78 incidents and 80 deaths recorded, alongside just 1 injury and 9 arrests. Overall, the data indicate a peak in suicide incidents

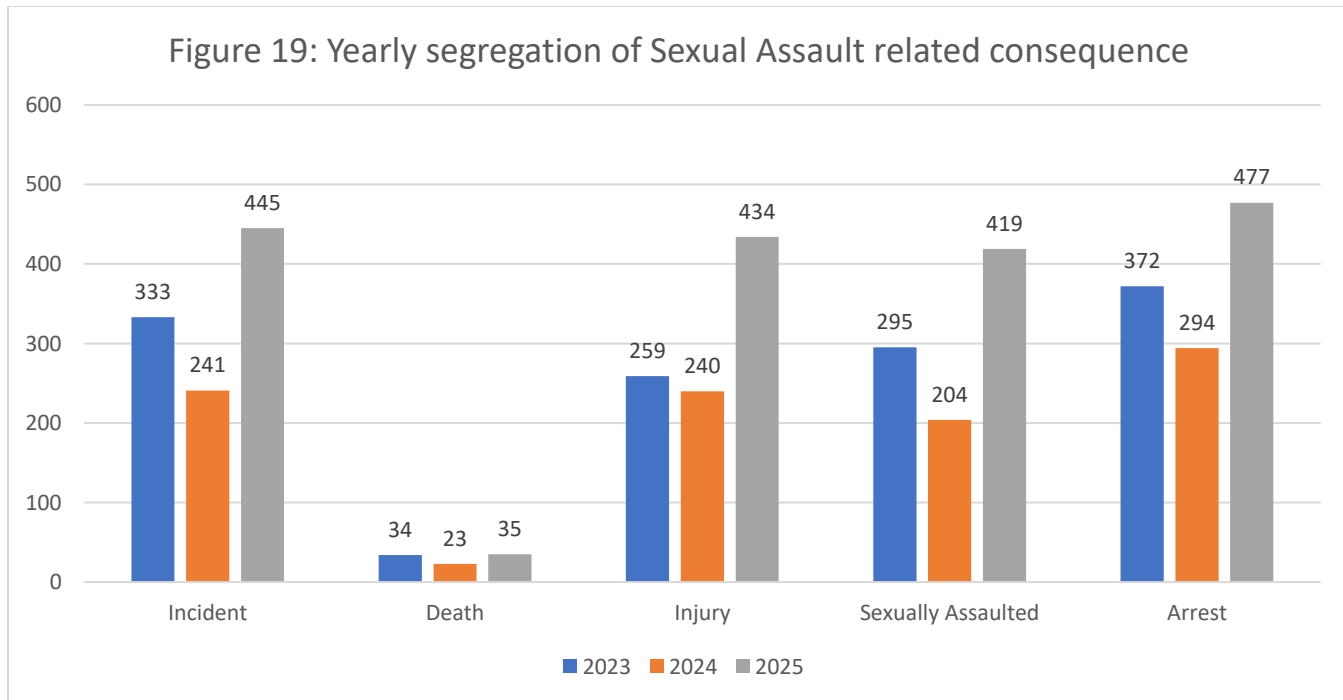
and fatalities in 2024, followed by a substantial decline in 2025, though the 2025 figures likely reflect partial-year reporting.

The dominant motive of suicide by women is domestic violence (54 cases), accounting for the clear majority of incidents. This is followed by other domestic/GBV/VAW-related motives (10 cases), reinforcing that gender-based and domestic contexts underpin most incidents. Smaller categories include other social causes (4), sexual assault (4), other causes (2), and single cases each of dowry-related, justice-related, and unspecified motives (1 each). Overall, the distribution shows an intense concentration in domestic and gender-based violence, with relatively few incidents attributed to other motives.

Sexual Assault

In the very first week of 2025, the country was shaken by a horrible crime against an eight-year-old girl in Magura. On 5 March, the girl was brutally raped while being suffocated by her sister's father-in-law at the perpetrator's house. The girl succumbed to the severe injury that led to country-wide protests against the dominant culture of rape and violence against women in Bangladesh.² This was a terrible reminder of the insecurity of women and girls in their supposed safe place. Figure 3 depicts sexual assault-related data from 2023 to 2025, showing trends in incidents, deaths, injuries, reported sexual assault cases, and arrests. In 2023, there were 333 incidents, 34 deaths, 259 injuries, 295 sexual assault cases, and 372 arrests. These figures declined in 2024, with incidents dropping to 241, deaths to 23, injuries to 240, sexual assault cases to 204, and arrests to 294. In contrast, 2025 shows a sharp increase across all categories, recording 445 incidents, 35 deaths, 434 injuries, 419 sexual assault cases, and 477 arrests. Overall, the grand totals indicate 1,019 incidents, 92 deaths, 933 injuries, 918 sexual assault cases, and 1,143 arrests over the three years, highlighting a significant rise in 2025 after a dip in 2024.

² Butler. G, (2025), Fierce protests as eight-year-old rape victim dies in Bangladesh, Cited in- <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ce30k9g6x2eo>



Nearly 60 per cent of the victims of sexual assaults are minor girls and boys. The sexual assaults on boys are rising at an alarming rate. In 2023, the number of boys who were sexually violated was 8; in 2024, it was 5; in 2025 (till November), the number already reached 14, crossing the numbers of previous years altogether.

Emerging trend of Gender-based violence: global and local scenario of technology-facilitated/online/digital gender-based violence

Gender based violence is not decreasing despite the worldwide prevention efforts by international and national humanitarian organisations. According to WHO data, one in every three women has faced intimate partner violence or sexual violence in their lifetime.³ The physical harm of violence does not go

³ Updated WHO data reveal persistence of violence against women and girls across the Western Pacific, 25 November 2025 , cited in-<https://www.who.int/westernpacific/news/item/25-11-2025-updated-who-data-reveal-persistence-of-violence-against-women-and-girls-across-the-western-pacific>

away; many women carry the burden throughout their lives in the form of sexually transmitted diseases and mental health issues.⁴

Recently, technology-facilitated gender-based violence has shown a clear progression in both form and intensity globally. Recent surveys show that online gender-based violence (OGBV) prevalence varies widely, ranging from 16% to 58%, depending on survey design and respondent demographics. Regionally, about 28% of women in major African cities (Addis Ababa, Nairobi, Kampala, Dakar, and Johannesburg), 31% of women in India (mainly college students), and 16% of adult women in the United States—rising to 33% among women under 35—report experiencing online sexual harassment. In the U.S., although 43% of men report general online harassment compared to 38% of women, 47% of women say their experience was gender-based, versus only 18% of men. Facebook is identified as the riskiest platform, with 39% of girls and women across 22 countries feeling unsafe there compared to 23% on Instagram and 14% on WhatsApp. Economically, OGBV imposes a substantial burden, costing EU countries an estimated €49–89 billion annually due to lost productivity and reduced quality of life.⁵ Often described as the first major pandemic of the social media era, COVID-19 triggered a sharp rise in technology-facilitated gender-based violence as daily life shifted online; notably, calls to digital harassment helplines in Pakistan tripled during this time. In South Asia, traditional forms of public sexual harassment, such as “eve-teasing”, have migrated online, normalising sexist abuse and rape threats in digital spaces. Countries like India exhibit organised “gender trolling,” where politically motivated or male-dominated groups collectively target women and religious or caste minorities to silence them, while the gender digital divide in many LMICs increases women’s and children’s vulnerability due to lower digital literacy. Female journalists, activists, and politicians in countries such as Nepal and the Philippines are particularly targeted through systematic online harassment aimed at pushing them out of male-dominated public roles.⁶ As of 2019, about 96% of deepfake videos online were non-consensual pornographic content, and 100% of identified victims were women, highlighting the strongly gendered misuse of this technology.

⁴ UNFPA, Lifetime toll: 840 million women faced partner or sexual violence, cited in-<https://www.unfpa.org/press/lifetime-toll-840-million-women-faced-partner-or-sexual-violence>

⁵ Hicks, J. (2021). Global evidence on the prevalence and impact of online gender-based violence. K4D Helpdesk Report. Institute of Development Studies. DOI:10.19088/K4D.2021.140

⁶ Bansal, V., Rezwan, M., Iyer, M., Leasure, E., Roth, C., Pal, P., & Hinson, L. (2023). A Scoping Review of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence in Low- and Middle-Income Countries Across Asia. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 25(1), 463-475. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380231154614> (Original work published 2024)

The number of deepfake videos is doubling roughly every 6 months, increasing from 7,964 in 2018 to 14,678 in 2019, with targets primarily high-profile women, such as celebrities and politicians. However, private individuals are increasingly affected by revenge porn. This rapid spread is driven by the easy availability of “one-click” tools like DeepNude, which attracted over 500,000 users before being shut down, reflecting significant demand for non-consensual image manipulation.⁷

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics conducted the Violence Against Women Survey 2024, and the data show that 50.1% of ever-married women have experienced at least one form of partner violence in their lifetime, while 24.5% faced physical or sexual partner violence in the 12 months preceding the survey. Technology-facilitated GBV affects 8.1% of women over their lifetime, with the highest prevalence among young women aged 15–24 (14.2%). Yet, reporting remains exceptionally low, as 64.1% of survivors told no one, and only 1.5% sought police help. The risk is further compounded by child marriage, with women married before age 18 significantly more likely to experience partner violence than those married later.⁸ In 2022, 63.51% of surveyed women in Bangladesh experienced online violence, up sharply from 50.19% in 2021, with most survivors facing repeated abuse—67.81% targeted 1–5 times and over 10% more than 10 times—primarily on Facebook (47%) and Messenger (35%), through lewd or hateful comments (80.4%) and sexually explicit messages (53.3%). Compared to the previous dataset, where 8.1% of women reported lifetime experience of technology-facilitated GBV and 64.1% never disclosed abuse, this data suggests a much higher annual prevalence and intensity of online violence, particularly in everyday social media spaces. However, both datasets converge on a critical pattern of underreporting: only 15% of women in the 2022 survey filed formal complaints, closely mirroring the earlier finding of minimal help-seeking (1.5% of women reported to the police).⁹ Violence disproportionately impacts marginalised groups, including women in politics, ethnic/religious minorities, and the LGBTQI+ community (particularly Hijras).¹⁰ Online harassment and spreading propaganda using fake content are widely used in Bangladeshi politics. The newest female leaders of the political arena in Bangladesh are

⁷ Akter, M. S., & Ahmed, P. (2025). The Emergence of AI-Generated Deepfakes as a New Tool for Gender-Based Violence Against Women: A Brief Narrative Review of Evidence and the Implications of the Techno-Feminist Perspective. *Feminists@law*, 13(2). <https://doi.org/10.22024/UniKent/03/fal.1281>

⁸ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN SURVEY 2024

⁹ Action Aid, Research Findings: Online Violence Against Women in Bangladesh

¹⁰ NORC at the University of Chicago and the International Center for Research on Women. (2022). Case Study: Technology-facilitated Gender Based Violence in Bangladesh.

facing continuous bullying and harassment.¹¹ For instance, Tasnim Jara, a famous young politician and candidate in the national election, is regularly targeted through AI-generated, online, sexualised content that is proven chiefly fake.¹²

BPO's data collection methodology does not record verbal abuse and mental harassment as violence yet. We collect incidents influenced by the harmful use of technology that have at least one consequence. Despite the limited reported incidents of TFGBV by the victims, related incidents recorded in BPO in 2024 indicate that digital technology appeared mainly as a supporting tool in gender-based violence, used for hacking social media accounts, secretly recording intimate moments, and threatening to leak private photos or videos to blackmail or silence women; the abuse largely remained private and reinforced offline violence. By contrast, in 2025, technology became a central mechanism of abuse, with perpetrators more frequently filming sexual assaults, using videos for repeated digital extortion, and in some cases, circulating or preparing to circulate content through messaging apps and online platforms, causing rapid reputational and psychological harm.

What technology offers to the perpetrators of violence

Online gender-based violence exists along a continuum with offline abuse, reinforcing and intensifying real-world patriarchal discrimination. At the same time, digital technologies enable perpetrators to act anonymously and target victims across vast geographical and jurisdictional boundaries.¹³

Removing the concept of safe space from the picture, (TFGBV) reflects offline patriarchy, with 85% of women globally experiencing online violence, including harassment and abuse, which can drive victims like journalists to withdraw from digital spaces. Digital tools exacerbate harm through anonymity, automation, and emerging threats like deepfakes, which are predominantly pornographic and highly

¹¹ Faysal, S.U. (2025) ,Cyberbullying at DUCSU: A weapon to silence women candidates? Cited in-
<https://www.tbsnews.net/features/cyberbullying-duc-su-weapon-silence-women-candidates-1231471>

¹² Tabassum,F (2025), From sexualized posts to fake drug ads: A case study of online abuse targeting Tasnim Jara, Cited in-
<https://en.dismislab.com/online-bullying-tasnim-jara/>

¹³ Garrido V., M. (Ed.) (2022). Mapping online gender-based violence. University for Peace

gendered.¹⁴ ¹⁵ It enables the abuser to attack the target in groups in a coordinated manner and provides an opportunity to normalise and reproduce the sexist behaviour in the future.¹⁶ Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) harms individuals based on gender or sexual identity, silences women in public life, and poses a significant threat to democratic participation and physical security. Its global, digitally connected nature links misogynistic online communities to radicalisation, making this violence pervasive and challenging to regulate within national borders.¹⁷ Technology-facilitated gender-based violence increasingly involves AI, including deepfake creation, facial mapping for non-consensual content, and automated harassment through bots. Perpetrators also use AI-driven networks to share abusive tactics, alongside traditional cyber violence like stalking, trolling, doxing, and slut-shaming.¹⁸ Generative AI has created a new harm landscape by enabling synthetic narratives, compositional deepfakes, and large-scale automated harassment, often amplified by biased training data and weak platform safeguards. Current responses remain inadequate, as technological guardrails frequently fail and most protective measures place the burden on victims rather than addressing perpetrators' behaviour.¹⁹

How technology can assist the victims in healing and seeking justice

Technological advancement ushered in a new era for humanity, and its impact is undeniably deeply rooted in our everyday lives. Technology is a powerful enabler, but the outcome depends on the user's ethics. Just as the abuser put it to work to make other people's lives complicated, it can be used to uncomplicate

¹⁴ Daniel, Chandra & Block, Adam & Knapp, Kenneth & Immanuel, Gifty. (2023). Socio-economic Determinants of Gender-based Violence [GBV]: SDG Analytics on the Global GBV Scenario With Special Reference to Technology-Facilitated Gender-based Violence and Adolescent Birth Rates. 10.21203/rs.3.rs-3446090/v1.

¹⁵ de Silva, Rangita, A Rapidly Shifting Landscape: Why Digitized Violence is the Newest Category of Gender-Based Violence (November 29, 2023). *La Revue des Juristes de Sciences Po*, No. 25, p. 62, 2024, U of Penn Law School, Public Law Research Paper No. 23-43, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4648409>

¹⁶ López-de-Arana Prado E. Reconceptualising the Digital Gender Divide, Accommodating New Forms of Virtual Gender-Based Violence. *Behavioral Sciences*. 2025; 15(11):1568. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs15111568>

¹⁷ Kristine Baekgaard, 2023-2024 Hillary Rodham Clinton Fellow, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/GIWPS-TFGBV-Report-2025.pdf>

¹⁸ Balavadze, Mariam, The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Gender-Based Violence (September 27, 2025). *Perspectives on Federalism*, Vol. 17, issue 1, 2025, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=5542920>

¹⁹ "Your opinion doesn't matter, anyway": Exposing Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence in an Era of Generative AI, Cited in- <https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2024/04/Ai-livre-EN-web.pdf>

and prevent the violence. A group of researchers has proposed creating a feminist chatbot that will follow a feminist design justice strategy, prioritising privacy and safety in the design stage, ensuring responsible, strict review, and tailoring content to avoid grievances, identify trigger words, and serve different demographics.²⁰ AI-based chatbots can provide immediate, anonymous assistance that empowers women, expands access to justice, reduces isolation, and strengthens autonomy. Still, their effectiveness depends on gender-focused design, personalisation, strong privacy protections, low-connectivity functionality, and institutional integration—and critically, all such systems must be continuously audited to prevent algorithmic bias that could reproduce gender or cultural harms.²¹ Another innovative research suggests a model, Bindi, an AI- and IoT-powered autonomous system that detects fear-related emotions through wearable devices and auditory data across an edge–fog–cloud architecture, using machine learning and neural networks to identify potential gender-based violence situations and automatically trigger alerts to protection services while securely storing data in the cloud.²² Artificial intelligence and machine learning can support the prevention of gender-based violence by analysing large datasets to identify patterns, predict high-risk situations, map hotspots, and improve the allocation of support services. While algorithms help moderate harmful content and enable early intervention, these technologies must be developed within Responsible AI frameworks to avoid bias and to ensure they contribute to accountability and justice rather than reinforcing existing inequalities.^{23 24}

²⁰ Nicola Henry, Alice Witt & Stefani Vasil (2025) A ‘design justice’ approach to developing digital tools for addressing gender-based violence: exploring the possibilities and limits of feminist chatbots, *Information, Communication & Society*, 28:11, 1884-1907, DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2024.2363900

²¹ Rodriguez Saavedra, Miluska Odely, Erick Alexander Donayre Prado, Adolfo Erick Donayre Sarolli, Paola Gabriela Lujan Tito, Jose Antonio Escobedo Pajuelo, Ricardo Enrique Grundy Lopez, Orlando Aroquipa Apaza, María Elena Alegre Chalco, Wilian Quispe Nina, Raúl Andrés Pozo González, and et al. 2025. Chatbots and Empowerment in Gender-Based Violence: Mixed Methods Analysis of Psychological and Legal Assistance. *Social Sciences*, 14: 623. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci14100623>

²² Miranda, Jose & Rituerto-González, Esther & Luis Mingueza, Clara & Canabal, Manuel & Ramírez, Alberto & Lanza-Gutierrez, Jose & Peláez-Moreno, Carmen & Ongil, Celia. (2022). Bindi: Affective Internet of Things to Combat Gender-Based Violence. *IEEE Internet of Things Journal*. 9. 1-1. 10.1109/JIOT.2022.3177256.

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ Ekeh, Amazing & Apeh, Charles & Odionu, Chinekwu & Austin, Blessing. (2025). Data analytics and machine learning for gender-based violence prevention: A framework for policy design and intervention strategies. *Gulf Journal of Advance Business Research*. 3. 323-347. 10.51594/gjabr.v3i2.87.

One expert suggests that current AI systems for addressing gender-based violence are limited by narrow, static datasets and weak theoretical foundations, often focused on only a few social media platforms. Future developments should integrate stakeholder and survivor perspectives, be grounded in sociological expertise, account for intersectional vulnerabilities, and adopt holistic monitoring approaches that capture patterns of abuse across platforms and contexts.²⁵

Existing legal parameters to fight TFGBV and the way forward

The legal framework addressing digital gender-based violence is grounded in international instruments such as the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW, and relevant case law from the European Court of Human Rights added exemplary value to treat such an offence worldwide. As traditional forms of violence shift to digital and AI-generated formats, criminal law increasingly assesses these acts based on their impact on fundamental legal interests, including human dignity, personal freedom, and data protection. A dedicated legal reform to address digital gender-based violence, including special criminalisation of online acts, clearer standardisation of digital crime elements, adoption of an EU Directive for consistent enforcement, and broader use of the term “digital violence” to capture all forms of ICT-facilitated abuse.²⁶ In addition to the urge for legal reforms to standardise and address digital gender-based violence, including special criminalisation and aggravated penalties for digitally enabled gender-based crimes, a call is also there for a shift to a human rights–based legal approach that prioritizes victims’ dignity, mandates “safety by design” in AI development, reforms intermediary liability, criminalizes AI services designed for non-consensual sexual content, applies proportionality safeguards to avoid over-censorship, and strengthens regulatory oversight through algorithmic impact assessments.^{27 28} Furthermore, to prevent technological threats, the legal institutions should incorporate technological solutions in their preventive

²⁵ Abercrombie, Gavin & Jiang, Aiqi & Gerrard-Abbott, Poppy & Konstas, Ioannis & Rieser, Verena. (2023). Resources for Automated Identification of Online Gender-Based Violence: A Systematic Review. 170-186. 10.18653/v1/2023.woah-1.17.

²⁶ Polyzoidou, Vagia. (2024). Digital Violence Against Women: Is There a Real Need for Special Criminalization?. *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law - Revue internationale de Sémiotique juridique*. 37. 1777-1797. 10.1007/s11196-024-10179-3.

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ Romero Moreno, F. (2024). Generative AI and deepfakes: a human rights approach to tackling harmful content. *International Review of Law, Computers & Technology*, 38(3), 297–326. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600869.2024.2324540>

measures. Predictive and forecasting facilities can be integrated into the risk assessment policies of the law enforcement agencies.²⁹ Also, understanding the TFGBV frontiers from a proximity perspective, activists and practitioners will impart valuable insights into structural platform reform, counteracting misogynistic repertoires, empowering activist networks, and rethinking the political economy of platforms.³⁰

Bangladesh has been fighting TFGBV using existing traditional laws for some time. Bangladesh established an all-woman police unit in 2020 to address cybercrimes against women. The Digital Security Act was passed in 2018 to address violent extremism and hate speech, but received criticism as a tool of suppression used by the former regime.³¹ A new Cyber Safeguarding Ordinance was passed in 2025, leaving the DSA 2023 null.³² The ordinance declared that online abuse and sexual harassment of women and children are criminal offences, along with publishing sexually exploitative content, issuing threats, and inciting religious hatred or violence. It also criminalises cybercrimes committed using artificial intelligence.³³ Experts opined that it would yield positive outcomes for women and children, now and in the future.³⁴

Conclusion

Gender based violence is a multifaceted problem from the beginning. It is becoming more complex with time. Reasonably, it demands multi-stakeholder engagement and a dynamic approach to tackle this

²⁹ Rodríguez-Rodríguez, I., Rodríguez, J.-V., Pardo-Quiles, D.-J., Heras-González, P., & Chatzigiannakis, I. (2020). Modeling and Forecasting Gender-Based Violence through Machine Learning Techniques. *Applied Sciences*, 10(22), 8244. <https://doi.org/10.3390/app10228244>

³⁰ Belotti, F., Sciannamblo, M., Panarese, P., Parisi, S., & Comunello, F. (2025). Online gender-based violence as a socio-technical issue: The aware gaze of activists and practitioners. *AG AboutGender*, 14(27), 118–141. <https://doi.org/10.15167/2279-5057/AG2025.14.27.2>

³¹ NORC at the University of Chicago and the International Center for Research on Women. (2022). Case Study: Technology-facilitated Gender Based Violence in Bangladesh.

³² সাইবার সুরক্ষা অধ্যাদেশ, ২০২৫ (২০২৫ সনের ২৫ নং অধ্যাদেশ) cited in- <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-1538.html>

³³ 'Cyber Security Ordinance approved with softer penalties, more bailable offences', *The Business Standard*, Cited in- <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/govt-approves-cyber-security-ordinance-2025-repeals-9-sections-previous-law-1135181>

³⁴ Abbas, MD (2025), New cyber ordinance: Stronger shield for women, children, Cited in- <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/new-cyber-ordinance-stronger-shield-women-children-3901091>

societal bane. The TFGBV is one of the most harmful forms of violence against women, as abusers can destroy victims' lives in a second without laying a finger on them. The mental toll of TFGBV leaves a profound impact, as it is nearly impossible to erase a memory, ironically, thanks to technology. Technology itself is a tool; it enables users to have a positive or negative impact on society. So, the criminal offences against women that violate their physical, mental, sexual, and financial wellness should be brought under robust legal parameters. There should be regional, global, and international collaboration and policy to fight TFGBV, as the nature of the violence blurs traditional notions of borders and jurisdiction. In Bangladesh, the Cyber Safeguarding Ordinance 2025 is a commendable initiative, but policymakers should remain vigilant to incorporate novel features to address the evolving nature of technology-facilitated crimes.



AI and Violence Mapping

Khandakar Tahmid Rejwan³⁵

Introduction

Violence mapping involves systematically recording violent incidents and their characteristics, including their type, actors, and geographic location, to reveal patterns and hotspots.³⁶ It is an interdisciplinary practice that combines data from various sources, such as news reports, social media, satellite imagery, and field observations, and plots these incidents on interactive maps or dashboards for analysis. The goal of violence mapping is to provide clarity in a crisis by identifying who did what, where, and when, thereby helping analysts and stakeholders understand the spatial and temporal dynamics of violence. Violence mapping can operate at different scales, from global conflict trackers to community-based maps of local violence. In all cases, it transforms raw incident data into visual maps, graphs, etc., that make violence more legible, highlighting incident concentrations, the movement of conflict across geography, and changes in intensity over time. This visual approach allows policymakers, researchers, and the public to literally see the distribution of violence, which can be crucial for awareness, early warning, and response planning.

In practice, this means building a geocoded database of reported acts of violence that analysts can query and visualise on maps to understand where and how violence is occurring.³⁷ The process enhances situational awareness and can feed into early warning systems. In effect, violence mapping treats conflicts as data, with each reported incident becoming a quantitative data point. By converting anecdotes into

³⁵ Research Data Analyst, Centre for Alternatives (CA).

³⁶ "Conflict Mapping," n.d. <https://www.sustainingpeace-select.org/tool/conflict-mapping/>.

³⁷ *ibid*

empirical datasets, analysts can apply statistical methods, for example, correlating violence with economic or political factors, and identify hotspots that might otherwise go unnoticed.

With Artificial Intelligence (AI) and big data tools, this data-driven approach to conflict analysis has grown ever more powerful and essential in today's information-rich environment. The proliferation of open-source data on violence, often termed Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) and including millions of news articles, tweets, videos, and sensor data, has created a 'big data' challenge that manual analysis alone cannot address. AI offers tools to efficiently process and analyse this vast amount of information. AI provides tools to process and analyse this enormous amount of information efficiently. For instance, United Nations conflict prevention teams now use digital data capture and AI analytics to map recurring conflict patterns and even forecast potential crises.³⁸ In short, the convergence of AI and violence mapping is enabling a shift from retrospective documentation of violence to more proactive, predictive, and granular understanding, a development of growing importance for conflict early warning, human rights monitoring, and violence prevention in the 21st century.

The Role of OSINT Data and Mapping in Understanding Violence

Modern violence mapping depends critically on open-source intelligence (OSINT). OSINT gathers information from publicly available outlets such as local and international news, social media, NGO reports, and satellite imagery for analysis. Analysts note that OSINT has had a dramatic impact on armed conflict in the 21st century, since it rebalances information asymmetries and provides unprecedented visibility into wars. In practical terms, this means volunteer networks and online platforms continuously feed conflict information into mapping systems. For example, crowdsourcing tools (for example: Ushahidi or Telegram) allow civilians to report attacks or protests in real time, automatically forwarding geotagged reports to analysts. These community-driven channels, combined with traditional news outlets, flood OSINT databases with rich, localised inputs. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has

³⁸ Dr. Dirk Kolb & Philipp Starz, *Real-time conflict monitoring using artificial intelligence for peace operations*, ZIF TechBlog (Zentrum für Internationale Friedenseinsätze, Berlin), 13 Oct. 2022, <https://tech-blog.zif-berlin.org/real-time-conflict-monitoring-using-artificial-intelligence-peace-operations>

observed that current OSINT operations routinely integrate social media feeds, geospatial imagery, and advanced mapping software, greatly enriching the data available for conflict analysis.³⁹

In mapping projects, OSINT feeds are converted into structured event data for Geographic Information Systems (GIS) plotting. Each reported incident (e.g., an ambush, riot, or airstrike) is coded by trained analysts or AI tools with a date, location, and attributes. These geocoded data points are then layered on maps to reveal concentrations and trends of violence. For instance, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) codes each event by its precise coordinates from source reports, creating a global grid of conflict activity.⁴⁰ Crucially, OSINT-driven mapping helps capture violence that might otherwise remain hidden or underreported. Satellite imagery is a prime example, with it being initially a tool of military spies, it has evolved into a powerful open-source resource for investigating and visualising war crimes and violence in inaccessible regions. Analysts using high-resolution satellite photos have exposed mass graves, razed villages, and prison camps that perpetrators tried to conceal from ground observers. For instance, destruction of civilian settlements in conflicts across Africa and Myanmar has been documented via before-and-after satellite images, bringing unseen atrocities to light for the world to see.⁴¹ In Egypt, activists created ‘HarassMap’, a platform that allows women to report incidents of sexual assault via SMS or online, which are then mapped to reveal harassment hotspots and hold perpetrators accountable.

Another seminal example is Ushahidi in Kenya, which in 2008 crowd-mapped post-election violence by inviting Kenyans to text in reports of riots, attacks, and hate speech. Within days, an online map emerged that provided a more complete picture of the violence than any official or media source, especially in remote areas.⁴² In sum, OSINT data and mapping provide an indispensable window into

³⁹ Ed Millett, *Deploying OSINT in armed conflict settings: law, ethics, and the need for a new theory of harm*, Humanitarian Law & Policy Blog (International Committee of the Red Cross), 5 Dec. 2023, <https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2023/12/05/deploying-osint-in-armed-conflict-settings-law-ethics-theory-of-harm/>

⁴⁰ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, *ACLED Codebook 2023*, June 2023, https://acleddata.com/sites/default/files/wp-content-archive/uploads/dlm_uploads/2023/06/ACLED_Codebook_2023.pdf

⁴¹ Victor Vilisov, *Logging a war. How digitalization has changed the perception of modern warfare and the documentation of war crimes*, *The Insider*, 27 May 2022, <https://theins.ru/en/society/251631>

⁴² Janet Marsden and Angela Oduor Lungati, *Ushahidi*, in Charla M. Burnett (ed.), *Evaluating Participatory Mapping Software*, Springer, 2023, pp. 219–233, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-19594-5_10

contemporary violence, revealing both the broad trends and granular details needed to inform responses, all while complementing (and often surpassing) traditional intelligence in accessibility and scope.

Case Studies

To illustrate these concepts, we examine five prominent violence-mapping initiatives. Each uses OSINT and digital mapping to track violence in different contexts.

1. ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data)

A global conflict monitoring project that collects and geocodes reported incidents of political violence and protest.⁴³ ACLED's researchers and local partners scan thousands of open sources in over 75 languages, recording each event's date, location, actors, and type.⁴⁴ For example, ACLED's codebook explains that it collects reported information on the type, agents, location, date, and other characteristics of political violence events in every country and territory in the world.⁴⁵ ACLED publishes all its data openly and maintains interactive dashboards. These include country-level conflict monitors, a global interactive map, and analytical products like the annual 'Conflict Index'.⁴⁶ From 2024 to 2025, ACLED recorded roughly 204,000 events and ranked the top 50 conflicts by intensity.⁴⁷ ACLED also produces thematic datasets (for example, on elections and gendered violence) from the same mapped data, illustrating the platform's versatility. In effect, ACLED exemplifies a comprehensive global violence map built from OSINT.

2. Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR):

An independent group focused exclusively on the Syrian Civil War, and now, after the fall of the Assad regime, in the post-war conflict situation of the countries. SOHR relies on a network of activists and contacts inside Syria, which is coordinated from abroad to gather reports of fighting, airstrikes, and

⁴³ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED), *About ACLED*, ACLED, <https://acleddata.com/about-acled>

⁴⁴ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, *ACLED Codebook 2023*, June 2023, https://acleddata.com/sites/default/files/wp-content-archive/uploads/dlm_uploads/2023/06/ACLED_Codebook_2023.pdf

⁴⁵ *ibid*

⁴⁶ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, *ACLED Conflict Index*, ACLED, <https://acleddata.com/series/acled-conflict-index>

⁴⁷ *ibid*.

civilian casualties since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. It compiles daily tallies of casualties and incident locations using videos, medical records, and eyewitness accounts. SOHR publishes regular infographics and bulletins on its website and social media.⁴⁸ While it does not provide an interactive GIS map, its detailed casualty charts effectively create a one-dimensional timeline map of the war's toll by region. SOHR's database is widely trusted: major media outlets and the UN frequently cite its figures. In practice, SOHR serves as a de facto conflict map of Syria's violence, demonstrating how a relatively small OSINT network can produce influential data. Its case highlights deep focus on one country with high public impact.⁴⁹

3. IISS Myanmar Conflict Map:

An online platform by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) was launched after Myanmar's 2021 coup.⁵⁰ It hosts an interactive map plotting tens of thousands of reported conflict events across Myanmar's states and regions. As of early 2024, the map contained about 56,830 incidents, categorised by date, location, and actor. Users can filter incidents by date, attack type, and involved group.⁵¹ The data come from open media reports and NGO field sources. Accompanying analytical briefs interpret the trends (for example, surges in particular regions). This map is updated regularly, providing near-real-time tracking of multiple simultaneous insurgencies. It shows how an institutional think tank can rapidly build a detailed conflict map for an active crisis, using OSINT and digital tools. Governments and researchers have cited the IISS map as an authoritative source on Myanmar's conflicts.

4. India Hate Lab (IHL):

A project of the Centre for the Study of Organised Hate (CSOH), focusing on anti-minority violence and hate speech in India. Unlike traditional conflict maps, IHL systematically collects data on hate incidents targeting groups like Muslims, Christians, and Dalits. It scans social media posts, news outlets, and official speeches, logging incidents of hate speech and violent harassment. The platform maintains an interactive database of 'hate incidents' with details on location, date, and content of the abuse. IHL also issues periodic analytical reports linking hate trends to political events. While not a geocoded battlefield

⁴⁸ Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, *About Us*, <https://www.syriahr.com/en/about-us/>

⁴⁹ *ibid*

⁵⁰ International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *About Myanmar Programme*, <https://myanmar.iiss.org/about>

⁵¹ International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *IISS: International Institute for Strategic Studies*, <https://myanmar.iiss.org/>

map, IHL's approach essentially produces a thematic map of social conflict in India. Its data have informed academic research and public policy debates about polarisation in India.⁵²

5. Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO):

An open-access platform launched in 2017 (Dhaka University with UNDP) to track violence in Bangladesh. BPO compiles incidents of terrorism, political clashes, communal violence, and other crimes. Its database now contains over 110,000 records across 26 categories from 2014 onward.⁵³ This responded to an identified data gap: analysts had noted a 'scarcity of data on violent extremism' and related violence in Bangladesh. BPO aggregates reports from media, police, and NGO sources into a public portal. Users can query incidents by date, district, and type. BPO also produces biannual reports and policy briefs. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, BPO published statistics on symptom-related deaths, which the media cited to question official counts. By engaging local journalists, police, and community leaders (through workshops and conferences), BPO ensures its data informs national security planning.⁵⁴ In sum, BPO illustrates how a focused observatory can fill national data gaps by mapping violence and feeding insights to policymakers.

AI as Force Multiplier in Violence Mapping

Artificial intelligence dramatically speeds up and scales violence mapping. AI systems, in fact, can process more information than human analysts and do so continuously. For example, Natural language processing (NLP) tools automatically scan thousands of news articles, social media posts, and field reports in many languages, extracting mentions of violence and classifying each event.⁵⁵ Again, AI also accelerates image

⁵² India Hate Lab (IHL), *About India Hate Lab*, <https://www.indiahatelab.com/about/>

⁵³ Faisal Bin Majid, *Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO), a Data Solution to Dealing with Social Tension*, UNDP Asia-Pacific Blog, United Nations Development Programme, 14 October 2021, <https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/blog/bangladesh-peace-observatory-bpo-data-solution-dealing-social-tension>

⁵⁴ Faisal Bin Majid, *Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO), a Data Solution to Dealing with Social Tension*, UNDP Asia-Pacific Blog, United Nations Development Programme, 14 October 2021, <https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/blog/bangladesh-peace-observatory-bpo-data-solution-dealing-social-tension>; Centre for Alternatives, *Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO)*, Centre for Alternatives, <https://www.calternatives.org/projects/bangladesh-peace-observatory-bpo>

⁵⁵ Dr. Dirk Kolb & Philipp Starz, *Real-time conflict monitoring using artificial intelligence for peace operations*, ZIF TechBlog (Zentrum für Internationale Friedenseinsätze, Berlin), 13 Oct. 2022, <https://tech-blog.zif-berlin.org/real-time-conflict-monitoring-using-artificial-intelligence-peace-operations>

and signal analysis. Computer vision algorithms can sift through satellite imagery or uploaded videos to detect signs of conflict, such as destroyed buildings, troop convoys, or weapons caches, with speed and scale beyond human capability. For instance, the VFRAME project uses machine learning to scan thousands of conflict video frames and flag the presence of specific weapons or militant insignia. Likewise, combining speech recognition with NLP can turn radio broadcasts into text and scan them for hate speech or mobilisation signals. In Uganda, for example, machine learning was applied to local radio news and shows to detect rising ethnic tensions and predict refugee surges.⁵⁶ These AI-driven capabilities complement text analysis by adding visual and audio sensing to the OSINT mix. In short, AI acts as a force multiplier for OSINT-based mapping. Tasks that would take any team days or weeks, such as translating and coding reports, geolocating events, and deduplicating entries, can now be done in seconds.

Applications and Use Cases

AI-enhanced violence mapping serves many purposes, including in policy, research, and operations. Below are a few significant cases for potential application:

- **Policy and Early Warning**

Geospatial violence data inform decision-makers at all levels. ACLED's analytical products, for example, help governments and the UN prioritise responses. Its annual 'Conflict Index' and 'Watchlist' synthesise thousands of event records to rank the world's worst conflicts and forecast emerging hotspots.

- **Research and Trend Analysis**

Scholars, think tanks, and NGOs use violence maps to study conflict dynamics and social trends. Longitudinal event data allow analysts to quantify changes, for instance, whether violence is intensifying, spreading to new areas, or shifting seasonally, and to correlate conflicts with social factors (economic conditions, demographic changes, etc.). National observatories like BPO and IHL produce periodic analytical reports. These reports, based on real-time analysis, allow BPO

⁵⁶ Eleonore Pauwels, *Artificial Intelligence and Data Capture Technologies in Violence and Conflict Prevention: Opportunities and Challenges for the International Community*, Global Center on Cooperative Security, September 2020, https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/GCCS_AIData_PB_H-I.pdf

to analyse trends in communal clashes over time, while IHL might study spikes in hate incidents during elections.

- **Journalism and Public Information**

Media organisations increasingly rely on conflict maps to inform the public. Journalists embed interactive maps and graphics in their reporting to illustrate how violence is spreading or declining. Observatories also help verify public claims and fight misinformation. Reporters can cross-check rumour claims (for example, ‘X town was bombed’) against official event databases. As SOHR notes, its data are ‘often cited by major international news outlets... and the UN’, lending credibility to media reports.⁵⁷ Public dashboards and maps likewise empower citizen watchdogs and social media communities to hold leaders accountable. By visualising conflict data, these tools make complex trends accessible to a broader audience.

- **Humanitarian Aid and Conflict Mitigation**

AI-driven maps support crisis prevention and relief. A heatmap of recent violent incidents can flag communities at the highest risk, allowing agencies to prioritise those areas for aid or protection. For example, if a map shows rising communal violence in a particular province, NGOs might pre-deploy mediators or food assistance there. Similarly, sudden rises in plotted hate speech or militant mobilisation can prompt early peacebuilding dialogue. The BPO exemplifies this by not only mapping incidents but also actively engaging local NGOs, law enforcement, and media, sharing its findings in workshops so that its data directly informs safety measures. In one case, BPO’s report on COVID-related deaths was used by authorities to better target health resources.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, *About Us*, <https://www.syriahr.com/en/about-us/>

⁵⁸ Faisal Bin Majid, *Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO), a Data Solution to Dealing with Social Tension*, UNDP Asia-Pacific Blog, United Nations Development Programme, 14 October 2021, <https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/blog/bangladesh-peace-observatory-bpo-data-solution-dealing-social-tension>

- **Operational Planning and Response**

Humanitarian, security, and peacekeeping operations rely on accurate maps to plan their actions. Aid agencies overlay incident maps with population or infrastructure data to decide where to deliver food, medical aid, or shelters. Police and military forces use real-time dashboards to identify emerging flashpoints, adjust patrol routes, or establish checkpoints.

Methodological and Ethical Considerations

Mapping violence with AI and OSINT raises essential methodological and ethical issues. These are:

- **Data Quality and Bias:** Open-source conflict data can be incomplete or skewed. Media reports tend to emphasise sensational or urban violence, whereas remote or state-controlled areas may be undercovered.
- **Privacy and Safety:** Even publicly reported violence can endanger individuals if mapped indiscriminately. To protect privacy, observatories often anonymise or aggregate data. This ‘do no harm’ principle guides ethical OSINT practice, where public data must be handled with care to avoid exacerbating harm to populations.
- **Interpretability and Trust:** AI-generated analyses and aggregated maps must be transparent to gain trust. Analysts caution users to avoid automation bias and to assume AI outputs are infallible. The lesson is that even the best AI-produced map needs human explanation and cross-checking to be truly reliable.

Challenges, Risks, and Limitations

Despite its promise, AI-based violence mapping has severe limitations. Significant limitations are highlighted below:

- **Data Gaps and Representativeness**

Not all violence is visible to OSINT tools. Clandestine attacks, crimes by covert militias, or state-perpetrated abuses often leave no public trace, creating blind spots on the map. In Bangladesh,

for example, analysts noted that before BPO's creation, the lack of open-source data on extremist violence meant many incidents went undocumented.

- **Algorithmic Limitations**

Machine learning models have intrinsic constraints. They can misinterpret context: local slang, sarcasm, or code words may fool NLP classifiers, and unusual image angles or low lighting may confuse computer vision systems. AI models also inherit biases from their training data. For example, an NLP model trained on Western news might misclassify an African militia's slogan as harmless.

- **Risks of Misuse and Overreliance**

Geospatial violence data and predictive tools can be misused. Authoritarian regimes or armed factions might co-opt mapping to surveil and target opponents under the guise of security monitoring. A Belfer Centre expert panel noted that AI can assist analysis but can also create disinformation and division if misused.⁵⁹

- **Need for Human Supervision**

Given all the above issues, human analysts must remain in the loop. AI should augment, not replace, human judgment. Trained analysts should verify every AI-flagged incident and interpret maps with context in mind. Keeping these in mind, many projects are built in multiple review layers, requiring each mapped event to be confirmed by at least two independent sources before inclusion. Ultimately, the promise of AI in conflict mapping depends on responsible human stewardship.

⁵⁹ Rod Moshtagi, Josh Cortez & Angie Sohn, *AI and the Future of Conflict Resolution: How Can Artificial Intelligence Improve Peace Negotiations?*, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs (Harvard Kennedy School), 27 May 2025, <https://www.belfercenter.org/research-analysis/ai-and-future-conflict-resolution-how-can-artificial-intelligence-improve-peace>

Future Directions and Conclusion

Emerging technologies will further shape violence mapping. Advances in remote sensing, such as higher-resolution satellites, drone swarms, and dense networks of high-tech sensors, will supply ever-more-detailed real-time data on conflict zones. Likewise, breakthroughs in AI, such as large multilingual models and multimodal neural networks, will improve automated understanding of text, imagery, and social networks. These emerging innovations could make mapping more accurate and interactive, though they will also raise new ethical questions.

Standardisation and interoperability are also key trends. As more organisations collect conflict data, adopting standard taxonomies and open formats will allow different systems to share information. For example, if observatories use a shared event codebook (as ACLED, BPO, and the IISS Myanmar Conflict Map have done), their datasets could be merged into a more complete picture. Open Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) and shared platforms might integrate local and global feeds, for instance, combining ACLED's global events with BPO's local incidents to fill geographic gaps. In essence, the future may see a collaborative ecosystem of conflict data, where maps from many sources overlay to improve coverage. Capacity-building among local stakeholders is crucial for these advancements. ACLED has established local networks that train and fund grassroots partners to collect data in hard-to-reach areas.⁶⁰ The case of BPO shows how engaging local journalists, police, and community leaders improves data quality and relevance.⁶¹ In the future, donors, think tanks, research, and academic institutions can support similar programs worldwide by offering workshops, certifications, and funding to help communities use these tools. Such efforts would help ensure that violence mapping is not just a foreign technology, but a locally sustained practice.

Finally, robust policy and ethical frameworks are needed. Mapping violence with AI involves sensitive personal and security-related information, so governance must keep pace. Emerging global standards on AI ethics, such as the UNESCO Recommendation, stress that AI systems should be transparent, accountable, and aligned with human rights. Translating these principles into practice might

⁶⁰ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), *Local Networks*, <https://acleddata.com/about/local-networks>

⁶¹ Faisal Bin Majid, *Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO), a Data Solution to Dealing with Social Tension*, UNDP Asia-Pacific Blog, United Nations Development Programme, 14 October 2021, <https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/blog/bangladesh-peace-observatory-bpo-data-solution-dealing-social-tension>

involve national regulations on conflict data (e.g., privacy safeguards and data-sharing agreements) and mandatory audits of AI models to detect bias.⁶² These guidelines will ensure that the benefits of AI mapping (better warning, more accountability) do not come at the cost of privacy or injustice.

In conclusion, integrating AI into violence mapping holds great promise but also great responsibility. Open-source spatial data can illuminate conflicts at both global and local scales. AI accelerates this process, unlocking insights from vast data streams in near real time. When applied responsibly, AI-powered maps can provide critical early warnings, evidence for accountability, and guidance for humanitarian response. This can potentially save lives and promote peace. However, this potential can only be fully realised with careful governance, continued human oversight, and an unwavering commitment to ethical principles.

⁶² United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence*, adopted 23 November 2021, published 2022, UNESCO, Paris, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381137>

From Land to Sea: Mapping Rohingya Boat Migration and Human Security Risks

Mohammad Atique Rahman⁶³

Kawsar Uddin Mahmud⁶⁴

I. Introduction

The term 'boat people' is an important aspect of migration theory. It is a generic term for migrants seeking to reach their dream countries by water. The term first received media attention in the 1970s. Mass movements of people were recorded in the Southeast Asian countries during the 1970s. Groups of people left the Indo-China region via boat to reach Southeast Asian countries to avoid war and conflict. Approximately 130,000 people escaped Southern Vietnam in early 1975 due to the invasion by the northern forces and the subsequent fall of the southern government.⁶⁵ Many of them were rescued by US forces. Some of them subsequently received new homes in Malaysia and the Philippines. In the late 1970s, the volume of these boat people increased due to increasing tension and war between China and Vietnam. Almost 800,000 Vietnamese escaped Vietnam via boat.⁶⁶ These boat people spread across the region, arriving in Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Singapore, Japan, Macau, Korea, and even Australia.

Many boats that were not built for rough, high seas sank, resulting in many lives lost. They suffered from starvation, and diseases accounted for many deaths on these overcrowded boats. They were

⁶³ Mohammad Atique Rahman, Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka. Email: atique@du.ac.bd

⁶⁴ Kawsar Uddin Mahmud, Lecturer, Department of International Relations, Netrokona University, Netrokona-2400. Email: kawsar@neu.ac.bd

⁶⁵ C. O. Hoang, "From Both Sides of the Fence: Vietnamese Boat People in Hong Kong 1975–2000," August 2018, https://www.academia.edu/112833476/From_Both_Sides_of_the_Fence_Vietnamese_Boat_People_in_Hong_Kong_1975_2000.

⁶⁶ *ibid*

robbed, tortured, murdered, raped and maimed by robbers and human traffickers on the high seas.⁶⁷ Apart from Vietnamese migration by boat, the term has also been widely used to describe irregular migration. For example, in 1975, the *Washington Post* first used the term to refer to the growing number of Haitian refugees who arrived on the Florida coast.⁶⁸ Subsequently, academics, writers, and journalists began using the term to refer to migrants worldwide. In the United States, boat people used to describe people who left communist Cuba throughout the period of 1970–1990s.

From the above examples, it can be said that boat people mostly hail from countries experiencing war, internal conflict, human rights violations, or political and humanitarian crises. These people undertook boat journeys to escape these situations and reach other countries they believed were economically and politically more stable. They chose boats as the mode of travel because they were the only available means to access states that were closed to them due to strict land border controls. At the same time, human traffickers and smugglers prefer to use sea routes for human, arms and drug trafficking. They have loose networks of recruiters, intermediaries, smugglers, local and foreign financiers, government officials, and law-enforcement agencies. A study shows that, on average, 94 per cent of migrants in 2000 entered the EU with the help of human traffickers.⁶⁹ The central motive of boat people is to move across international borders in search of protection as asylum seekers or refugees. The 1951 UN Refugee Convention states that persecution is the central motive for asylum seekers. This is also applicable to refugees. The convention defines a refugee as someone who requires protection “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion”.⁷⁰ Therefore, boat people flee their countries to avoid maltreatment. Employment prospects or wage differentials do not drive their primary motive. Given this context, in

⁶⁷ Carina Hoang, ed., *Boat People: Personal Stories from the Vietnamese Exodus 1975–1996* (New York: Beaufort Books, 2013).

⁶⁸ Karen DeYoung, “U.S. Accused of Denying Rights to Haitian Exiles,” *The Washington Post*, December 22, 1978, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1978/12/22/us-accused-of-denying-rights-to-haitian-exiles/4c04fd96-7362-4fec-b3ab-c058edcf1127/>.

⁶⁹ European Commission, *A Study on Smuggling of Migrants: Characteristics, Responses and Cooperation with Third Countries* (2015), <https://migrationnetwork.un.org/resources/study-smuggling-migrants-characteristics-responses-and-cooperation-third-countries>.

⁷⁰ United Nations, “Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees,” OHCHR, July 28, 1951, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-relating-status-refugees>.

the following section, we will discuss the nature of Asia's new boat people, i.e. the Rohingya, from a human security perspective.

2. Rohingyas as Asia's New Boat People

Although the Rohingyas in Myanmar have been denied their fundamental rights and human rights since the mid-1950s, the issue gained global attention in 1991. Since 1991, the Rohingya's plight has revealed the fact that, as a stateless people, they are among the most persecuted of people in the world. Pressure from their own government has pushed them to sea, on journeys to reach neighbouring countries to save their lives and find better places to live. On several occasions, since 1991, Rohingya people have left their country. There have been several mass exoduses from Myanmar into Bangladesh and beyond—in 1978, 1992, 2012–2013, and most recently in 2017—as a result of organised mass violence against the community in Myanmar. Bangladesh is among the countries to which the largest numbers have fled. For the vast majority, the suffering has not ended upon reaching new shores. Often, these Rohingya migrants are not recognised and protected as refugees, but are marginalised and excluded; many live in poverty, often working illegally with no documentation, and are vulnerable to discrimination, violence, arbitrary treatment, exploitation, and deportation.⁷¹ The sectarian violence in Rakhine State in Myanmar ignited the issue of Asia's new boat people. In 2013, the Thai government reported that over 6,000 Rohingya had arrived since October 2012, but many more are believed to have made the journey during this time⁷². The Arakan Project, which monitors boat movements, estimates that between June 2012 and June 2013, 37,000 people boarded boats from northern Rakhine, Sittwe and Bangladesh.⁷³

The increase in Asia's new boat people corresponds to the heightened crisis in Myanmar's Rakhine State since July 2012. The violence also increased among women and children making the journey. Bangladesh remains a major starting point for the Rohingya boat people. Several reports published that share the experiences of stranded boat people reveal that the Shah Parir Dwip of Teknaf Upazila in Bangladesh, located at the mouth of the Naf River, a maritime boundary

⁷¹ Equal Rights Trust-ERT, "The Human Rights of Stateless Rohingya in Thailand," Refworld, February 2014, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/ert/2014/en/98217>.

⁷² Amy Sawitta Lefevre, "After Burma Violence, Almost 6,000 Rohingyas Arrive in Thailand," *The Irrawaddy*, February 7, 2013, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/asia/after-burma-violence-almost-6000-rohingyas-arrive-in-thailand.html>.

⁷³ Equal Rights Trust-ERT, "The Human Rights of Stateless Rohingya in Thailand."

between Bangladesh and Myanmar, is the departure point for many of them. Rohingya people who took boats to flee Myanmar first reached this place in Bangladesh by crossing the Naf River. From Shah Porir Dwip, they managed to escape to Thailand and other countries later on. Sharing his experience, one Rohingya individual said: “We boarded a boat from the last point of Teknaf at Shah Porir Dwip. We reached a large trawler at sea. It took five days and six nights to reach Thailand.⁷⁴ By sea, these boat people reached Thailand. For them, Thailand was the final destination. Some of them paid more to reach Thailand as a transit point, and from there, go on to Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia (See Annex: I). The influx of the Rohingya people has been dealt with by the host countries with ambiguity and ad hoc measures. Overlooking the deepening ethnic tension in Myanmar, these host countries have adopted three types of inhuman measures. These are:

1. Intercepting boats at sea and preventing them from entering their borders.
2. Adopting brief detention and overland deportation
3. Interception at sea and providing food and water before towing them out to sea.

3. Analysing Boat Migration of Rohingya through Human Security Lenses

The concept of “human security” was first systematically advanced in the United Nations Development Programme’s landmark 1994 Human Development Report, authored under the guidance of Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen.⁷⁵ It reoriented the analytical focus of security studies from the state to the individual. The human security notion recognises seven interdependent dimensions: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security.⁷⁶ The Commission on Human Security, co-chaired by Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen, elaborated on this framework, insisting that human security demands both protecting people from critical and pervasive threats and empowering

⁷⁴ Ruhul Amin, “Displaced Rohingyas at Great Risk of Human Trafficking in Overwhelmed Camps,” 2025, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/displaced-rohingyas-at-great-risk-of-human-trafficking-in-9258108>.

⁷⁵ Alistair D. Edgar, “Chapter 3: Human Security and the United Nations,” in *Research Handbook on International Law and Human Security: Research Handbooks in International Law Series*, ed. Gerd Oberleitner (Elgar Online, 2022), <https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollchap/book/9781800376977/book-part-9781800376977-9.xml>.

⁷⁶ Mary Martin, and Taylor Owen, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Human Security*, First (Routledge, 2015), <https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Handbook-of-Human-Security/Martin-Owen/p/book/9781138183681>.

them to exercise meaningful choices over their own lives.⁷⁷ When applied to Rohingya boat migration, this framework does more than catalogue suffering. It exposes a structural continuum of insecurity that originates in Myanmar, persists through forced encampment in Bangladesh, intensifies during the maritime crossing, and frequently reproduces itself indefinitely in destination countries.

Rohingya boat migration is not a voluntary calculation of opportunity. It is the cumulative consequence of the systematic elimination of the conditions that make a dignified life possible.^{78,79} Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law rendered the Rohingya effectively stateless by excluding them from the list of 135 recognised national races, severing civic and political security at the most fundamental legal level.^{80,81} Rakhine State has consistently registered among the lowest scores on Myanmar's human development indicators, considering the factors of movement restrictions, denial of access to higher education and formal employment, and prohibitions on marriage without official authorisation, characterising daily existence for Rohingya communities long before the 2017 operations.^{82,83,84} These conditions were not incidental policy failures but components of a deliberate pattern designed to make the Rohingya presence in Rakhine State existentially untenable⁸⁵. For many Rohingya, therefore, the

⁷⁷ Commission on Human Security, ed., *Human Security Now: Protecting and Empowering People* (The Commission, 2003), 3–6, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/503749>.

⁷⁸ Aizat Khairi et al., “Navigating Security and Human Rights: The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency’s Response to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis,” *Malaysian Journal of History, Politics & Strategic Studies* 52 (September 2025): 413–30, <https://doi.org/10.17576/jebat.2025.5203.08>

⁷⁹ Hossain Ahmed Taufiq, “Rohingya Refugee Crisis and the State of Insecurity in Bangladesh,” arXiv:2107.12080, preprint, arXiv, July 26, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2107.12080>.

⁸⁰ Nehginpao Kipgen, “Addressing the Rohingya Problem,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 49, no. 2 (2014): 234–47, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909613505269>

⁸¹ Maung Zarni and Alice Cowley, “The Slow-Burning Genocide of Myanmar’s Rohingya,” *Washington International Law Journal* 23, no. 3 (2014): 683–88.

⁸² Mark S. Cogan et al., “The Rohingya: A Perceived Security Threat and the Dominant Issue in Bangladesh–Myanmar Relations,” *Asian Politics & Policy* 17, no. 4 (2025): e70048, <https://doi.org/10.1111/aspp.70048>

⁸³ Syed S. Mahmood et al., “The Rohingya People of Myanmar: Health, Human Rights, and Identity,” *The Lancet* 389, no. 10081 (2017): 1841–50, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)00646-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)00646-2)

⁸⁴ Parveen K. Parmar et al., “Violence and Mortality in the Northern Rakhine State of Myanmar, 2017: Results of a Quantitative Survey of Surviving Community Leaders in Bangladesh,” *The Lancet Planetary Health* 3, no. 3 (2019): e144–53, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196\(19\)30037-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(19)30037-3).

⁸⁵ Cogan et al., “The Rohingya”; Parmar et al., “Violence and Mortality in the Northern Rakhine State of Myanmar, 2017.”

decision to board a boat represents not a choice between safety and risk but a calculation between certain degradation on land and uncertain survival at sea.⁸⁶

Table 1: Yearly Segregation of the Consequences of Rohingya-Related Violence. *Source: Bangladesh Peace Observatory, 2025.*

Year	Incident	Death	Injury	Abduction	Arrest
2016	11	10	1	0	41
2017	65	5	31	3	321
2018	109	21	84	16	341
2019	224	91	82	1	1060
2020	248	77	125	13	760
2021	352	54	91	35	1578
2022	311	46	34	12	2387
2023	186	88	54	22	734
2024	129	40	38	24	360
2025	57	25	29	29	472
Grand Total	1692	457	569	155	8054

In this regard, the empirical weight of this claim is substantiated by incident-level security data compiled by the Bangladesh Peace Observatory (2025) from 2016 to 2025. Over those nine years, a total of 1,692 documented incidents of Rohingya-related violence were recorded, resulting in 457 deaths, 569 injuries, 155 abductions, and 8,054 arrests. The escalation from 11 incidents in 2016 to 224 in 2019, and then to a peak of 352 in 2021, broadly tracks the compounding pressures of camp overcrowding, gang proliferation inside Cox’s Bazar, and the renewed armed conflict in Rakhine State that followed the February 2021 military coup in Myanmar. That 2021 also recorded the highest single-year arrest total of 1,578 individuals reflects not simply a deterioration in personal security but the emergence of organised

⁸⁶ Khairi et al., “Navigating Security and Human Rights”; Taufiq, “Rohingya Refugee Crisis and the State of Insecurity in Bangladesh.”

violence networks operating within and around the camps.⁸⁷ The partial decline in incident numbers after 2022, which might superficially suggest improvement, is more plausibly read as a statistical artefact of reduced reporting access following restrictions on humanitarian organisations, rather than a genuine reduction in insecurity. In addition, seven Rohingya people died after a migrant boat sank near the Thai-Malaysian border during their risky boat migration.⁸⁸ Taken together, these figures portray a systematic pattern that renders continued residence in Bangladesh an exercise in endurance rather than protection, and that materially explains why departure by sea remains a calculated, if desperate, option for a growing share of the encamped population.⁸⁹⁹⁰

The 2015 Andaman Sea crisis is still viewed as the most concentrated single illustration of what human insecurity at sea actually looks like in practice. Between January and May of that year, an estimated 25,000 Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants departed on vessels facilitated by trafficking networks; after Thai authorities disrupted land-based smuggling routes in May, regional states refused disembarkation, leaving thousands adrift for several weeks.⁹¹ The UNHCR documented acute food and water deprivation aboard these vessels, physical violence inflicted by captains on passengers, and deaths from dehydration and untreated illness.⁹² Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and other organisations independently verified accounts of passengers coerced into debt servitude mid-voyage.⁹³ This exhibited the simultaneous collapse of all seven human security dimensions: personal security negated by coercion

⁸⁷ United Nations, “UN Expert Underscores Importance of Human Rights for Rohingya | UN News,” December 19, 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/12/1108392>.

⁸⁸ André Rhoden-Paul and Kelly Ng, “Seven Dead after Migrant Boat Sinks near Thai-Malaysian Border,” November 10, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd7rp5zj484o>.

⁸⁹ Hanh Nguyen and Themba Lewis, “Andaman Sea: As Movements from Myanmar and Bangladesh Resume, Safe Routes Are Needed to Avoid Another Crisis |,” Mixed Migration Centre, August 22, 2022, <https://mixedmigration.org/articles/andaman-sea-myanmar-bangladesh-safe-routes-needed-to-avoid-another-crisis/>

⁹⁰ Rhoden-Paul and Ng, “Seven Dead after Migrant Boat Sinks near Thai-Malaysian Border.”

⁹¹ BBC, “‘Thousands’ of Rohingya and Bangladeshi Migrants Stranded at Sea,” Asia, *BBC News*, May 11, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-32686328>; Peter Hughes et al., “The Andaman Sea Refugee Crisis a Year on: What Happened and How Did the Region Respond?,” *The Conversation*, May 25, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.64628/AA.knhanxnu3>.

⁹² UNHCR, “UNHCR Urges States to Act Now to Save Lives in the Andaman Sea,” UNHCR, December 23, 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press-releases/unhcr-urges-states-act-now-save-lives-andaman-sea>.

⁹³ Amnesty International, “Southeast Asia: Deadly Journeys - The Refugee and Trafficking Crisis in Southeast Asia,” *Amnesty International*, October 21, 2015, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa21/2574/2015/en/>.

and crew violence; food security by deliberate starvation; health security by total absence of medical infrastructure; and political security by the categorical refusal of regional governments to recognise any protection obligation.⁹⁴

The post-2017 surge in maritime departures introduced a qualitatively distinct dynamic. Following military operations in Rakhine State that the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission marked as bearing the hallmarks of genocidal intent,⁹⁵ the departure pool shifted from a mixed population of economic migrants and refugees to an overwhelmingly encamped population. By 2025, the Cox's Bazar complex housed over 1.2 million registered refugees in some of the most densely settled terrain on earth. Conditions within Cox's Bazar constitute, in themselves, a chronic human security failure.⁹⁶ Bangladesh government policy prohibits the Rohingya from formal employment, enrolment in national schools, and free movement beyond camp perimeters. When the World Food Programme reduced monthly food rations by approximately 17 per cent in early 2023 due to severe funding shortfalls, the material foundations of food security for nearly a million people deteriorated further.⁹⁷ These cumulative deprivations created the structural conditions for onward maritime movement rather than resolving them.

The crossing itself functions as an extreme concentrator of vulnerability. Small boats depart from various locations in Teknaf (including Sabrang, Katabania, and Hariakhali) and Ukhia (Badamtoli). Passengers are often transferred to larger, overcrowded vessels near Saint Martin's Island for the long voyage across the Bay of Bengal.⁹⁸ Fees vary based on the destination and the level of "service." While initial boarding fees can be low, total costs often reach USD 2,300 to USD 3,000. Some reports cite an

⁹⁴ Bríd Ní Ghráinne, *The 2015 Andaman Sea Boat 'Crisis': Human Rights and Refugee Law Considerations* (Brill, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004326873_007.

⁹⁵ United Nations, "Head of Human Rights Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar Urges Security Council to Ensure Accountability for Serious Violations against Rohingya," UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, October 24, 2018, <https://press.un.org/en/2018/sc13552.doc.htm>.

⁹⁶ Norwegian Refugee Council, "Eight Things You Should Know about the Rohingya Crisis in Bangladesh," NRC, September 15, 2025, <https://stories.nrc.no/eight-things-you-should-know-about-the-rohingya-crisis-in-bangladesh/>.

⁹⁷ World Food Programme, "Lack of Funds Forces WFP to Cut Rations for Rohingya in Bangladesh," February 17, 2023, <https://www.wfp.org/news/lack-funds-forces-wfp-cut-rations-rohingya-bangladesh>.

⁹⁸ Rowlatt, "Bangladeshi Boat Migrants Doomed from the Start," *Asia*, BBC News, May 28, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-32918219>.

average cost of approximately USD 2,544 per person for the full journey to Malaysia.⁹⁹ However, traffickers frequently hold passengers for ransom mid-journey, demanding additional payments of up to £3,000 (~USD 3,700) from relatives before allowing the boat to continue or disembark.¹⁰⁰¹⁰¹ By the way, boat departures from Bangladesh tripled in the first half of 2025 compared to the previous year. Between January and March 2025 alone, over 1,200 sea or river journeys were documented.¹⁰² On January 3, 2026, the Bangladesh Navy intercepted a wooden boat near Saint Martin's Island carrying 273 Rohingya, including women and children, who were attempting to reach Malaysia.¹⁰³ In April 2025, another 214 Rohingya were arrested 44 kilometres from Saint Martin's while crossing the Bay of Bengal. The 2025 "sailing season" has been one of the deadliest on record, with nearly 1 in 5 people attempting these journeys reported dead or missing. Boats are often overcrowded, lack navigation equipment, and carry insufficient food and water.¹⁰⁴¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ Kaamil Ahmed and Verena Hölzl, "Death, Abuse and Torture: Traffickers Hold Fleeing Rohingya to Ransom for up to £3,000 a Time," Global Development, *The Guardian*, March 5, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2024/mar/05/death-abuse-and-torture-traffickers-hold-fleeing-rohingya-to-ransom-for-up-to-3000-a-time>.

¹⁰⁰ Nazmun Naher Shishir, "Human Traffickers Prey on Rohingya Refugees," *Dialogue Earth*, February 2, 2021, <https://dialogue.earth/en/justice/human-traffickers-prey-on-rohingya-refugees/>;

¹⁰¹ UNODC Observatory, "MIGRANT SMUGGLING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA," ArcGIS StoryMaps, May 22, 2024, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/24c172302ab64ad0b786ee16fa8e601c>.

¹⁰² Save the Children, "Number of Rohingya Refugees Leaving Bangladesh by Boat Tripled in First Half of 2025, Including at Least 87 Children," Save the Children International, October 15, 2025, <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/number-rohingya-refugees-leaving-bangladesh-boat-tripled-first-half-2025-including-least-87>.

¹⁰³ Hafizur Rahman, "Bangladesh Navy Arrests 273 Rohingya Attempting to Reach Malaysia by Sea," *Rohingya Khobor*, January 4, 2026, <https://rohingyakhobor.com/bangladesh-navy-arrests-273-rohingya-attempting-to-reach-malaysia-by-sea/>.

¹⁰⁴ Shayna Bauchner, *10 Years of Rohingya Refugees Stranded at Sea*, Human Rights Watch, May 26, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/05/26/10-years-rohingya-refugees-stranded-sea>;

¹⁰⁵ Obaidur Chowdhury, "Rohingya Sea Deaths Hit Decade High as Trafficking Rings Exploit Despair," Bay of Bengal Post, November 17, 2025, https://bayofbengalpost.com/news/rohingya_sea_deaths_2025_decade_high_trafficking.

Table 2: Human Trafficking Trend Analysis—Rohingya Issue (2017–2025).¹⁰⁶

Year	Incident	Death	Injury	Abduction	Arrest
2017	4	0	0	1	36
2018	8	0	0	10	70
2019	21	2	4	0	207
2020	10	0	0	0	47
2021	18	0	0	2	284
2022	13	0	0	0	203
2023	5	0	0	0	11
2024	1	0	0	0	17
2025	1	0	0	0	1
Grand Total	81	2	4	13	876

If we go through the data of Bangladesh Peace Observatory,¹⁰⁷ we discern that between 2017 and 2025, security forces documented 81 trafficking incidents directly linked to the Rohingya issue, generating 876 arrests and recording 13 abductions and 4 injuries among intercepted persons. The year 2019 registered the highest single-year count of 21 incidents and 207 arrests, a figure that coincides with the progressive deterioration of camp conditions in the two years following the 2017 influx, when the initial humanitarian response began to contract and funding shortfalls started to accumulate. A secondary rise is visible in 2021, with 18 incidents and 284 arrests, tracking closely with the combination of the Myanmar coup, renewed Rakhine displacement, and the WFP ration reduction cycle. The declining incident numbers from 2023 onward, however, do not signal a weakening of the underlying networks. The main takeaway is that these 876 arrests are just the tip of the iceberg of a massive smuggling network. This network continues to thrive because the root causes making people desperate enough to flee by sea—such as statelessness, being physically trapped, and living in extreme poverty—have not been fixed yet.

¹⁰⁶ BPO. See, <http://peaceobservatory-ca.org/#/>. Accessed on 03 January 2026.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*

However, destination countries have failed to provide the safety promised by international law. Malaysia, the main intended destination, lacks domestic refugee laws and often subjects Rohingya migrants to indefinite detention.¹⁰⁸¹⁰⁹ Indonesia and Thailand alternate between temporarily accepting refugees and forcing their boats away—a practice legal scholars argue violates the 1951 Refugee Convention’s rule against returning people to danger.¹¹⁰ Because the ASEAN bloc avoids interfering in its members’ domestic affairs, there is no regional refugee policy, creating what might be called a “protection vacuum.”¹¹¹ Even when refugees are temporarily accepted, they are left in a permanent legal limbo without the right to work or gain legal status.¹¹²¹¹³

Viewing this issue through a “human security” framework shows that these are not separate emergencies, but a continuous cycle of vulnerability. The crisis begins with a lack of citizenship and persecution in Myanmar. It worsens in Bangladesh, where long-term refugee camps erode human dignity without offering a permanent solution. The dangerous ocean crossing then adds severe, life-threatening risks. Finally, because destination countries have strict policies, surviving the boat journey does not necessarily guarantee safety. Throughout this entire system, Rohingya refugees are durably denied their basic rights to live without fear and without poverty.

¹⁰⁸ Anas Ansar, *Rohingyas and the Geographies of Precarity in Exile: Everyday Life in Bangladesh and Malaysia*, vol. 22 (Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2025), <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=FTaUEQAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=Malaysia,+no+domestic+refugee+law+regard+Rohingya+migrants+to+indefinite+detention+&ots=qmboJvLZWx&sig=opjMh7P3JscphHsol0Rihvt4dpc>;

¹⁰⁹ Mohd Ramlan Mohd Arshad et al., “A Plea for Refugee Human Rights in Malaysia: An Examination Using Statistical Technique,” *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work* 10, no. 3 (2025): 513–25, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-025-00369-9>.

¹¹⁰ Tin Maung Htwe, “Analysing ASEAN’s Responses to the Rohingya Crisis: Diplomatic Forays and Humanitarian Initiatives Amidst Pre- and Post-Coup Scenarios in Myanmar,” in *Scattered Lives of ‘Stateless’ People: The Rohingyas in SAARC & ASEAN Countries*, ed. Nasir Uddin (Springer Nature, 2025), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-9821-9_9.

¹¹¹ Agusmidah Agusmidah et al., “ASEAN’s Migrant Rights Policy Dilemma and Deadlock on Migrant Worker Protection,” *Journal of Human Rights, Culture and Legal System* 5, no. 3 (2025): 714–48, <https://doi.org/10.53955/jhcls.v5i3.581>.

¹¹² Aslam Abd Jalil, “Rohingya Refugees in Klang Valley, Malaysia: Permanent (Im)Mobility?,” *Mobilities* 0, no. 0 (2026): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2026.2628104>;

¹¹³ Gerhard Hoffstaedter and Louise Perrodin, “Life in Limbo: Refugees in Malaysia,” in *Illusions of Democracy* (Routledge, 2019).

4. Policies and Practices of Key Regional States

The geopolitical landscape governing Rohingya maritime displacement is defined less by the normative frameworks of international humanitarian law and more by a rigid adherence to Westphalian sovereignty and the volatility of domestic populism.¹¹⁴ Within the primary littoral and transit states—Myanmar, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia—the governing paradigm is one of profound inconsistency. Regional policy frequently oscillates between fleeting philanthropic interventions and systemic deterrence. Alchatib,¹¹⁵ Khan, Kontinen,¹¹⁶ and Marsh¹¹⁷ termed this instability as a fragmented “patchwork of ad hoc responses”, a direct consequence of the total absence of a unified regional protection architecture. Ultimately, these uncoordinated strategies do not merely fail to mitigate the crisis; they actively sustain the hazardous cycle of displacement and maritime peril that has become a recurring feature of the Bay of Bengal's security environment.

4.1. Myanmar

Myanmar's central role in catalysing these migrations transcends mere operational neglect; it is rooted in a deliberate architecture of institutionalised exclusion. The 1982 Citizenship Law is the cornerstone of this disenfranchisement¹¹⁸. By mandating proof of residence before 1823, the statute effectively created a condition of mass statelessness. This legislative manoeuvre transformed the Rohingya into a vulnerable underclass, subject to state-sanctioned extortion, forced labour, and arbitrary detention¹¹⁹. While the 2015 National Verification Card (NVC) scheme was presented as a pathway to documentation, it

¹¹⁴ Moinuddin Zahangir et al., “Global and Regional Migration Frameworks: A Case Study on the Rohingya Displacement,” *Religion and Policy Journal* 3, no. 2 (2025): 115–26, <https://doi.org/10.15575/rpj.v3i2.2910>.

¹¹⁵ S. R. Alchatib, “Reinventing the Regional Humanitarian Order: Responses to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis from the UNHCR, ASEAN and South Asia,” in *Marginalisation and Human Rights in Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 2022), 67–83.

¹¹⁶ A. K. Khan and T. Kontinen, “Impediments to Localization Agenda: Humanitarian Space in the Rohingya Response in Bangladesh,” *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 7, no. 1 (2022): 14.

¹¹⁷ J. Marsh, “Promoting Regional Responses to Rohingya Displacement in Southeast Asia,” Mixed Migration Centre, 2023, https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/287_PRRiA-Discussion-Paper.pdf.

¹¹⁸ Md. Mahbubul Haque, “Rohingya Ethnic Muslim Minority and the 1982 Citizenship Law in Burma,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 37, no. 4 (2017): 454–69, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2017.1399600>.

¹¹⁹ Kunal Debnath et al., “Natural Resources and Ethnic Conflict: A Geo-Strategic Understanding of the Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar,” *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations* 26, no. 2 (2022): 186–207, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09735984221120309>.

functioned primarily as a mechanism of erasure.¹²⁰ By requiring individuals to self-identify as “Bengali,” the state forced a choice between total exclusion and the acceptance of a label that solidified their status as foreign interlopers.¹²¹

The military’s 2017 “clearance operations” were a violent acceleration of this exclusionary logic.¹²² As granular satellite imagery and UN investigations have confirmed, the systematic razing of over 350 villages was followed by the rapid construction of security outposts and state-planned infrastructure on the scorched earth. The 2021 military putsch further compounded the crisis by decimating the fragile civilian conduits necessary for repatriation negotiations.¹²³ With armed conflict intensifying across Rakhine State, the region has witnessed a surge in secondary displacement waves and a renewed desperation for maritime escape throughout 2022 and 2023.¹²⁴ In 2025 alone, an estimated 1,50,000 new Rohingya have arrived in Bangladesh, putting further strains on Bangladesh.¹²⁵

4.2. Bangladesh

Bangladesh has sought to share its fair share of the humanitarian burden in numerical terms while simultaneously building a policy environment that supports durable solutions. The state’s 2017 decision to permit the ingress of over 700,000 arrivals within a matter of weeks was an act of profound

¹²⁰ Gabrielle K. Frawley, “Digital Refoulement or Preservation of the Right to a Safe and Voluntary Return? Release of Rohingya Data to Myanmar with Dubious Consent,” *Washburn LJ* 62 (2022): 97.

¹²¹ Muhammad Asaduzzaman Noor, *The Genesis of Rohingya Statelessness and Justice Pathways for Rohingya Refugees*, 2025, <https://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/search/publication/9204206>.

¹²² United Nations, *THE DESTRUCTION AND DISPOSSESSION OF ROHINGYA LAND AND PROPERTY DURING THE 2017 CLEARANCE OPERATIONS - PUBLIC SUMMARY* (United Nations, 2025), 1–29, <https://iimm.un.org/sites/default/files/2025/09/Land%20Report%20Public%20Summary%20EN.pdf>.

¹²³ Kawsar Uddin Mahmud, “Where Does the Resistance Movement in Myanmar Stand?,” *South Asian Voices (Stimson Center)*, May 15, 2023; Kawsar Uddin Mahmud, “The Rohingya Repatriation to Myanmar: The Relevance of the Trilateral Diplomacy,” *The Geopolitics*, October 8, 2023, <https://thegeopolitics.com/the-rohingya-repatriation-to-myanmar-the-relevance-of-the-trilateral-diplomacy/>.

¹²⁴ Mohammad Atique Rahman and Kawsar Uddin Mahmud, “The Stranded Million: Rohingyas in Bangladesh and Their Repatriation,” *CA Peace Report 2024* (Dhaka: Bangladesh Peace Observatory, 2024), 23–39.

¹²⁵ The Daily Star, “1.5 Lakh Rohingyas Arrived in Months,” May 20, 2025, <https://www.thedailystar.net/rohingya-influx/news/15-lakh-rohingyas-arrived-months-3899611>.

humanitarianism, yet it was equally informed by strategic regional positioning.¹²⁶ For the reason that Dhaka has refrained from ratifying the 1951 Refugee Convention or its subsequent 1967 Protocol, the Rohingya population in Cox’s Bazar occupies a legal vacuum. In this context, protection has been a matter of executive discretion rather than codified right, governed primarily by the Bangladesh Standing Orders on Disasters (SOD) 2019. The SOD 2019 provided a framework for integrating camp management with local government (Union/District Disaster Management Committees) structures in Cox’s Bazar to manage floods, landslides, and cyclones.¹²⁷

In this respect, this precarious legal status is exacerbated by chronic financial instability. The Joint Response Plan, managed by the UNHCR and the Inter-Sector Coordination Group, has faced persistent resource deficits, meeting only 56% of its budgetary requirements in 2022 and 63% in 2023.¹²⁸¹²⁹ Such shortfalls have institutionalised significant gaps in essential services, particularly within health, education, and livelihood sectors. Simultaneously, the government’s promotion of Bhasan Char—a low-lying silt island over 60 kilometres offshore—as a viable relocation site has invited intense international scrutiny. However, critics argue that the transfer of over 30,000 individuals to this flood-prone environment is driven by an imperative for spatial containment rather than genuine human security.¹³⁰ Independent monitors further suggest that the conditions on Bhasan Char severely restrict freedom of movement and access to vital services. Ultimately, Dhaka’s steadfast refusal to integrate stems from acute resource

¹²⁶ United Nations, “UN Human Rights Chief Points to ‘Textbook Example of Ethnic Cleansing’ in Myanmar | UN News,” September 11, 2017, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/09/564622-un-human-rights-chief-points-textbook-example-ethnic-cleansing-myanmar>.

¹²⁷ Govt. of Bangladesh, “Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh - Standing Orders on Disaster 2019 - Bangladesh,” ReliefWeb, November 2, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/government-people-s-republic-bangladesh-standing-orders-disaster-2019>.

¹²⁸ BSS, “UNHCR, Partners Seek \$876m for Rohingyas, Host Communities,” The Business Standard, March 7, 2023, <https://www.tbsnews.net/rohingya-crisis/unhcr-partners-seek-876m-rohingyas-host-communities-595934>;

¹²⁹ ReliefWeb, “Bangladesh: Rohingya Refugee Response | Urgent Priorities: Addressing the Most Pressing Needs of the Joint Response Plan (June - December 2025) - Bangladesh,” July 29, 2025, <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/bangladesh-rohingya-refugee-response-urgent-priorities-addressing-most-pressing-needs-joint-response-plan-june-december-2025>.

¹³⁰ Md. Didarul Islam and Ayesha Siddika, “Implications of the Rohingya Relocation from Cox’s Bazar to Bhasan Char, Bangladesh,” *International Migration Review* 56, no. 4 (2022): 1195–205, <https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183211064829>; Tazreena Sajjad, “The Curious Case of Bhasan Char: Island Relocation and the Politics of Refugee Containment in the ‘Global South,’” *Migration Politics* 4, no. 1 (2025): 006, <https://doi.org/10.21468/MigPol.4.1.006>.

scarcity and the sociopolitical sensitivity of the Bengali-Rohingya demographic interface. This stance serves as strategic leverage in international burden-sharing negotiations.

4.3. Malaysia

Malaysia occupies a paradoxical position as the preeminent destination for Rohingya maritime migrants. Yet, its statutory landscape remains among the most adversarial in Southeast Asia regarding formalised protection. Crucially, Kuala Lumpur is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and possesses no indigenous asylum legislation.¹³¹ Consequently, all undocumented arrivals are categorised under the Immigration Act 1959/63. This act is regarded as a blunt instrument that mandates detention, corporal punishment (caning), and deportation without regard for individual protection exigencies.¹³² Although the UNHCR has operated under a memorandum of understanding since 2008, its status remains precarious. While the agency performs refugee status determination in a quasi-official capacity, its recognition documents lack statutory authority; thus, they offer no legal immunity from the predations of immigration enforcement.¹³³

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic catalysed a sharp escalation in this structural exclusion. In April 2020, the Malaysian navy intercepted and forcibly repelled a vessel containing over 200 Rohingya.¹³⁴ Malaysia intensified its “push-back” efforts, citing public health concerns. In January 2025, Malaysian authorities confirmed the expulsion of two boats ferrying approximately 300 undocumented migrants (mostly Rohingya) from Myanmar from the country’s territorial waters. In November 2025, a group of approximately 300 Rohingya who departed from the Myanmar-Bangladesh border were split into smaller

¹³¹ Patrícia Nabuco Martuscelli et al., “‘Resettlement Is Worthwhile for Our Children’s Future’: Reflections from the Stateless Rohingya Refugees in Malaysia,” *Comparative Migration Studies* 12, no. 1 (2024): 46, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-024-00407-x>.

¹³² Gerhard Hoffstaedter and Aslam Abd Jalil, “The (Un) Official Refugee Protection Regimes in Malaysia What Is the Way Forward?,” *Refugee Protection in Southeast Asia*, 2024, 159.

¹³³ Aslam Abd Jalil and Gerhard Hoffstaedter, “Refugee Registration Schemes in Malaysia: Governing Refugees by Maintaining the Status Quo and Reinforcing Borders,” *Migration and Society* 7, no. 1 (2024): 46–61.

¹³⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Malaysia: Allow Rohingya Refugees Ashore*, April 18, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/18/malaysia-allow-rohingya-refugees-ashore>.

vessels to avoid detection. One boat carrying about 70 people capsized off the coast of Langkawi, resulting in at least 21 confirmed deaths.¹³⁵¹³⁶

This manoeuvre, which was marked as a potential violation of non-refoulement principles, drew sharp condemnation from both Amnesty International and the UNHCR¹³⁷. This period of crisis also witnessed intensified immigration raids and a surge in digital xenophobia. Public discourse on social media platforms amplified hostile narratives, generating documented threats to the physical safety of displaced communities. Nevertheless, Malaysia is still the preferred terminus for many. The resilience of established diaspora networks continues to provide access to informal labour markets and social capital—vital resources that other regional neighbours do not offer.

4.4. Thailand

Thailand is a particularly complex case because it functions simultaneously as a transit country, an interception zone, and an irregular destination. In Thailand’s “push-back architecture, the navy and marine police often employ a “help on” policy, where intercepted Rohingya boats are provided with basic supplies—fuel, water, and food—before being towed or directed back into international waters toward Indonesia or Malaysia. However, the Thai Navy frequently intercepts vessels in the Andaman Sea. Since Thailand is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, it often treats Rohingya as “illegal entrants” rather than asylum seekers.¹³⁸¹³⁹

Following the 2015 discovery of mass graves in Songkhla province, Thai authorities dismantled major trafficking networks and convicted dozens, including high-ranking officials, under the Anti-

¹³⁵ Amnesty International, “Malaysia: Migrant Boat Tragedy Highlights Worsening Plight of Rohingya,” *Amnesty International*, November 10, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/11/malaysia-migrant-boat-tragedy-highlights-worsening-plight-of-rohingya/>

¹³⁶ Lyndal Rowlands, “Refugee Boat Sinks near Malaysia, Thailand; 21 Dead, Search Continues,” *Al Jazeera*, November 11, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/11/11/21-dead-search-continues-after-refugee-boat-sinks-near-malaysia-thailand>.

¹³⁷ Amnesty International, “Malaysia.”

¹³⁸ Fortify Rights, “Thailand: Prevent the Detention of Rohingya Refugees and Survivors of Human Trafficking,” *Fortify Rights*, June 12, 2019, <https://www.fortifyrights.org/tha-inv-2019-06-12/>;

¹³⁹ Sunai Phasuk, *Thailand Needs to Stop Inhumane Navy “Push-Backs,”* Human Rights Watch, September 22, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/22/thailand-needs-stop-inhumane-navy-push-backs>.

Trafficking in Persons Act 2008. These prosecutions, including the sentencing of Lt. Gen. Manas Kongpan, addressed the network responsible for holding Rohingya and Bangladeshi nationals in jungle camps. Lt. Gen. Kongpan was among more than 60 people who were convicted in Bangkok of trafficking Bangladeshis and Rohingya Muslims.¹⁴⁰ These enforcement actions disrupted the land-based route but displaced migration flows rather than reducing them. Thailand's practice of pushing back vessels intercepted within its maritime jurisdiction has been documented periodically since 2009. The formal policy position, which involves providing fuel and supplies before directing boats onward, has been challenged by legal scholars as incompatible with customary international law obligations of non-refoulement that apply to states irrespective of Convention ratification status.¹⁴¹ Thailand has repeatedly resisted moves within the Bali Process toward binding protection commitments, preferring declarations of cooperative intent that generate no enforceable obligations.

4.5. Indonesia

Indonesia's entanglement with Rohingya maritime arrivals gives rise to a fundamental tension, lodged between the imperatives of domestic Islamic solidarity politics and an institutional aversion to assuming formal protection responsibilities.¹⁴²¹⁴³ The 2015 crisis was revelatory. Indonesian fishermen, defying explicit government directives, towed stranded vessels ashore along the coast of Aceh province, an act of spontaneous humanitarian defiance that drew considerable domestic and international media scrutiny and ultimately compelled Jakarta to sanction the temporary admission of approximately 1,800 individuals.¹⁴⁴ Since that precipitating episode, however, Indonesia has navigated an unsteady course, vacillating between provisional humanitarian accommodation for vessels in demonstrable distress and

¹⁴⁰ BBC, "Thailand General Jailed for Human Trafficking at Mass Trial," July 19, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-40652012>.

¹⁴¹ Hassan Al Imran, *The Plight of Boat Refugees to Thailand*, May 12, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718115-bja10081>.

¹⁴² Zezen Zainul Ali et al., "Navigating Social Piety and State Stability in Indonesia's Response to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis," *Human Rights in the Global South (HRGS)* 3, no. 2 (2024): 189–208;

¹⁴³ Ann Marie Murphy, *Islam in Indonesian Foreign Policy: The Limits of Muslim Solidarity for the Rohingya and Uighurs* (JSTOR, 2022), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep27633.pdf>.

¹⁴⁴ M. Yakub Aiyub Kadir et al., "The Interplay of Human Trafficking and the Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Aceh Province, Indonesia: Exploring the Complexities of Criminality and Humanitarian Concerns," *Jurnal IUS Kajian Hukum Dan Keadilan* 12, no. 1 (2024): 122–45.

increasingly assertive maritime pushback operations.¹⁴⁵ This volatility reached a particular inflexion point during 2023, when successive large vessels carrying several hundred Rohingya made landfall sequentially on Acehese beaches.¹⁴⁶ In late 2023, a significant surge of Rohingya refugees made landfall in Indonesia's Aceh province, with 1,543 individuals arriving on nine boats between mid-November and mid-December alone. This influx marked the largest wave of arrivals since the 2015 Andaman Sea crisis, characterised by successive large vessels landing on Acehese beaches.¹⁴⁷ Compounding these operational instabilities is a deeper structural deficit: Indonesia is party to neither the 1951 Refugee Convention nor its 1967 Protocol and possesses no domestic asylum framework whatsoever. This legislative lacuna has preserved considerable executive flexibility, yet it has simultaneously engendered chronic legal insecurity for every cohort admitted under an ad hoc dispensation.

5. The Way Forward

Given the protracted nature of Rohingya displacement in Myanmar and Bangladesh, the Rohingyas' movement across the region via sea routes is of a different magnitude, considering the thousands of lives at risk, the hundreds of deaths at sea, the involvement of smugglers, and the ambiguous behaviour of the concerned countries regarding acceptance of migrants and their protection. It is an irony that none of the Rohingya hosting countries, i.e. Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, are signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention, nor its 1967 Protocol. In 2015, then-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon urged these countries to open their sea borders to help the boat people. He also urged Myanmar's authorities to stop persecution against them. He urged the local authorities of host countries to be responsive in providing assistance and aid and to respect the international norm against expelling prospective refugees. Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, the major nations dealing with these boat people, were thus urged to move away from the cold-hearted policies of pushing back this new wave of boat people and putting thousands of lives at further risk.

¹⁴⁵ Muammar Hanif, "The Impact of Indonesia's Refugee Policy 2016-2023: The Rohingya Refugees" (PhD Thesis, Flinders University, College of Business, Government and Law., 2023), <https://flex.flinders.edu.au/file/5fc94cac-8af7-4a38-b7c8-db50052dd648/1/HanifThesis2023.pdf>.

¹⁴⁶ Aisyah Llewellyn, "Indonesia Faces New Refugee Crisis as Rohingya Boat Pushed Back to Sea," Al Jazeera, November 17, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/17/indonesia-faces-new-refugee-crisis-as-rohingya-boat-pushed-back-to-sea>.

¹⁴⁷ HuiYin Chuah and Jennifer Vallentine, "Rohingya Refugees and the Shifting Tide in Indonesia," January 23, 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/01/rohingya-refugees-and-the-shifting-tide-in-indonesia/>.

There is a need to work together and mobilise regional and international support to rescue these desperate people, provide humanitarian aid, assist with processing claims, and provide resettlement places for those in need of international protection. However, the actual response was ambiguous and frustrating. For example, Malaysia, the second largest Muslim nation in the world, refused to welcome any stranded Rohingya boat people due to security reasons. The Malaysian former Deputy Home Minister, Wan Junaidi Jafaar, said: “We have been very nice to the people who broke into our border. We have treated them humanely, but they cannot be flooding our shores like this”.¹⁴⁸ After renewed requests from the international community, Malaysia and Indonesia agreed in 2015 to help bring the rickety boats ashore. However, they issued an official statement that the humanitarian assistance was only temporary. These two countries decided not to push back the boat people into the sea, instead opting to bring them ashore and later set up temporary shelters for them. The action seems to be in line with international humanitarian law. However, both countries also made a clear statement that the international community could not expect Malaysia and Indonesia to deal with this problem again if there was another influx in the future.¹⁴⁹

The Rohingya crisis has originated in Myanmar, but this is no longer only an internal matter of Myanmar. It has evolved rapidly and explicitly with regional implications. The crisis is now associated with uncontrolled refugee spill-overs and the spread of transnational crime syndicates involved in human trafficking. In this regard, the role of ASEAN is critically important to resolve the crisis. However, ASEAN has maintained a strict policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of its member countries. Myanmar has been a member of ASEAN since 1997. Although the Rohingya crisis originated in Myanmar through its systemic persecutions against the Rohingyas, due to the 1976 guiding principle of non-intervention of the ASEAN charter, member countries could not even adopt any verbal condemnation against the Myanmar government for their crimes against humanity against the Rohingyas. ASEAN can mobilise its members to activate the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime. The Bali Process is a voluntary, non-binding process with 49 members, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Office on Drugs

¹⁴⁸ Associated Press, “Malaysia and Thailand Turn Away Hundreds on Migrant Boats,” World News, *The Guardian*, May 14, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/14/malaysia-turns-back-migrant-boat-with-more-than-500-aboard>.

¹⁴⁹ Lucy Westcott, “Indonesia and Malaysia Agree to Shelter Migrants,” *Newsweek*, May 20, 2015, <https://www.newsweek.com/indonesia-and-malaysia-agree-take-rohingya-and-bangladeshi-boat-migrants-334037>.

and Crime (UNODC), and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).¹⁵⁰ The main principles of the Bali Process are:¹⁵¹

- promote human life and dignity;
- seek to build capacity to process mixed flows and, where appropriate, utilise available resources;
- reflect principles of burden sharing and collective responsibility while respecting sovereignty and the national security of concerned States;
- seek to address the root causes of irregular movement and promote population stabilisation wherever possible;
- promote orderly, legal migration and provide appropriate opportunities for regular migration;
- avoid creating pull factors to or within the region;
- undermine the people smuggling model and create disincentives for irregular movement, and may include, in appropriate circumstances, transfer and readmission;
- support and promote increased information exchange while respecting confidentiality and upholding the privacy of affected persons.

The Bali Process can be taken into consideration in urging all ASEAN member countries to push for a solution for the Rohingya boat people. The Bali Process can also be applied to investigate the root causes of irregular migration of the Rohingya from Myanmar. If this can be applied accordingly, the Myanmar authorities can be held accountable for their actions against the Rohingyas and may help in ending their forced migrations in the future. Until the protection gap at the regional level is addressed through mechanisms that distribute responsibility equitably and vest rights in displaced persons rather than discretion in receiving states, Rohingya boat migration will persist as a predictable, structurally generated phenomenon rather than an exceptional humanitarian emergency.

¹⁵⁰ Migration Protection Platform, “The Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime,” Migrant Protection Platform, 2014, <https://migrantprotection.iom.int/en/resources/guideline/bali-process-people-smuggling-trafficking-persons-and-related-transnational>.

¹⁵¹ *ibid*

Bangladeshi and Rohingya trafficking routes



Annex

Some definitional clarification according to the BPO Codebook.

Gunfight. Shootout between the law enforcement agencies and criminals, militants, or other irregular forces, including amongst the latter, that does not match the definition of a non-state armed group.

Clash. Two-sided violence between groups, outside of the context of war or insurgency. Example: supporters of rival political parties fight each other.

Assault. One-sided violence by an individual or small group against another individual or small group. Example: stabbing or shooting of someone by a perpetrator

Fight. Two-sided violence between individuals or small groups. Example: brawl between 3-4 people.

Sexual assault. One-sided sexual violence, such as rape or attempted rape, by an individual or small group against another individual or small group.

Destruction of property. One-sided violence perpetrated with the intent of damaging property. Examples: vandalism, arson.

Mob violence (large group assault). One-sided violence by a mob or large group against an individual or a comparatively small and/or defenceless group. Examples: lynching of a thief, looting of shops and houses owned by a religious minority

