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Partisan Attribution and Crime Framing in Bangladeshi Online News during the 2024–2026 Political Transition

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Bangladeshi online news linked political parties to crime during the 2024–2026 political transition. Drawing on framing, agenda-setting and attribution theories, it analyses 152 news articles from 45 outlets, selected through Google searches and manual screening of 270 candidate reports. The purposive corpus was limited to party families represented in the 13th Parliament. Articles were coded for party family, organizational affiliation, crime type, actor position, procedural status, political phase, outlet, location and four overlapping frames. Two coders independently coded 35 systematically selected articles; the pooled Krippendorff's alpha was .94. BNP-linked actors dominated the coverage (121 articles), followed by NCP (14) and Jamaat-e-Islami (8). Extortion was the largest crime category (57 articles). Party-linked actors appeared as accused in 114 articles, as victims or targets in 34, and in mixed positions in 4. Coverage was highest after the election, even after adjustment for phase length. The findings show that party labels functioned as prominent cues of responsibility during the transition. However, the corpus measures news visibility rather than crime prevalence or legal guilt and cannot establish a causal governing-party effect.

Keywords: Bangladesh, Crime News, News Framing, Partisan Attribution, Political Communication, Political Transition

2024–2026 Siyasi Geçiş Sürecinde Bangladeş Çevrim İçi Haberlerinde Partizan Atıf ve Suçun Çerçevelenmesi

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Bangladeş'teki çevrimiçi gazetelerin 2024-2026 iktidar geçişi sırasında suç haberlerine siyasi parti etiketlerini nasıl iliştirdiğini incelemektedir. Analiz, 5 Ağustos 2024 ile 14 Haziran 2026 arasında yayımlanan, 46 çevrimiçi haber kaynağından derlenen 152 kodlanmış haber öğesini kapsamaktadır. Her öğe 13. Parlamento'da sandalye kazanan bir partiyle bağlantılı bir kişiyi, kanadı veya yerel birimi adlandırır ve bu aktörü haraç, arazi ya da pazar gaspı, saldırı, cinayet, tehdit veya kadına yönelik cinsel şiddet ve istismarla ilişkilendirir. Nitel içerik analizi ve betimsel sayımlar kullanılarak öğeler, parti ailesi, örgütsel kanat, suç türü, kanıt aşaması, haber kaynağı, dönem, idari bölge ve yön (parti figürünün sanık mı yoksa mağdur mu olarak sunulduğu) bakımından kodlanmıştır. Haberler büyük ölçüde Bangladeş Milliyetçi Partisi (BNP) ve onun kanatları çevresinde yoğunlaşır; 152 öğenin 122'sini bunlar oluşturur ve bu, Ulusal Vatandaş Partisi (NCP) (14), Bangladeş Cemaat-i İslami (Jamaat) (10) ve daha küçük partilerin çok önündedir. Bu durum, ölçülmüş suçluluğu değil, iktidardaki partinin görünürlük etkisini yansıtır. Haraç, en büyük suç kategorisidir (58 öğe) ve başta Jubo Dal olmak üzere gençlik ile öğrenci kanatlarına atfetmelerin çoğunu taşır. Yön, 117 sanık ile 35 mağdur ya da hedef öğe arasında bölünür. Tüm derlemde iddia aşamasındaki ve erken işlem haberleri mahkemece kanıtlanmış sonuçlardan fazladır ve pencere içinde hiçbir mahkûmiyet kaydı yoktur; öne çıkan bir tecavüz davasında parti etiketinin kendisi mahkemede tartışma konusu olmuştur. Çalışma, parti atfetmesinin kamuoyu dikkatini biçimlendiren bir çerçeveleme aracı olarak işlev gördüğünü ve kanıtlanmış suçun doğrudan bir ölçüsü olarak okunmaması gerektiğini savunur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bangladeş, Suç Haberleri, Haber Çerçeveleme, Partizanca Atıf, Siyasal İletişim, Siyasal Geçiş

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Introduction

When a news report places a political party's name beside an alleged offense, the label does more than identify an actor. It can guide readers' judgments about responsibility, political power and moral accountability. During a political transition, this connection may turn a local crime report into a broader account of political culture and governing legitimacy.

Bangladesh, after 5 August 2024, provides a useful setting for this question. The fall of the Awami League government, the interim period, the February 2026 election and the formation of the 13th Parliament changed the direction of political scrutiny. This study does not attempt to cover every party active during the transition. Before searching, it retrospectively bounded the comparison to party families that secured at least one seat in the 13th Parliament and identified wings and closely linked precursor organisations. The Awami League fell outside this parliamentary inclusion rule; its activities had also been prohibited and its registration suspended before the 2026 election (Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, 2025).

The paper therefore studies crime-news attribution among selected parliamentary and power-relevant party families, not all political actors in Bangladesh. It measures how often and how clearly included online reports connect these actors to alleged crime, and what procedural status each article reports. A news count measures attention within a purposive corpus, not offending, guilt or the complete volume of coverage. Party attribution is consequently analysed as a framing practice rather than proof of criminal responsibility.

The paper is guided by four research questions:

RQ1. How is the online crime-news corpus distributed across retrospectively selected parliamentary party families and their organizational wings or linked units, and how are these actors positioned as accused persons, victims or targets?

RQ2. How does party-attributed crime-news coverage vary across crime types, transition phases, news outlets and administrative divisions, and what party-by-crime concentrations emerge within these distributions?

RQ3. What reported procedural status appears in the corpus, from allegation and organizational action to arrest, case filing, charge or jail, and what does this distribution imply for pre-adjudication framing risk?

RQ4. What recurring framing patterns organise party attribution in the corpus, particularly accused-side attribution, contested party labels and combinations of responsibility, conflict, crime-event and political-attack frames?

Literature Review

The first body of work is framing theory. Goffman (1974) described frames as structures that organize experience, while Entman (1993, p. 52) defined framing as the selection and salience of information. Later scholarship treats news frames as patterned interpretive packages rather than isolated words and stresses that they can be identified through several valid conceptual and methodological approaches (Chong & Druckman, 2007; D'Angelo, 2002; de Vreese, 2005; Matthes, 2009). This matters for crime news because an article can foreground the offense, the accused person, the party label, the victim, police action or political reaction. The same event can therefore be organized as a law-and-order story, a party-discipline story, a victim story or a political-attack story.

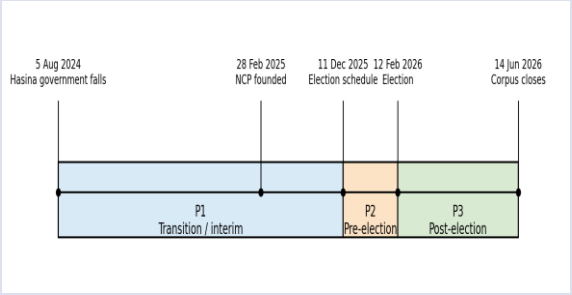

Figure 1. Timeline of the 2024-2026 transition and the three coding phases used in this study

The second body of work is agenda-setting and attribute salience. McCombs and Shaw (1972, p. 176) showed that news attention can shape what the public considers important. Second-level agenda-setting extends this argument to the attributes attached to public objects and political actors (Kiousis & McCombs, 2004; McCombs et al., 1997). In this study, the party label is treated as such an attribute. Repetition in headlines and leads can make political identity as visible as the alleged offense, although agenda-setting power varies across issues and political contexts (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006).

The third body of work concerns press-state relations and the sociology of news. Bennett's indexing theory argues that news frequently follows the boundaries of elite debate (Bennett, 1990, p. 106), while Hallin's (1986) spheres of consensus, legitimate controversy and deviance explain how political actors move between normality and marginalization. News production is also shaped by professional routines, organizational priorities, ownership and institutional pressure (Bennett et al., 2007; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). In Bangladesh, legal pressure, party polarization and ownership influence have constrained journalistic autonomy and made changes in political power especially relevant to news visibility (Ahmed, 2012; Haque, 2019).

The fourth body of work is attribution and crime reporting. Heider (1958) and Weiner (1985, p. 548) show how available cues guide judgments about causes and responsibility. Crime reports supply such cues through names, occupations, locations, party identities and

descriptions of police or court action. Because crime news is often dramatic, episodic and person-centered, it can encourage judgments before broader institutional context or legal resolution becomes visible (Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000, p. 560; Jewkes, 2015; Surette, 2015). Experimental and linkage research further demonstrates that episodic and thematic framing can alter individual and political responsibility attributions (Boukes, 2022; Iyengar, 1991). This is why the present study separates actor direction from reported procedural status.

Research focused on Bangladesh shows why party labels cannot be treated as neutral identifiers. Ahmed (2012) describes political parallelism and self-censorship in the Bangladeshi press, while Arman et al. (2025) show that ownership shaped the framing of the July 2024 uprising. Farhanaz and Hossain (2026) find that election coverage in The Daily Star varied between caretaker- and party-government contexts, with conflict, intimidation and election-conspiracy frames becoming prominent. Research on controversial online coverage also identifies misleading headlines, contextual distortion, victim blaming and character assassination as recurring framing risks (Nahar et al., 2023). Together, these studies indicate that political context, ownership and newsroom constraints influence which actors and attributes become visible.

Existing studies have examined Bangladeshi election framing, uprising narratives, ownership influence, press constraints and sensational coverage. However, none has systematically mapped party-attributed crime news across the 2024–2026 transition while distinguishing accused actors from victims or targets or separating reported procedural status from proven guilt. International work demonstrates that episodic and thematic frames can shift individual and political responsibility attributions (Boukes, 2022), yet this mechanism has not been tested through a multi-outlet corpus centered on Bangladesh's newly formed parliamentary and power-relevant actors. This study addresses that gap through article-level coding of party family, organizational label, actor direction, crime category, political phase and procedural status, while treating the four qualitative frames as overlapping interpretive devices.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework treats party attribution as a layered framing process. It combines agenda-setting, framing and attribution theory. Agenda-setting explains why repeated naming of a party makes it more visible in public discourse. Framing explains how news texts give meaning to party labels. Attribution theory explains how readers may move from a reported party connection to a judgment about responsibility.

The first layer is salience. In a news item, salience is created by headline placement, repetition, naming and the order of facts. If a headline says that a Jubo Dal leader, a Chhatra Shibir leader or an NCP organizer was arrested, the political label becomes part of the event's meaning. It may be factually relevant, but it also shapes interpretation.

The second layer is direction. A party may be visible because its figure is accused, or because its figure is the victim of an attack or killing. These two directions must not be combined without care. Coverage about a party is not the same as wrongdoing by that party. This study, therefore, distinguishes between accused items and victim or target items, following Iyengar's (1991) distinction between episodic and thematic responsibility.

The third layer is reported procedural status. Articles do not all describe the same stage: some report an allegation, some report organizational action, some report detention or arrest, some report a case filing, and a smaller number reach charge or jail. These are descriptive categories, not a certainty gradient and not a legal scale. Arrest or case filing does not, by itself, make an allegation true, and none of these stages is equivalent to a conviction.

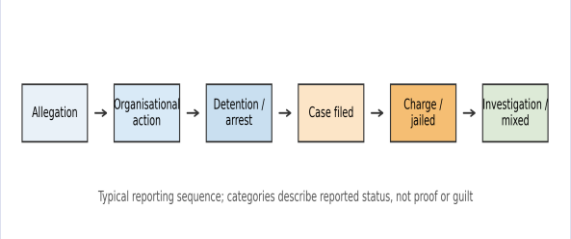

Figure 2. Reported procedural-status sequence used in the coding; the categories describe reporting, not proof or guilt

The fourth layer is interpretive packaging. Four frames were coded as non-mutually-exclusive variables, so an article could receive more than one. The responsibility frame was assigned when a party actor or wing was explicitly held responsible for an alleged act, often alongside denial or organizational discipline. The conflict frame was assigned when rival political sides, reciprocal violence, or a party-linked victim or target organized the account. The crime-event frame applied when police arrest, case or court procedure led the story. The political-attack frame was applied when denial, counter-accusation or a claim of politically motivated labelling was foregrounded. Contested attribution cuts across these frames when the party label itself becomes disputed.

Methodology

This study uses qualitative content analysis with descriptive counting (Krippendorff, 2018; Neuendorf, 2017; Riffe et al., 2019). The unit of analysis is one retrievable online news article. Exact duplicate URLs are counted once. Distinct reports and subsequent follow-ups on the same incident are included because the

research question concerns article-level visibility and framing across outlets and over time. The results must therefore be interpreted as article counts, not as a count of unique criminal incidents.

The coverage window runs from 5 August 2024 to 14 June 2026 and is divided into three phases: P1, the transition or interim phase (5 August 2024–10 December 2025); P2, the pre-election phase (11 December 2025–12 February 2026); and P3, the post-election phase (13 February–14 June 2026). Before searching, the researchers adopted a retrospective inclusion rule: the party family had to have secured at least one seat in the 13th Parliament (Bangladesh Parliament, 2026). Identified wings and closely linked precursor organizations were included within those parliamentary party families. This design was intended to examine actors who became relevant to the parliamentary or governing power after the transition, not every political party active after 5 August 2024. The Awami League was excluded by the no-seat rule; additionally, its activities had been prohibited and its registration suspended before the election (Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, 2025).

Each article was coded for party family, wing or organizational label, crime type, actor direction, reported procedural status, phase, administrative division, outlet, source link, coverage note and four frames. Crime categories were extortion, land or market grabbing, attack or clash, murder or killing, intimidation or threat, and rape or abuse of women. Direction recorded whether the party-linked actor appeared as accused, victim or target; articles containing both positions were coded as mixed. Reported procedural status recorded the highest stage described in the article: allegation, organizational action, detention, arrest, case filing, charge or jail, investigation, or mixed-clash status. Frames were coded as non-mutually-exclusive binary variables using the definitions stated above.

Intercoder reliability was assessed on 35 of the 152 records (23.0%). Two coders with academic backgrounds in journalism independently coded all variables. The overlap sample was selected systematically by taking every second record from the ordered coding sheet, beginning with C001, until 35 records had been selected. The pooled Krippendorff's alpha was .94 across the coded variables (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007; Krippendorff, 2011). Because variable-specific coefficients and coder-by-variable matrices were not available, .94 is reported as an aggregate coefficient and should not be interpreted as evidence that every variable separately achieved that value.

Search procedure and keywords

Candidate discovery was conducted through Google and followed a purposive, party-by-party procedure. Searches were performed separately and sequentially, beginning with BNP, followed by Jamaat-e-Islami and NCP, and then each of the remaining parties represented by at least one member in the 13th Parliament. For every eligible party, the researchers used combinations of the party name, relevant wing names, crime terms and procedural terms in English and Bangla. The combined searches produced 270 potentially relevant reports, all of which were opened and checked manually against the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Party and wing terms included BNP, Jubo Dal, Chhatra Dal, Swechhasebak Dal, Sramik Dal, Jamaat, Chhatra Shibir, NCP / National Citizen Party, Jatiyo Nagorik Committee, Islami Andolan, and the names of other parties that obtained at least one seat in the 13th Parliament. Searches used both English and Bangla-script equivalents. Closely linked movement or precursor labels were included only when their relationship to an eligible parliamentary family was explicit in the article.

Crime terms included chadabaji / extortion, dakhal / land or market grabbing, dhorshon / rape, nari nirjaton / abuse of women, hamla-songhorsho / attack and clash, khun / murder, and humki / threat. English, romanised Bangla, and Bangla-script equivalents were used in the Google search queries.

Procedural terms included greptar / arrest, mamla / case, charge sheet, and bohishkar / expulsion, together with their Bangla-script equivalents. A candidate was eligible only when it fell within the study window, contained a relevant party-linked actor and crime-related event or allegation, and provided an article-specific retrievable URL. The final purposive corpus comprises 152 articles from 45 outlets. The coded-item dataset preserves the article identifiers and source URLs. The corpus supports descriptive and frame-analytic claims about the included coverage, but not estimates of real-world crime prevalence, the total population of transition-period news, or the frequency of unique criminal incidents. Data availability information is provided in the declaration section.

The main limitation is selection dependence. Google results are ranked and dynamic, and their ordering can vary by time, location and search history. The searches were conducted separately for each eligible party using consistent categories of terms, but the design did not impose equal-count quotas and cannot be treated as a probability sample or an exhaustive census of transition-period news. National, recent and highly indexed reports may have been easier to retrieve than local reports. Repeated reports and follow-ups can also make one incident more visible at the article level. The study therefore avoids claims about crime prevalence, equal party offending, unique incident frequency or causation. Future research should preregister database-search strings, preserve complete result and exclusion logs, assign incident identifiers and report variable-specific reliability coefficients.

Findings

The findings are organized around RQ1-RQ4. RQ1 addresses parliamentary party-family, organizational-label and actor-direction distributions; RQ2 examines

crime type, phase, outlet and regional variation; RQ3 reports procedural status and unresolved-stage exposure; and RQ4 examines accused-side attribution, contested party labels and overlapping frames. All counts refer to the corpus of 152 articles.

Party concentration and the accused-victim split

Addressing RQ1, the corpus is strongly concentrated on the BNP family and features party-linked actors as accused persons, victims, or targets. BNP accounts for 121 of 152 articles, followed by NCP-linked actors with 14 and Jamaat-linked actors with 8; four articles concern other residual actors, four are multi-party articles and one concerns Islami Andolan. Within BNP coverage, 93 articles position BNP-linked actors on the accused side, 26 position them as victims or targets, and 2 contain mixed directions. This pattern is consistent with heightened scrutiny of the party family closest to governing power, but the purposive design cannot demonstrate a governing-party effect or enable comparison of offending rates.

Attribution through wings and local units

RQ1 is further addressed by the organizational labels through which attribution operates. Jubo Dal remains the most frequent label group with 54 articles, followed by the BNP central structure with 37, Chhatra Dal with 18, NCP with 11, Swechhasebak Dal with 9, Jamaat central with 5, and Sramik Dal, Chhatra Shibir, Gono Odhikar Parishad and Khelafat Majlish with 3 each. These are article-level labels; combined organizational labels are grouped under the most directly relevant displayed category. The concentration shows how local and wing identities make political connections visible, but it also risks leading readers to generalize from a local actor to an entire party.

Distribution of Crime Categories

Addressing RQ2, extortion remains the largest crime category with 57 articles, followed by murder or killing with 31, rape or abuse of women with 26, attack or clash with 21, land or market grabbing with 15, and intimidation or threat with 2. These are coverage categories rather than crime-incidence estimates. Extortion is especially visible in reports about transport stands, hospitals, markets, land and informal toll systems, whereas murder coverage often includes victim-centered reports and later procedural follow-ups.

Timing across the transition

For RQ2, raw phase totals are 60 articles in P1, 11 in P2 and 81 in P3. Because the phases are unequal in length, the comparison was normalized using articles per 30.44 days. P1 covers 493 days and yields 3.70 articles per 30.44 days; P2 covers 64 days and yields 5.23; P3 covers 122 days and yields 20.21. The post-election concentration, therefore, remains visible after time standardization. This is a descriptive coverage pattern and does not establish that the election caused the increase.

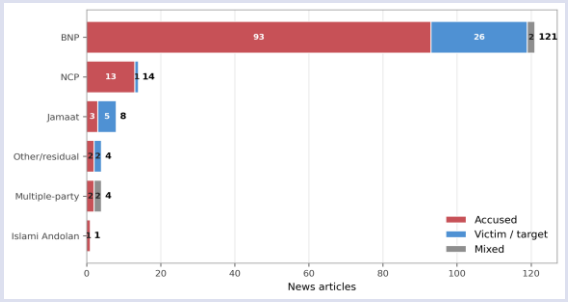

Figure 3. Article-level coverage by party family and actor direction (n = 152)

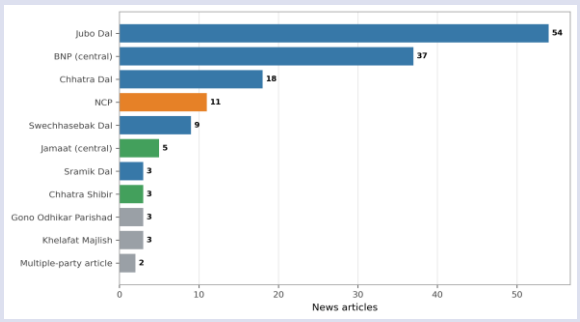

Figure 4. Most frequent organizational labels in the corpus

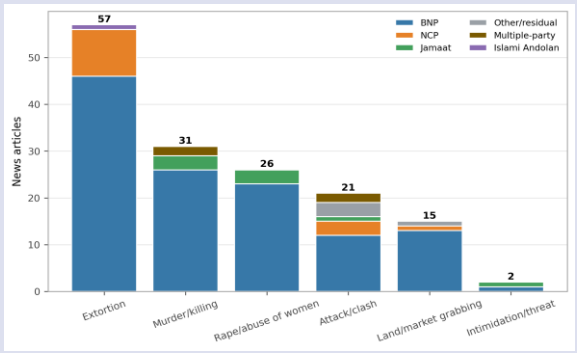

Figure 5. Crime-type coverage by party family in the corpus

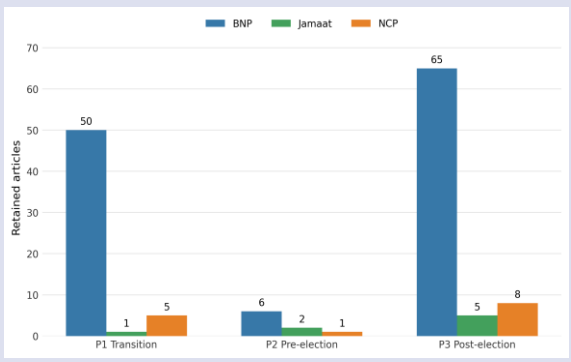

Figure 6. Phase-wise coverage by the three largest party families

Outlets and amplification

For RQ2, at the outlet level, Prothom Alo contributes 26 articles, Desh Rupantor 20, The Daily Star 19, Ittefaq 14 and The Business Standard 12. These concentrations matter because the study measures article-level visibility: multiple reports or follow-ups can repeatedly expose readers to the same party label, even when they concern a single underlying incident.

Party-by-Crime Distribution

For RQ2, at the party-by-crime level, BNP-linked articles occupy the largest cells: extortion (46), murder or killing (26), rape or abuse of women (23), land or market grabbing (13), attack or clash (12), and intimidation or threat (1). NCP-linked coverage is concentrated in extortion (10) and attack or clash (3), while Jamaat-linked coverage includes rape or abuse (3), murder or killing (3), attack or clash (1), and intimidation or threat (1). Four multi-party articles are shown separately; each represents a unique outlet article, and no URL is counted twice.

Regional patterns by division

For RQ2, Dhaka is the largest regional category with 45 articles, followed by Chattogram with 29. Khulna contains 13, Rajshahi 12, Barishal 9, Mymensingh 7, Rangpur 6 and Sylhet 6; 25 national-level or unspecified-location articles remain outside a single division. In Figure 10, the left chamber compares total article volume by location, while the right chamber displays the crime-category composition of each location. Because the public appendix does not preserve a separate row-level division field, these cross-tabulated regional values derive from the regional coding and should be interpreted descriptively.

Reported Procedural Status and Evidential Limits

Addressing RQ3, the reported procedural-status categories show 53 arrest articles, 40 allegation articles, 23 case-filed articles, 13 charge-or-jailed articles, 10 organizational-action articles, 6 investigation articles, 5 detention articles and 2 mixed-clash articles. Collapsing these categories, 104 articles report some action beyond allegation or unresolved investigation, 40 remain at allegation, and 8 remain under investigation or mixed-clash reporting. These categories describe what the article reported; they do not rank the truth of an allegation, and no conviction was recorded within the window.

Unresolved-stage exposure and pre-adjudication risk

RQ3 is further addressed through an unresolved-stage indicator. For outlets with at least five articles, Figure 13 shows the share coded as allegation, investigation or mixed-clash rather than a later reported action. The Business Standard has the highest share in this selected group (75%), followed by Prothom Alo (42%), The Daily Star (42%), ITV (40%), Desh Rupantor (20%) and Ittefaq (7%). This is a descriptive proxy for unresolved-stage exposure, not a judgment of headline wording, newsroom intent or reporting quality.

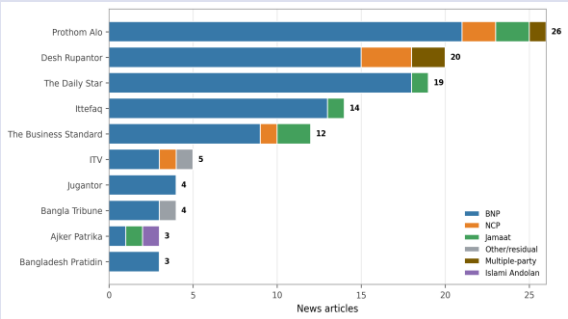

Figure 7. Most active outlets in the corpus, by party family

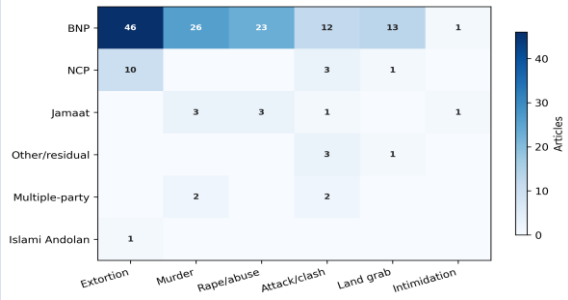

Figure 8. Party family by crime type in the corpus

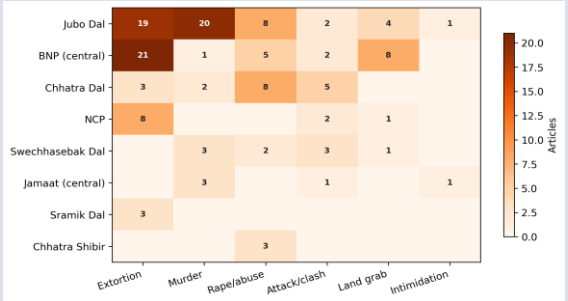

Figure 9. Organizational label by crime type in the corpus

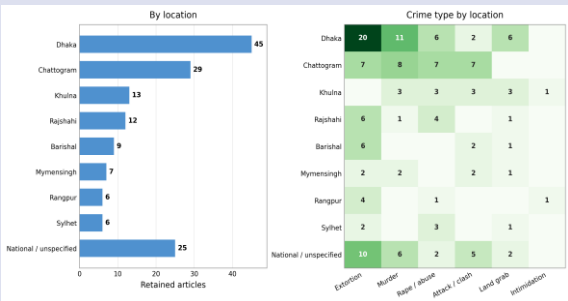

Figure 10. Regional distribution of the corpus, by article volume and crime type

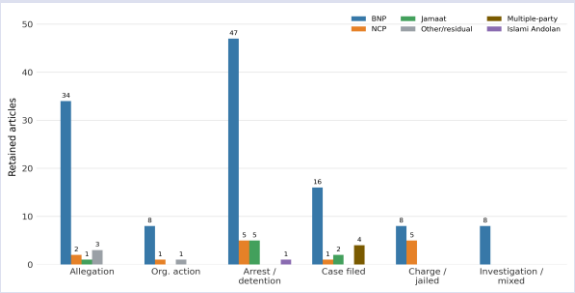

Figure 11. Reported procedural status by party family in the corpus

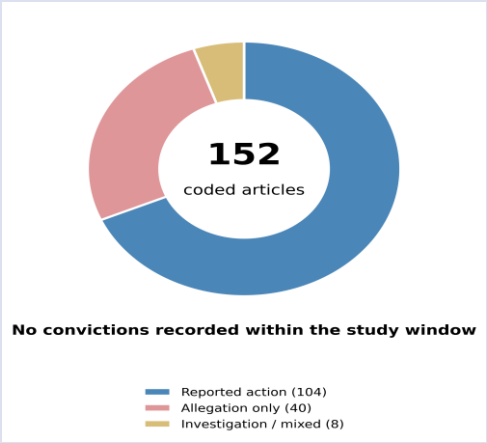

Figure 12. Reported action, allegation and unresolved-status groups; no conviction was recorded

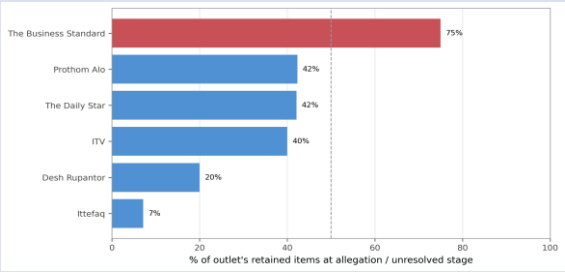

Figure 13. Share of articles at allegation or unresolved status among outlets with at least five items

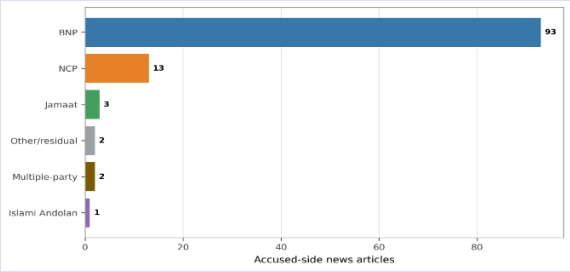

Figure 14. Party attribution among accused-side articles (n = 114)

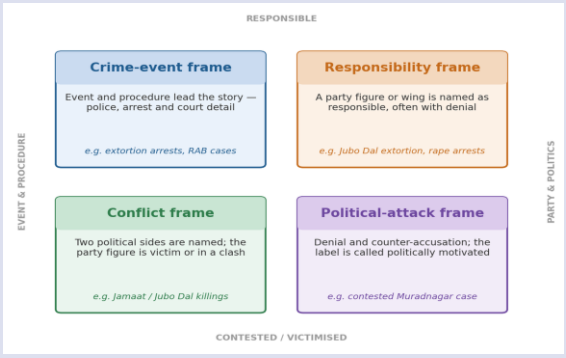

Figure 15. Qualitative frame map of party crime coverage, shown as four interpretive quadrants

Party attribution in accused-side coverage

Addressing RQ4, Figure 14 presents party attribution across the 114 articles in which the party-linked actor is positioned on the accused side. It does not measure positive, negative or neutral headline tone. BNP-linked actors appear in 93 accused-side articles, NCP-linked actors in 13, Jamaat-linked actors in 3, other residual actors in 2, multi-party actors in 2 and Islami Andolan in 1. These results concern accused-side attribution and should not be interpreted as a headline-valence measure.

Contested attribution: the Muradnagar case

RQ4 is also addressed through the Muradnagar case, where the party label itself becomes contested and thus part of the political framing of the alleged crime. In the Muradnagar rape case in Cumilla in June 2025, the prime accused, Fazor Ali, was named in much early coverage as a local BNP figure and was arrested with four others. Soon afterwards, a BNP joint convener filed a defamation case against a local journalist for identifying Fazor Ali as a BNP leader, calling the label false, fabricated and politically motivated, while a senior BNP figure described the wider episode as an attempt to damage the party. This item is coded as accused but flagged as contested, because the dispute is exactly what the study is built to observe. The party label is doing visible political work, and its attachment to a crime is itself being fought over in public and in court. Read alongside the political-attack frame, the case is a clear reminder that attribution and proven responsibility are separate questions.

Frame combinations

Finally, RQ4 is addressed through four recurring, overlapping frames: responsibility, conflict, crime-event and political-attack framing. Figure 15 organizes the operational definitions into four interpretive quadrants. Articles could receive more than one frame. Responsibility and crime-event frames frequently overlap in stories that name an accused party actor and report police or court action. Conflict framing appears when rival sides or a party-linked victim organize the account. Political-attack framing appears when denial, counter-accusation, or claims of politically motivated labelling are foregrounded, as in the contested coverage of Muradnagar. Because the public appendix does not display article-level frame fields, the paper treats the figure as an operational map rather than reporting unverified frame frequencies.

Discussion

The clearest result is a BNP-centered pattern of news visibility. BNP-linked actors appear in 121 of the 152 articles, or 79.6% of the purposive corpus, far more often than actors linked to NCP, Jamaat-e-Islami or the other parliamentary party families. This concentration is consistent with a governing-party visibility effect, but it should not be treated as proof of such an effect. The study measures the visibility of party labels in selected news reports, not the prevalence of crime among party members. It also uses a retrospectively defined parliamentary sampling frame and Google-based candidate discovery. The central finding is therefore best understood as a relationship between political relevance and mediated attention within this corpus, rather than as a causal estimate of how governing status changes news coverage.

Bennett's (1990) indexing theory helps explain why actors close to political power may occupy more news space. Journalists routinely depend on officials, police, party representatives, rivals and locally recognized power holders to define events and provide quotable claims. As the BNP moved from the principal opposition force to the dominant parliamentary and governing actor, its leaders and affiliated organizations became more available as sources, more consequential as objects of criticism and more valuable as labels through which local conflict could be narrated. Hallin's (1986) model provides a related insight: allegations involving actors connected to a legitimate governing force fall within the sphere of legitimate controversy, where routine scrutiny is expected. However, these theories describe plausible mechanisms; the present design does not directly test journalistic sourcing, editorial decision-making or changes in newsroom behavior.

External evidence gives the BNP concentration a political context, but not direct validation. As contextual background rather than a directly comparable benchmark, TIB (2026), drawing on statistics compiled by Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), reported BNP involvement in 550 of 600 political-violence incidents (91.7%) between August 2024 and December 2025 (The Business Standard, 2026). TIB's subsequently updated executive summary extended the period through January 2026 and reported BNP involvement in 617 of 675 incidents (91.4%). The similarity between these proportions and the BNP's dominance in the present corpus is notable, but the figures are not equivalent. TIB counted incidents of political violence, allowed more than one party to be associated with the same incident and used a different observation period. This study counts online news articles, includes offenses beyond political violence and may contain separate reports about the same event. The comparison, therefore, supports contextual plausibility rather than statistical convergence or external validation.

The dominance of extortion reporting provides a second, more substantive insight. Extortion accounts for 57 articles, making it the largest crime category. In these reports, extortion is not presented simply as an exchange of money under threat. It is frequently tied to control over transport stands, hospitals, markets, business premises, land, waterways and informal toll systems. The frame is therefore also about territorial and economic authority. During a political transition, reports of extortion can signal that access to local resources is being redistributed from one network of influence to another. This reading is consistent with TIB's wider observation that post-transition political competition involved attempts to control terminals, bridges, markets, ghats, quarries and water bodies. The critical point is that crime reporting becomes a way of mapping informal governance: the alleged offense tells readers who may control everyday economic space, while the party label connects that local claim to a national political narrative.

At the same time, the prominence of extortion should not be interpreted as evidence that it was objectively the most common offense. Extortion has characteristics that make it highly reportable: it produces identifiable complainants, visible commercial locations, police complaints, party disciplinary responses and recurring conflict over control. Other forms of coercion may be less visible, less likely to be reported or described without a party label. Agenda-setting and framing theory, therefore, direct attention to salience rather than prevalence (Entman, 1993; McCombs, 2004). Repetition can make extortion appear to define the political transition even when the corpus cannot establish its frequency relative to unreported or differently labelled offenses.

The accused-victim distinction is essential to interpreting this visibility. Party-linked actors are positioned as accused in 114 articles, as victims or targets in 34 and in mixed positions in 4. Within BNP coverage, 93 articles place BNP-linked actors on the accused side, 26 place them as victims or targets, and 2 contain both positions. A party label, therefore, does not perform one stable function. In accused-side reports, it can operate as a cue for responsibility and organizational accountability. In victim-side reports, it can identify the target of political violence, explain the motive or intensify the political significance of a killing or attack. Collapsing these positions would exaggerate accusatory coverage and conceal how the same party can be framed simultaneously as powerful, responsible, vulnerable and internally divided.

The procedural-status results further complicate any simple reading of guilt. The corpus contains allegations, arrests, detentions, case filings, charges, organizational measures and ongoing investigations, but no recorded conviction within the study window. These categories represent different stages of public and institutional response; they are not a ladder of evidential certainty. Arrest or expulsion may increase the perceived credibility of an allegation without proving legal responsibility. Conversely, a contested party affiliation can cause reputational harm before the underlying event

is established. The rape-or-abuse category illustrates the problem sharply: 23 of its 26 articles concern BNP-linked actors and 3 concern Chhatra Shibir, yet these remain article-level reports, and at least one-party attribution was formally disputed. The findings therefore support careful differentiation among alleged, accused, arrested, charged and convicted, especially in headlines and opening paragraphs.

The prominence of affiliated wings and local bodies shows how organizational identity is constructed from the ground up. Jubo Dal, Chhatra Dal, Sramik Dal, Swechhasebak Dal, Chhatra Shibir and local BNP or NCP structures appear more often than national leadership. This reflects the practical conditions of local reporting: a ward position, committee role, or student-wing identity offers an immediate explanation of political connection. Such labelling can make networks of influence visible and can create pressure for internal party discipline. Yet it also creates a problem of scale. A report about one local activist may be read as evidence about an entire party, even when the article does not establish authorisation, knowledge or support from higher organizational levels. Responsible reporting should therefore distinguish individual affiliation from institutional responsibility.

The temporal pattern strengthens the interpretation of intensified scrutiny but still does not establish its cause. Raw totals are 60 articles in P1, 11 in P2 and 81 in P3. After adjustment for unequal phase length, the average monthly rates are 3.70, 5.23 and 20.21, respectively. The sharp rise in P3 is consistent with greater attention following the election, when political power became institutionally settled. It may also reflect changes in the underlying number of reportable events, party competition, policing, outlet activity, search engine indexing, or the availability of follow-up reports. Because these explanations were not tested independently, the result should be described as a post-election concentration in coverage rather than as evidence that governing status itself caused the increase.

Regional variation points to the interaction between national party labels and local political economies. Dhaka and Chattogram contain the largest regional totals, while particular cases create visible clusters in Chattogram and Khulna. These concentrations may reflect local disputes over transport, markets, land, organizational control and factional competition. They may also reflect differences in outlet presence and online discoverability. Since the public appendix does not provide a complete, independently auditable division-by-crime cross-tabulation, the regional results should remain descriptive. Their value lies less in ranking divisions than in showing that party attribution is shaped by place-specific conflicts rather than by national politics alone.

Taken together, the findings reveal a democratic tension. Naming a political affiliation can improve accountability when the connection is relevant, verified and proportionate to the event. It can expose local abuses of political identity, show patterns across affiliated organizations and encourage parties to discipline members. The same label can also serve as a shortcut, converting an unresolved allegation into a broader judgment about a party. In a polarized transition, party identification may take precedence over procedural qualifications, while corrections or disputes receive less attention. The solution is not to remove party labels from crime news, but to explain the basis of the affiliation, distinguish individual conduct from organizational responsibility, preserve the accused-victim direction and keep the procedural status visible throughout the report.

The study contributes to framing research by showing how indexing, agenda-setting and attribution operate together in a transitional media environment. Political power influences which actors become visible; repeated visibility increases the salience of party-crime associations; article-level frames assign responsibility or victimhood; and procedural labels shape how unresolved claims are interpreted. The BNP-centered distribution is consistent with this process, while the TIB/ASK figures place it within a wider context of documented political violence. However, the purposive parliamentary frame, unequal Google result environments, absence of an incident identifier and lack of direct newsroom evidence limit the conclusion to article-level visibility. Future research should combine a systematic outlet-based census with incident deduplication, party-exposure measures, headline-valence coding and interviews with journalists to test whether proximity to governing power independently predicts crime-news visibility.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study shows that party attribution in Bangladeshi online crime news operates as more than a descriptive label. It connects local allegations and acts of violence to broader judgments about political authority, organizational responsibility and the use of power during transition. The BNP-centered concentration and the marked post-election rise in coverage are consistent with intensified scrutiny of actors closer to the governing power, although the article-level design cannot determine crime prevalence or establish a causal effect of the governing party. The more important conclusion is therefore not simply which party was named most often, but how party identification shaped the meaning of crime. Extortion reports associated political identity with control over every day economic spaces, while references to local wings cast individual conduct as a question of organizational reputation. The accused-victim distinction further showed that the same party label could signal responsibility, vulnerability or political conflict.

The findings extend framing and indexing perspectives by showing how political visibility and procedural uncertainty interact. News attention followed power-relevant actors, but much of that attention developed before legal responsibility had been

determined. Allegation, arrest, detention, case filing, party discipline and charge are institutionally meaningful events, yet none is equivalent to conviction. A party label can nevertheless make an unresolved allegation politically consequential long before a court reaches a decision. Distinguishing actor direction and reported procedural status is therefore central to the study's contribution: it prevents all party mentions from being read as accusations and prevents official action from being mistaken for proof.

These conclusions have direct implications for political journalism. A party affiliation should be reported when it is relevant to the event and supported by verifiable information, with the basis of that connection made clear. Reports should distinguish an individual's affiliation from evidence of organizational authorization or responsibility, identify whether claims come from police, victims, party documents, court records or political rivals, and follow cases beyond their initial accusatory stage. Political parties also have an institutional responsibility to maintain transparent disciplinary records and to respond to credible allegations through accountable procedures rather than by unsupported denial. These practices would preserve the accountability value of party identification while reducing guilt-before-proof framing and reputational harm.

The conclusions remain bounded by the purposive parliamentary sampling frame, Google-based discovery, the absence of an incident identifier and the use of an aggregate rather than variable-specific reliability coefficient. Separate reports on a single event may increase article-level visibility, and the corpus cannot represent all crime news or all political actors during the transition. Future research should combine a systematic outlet-based census with incident deduplication, party-exposure measures, visible article-level frame and headline-valence coding, variable-specific reliability estimates and interviews with journalists. Such work could test whether proximity to governing power independently increases crime-news visibility. Within its stated limits, however, this study demonstrates why party attribution deserves attention as a consequential journalistic practice: during political transition, the way news connects crime, affiliation and procedural status can shape public understanding of both accountability and legitimate political power.

Declaration of Competing Interest:

No conflicts of interest.

Declaration of using Generative AI:

Generative AI tools were used only for language editing and data visualization. The authors conducted and verified article discovery, selection, coding, analysis and interpretation.

Data Availability Statement:

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