

# CA PEACE REPORT

*an initiative of BPO*

Centre for  
**ALTERNATIVES**  
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**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**

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*an initiative of*  
**BPO- Bangladesh Peace Observatory**



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## From the Editor's Desk

Extortion is as old as civilisation. Humans fight over resources and coerce others to submit and gain advantages. The abduction of Sita in the epic *Ramayana* is a classic example. I am not sure how much it was for Ravana's love or lust for Sita, but the abduction seems to be an outcome of revenge and for containing Rama's power. The story is worth narrating, and the story begins with Ravana's sister, Shurpanakha, who suffered mutilation or, more precisely, got her nose and ears cut off at the hands of Lakshmana, the brother of Rama, when she tried to attack Sita out of jealousy for failing to seduce Rama and seeing Rama's commitment to Sita. However, Ravana sends his brother, Maricha, as a deer to entice Sita and take revenge. Maricha succeeds in fooling Sita to the point that she requests Rama to kill the deer. But when Rama ventures out to kill the deer, Lakshmana hears Maricha, dying from Rama's arrow, call for help in Rama's voice and is fooled into leaving Sita unguarded to search for Rama. Ravana seizes the opportunity and abducts Sita. Rama had no other option but to attack Lanka, Ravana's abode, and rescue Sita. While this may have ended the extortion, it remains a classic example of what it can do to humans, even noble heroes and heroines.

Colonialism, too, is a form of extortion. In Bengal, it began with Robert Clive of East India Company in 1757 when he decided to support Mir Jafar, the Arab-born military commander of Nawab Sirajuddaula, in dethroning the latter. Mir Jafar promised Clive a piece of land or *jagir* with judicial and police responsibilities in exchange for GBP 30,000 (equivalent to GBP 5,100,000 in 2023) per year.<sup>1</sup> Historians now tell us that when Clive left India in 1767, he accumulated a fortune of GBP 180,000 (equivalent to GBP 30,500,000 in 2023), which he remitted back to London through dubious channels. But then the extortion continued. According to Shashi Tharoor, "At the beginning of the eighteenth century, India's share of the world economy was 23 per cent, as large as all of Europe put together. (It had become 27 per cent in 1700 when the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb's treasury raked in GBP 100 million in tax revenues alone.) By the time the British departed India, it had dropped to just over 3 per cent.... The British extracted from India approximately GBP 18,000,000 each year between 1765 and 1815."<sup>2</sup> The wholesale looting of British India financed Britain's rise for 200 years. In contemporary

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<sup>1</sup> T.G Percival Spear, "Robert Clive," *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Volume 3: Micropaedia (Chicago: The Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1986), pp. 390-392. See also [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_Clive#cite\\_note-11](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Clive#cite_note-11). Accessed on 13 February 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Shashi Tharoor, *Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India* (London: Penguin Books), pp. 2-9.

times, France, another former colonial power, continues to extract USD 400-500 billion annually from 14 former colonial countries in Africa.<sup>3</sup>

The consent or complicity of Mir Jafar or the former African colonial powers to the colonial and post-colonial extortion can hardly be denied. Still, then, that consent is obtained illegally. The Indian Penal Code (1860), Section 383, defines extortion in the following manner: “Whoever intentionally puts any person in fear of any injury to that person, or to any other, and thereby dishonestly induces the person so put in fear to deliver to any person any property, or valuable security or anything signed or sealed which may be converted into a valuable security, commits extortion.” However, as the Indian Penal Code indicates, this has not remained at the state level; it has percolated into the public sphere, often creating fear among individuals, particularly those who have become victims of extortion.

Several factors are responsible for this. Firstly, misgovernance. The absence of the rule of law creates space for extortion. The extortionists know very well that they can coerce the victim to fulfil their demands and get away with it without facing prosecution or punishment. Misgovernance is more glaring when the country suffers from polarised politics. This is because the perpetrator-victim dialectic remains active, which often gets reversed with the change of power. Such a situation has little to do with the country's socio-economic development or lack thereof.

Secondly, throughout history, technology has empowered the extortionist and the victim alike. However, at times, the extortionist's use or misuse of technology has been more creative and sinister than that of the rest of the population, and there lies the fear. If this is not addressed swiftly and creatively, with state agencies working with the public, the possibility of extortionists using or misusing technology becomes even more significant. This brings us to the third and final issue, the gender dimension of extortion.

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<sup>3</sup> News Agency, “Zahid Oruj: ‘France earns \$400-\$500B annually from Africa as colonial tax,’” *Report*, 18 April 2024. See <https://report.az/en/foreign-politics/zahid-oruj-france-earns-400-500b-annually-from-africa-as-colonial-tax/>. Accessed on 13 February 2025.

Technology has helped reproduce sextortion, the practice of extorting money or sexual favours from someone by threatening to divulge evidence of their sexual activity. This has spread horizontally as well as vertically. The practice of sextortion has been as rampant in developed countries as it has been in developing countries, including Bangladesh. Sextortion is otherwise a global problem and, therefore, requires an international response, including the development of technology to identify a sextortion, preferably before and certainly after the crime.

**Professor Imtiaz Ahmed**  
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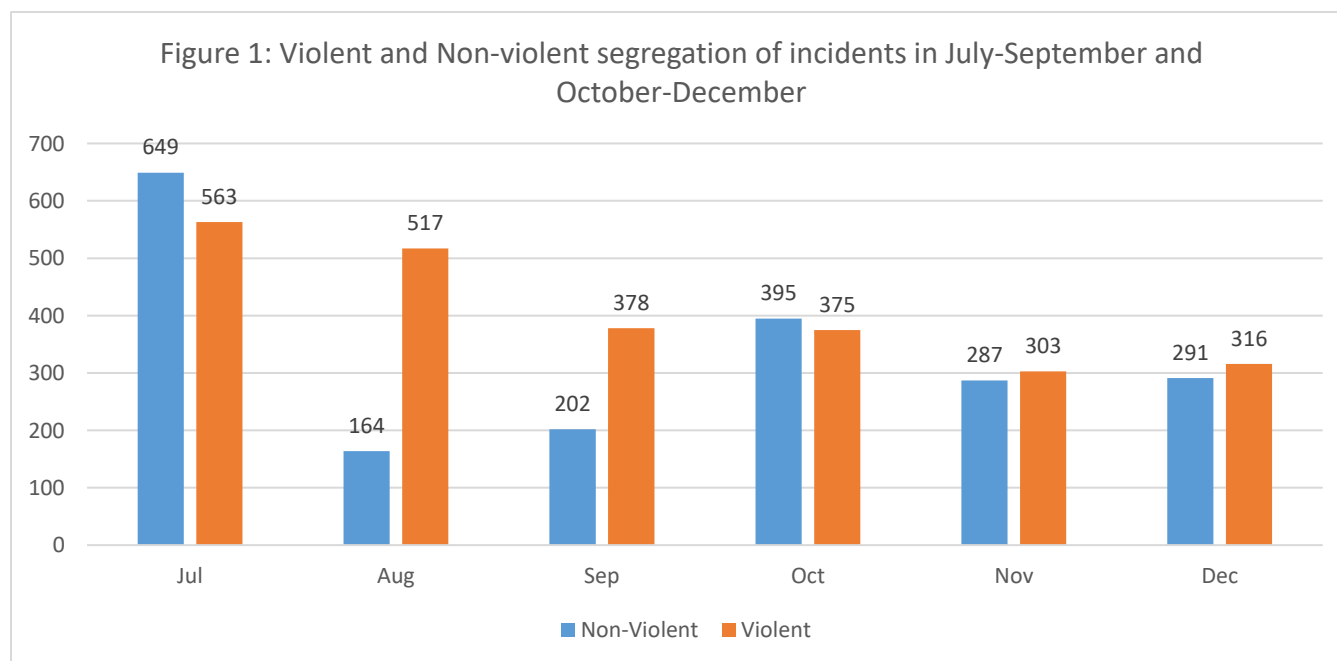
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## Crime and Violence Update in Bangladesh: An Analysis from BPO

### October to December 2024

The Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) brings together different streams of publicly available data on violence using news reports from prominent national and regional dailies. From October to December 2024, BPO has recorded 994 violent<sup>4</sup> and 973 non-violent<sup>5</sup> incidents. Figure 1 shows the monthly segregation of the violent and non-violent incidents that occurred this quarter alongside the monthly segregation of the

previous quarter (July-September 2024). Drawing a comparison between these two quarters, it is noticeable that violent incidents decreased significantly in October- December 2024 than in July- September 2024. The non-violent incidents increased in the following three months compared to July- September 2024.



<sup>4</sup> Violent Incident: According to the BPO Codebook, The reported incident 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

<sup>5</sup> Non-violent Incident: According to the BPO Codebook, the reported incident did not involve 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, e.g., Arrest, Peaceful Protest, Rescue, and Recovery.

Table I summarises the updates on major violence types that constitute the most violent incidents. The Annex provides a brief description of each category. The table shows that most of the violent incidents fall under the Assault, Clash, Destruction of Property, Mob Violence, and Sexual Assault categories. The

October-December 2024 quarter saw a significant decrease in violent incidents related to assaults, clashes, destruction of property, fights, mob violence, and sexual assaults. However, abductions increased in this quarter.

<b>Table I: Comparison of Major Violence Types between two quarters 2024</b>		
<b>Major Violence types</b>	<b>July-September</b>	<b>October-December</b>
Abduction/hostage	15	20
Assault	872	694
Clash	373	170
Destruction of property	83	35
Fight	38	16
Mob violence (large group assault)	52	28
Sexual assault	42	30
Violence against civilians	32	10
Violent demonstration	20	2

The total number of deaths, injuries, arrests, and sexual assaults declined significantly compared to the July–September quarter. Table 2 illustrates that fatalities dropped by 56.3% (from 1,499 to 655), injuries decreased by 72.49% (from 12,110 to 3,331),

sexual assaults fell by 36% (from 50 to 32), and arrests were reduced by 59.24% (from 12,673 to 5,166). In contrast, abductions rose dramatically by 400% (from 33 to 165).

<b>Table 2: Major violence types in October-December 2024</b>					
<b>Quarters</b>	<b>Total Arrest</b>	<b>Total Sexual Assault</b>	<b>Total Abduction</b>	<b>Total Killed</b>	<b>Total Injured</b>
<b>October</b>	2781	16	68	252	769
<b>November</b>	1220	6	58	203	991
<b>December</b>	1165	10	39	200	1571
<b>Total in this quarter</b>	5166	32	165	655	3331
<b>Total in previous quarter (July-September)</b>	12673	50	33	1499	12110
<b>Increase/Decrease in percentage</b>	-59.24%	-36%	400%	-56.3%	-72.49%

In the previous quarter (July–September 2024), the fall of the Awami League regime, driven by the revolutionary Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, led to a peak in violent incidents, resulting in a significant rise in deaths and injuries nationwide. These circumstances explain why the July–September quarter recorded more violent incidents than October–December 2024 and the stark differences in their consequences.

#### **Abduction: Low-Frequency, High-Impact Violence in October–December 2024**

The number of victims in the 20 reported abduction cases during this quarter is deeply concerning. Nearly one-third of the total victims were abducted by the Myanmar Navy, while the Arakan Army took 31 fishermen near the naval border. Additionally, pirate attacks in the coastal areas have become a critical law-and-order issue, with 19 forest officials and 19 fishermen abducted. These alarming incidents have

turned Cox’s Bazar district into a hotspot for abductions.

#### **Understanding the Decrease in Assaults**

The BPO categorises interpersonal attacks—carried out by individuals or groups for various motives—under the assault category. Between October and December 2024, the BPO recorded 694 assault cases. These incidents were linked to factors such as domestic violence, robbery, land disputes, economic conflicts, social and personal rivalries, political tensions, and sexual violence.

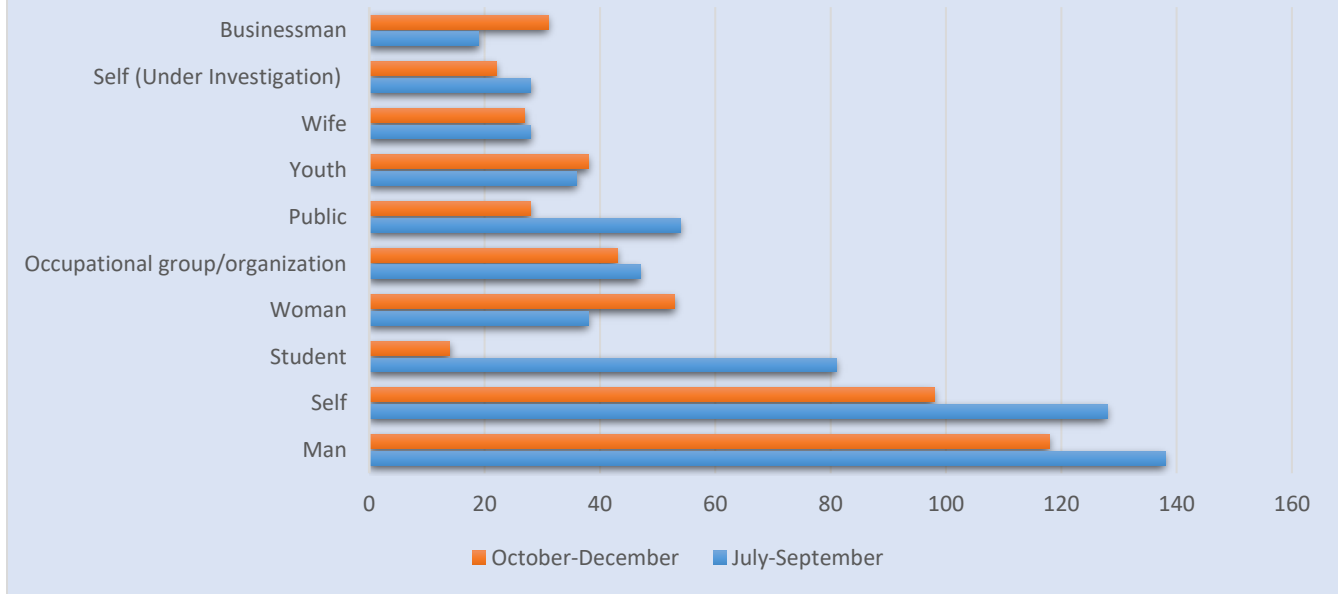
Table 3 reveals that while assaults related to robbery, religious sectarianism, inter-party tensions, intra-party conflicts, and kidnappings for ransom increased during this quarter, incidents tied to domestic violence, raids, sexual assault, and mob justice decreased compared to the previous quarter (July–September 2024).

<b>Table 3: Comparative motives of Assaults</b>		
<b>Motives</b>	<b>Number of incidents</b>	
	<b>July-September</b>	<b>October-December</b>
Robbery/burglary/violent theft	60	85
Other social	49	67
Land	66	60
Domestic violence	80	61
Raids	196	134
Other political issues	321	71
Other economic	47	53
Sexual assault	47	37
Intra-party tensions	30	45
Positions and influence	58	55
Religious sectarianism	26	30
Inter-party tensions	21	23
Mob justice in response to crime	28	23
Kidnapping for ransom	13	17
Other domestic/GBV/VAW	28	22
Organized crime/gangs	27	14
Other cause	268	280

Figure 2 highlights the top 10 categories of assault victims, which include men, women, and cases of suicide. During this quarter, 26 females reportedly committed suicide due to incidents related to

domestic violence. The category "public" encompasses both men and women who were assaulted, predominantly over land-related disputes and conflicts involving position and influence.

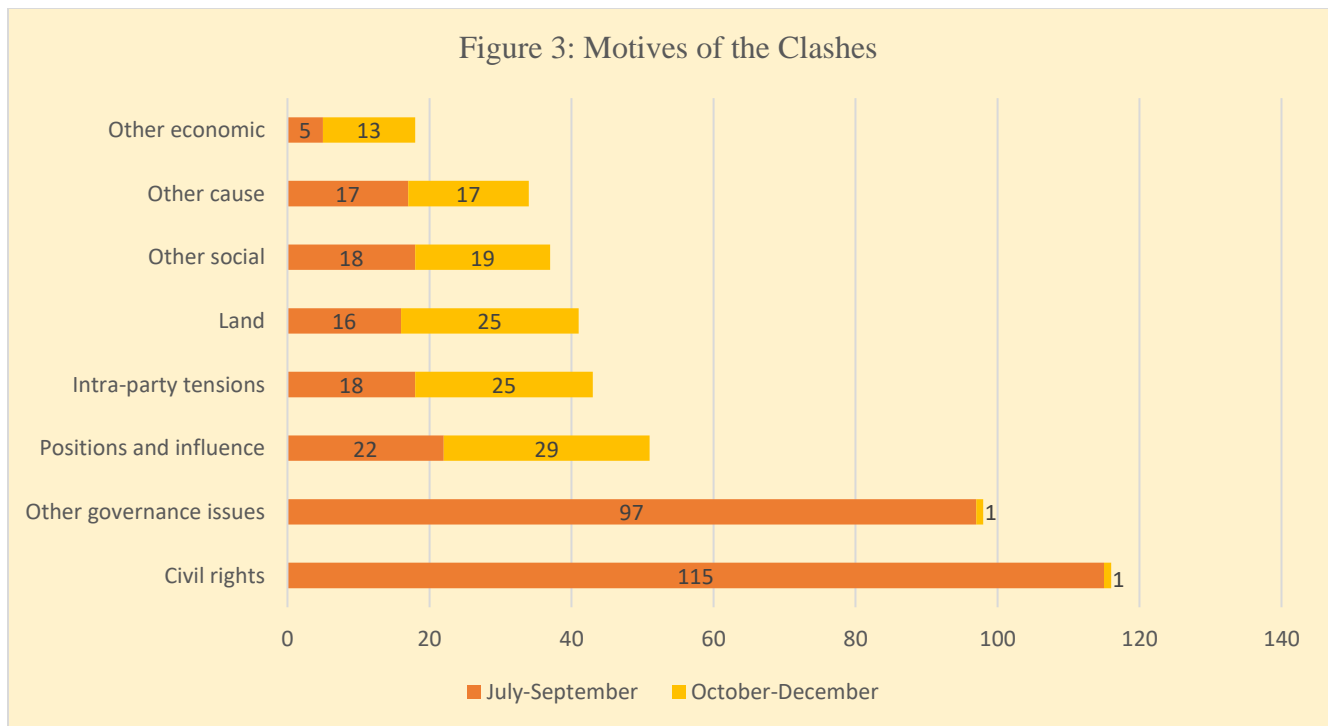
**Figure 2: Top 10 categories of assault victims of assaults**



### **A Lower Number of Clashes**

In the October–December 2024 quarter, reported clashes dropped significantly compared to the previous quarter. However, clashes related to position and influence, intra-party tensions, and land disputes increased. A total of 170 incidents of clashes were

recorded during this period, resulting in 38 fatalities and 2,585 injuries. Figure 3 illustrates that the primary motives for these clashes included land-related disputes, political rivalries such as inter- and intra-party conflicts, and other personal, social, economic, and civil rights issues.



### Violence-Population Nexus

Figure 4 provides a spatial overview of the divisional distribution of recorded incidents and their consequences in October–December 2024. The graph shows that Chattogram, Dhaka, and Khulna are the

top three divisions with the highest number of people killed, arrested, and injured. Sylhet ranks second in terms of total injuries. In contrast, Mymensingh, Barisal, and Rangpur report comparatively lower rates of incident-related consequences.

Figure 4: Divisional Distribution of Incidents and Consequences

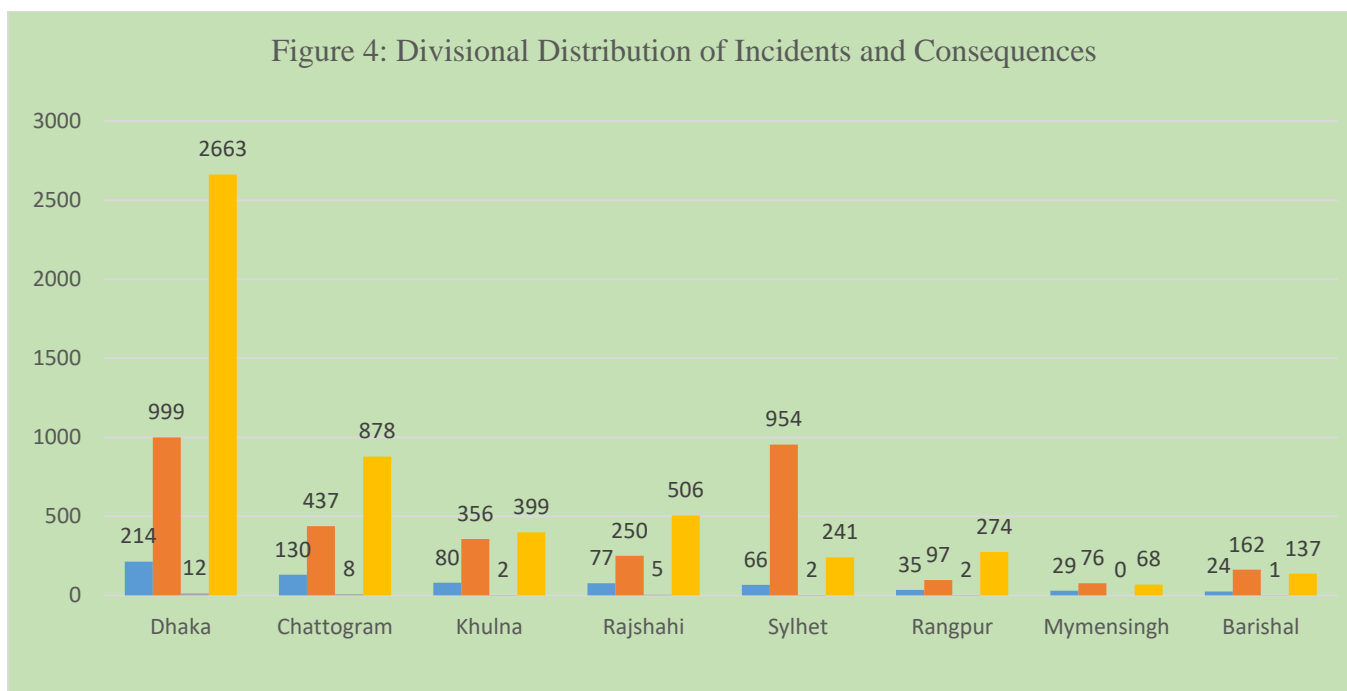


Table 4: Comparison of projected Yearly rate of incidents and consequences in the Divisions

Division	Total Death	yearly projected death rate per 100000	Total Injury	projected Yearly injury rate per 100000	female death	projected yearly feamle death rate per 100000	incident	projected yearly incident rate per 100000
<b>Barishal</b>	24	1.1	162	7.1	14	0.6 (1st)	74	3.3
<b>Chattogram</b>	130 (2nd)	1.6	437 (3rd)	5.3	35 (2nd)	0.4	397 (2nd)	4.8
<b>Dhaka</b>	214 (1st)	1.9 (2nd)	999 (1st)	9.0 (2nd)	60 (1st)	0.5 (2nd)	575 (1st)	5.2 (3rd)

<b>Khulna</b>	80 (3rd)	1.8 (3rd)	356	8.2 (3rd)	16	0.4	224	5.1
<b>Mymensingh</b>	29	0.9	76	2.5	7	0.2	59	1.9
<b>Rajshahi</b>	77	1.5	250	4.9	26 (3rd)	0.5 (2nd)	311 (3rd)	6.1 (2nd)
<b>Rangpur</b>	35	0.8	97	2.2	13	0.3	150	3.4
<b>Sylhet</b>	66	2.4(1st)	954 (2nd)	34.6 (1st)	13	0.47 (3rd)	177	6.4 (1st)

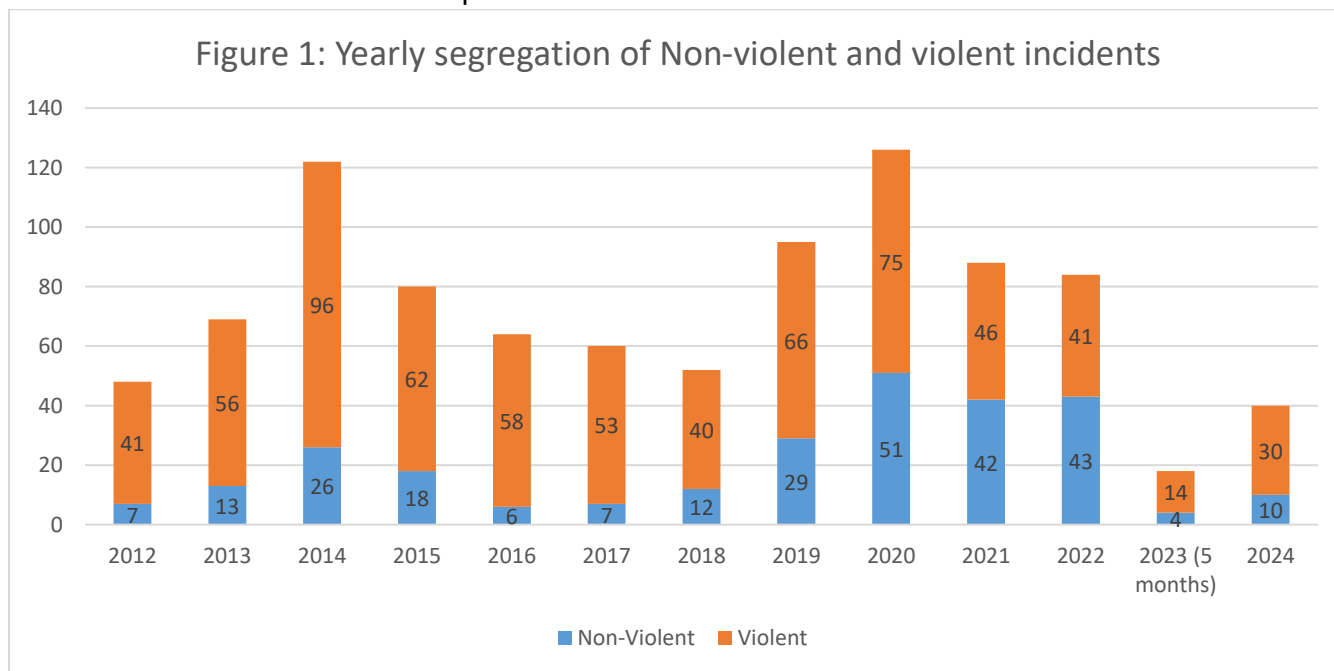
While Dhaka, Chattogram, and Rajshahi are the most populous divisions in Bangladesh, applying a population ratio to analyse the prevalence and consequences of incidents reveals a different perspective. Table 4 shows that Sylhet, Dhaka, and Khulna have the highest female

death and injury rates; Barisal, Rajshahi, and Dhaka rank highest. Sylhet, Rajshahi, and Dhaka have the highest incident rates overall, whereas Barisal, Rangpur, and Mymensingh report the lowest relative to their populations.

## Extortion: An analysis of BPO data

Extortion-related violence in Bangladesh reflects more profound socio-economic and security challenges that demand critical examination. Using data from the Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) platform, this analysis delves into 13 years of recorded incidents (2012–2024), exploring yearly trends, quarterly comparisons, and key categories such as perpetrators, targets, motives, and consequences. It is important to note that the data for 2023 is incomplete due to an

ongoing data-cleaning process for February to August; therefore, the analysis for that year focuses on the remaining five months. By providing a comprehensive overview of extortion-related incidents, this discussion highlights patterns, evolving methods, and systemic vulnerabilities, offering valuable insights into their broader implications for societal security and governance in Bangladesh.



The data presented in Figure 1 provides a comprehensive view of extortion-related incidents from 2012 to 2024, encompassing their frequency, nature, and underlying motivations. In this timeline, a

total of 946 incidents, 268 non-violent and 678 violent incidents, were recorded by BPO. Looking at the yearly segregation of violent and non-violent incidents, we observe significant fluctuations over the thirteen

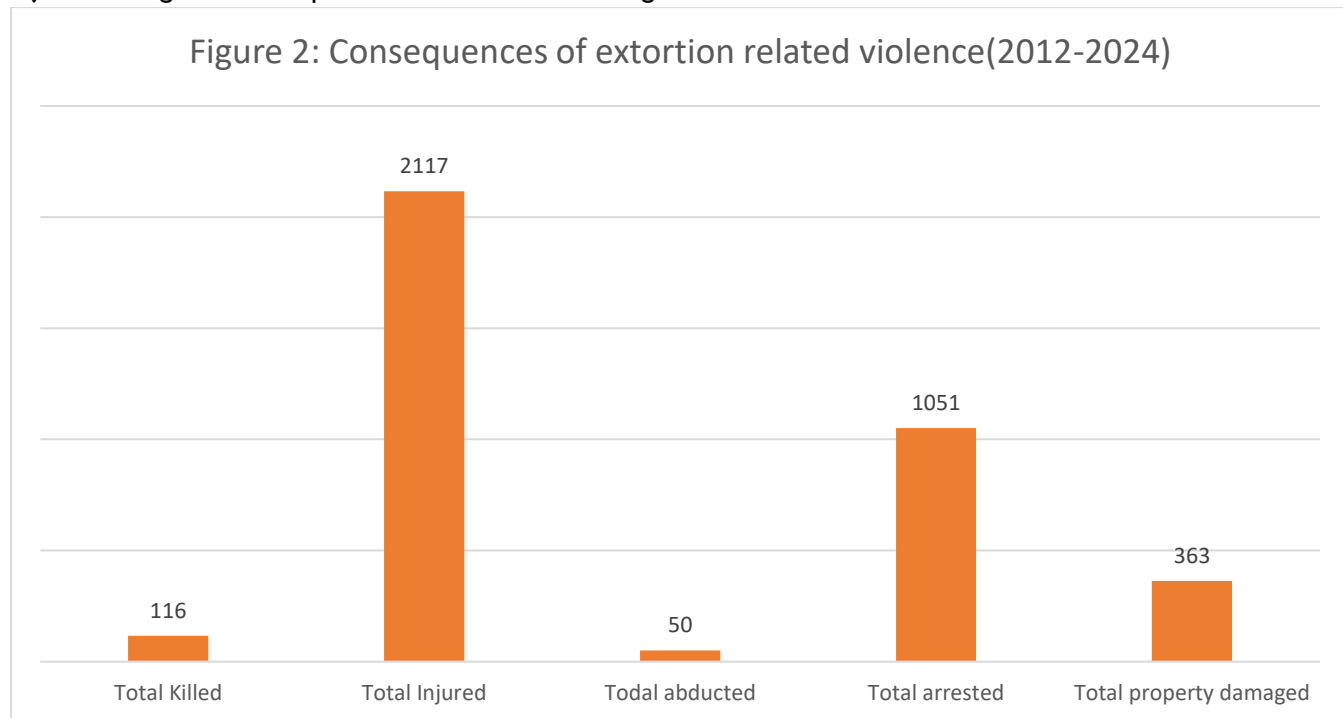
years. 2014 and 2020 stand out as particularly problematic, with total incidents reaching peaks of 122 and 126 cases, respectively. Violent incidents dominated the landscape throughout this period, though recent years have witnessed a noteworthy shift. Since 2018, there has been a steady increase in non-violent incidents, rising from 12 cases to 43 cases in 2022, suggesting an evolution in extortion methods.

### Consequences of Extortion-related Violence

Figure 2 reveals severe consequences of extortion-related violence over 13 years (2012-2024), with injuries being the most prevalent outcome reaching

2,117, followed by 1,051 arrests, while 116 people were killed, 50 were abducted, and 363 various types of property damage like vehicles, houses, public or private properties, etc. were recorded. The high number of injuries and arrests compared to fatalities suggests that while extortion-related violence is widespread, it tends to focus more on intimidation and physical harm rather than lethal violence. However, the significant number of arrests indicates active law enforcement intervention in these cases.

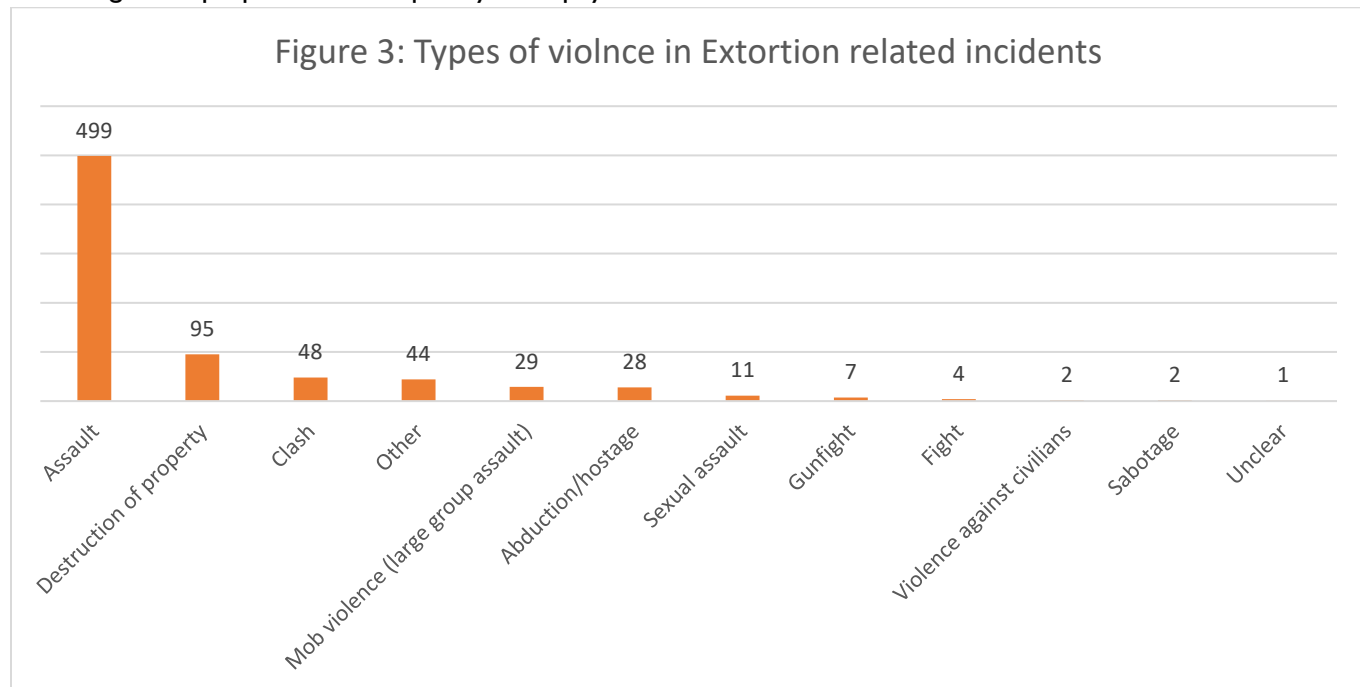
Highlighting that most perpetrators rely on more straightforward forms of intimidation.



## Types of Violence in Extortion-Related Incidents

Figure 3 highlights the types of violence employed in extortion-related incidents, with assault emerging as the predominant form, accounting for approximately 450 cases. This is followed by the destruction of property, with around 100 recorded incidents indicating that perpetrators frequently use physical

intimidation and material damage as their primary tactics. Other forms of violence, such as clashes, mob violence, gunfights, and sabotage, occur less frequently. Severe crimes such as sexual assault and abduction/hostage situations, while present, constitute a smaller portion of the overall incidents, underscoring that most perpetrators rely on relatively straightforward methods of intimidation.



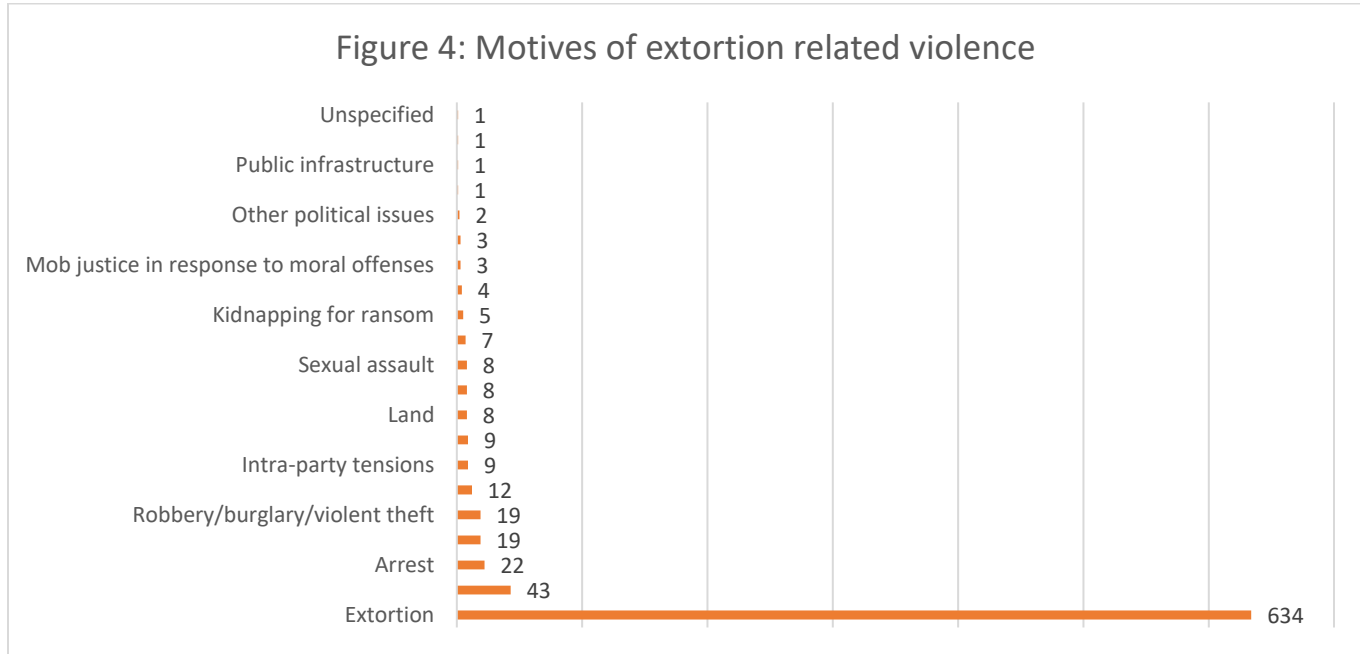
## Motives Behind Extortion-Related Violence

The analysis of motives in Figure 4 behind extortion-related violence reveals a stark pattern: pure extortion, aimed directly at financial gain, overwhelmingly dominates as the primary motivation

with around 650 cases. This suggests that most violent incidents are straightforward attempts at financial extortion rather than being driven by complex underlying factors. Organised crimes/gang incidents emerge as the second most common motive, though significantly less frequent than pure extortion. Other

motivations-- including robbery/burglary, intra-party tensions, land disputes, and sexual assault-- play relatively minor roles. Political issues and public infrastructure-related motives appear at the bottom of

the scale, indicating that extortion in this context is primarily driven by immediate financial objectives rather than broader political or social agendas.

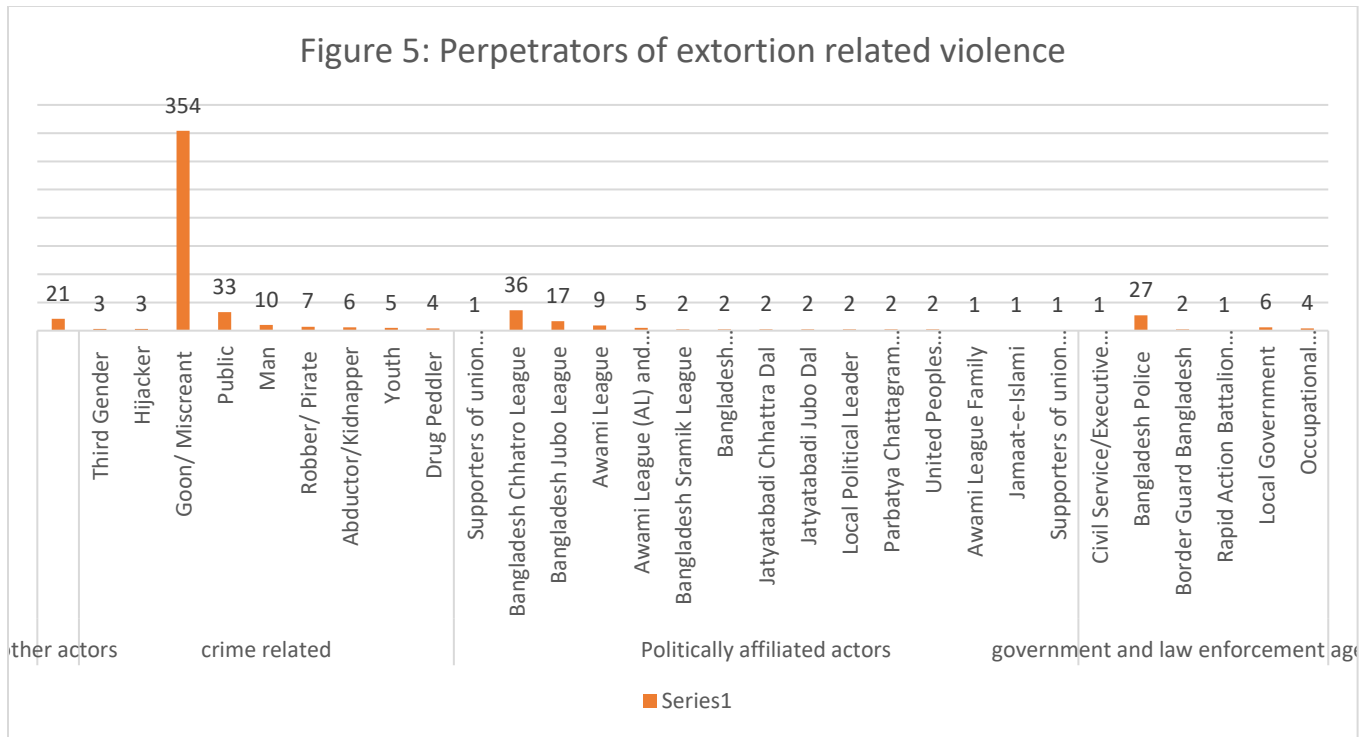


### Actors Involved in Extortion-Related Violence

Figure 5 presents a comprehensive breakdown of various actors involved in extortion-related violence,

categorised into four main groups: other actors, crime-related perpetrators, politically affiliated actors, and government and law enforcement agencies.

Figure 5: Perpetrators of extortion related violence



The Goon/Miscreant category stands out significantly among all perpetrators, with 354 recorded incidents exceeding all other groups. This falls under the crime-related category, which also includes other actors like the "Public" (33 cases), "Man" (10 cases), and various other criminal elements such as robbers, abductors, and drug peddlers, though with much lower frequencies.

The politically affiliated actors segment shows a diverse range of groups, with the "Bangladesh Chhatra League" having the highest number (36 cases) within this category. Other political groups show varying levels of involvement, ranging from 17 cases (Bangladesh Jubo League) to single incidents for some

organisations. This category demonstrates how political affiliations can sometimes intersect with extortion-related violence.

Government and law enforcement agencies appear at the end of the chart, with notable mentions of the police (27 cases) and other governmental bodies. However, their involvement is relatively limited compared to criminal and political actors. The "other actors" category, which includes "Third Gender" and "Hijacker" (3 cases each), represents a small portion of the overall incidents.

This distribution reveals that while extortion-related violence is predominantly perpetrated by criminal

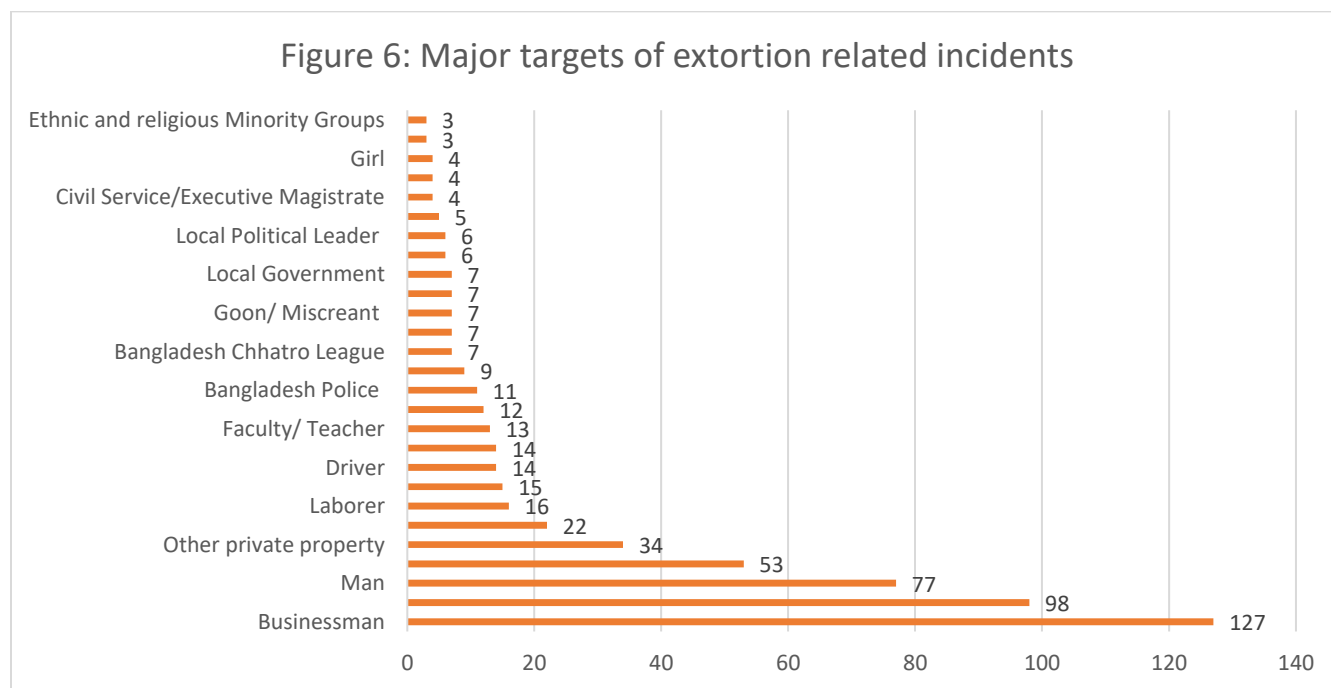
elements, particularly goons and miscreants, it involves a complex web of actors across various sectors of society, including political organisations and, to a lesser extent, law enforcement agencies.

### Target Groups in Extortion-Related Incidents

According to Figure 6, businesspeople were the most frequently targeted group, with approximately 127 reported incidents, likely due to their perceived financial capacity and access to liquid assets. The second most targeted category was occupational groups/organisations, with around 80 incidents. This category includes professionals and service holders such as farmers, fishermen, NGO workers, and

contractors. Labourers were the third most common target, with roughly 35 incidents.

The data also highlights that women, the Bangladesh Police, Bangladesh Jubo League members, local government officials, media workers/personalities, and girls were also targets of extortion, though at lower frequencies, ranging from approximately 5 to 25 incidents each. The presence of diverse targets—including women, police, local government officials, and political group members—indicates that extortionists employ varied strategies. These targets range from those with financial resources to those vulnerable to coercion, reflecting systemic security challenges in protecting different segments of society.



The presence of "Goon/Miscreants" as significant perpetrators and targets may confuse. In cases where extortionists were targeted, the incidents primarily involved mob violence carried out as retaliation. Incidents involving girls and women were often linked to more severe crimes, such as rape and blackmail, which occurred following refusal or inability to pay extortion demands.

**Quarterly and Monthly Trends in Extortion-Related Incidents**

The quarterly analysis of extortion-related incidents from October to December over 13 years (2012–2024) reveals significant fluctuations. The trend began with six incidents in 2012, peaked at 28 incidents in 2015, and then declined to 10 incidents in 2018. The highest peak occurred in 2020, with 32 incidents.

After 2020, there was a sharp decline to 10 incidents in 2022, followed by a slight decrease to 8 incidents by 2024. This suggests an overall downward trend in recent years despite the dramatic spike in 2020.

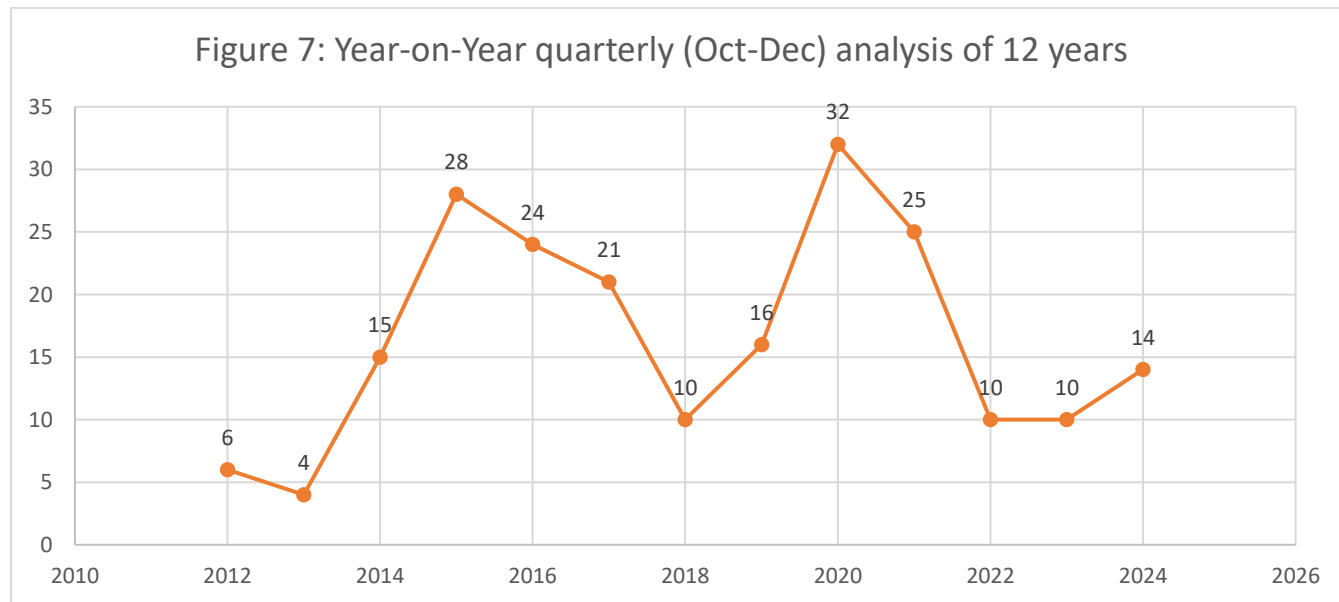
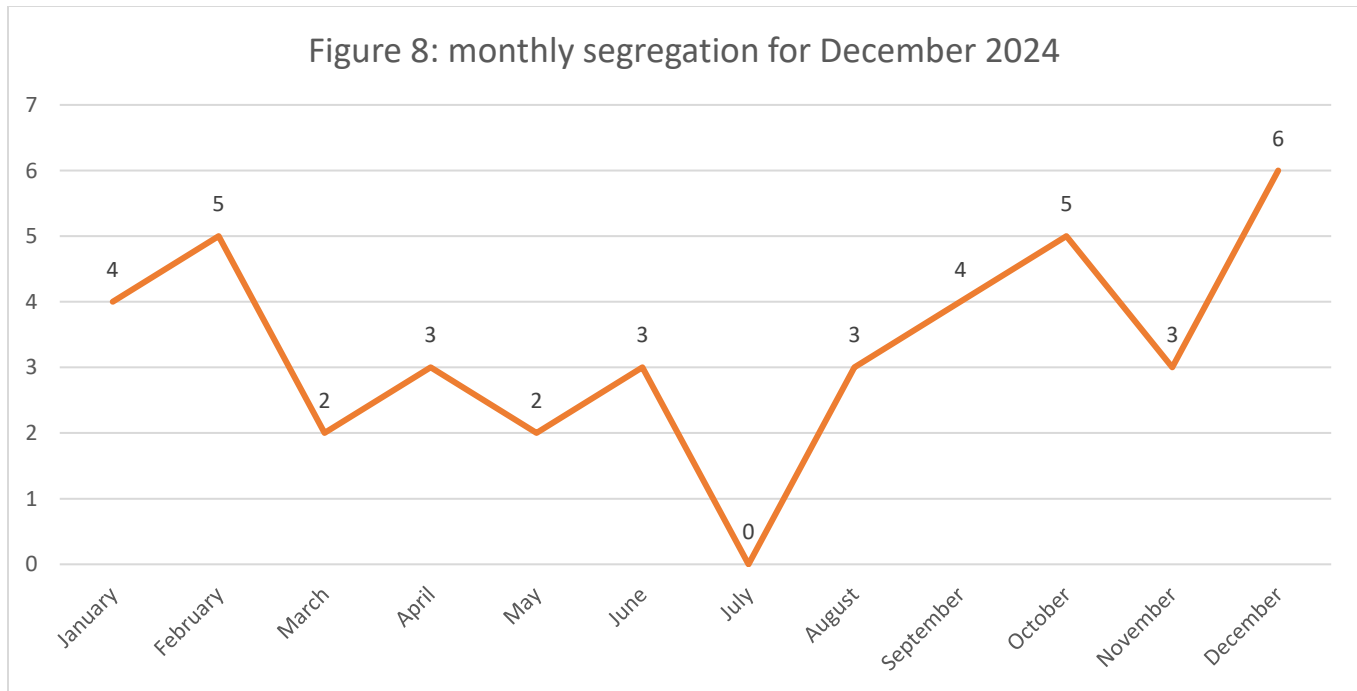


Figure 8 illustrates the monthly segregation counts for 2024, beginning with four incidents in January, peaking at 5 in February, and dipping to 2 in March. From April to June, the counts stabilised at around three before reaching a low of 0 in July. Following this, the numbers

rose again, reaching 3 in August and 4 in September, with another peak of 5 in October. Toward the year's end, the counts declined to 3 in November but rose sharply to 6 in December, the highest monthly count for the year.



The figure highlights two notable peaks in February and October, a significant low in July, and consistent mid-range values for much of the year. The countrywide instability and upsurge in July 2024 might be connected to zero-incident numbers for July. The extortion-related incidents increased in the post-July months since some familiar but non-active criminal faces surfaced and resumed their activities in prominent areas.<sup>6</sup> Also, a significant attack on the ethnic community in Lama, Bandarban, was carried out by miscreants on Christmas day while the people were out praying. Seventeen houses were destroyed in that community, and the victims claimed that their

<sup>6</sup> Mollah.S& Khan, M.J. (2025), 'Top criminals on extortion spree', Cited in- <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/top-criminals-extortion-sprees-3798126>

generational residences were forcefully taken away in the name of Benazir Ahmed, a former IGP during the Awami League regime. A group of people demanded extortion from the dwellers.<sup>7</sup>

The analysis of extortion-related incidents over the past 13 years reveals critical trends and dynamics, highlighting perpetrators' evolving methods and motives and the diverse range of targets. At the same time, the data underscores the dominance of violent extortion. The gradual rise in non-violent methods since 2018 signals a shift in tactics, possibly driven by changing socio-economic and political contexts. To a

<sup>7</sup> The Prothom Alo, 26 December 2024, Pg- 4 ; <https://epaper.prothomalo.com/Home/ShareArticle?OrgId=26129af1ed18&eid=1&imageview=0&epedate=26/12/2024&sedId=1>

lesser extent, the significant involvement of criminal actors, politically affiliated groups, and law enforcement agencies points to systemic vulnerabilities that enable such activities to persist. Moreover, the targeting of marginalised groups, such as women and ethnic minorities, emphasises the urgent need for enhanced protection and community-level interventions.

The detailed breakdown of incidents by frequency, motive, and actor—alongside the analysis of quarterly

and monthly trends—paints a complex picture of extortion as a pervasive threat to societal stability. Notable cases, such as the attack on the ethnic community in Lama, Bandarban, further illustrate the intersection of extortion, violence, and systemic abuse of power. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, combining improved law enforcement mechanisms, community engagement, and targeted policy interventions to mitigate the risks and consequences of extortion-related violence in Bangladesh.

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# Contemporary Trends and Effects of Extortion and Violence Across the Globe

Khandakar Tahmid Rejwan<sup>8</sup>

## Introduction

Extortion and violence have historically represented prevalent forms of criminal activity globally. These parallel criminal actions significantly affect individuals, communities, and nations. Extortion and violence possess a historical lineage spanning centuries, adapting to transformations in political, social, and economic processes.<sup>9</sup> Although these behaviours have historically manifested in several forms, contemporary worldwide trends in extortion and violence are shaped by several factors, including the rise of organised crime, political instability, and technological progress.<sup>10</sup> This analysis offers a brief yet extensive examination of the historical development of extortion and violence, assessing their evolution and the emergence of transnational trends. This analysis also attempts to explain the fundamental reasons and broader ramifications of extortion and violence by examining the forms of these criminal activities and regional variations across multiple geographies.

## Historical Overview of Extortion and Violence

The importance of analysing extortion and violence comes from its far-reaching implications for global security and economic stability. Criminal organisations engaged in extortion and violence frequently destabilise entire communities, perpetuating cycles of fear, poverty, and distrust.<sup>11</sup> Globalisation has increased global interconnectedness, allowing these activities to spread beyond national boundaries, take on new forms, and impact international relations. As a result, understanding the historical context and existing worldwide patterns of extortion and violence is critical for developing effective strategies to address these issues and mitigate their repercussions. Extortion and violence date back to ancient times, when power dynamics and territorial conflicts dominated societal systems.<sup>12</sup> Extortion was commonly formalised as taxation or tribute enforced by ruling elites in early civilisations such as Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt. Although these practices were not intrinsically criminal in their own

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<sup>8</sup> Research Data Analyst, Centre for Alternatives (CA).

<sup>9</sup> Sean Fox and Kristian Hoelscher, "The Political Economy of Social Violence: Theory and evidence from a cross-country study," *Crisis States Working Papers Series No.2*, April 2010.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> "Transnational Organized Crime in the Pacific: Expansion, Challenges and Impact," October 2024. Cited in [https://www.unodc.org/roseap/uploads/documents/2024/TOCTA\\_Pacific\\_2024.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/roseap/uploads/documents/2024/TOCTA_Pacific_2024.pdf). Accessed on 10 January 2025.

<sup>12</sup> Gerd Schwerhoff, "Early Modern Violence and the Honour Code: From Social Integration to Social Distinction?" *Crime, Histoire et Sociétés*, 2013.

right, they laid the groundwork for developing coercive tactics.

Extortion practices were more systematic during the medieval period. Feudal monarchs typically demanded extravagant fees or services from serfs under the guise of providing security.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, pirate factions and bandits operated outside formal governance, exploiting merchants and passengers to get riches through pressure and violence.<sup>14</sup> A notable example was the Viking raids in Europe, which combined savage attacks with soliciting payments to spare communities from destruction.<sup>15</sup> The Industrial Revolution caused significant social and economic changes, influencing the dynamics of extortion and violence. Urbanisation and industrial expansion aided the growth of criminal organisations.<sup>16</sup> Organisations such as the Sicilian Mafia in Italy and the Yakuza in Japan emerged, using extortion as their primary source of revenue. These organisations dominated local businesses and neighbourhoods, often imposing their demands through violence.<sup>17</sup> The rise of global organised criminal networks in the twentieth century heralded a new era of extortion and violence. During the Prohibition era in the United States, numerous

criminal groups rose to prominence, most notably the American Mafia.<sup>18</sup> These organisations profited from illegal activities like bootlegging, gambling, and extortion. Similarly, drug cartels in Latin America expanded their power in the second half of the century, using extortion and violence to seize control of territory and supply networks.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, technological advancements have greatly affected modern extortion.<sup>20</sup> Cyber extortion, a threat to compromise crucial digital information until a ransom is paid, has become a significant worry in the twenty-first century.<sup>21</sup> This extortion demonstrates adapting traditional approaches to new technological and social settings while keeping their relevance.

## Forms of Extortion and Violence

Extortion and violence have many forms, each adapted to the cultural, economic, and political settings in which they occur. While the core principles of coercion and intimidation are identical, the methods might differ significantly. Significant forms of extortions are:

### I. Traditional Extortion Practices

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<sup>13</sup> “Feudalism,” n.d. Cited in <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/feudalism>. Accessed on 10 January 2025.

<sup>14</sup> Robert A. Denemark, “Piracy, State-Formation, and the Bounding of Social Systems,” *Journal of Globalization Studies*, May 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Anders Winroth, “Viking Violence” in *The Cambridge World History of Violence*, March 2020.

<sup>16</sup> “Urbanization and organized crime: The challenge to global peace, security and human rights in the urban century,” 6 August 2024. Cited in <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/urbanization-and-organized-crime/>. Accessed on 10 January 2025.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> “Mafia in the United States,” 25 July 2024. Cited in <https://www.history.com/topics/crime/mafia-in-the-united-states>. Accessed on 10 January 2025.

<sup>19</sup> “R. Evan Ellis,” Drugs, Gangs, Transnational Organized Crime and “Malgoverned Spaces” in the Americas, *Air and Space Power Journal*, 1 January 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Jacopo Bellasio, Erik Silfversten, Eireann Leverett, Anna Knack, Fiona Quimbre, Emma Louise Blondes, Marina Favaro, Giacomo Persi Paoli, “How could technological developments influence the future of cybercrime?” *RAND*, 16 December 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Physical coercion and threats of violence are conventional forms of extortion employed to extract money, goods, or services from individuals and corporations. Protection rackets have been widespread across numerous civilisations, wherein criminal organisations solicit payment to safeguard businesses from damage. For example, The Sicilian Mafia has consistently implemented protection rackets in Italy, including intimidation and violence to ensure compliance.<sup>22</sup> Under different conditions, these strategies evolve into complex structures where the line between lawful and unlawful activities becomes indistinct, exemplified by organised criminal syndicates into legitimate corporate sectors to exert control and solicit payments under the guise of sanctioned agreements.

## 2. Cyber Extortion

Cyber extortion has emerged as a significant threat in the age of technology. Criminals use techniques such as ransomware attacks, in which malicious software encrypts a victim's data and demands payment for its recovery. Notable cases, such as the WannaCry ransomware attack in 2017, demonstrate the growing sophistication of these crimes and their ability to target individuals, businesses, and governments equally.<sup>23</sup> In addition to ransomware, other forms of cyber extortion include Distributed Denial of Service

(DDoS) attacks, in which attackers threaten to turn off a company's internet services unless a ransom is paid. Because of the anonymity provided by the internet, these offenders can operate across borders, making it difficult to monitor and prosecute them.

## 3. Political Extortion

Political extortion occurs when individuals or entities apply threats or coercion to influence political decisions or acquire power. Extortion is a prevalent strategy employed by terrorist organisations to finance their operations. At the height of its influence, organisations like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) funded their activities through abduction and extortion.<sup>24</sup> Corrupt politicians may leverage their positions to extort money or favours from corporations and citizens, undermining governance and diminishing public trust. A further form of political extortion is the exploitation of judicial or regulatory institutions to secure particular outcomes in return for bribes, illustrating the pervasive influence of such actions on society and governance.

## 4. Violence as a Tool for Extortion

Violence is frequently used to enforce extortion demands. This could include physical assault, property devastation, or even homicide. Criminal organisations

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<sup>22</sup> Áron Székely, Luis G. Nardin and Giulia Andrighetto, "Countering Protection Rackets Using Legal and Social Approaches: An Agent-Based Test," *Complexity*, 2 December 2018.

<sup>23</sup> "WannaCry, Petya, NotPetya: how ransomware hit the big time in 2017" 30 December 2017. Cited in

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/dec/30/wannacry-petya-notpetya-ransomware>. Accessed on 10 January 2025.

<sup>24</sup> "The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Illicit Drug Trade," 7 June 1999. Cited in <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/the-revolutionary-armed-forces-of-colombia-farc-and-the-illicit-drug-trade>. Accessed on 10 January 2025.

commonly use these tactics to maintain control and discourage opposing views. In various other places, violence is not only a strategy but an essential component of the extortion process, creating a sense of fear that ensures compliance. In conflict zones, rebel organisations or militias may threaten entire communities to gain supplies or loyalty. Furthermore, urban gangs regularly use violence to establish territorial supremacy, demanding payments from businesses and residents in exchange for ‘security.’ Such techniques create an environment in which the perceived cost of dissent outweighs compliance, prolonging cycles of fear and victimisation.<sup>25</sup>

## 5. Emerging Trends in Extortion

Extortion and violence strategies evolve across society. The growth of modern technologies, such as artificial intelligence, has created new opportunities for exploitation. Deepfake technology, for example, has been utilised in schemes that use falsified audio or video recordings to force victims to pay ransoms or comply with demands.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, expanding the gig economy and distant labour has created new vulnerabilities, with hackers targeting individuals using insecure networks.<sup>27</sup> These patterns highlight the adaptive nature of extortion and the need for strong preventative measures.

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<sup>25</sup> Sally Atkinson-Sheppard, “The gangs of Bangladesh: Exploring organized crime, street gangs and ‘illicit child labourers’ in Dhaka,” *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Jon Bateman, “Deepfakes and Synthetic Media in the Financial System: Assessing Threat Scenarios,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 8 July 2020.

<sup>27</sup> “Booming dark web gig economy is a rising threat” 30 March 2021. Cited in

## 6. Social and Cultural Contexts of Extortion

The types and prevalence of extortion frequently reflect a region’s underlying social and cultural characteristics. Extortion may become normalised in places with poor governance or pervasive corruption, with individuals and businesses accepting it as an unavoidable cost of doing business in such systems.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, civilisations with robust legal structures and community resilience may see lower levels of extortion-related violence. Understanding these situations is critical for establishing efficient strategies and laws that reduce the effects of extortion and violence on vulnerable communities.

### International Trends and Patterns

The global nature of extortion and violence has resulted in the formation of several transnational trends and patterns. These are influenced by globalisation, technological progress, and geopolitical dynamics. A few of the contemporary trends of extortion and violence are given below:

#### I. Globalization and Transnational Crime

Globalisation has facilitated the expansion of international criminal networks.<sup>29</sup> Organisations such as drug cartels, human trafficking networks, and cybercrime syndicates operate globally and use

<https://www.csoonline.com/article/570527/booming-dark-web-gig-economy-is-a-rising-threat.html>. Accessed on 10 January 2025.

<sup>28</sup> “Corruption and its impact on trade: Extortion or evasion?” 25 June 2009. Cited in <https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/corruption-and-its-impact-trade-extortion-or-evasion>. Accessed on 11 January 2025.

<sup>29</sup> Louise Shelley, “The Globalization of Crime” in *International and Transnational Crime and Justice*, 20 June 2019.

transnational communication and transportation systems to coordinate their activities.<sup>30</sup> This has increasingly complicated the ability of sovereign governments to tackle extortion and violence effectively. Furthermore, the interconnected framework of global economies allows criminal enterprises to exploit financial systems, laundering money through overseas banks and shell firms.<sup>31</sup> Thus, tackling these acts requires enhanced international cooperation and information sharing among law enforcement agencies.

## 2. Technology's Role in Modern Extortion

Cyber extortion has become easier due to technological advancements, which have also increased the operational capacity of criminal groups. Using encrypted communication technology, criminals can plan and execute their activities while evading law authorities. The proliferation of cryptocurrencies has resulted in new problems, mainly because these digital assets are regularly used for ransom payments, making it more difficult to track transactions.<sup>32</sup> The introduction of the dark web has increased the clandestine trade of unlawful goods and services,

including hacking tools and resources for data breaches. Furthermore, incorporating artificial intelligence and machine learning into cybercriminal attempts makes it easier to carry out more sophisticated attacks, such as phishing schemes tailored to specific persons, increasing the effectiveness of extortion procedures.

## 3. Socio-Political Instability

Extortion and violence are particularly likely to occur in regions that are characterised by political instability or weak administration.<sup>33</sup> In circumstances like this, criminal organisations usually fill the power vacuum and exert control over the local people and the resources available to them.<sup>34</sup> Armed factions can finance their activities through extortion by taking advantage of the lack of law enforcement in certain countries of Africa and the Middle East. This trend is made worse by the proliferation of small guns and light weapons, which makes it easier for non-state actors to exercise control over the regions they operate in.<sup>35</sup> Targeting occurs regularly for international relief groups that are operating in conflict zones. These organisations are frequently subjected to extortion

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<sup>30</sup> *ibid*

<sup>31</sup> "Trade-Based Money Laundering Trends and Developments" December 2020. Cited in <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/content/dam/fatf-gafi/reports/Trade-Based-Money-Laundering-Trends-and-Developments.pdf>. Accessed on 11 January 2025.

<sup>32</sup> Constantinos Patsakis, Eugenia Politou, Efthimios Alepis & Julio Hernandez-Castro, "Cashing out crypto: state of practice in ransom payments," *Journal of Information Security*, 13 October 2023.

<sup>33</sup> "Organised crime and violence and instability" August 2016. Cited in [https://gsdrc.org/topic-guides/organised-crime-violence-](https://gsdrc.org/topic-guides/organised-crime-violence-development/organised-crime-and-violence-and-instability/)

[development/organised-crime-and-violence-and-instability/](https://gsdrc.org/topic-guides/organised-crime-violence-and-instability/). Accessed on 12 January 2025.

<sup>34</sup> Giovanni A. Travaglino and Lisbeth Drury, *The Secret Power of Criminal Organizations: A Social Psychological Approach*. (Berlin: Springer Nature, 2020)

<sup>35</sup> "Rapid Spread of Small Arms, Light Weapons Still Threatening World Peace, Exacerbating Plight of Civilians in Conflict Zones, Disarmament Chief Tells Security Council" 6 October 2021. Cited in <https://press.un.org/en/2021/sc14656.doc.htm>. Accessed on 12 January 2025.

requests for money in exchange for safe passage or operational autonomy, which increases the complexity of the humanitarian situation.

#### **4. Regional Variations**

Violence and extortion are universal, yet their forms differ by region. Latin American drug cartels use extortion to control areas. Kidnapping for ransom and commercial threats are frequent ways to intimidate and comply. Extortion may be linked to governmental corruption or organised crime syndicates like the Triads in Asia.<sup>36</sup> These groups use legal grey areas like informal financing to trap victims in debt and dependency. In Europe, ransomware assaults on key infrastructure, healthcare systems, and schools have increased.

#### **5. Emerging Responses and Global Cooperation**

With the increasing complexity of extortion and violence, initiatives have increased to develop global collaboration and creative solutions. These efforts have been made in response to the growing number of cases. Some of the most important obligations that international agencies like the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) have been to play a role in facilitating collaboration across international borders. Joint task forces, capacity-

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<sup>36</sup> “Extortion and Extortion Racketeering” 21 August 2024. Cited in <https://oxfordre.com/criminology/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264079.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264079-e-384?p=emailAULnvL3dLaTLA&d=/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264079.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264079-e-384>. Accessed on 12 January 2025.

building programs, and information-sharing initiatives of various kinds are some of the activities being undertaken to enhance nations' capacity to deal with transnational threats. On top of that, technical advancements are being leveraged to combat these criminal activities. The employment of blockchain analytics to monitor cryptocurrency transactions and the utilisation of technologies powered by artificial intelligence to anticipate and avoid cyberattacks are two examples of these breakthroughs. Creating a comprehensive strategy for decreasing the consequences of extortion and violence globally requires several components, including public awareness campaigns and the corporate sector's participation.

#### **Extortion and Violence Across the Globe**

Extortion and violence are causing troubles across Latin America, Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, and the Middle East, which are typically driven by organised crime, armed conflict, and technological exploitation. In Latin America, fierce drug cartels retain considerable power, perpetuating extortion and violence.<sup>37</sup> The Zetas cartel in Mexico is well-known for using harsh tactics such as kidnappings and public murders to inspire fear in both enemies and civilians.<sup>38</sup> Despite the peace agreement with the FARC, dissident factions and other groups in Colombia continue to rely

<sup>37</sup> “Mafia of the Poor: Gang Violence and Extortion in Central America” 6 April 2017. Cited in <https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/central-america/62-mafia-poor-gang-violence-and-extortion-central-america>. Accessed on 12 January 2025.

<sup>38</sup> Valentin Pereda, “Macabre ceremonies: How Los Zetas produces extreme violence to promote organizational cohesion,” *Violence: An International Journal*. 17 November 2021.

heavily on extortion for funding.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Brazil's urban gangs, notably the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC), carry out extortion operations in the favelas, spreading fear and undermining social order.<sup>40</sup> Extortion in major cities is a problem in North America, with street gangs and cyber extortion targeting large corporations, healthcare systems, and municipal governments. The United States faces excessive protection prices levied by criminals on local businesses and significant threats from high-profile ransomware attacks.<sup>41</sup> Canada has seen a rise in ransomware attacks, demonstrating the region's vulnerability to cyber extortion. The worldwide nature of these offences needs coordinated actions. Europe is dealing with extortion from organisations like the Italian Mafia and Eastern European crime syndicates. The Italian Mafia wields dominance in industries such as construction and agriculture, imposing protection payments.<sup>42</sup> Eastern European networks increasingly resort to cyber extortion, targeting businesses and governments with ransomware attacks. The global nature of these acts has driven increased cooperation among European law enforcement organisations and

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<sup>39</sup> "Violent rivals rush into FARC void in Colombia: A fractured peace" 26 April 2018. Cited in <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/colombia-peace/>. Accessed on 12 January 2025.

<sup>40</sup> Valerie Wirtschafter, "The internationalization of organized crime in Brazil," *Brookings Institute*, 24 January 2024.

<sup>41</sup> John Sakellariadis, "Behind the rise of ransomware," *Atlantic Council*, 2 August 2022.

<sup>42</sup> "Italy's mafia turns to white-collar crime as murder, extortion fall out of favor" 6 May 2024. Cited in <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italys-white-collar-mafia-is-making-business-killing-2024-05-06/>. Accessed on 14 January 2025.

the development of advanced technologies to address these concerns.

Asia is grappling with long-standing organised crime syndicates such as Japan's Yakuza and China's Triads, who engage in extortion within complex political and business structures. The Yakuza, which has registered offices and participates in quasi-legal activities, focuses on construction projects and companies.<sup>43</sup> The Triads exploit underground economies through lending and racketeering schemes that use violence and intimidation. Southeast Asia is also seeing an increase in cyber extortion, particularly in Indonesia and the Philippines, where ransomware attacks exploit poor cybersecurity infrastructure and understanding, leaving enterprises and individuals vulnerable.<sup>44</sup>

Political unrest and military strife in Africa intensify extortion. Organisations like Boko Haram in Nigeria rely on abductions and ransom demands, as seen in the kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls.<sup>45</sup> Militant forces in crisis areas use unofficial taxation structures, such as Somalia's al-Shabaab, which collects funds from businesses and humanitarian organisations. These actions harm local economies and intensify the

<sup>43</sup> "Serious Organised Crime in Japan: The Yakuza" n.d. Cited in <https://intelligenceperspective.com/serious-organised-crime-in-japan-the-yakuza/>. Accessed on 14 January 2025.

<sup>44</sup> "How is Southeast Asia tackling cyberattacks on the underbanked?" 15 October 2024. Cited in <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/10/southeast-asia-tackling-cyberattacks-underbanked/>. Accessed on 14 January 2025.

<sup>45</sup> "For one Nigerian family, freedom after a kidnapping hasn't ended their terror" 9 April 2024. Cited in <https://www.npr.org/2024/04/09/1241997352/nigeria-kidnap-mass-abduction-chibok-girls>. Accessed on 14 January 2025.

difficulties encountered by already vulnerable populations. The Middle East's problems are linked to warfare and terrorism. Organisations like ISIS rely on extortion to fund their operations, levying fees on territory under their control.<sup>46</sup> Militias and warlords take advantage of instability in conflict zones like Syria and Yemen to engage in informal taxation and extortion. These practices fuel violent wars and exacerbate humanitarian crises, needing military intervention, economic development, and political stability to mitigate their effects.

Extortion and violence in these areas undermine economic growth, social stability, and public safety. Resolving these problems would necessitate international cooperation, capable law enforcement, technological innovation, and continuous attempts to promote economic and political stability in at-risk areas.

## **Impacts of Extortion and Violence**

The impacts of extortion and violence are wide-ranging, affecting individuals, communities, and entire nations. These activities cause direct harm and undermine social and economic stability.

### **I. Economic Consequences**

Extortion is highly detrimental to organisations and individuals. Cyber extortion, operational disruptions, and reputational damage can cause companies

significant financial losses. Traditional extortion blocks economic growth because businesses must divert resources to illegitimate demands. These costs frequently cause consumers to pay more for goods and services. Extortion also discourages foreign and domestic investment, limiting job creation and economic growth. In extortion-prone locations, businesses may move to informal economies to avoid criminal attention, limiting legal economic growth.

### **2. Social Implications**

Extortion and violence develop a pervasive sense of fear and mistrust on a societal scale. This can damage community cohesion and frustrate collaborative attempts to address common issues. Extortion victims frequently suffer from psychological stress, which can hurt their quality of life and capacity to participate in communal activities. In areas where criminal gangs wield significant power, residents may feel dissatisfied with formal governing mechanisms, aggravating social fragmentation.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the normalisation of extortion and violence in some societies can perpetuate criminal conduct by raising younger generations in situations where such behaviours are viewed as a means of survival or success.<sup>48</sup> The erosion of trust goes beyond local communities, influencing citizens' interactions with law enforcement, which is frequently considered incapable or complicit.

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<sup>46</sup> "The financing of the 'Islamic State' in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)" 2017. Cited in [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2017/603835/EXPO\\_IDA%282017%29603835\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2017/603835/EXPO_IDA%282017%29603835_EN.pdf). Accessed on 14 January 2025.

<sup>47</sup> Christopher Blattman Gustavo Duncan Benjamin Lessing Santiago Tobón, "Gang rule: Understanding and countering criminal governance," *national bureau of economic research*, April 2023.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

The long-term effects of extortion and violence can be severe, impeding progress across multiple facets of progress. Education systems frequently suffer when schools become targets for extortion or are forced to close due to violence in the surrounding neighbourhood. Health outcomes are also impacted, as healthcare providers may face threats or extortion demands, limiting their ability to offer critical services. The continuance of extortion and violence adds to long-term poverty and inequality, with disadvantaged communities bearing the brunt of the economic and social costs. A comprehensive approach that combines institutional improvement, community resilience promotion, and economic development is required to minimise the appeal of criminal activities.

### **3. Political and Governance Challenges**

Extortion and violence can erode democracy and governance by undermining state institutions and promoting corruption. Criminal groups occasionally enter political systems, leveraging their influence to safeguard their interests and sustain cycles of criminal activity.<sup>49</sup> This presents a considerable obstacle to initiatives that advance good governance and the rule of law. In areas where political officials participate in or gain from extortion schemes, popular trust in governmental institutions wanes, resulting in apathy and less civic participation. Moreover, reallocating resources to tackle extortion-related concerns,

including heightened security protocols and legal proceedings, can burden government resources and restrict the ability to invest in essential public services such as education and healthcare. The convergence of crime and politics obstructs international relations as countries grapple with transnational criminal networks that exploit fragile governance systems.<sup>50</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The history of extortion and violence demonstrates a constant and shifting threat that has influenced societies around the world. From ancient civilisations' institutionalised sacrifices to cyber extortion in the digital age, criminal behaviours have changed due to changing political, economic, and technological settings. This report briefly examined the historical trajectory and global patterns of extortion and violence, highlighting the complexities of these issues and the far-reaching implications. Combating extortion and violence requires a comprehensive strategy that combines vigorous law enforcement with programs that address root causes such as poverty, inequality, and political instability. International collaboration is critical, as the global nature of many criminal networks necessitates coordinated responses. Understanding the mechanisms of extortion and violence can help society better prepare to face these challenges and build a safer and more stable environment for future generations.

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<sup>49</sup> Nicholas Barnes, "Criminal Politics: An Integrated Approach to the Study of Organized Crime, Politics, and Violence," *Perspectives on Politics*, 20 November 2017.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

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## Annexe

Some definitional clarification according to BPO Codebook.

**Gunfight.** A shootout between law enforcement agencies and criminals, militants, or other irregular forces, including the latter, 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 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 is perpetrated with the intent of damaging property—examples are vandalism and 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: the lynching of a thief, looting of shops and houses owned by a religious minority



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