

Chapter Summaries

Reformation and Development in the Muslim World: Islamicity Indices as Benchmark

Chapter 1: Introduction

The political, social and economic performance of Muslim countries has been disappointing for at least 75 years and there is little prospect for improvement because they lack the institutional infrastructure to succeed. They cannot achieve sustained development and growth unless there is freedom, respect for human rights, the rule of law and justice, but these require political and social reforms that establish representative governance that is answerable to the people. While some attribute the failure of many Muslim societies to Islam, Islam is not the cause of their backwardness as they have not followed the rules and principles outlined in the Qur'an and practiced by the Prophet. Islam provides the framework for the path towards flourishing societies. Our hope is that Islamicity indices are adopted as the benchmark and impetus for needed reforms in Muslim countries. As one learned observer remarked: "The project holds up the mirror to the pretentious guardians of Islam to show how far apart their claims to Islamicity is from true Islam of the Qur'an. They would have to decide if they wish to continue to be part of the solution or continue to be a part of the problem. If the former, the project shows them where to begin—institutional reform."

Chapter 2: Islamic Teachings and Institutional Structure

In a rule-abiding Muslim community there must be political and individual freedom, no poverty alongside wealth, accountability of rulers and governments, and socio-economic justice. In Islam, justice thrives and proliferates when everything is placed in its rightful place and is achieved by simply following the divine rules. Based on Islamic teachings, we expect the Islamic economic system to differ in the following important ways from the conventional market-based economy: greater degree of justice in all aspects of economic management, higher moral standard, honesty and trust exhibited in the marketplace and in all economic transactions, poverty eradication, a more even distribution of wealth and income, no hoarding of wealth, no opulence in consumption, no exploitive speculation, risk sharing as opposed to debt contracts, better social infrastructure and provision of social services, better treatment of workers, higher education expenditures relative, higher degree of environmental preservation, and vigilantly supervised markets.

Chapter 3: Islamicity Indices and Institutional Assessment

There is much more to Islam than what is commonly referred to as the Five Pillars of Islam. These largely mechanical actions have been popularized by Western academics and in the process have trivialized the teachings of the Qur'an. In Islam actions speak louder than words. Indices provide a benchmark for measuring the degree to which a

country follows the practices and rules advocated in Islam. We do not incorporate the five pillars because our goal is not to reflect how many people say they are Muslims and pray five times a day or how many have performed their Hajj pilgrimage. Our benchmark is designed to assess the rule-compliance of societies with foundational Islamic teachings, or the extent that a society reflects Islamic teachings. This can be used by Muslims to gauge their performance as a community or country, assess what policies have supported and impeded progress, and what is needed for a sustained turnaround to establish just and thriving communities. Our indices capture the broad characteristics of a rule-abiding Muslim community and provide a mirror on the prevailing conditions in a community and country.

Chapter 4: The Broad Results

The countries that best exhibit the teachings of Islam are generally the countries of Europe, New Zealand, Australia and Canada. Their performance is strong across the board with limited up and down during the period 2000-2016. They exhibit strong institutions that are essential for economic and social development and growth—freedom, representative governance, the rule of law and an independent judiciary, respect for human and political rights and human dignity and generally avoiding conflicts. This is in contrast to the performance of Muslim countries, countries that profess Islam but do not reflect the teachings of the Qur’an. Their performance has been sub-par. The results lead to one inescapable conclusion—Muslim countries have little choice but to adopt effective institutional reform and scaffolding as recommended in Islam—recommendations that

are upheld outside of Islam. Muslim countries need essential political reforms and a realistic timetable for transitioning to representative and accountable governments.

Chapter 5: Muslim Country Indices and Attribution

The performance of Muslim countries, as detailed by our indices, has deteriorated during the period 2000 to 2016. Solid sustained performance requires all the four elements—economic, legal and governance, human and political rights and international relations—simultaneously and on a sustained basis. The four are interconnected, if one-part collapses, some other is unable to succeed. A look at the successful countries confirms two facts as the basis for success: (i) countries need a number of effective institutions simultaneously, and (ii) must avoid volatility. The Muslim countries that have done the best are few: Malaysia, the UAE, Qatar and Kuwait. Across the board, all of the countries that we reviewed had at least one sub-component indicator in which they persistently ranked in the worst 100-rank position between 2000 and 2016. Even top-ranking Muslim countries such as Malaysia and the UAE were not spared.

Chapter 6: Islamicity Indices as the Benchmark for Reforms in the Muslim World

Islam is a rules-based system (that define an institutional structure), with detailed rules that are designed to create thriving societies that have justice as their hallmark and foundation. Islam institutional scaffolding while similar to the basic institutions recommended by Adam Smith and enumerated by Douglass North, emphasizes

institutions that uphold social justice, freedom, human rights and human dignity, representative governance and political rights, an effective judicial system and the rule of law, provision of good education, healthcare and other social services for all, protection of property rights and competitive markets, a level playing field to insure equity for all individuals to thrive, and the provision of basic needs for those who cannot provide for themselves. Unfortunately, most of these attributes of an ideal Islamic system have been missing in most Muslim countries and are the reason for their dismal performance.

Chapter 7: Support from the Great Powers

Foreign interference in the affairs of many Muslim countries, especially those with oil and natural gas, principally by Great Britain earlier and more recently the United States, began after WWI. Besides foreign participation in conflicts and wars, foreign interference in support of oppressive rulers has bottled up dissent, prevented political reforms, eradicated peaceful opposition, obstructed the development of effective institutions, and held up human and economic development. In the Middle East, this interference has made the region more fertile for disputes, conflicts, and wars for decades to come. While such foreign support has arguably brought short-run stability to some countries, it has contained dissent but delayed the inevitable. Muslim countries in the region will need longer than normal to build the recommended Islamic institutions and to transition to liberal democracies.

Chapter 8: Muslims as Ambassadors in Foreign Lands

Muslims living in non-Muslim lands can also play an important role in educating their non-Muslim compatriots about Islam, by living lives that dispel the disparaging image of Muslims. Muslims should assimilate more into their communities to re-enforce the caring and compassionate nature of Islam. They should dispel the unfounded belief among many in the West that the dismal condition of Muslim countries reflects Islam and its teachings; instead, it is the result of many decades of corrupt governance that has permeated all their institutions. Muslims should work towards taking back the control of their religion from oppressive rulers and pliant clerics and garner worldwide concurrence among Muslims in the quest to build effective institutions in Muslim countries. Their goal should be to change the policy of Western countries to support freedom and the sustained development of Muslim countries as the policy that serves the long-term interest of all.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

We need only eyes to see that the Muslim World is in turmoil. As Mohammad Abduh famously observed over a century ago: “I went to the West and saw Islam, but no Muslims; I got back to the East and saw Muslims, but no Islam.” What went wrong? Corrupt rulers, supported by pliant and opportunistic clerics, commandeered the religion as a weaponized instrument of control. Muslims were spoon fed a distorted account of Islam and prevented from debating and understanding the application of Qur’anic teachings for their time. Thus, almost immediately after the passing away of the Prophet, Muslims set aside the important teachings of the Qur’an and the practice of the Prophet.

Muslims should begin by acknowledging the failed condition of their communities and individually and collectively participate in creating their ideal Islamic community. They cannot rely on rulers, or anyone else, to do it for them. Muslims should study, question, engage and debate the meaning of the Qur'an for their individual lives and for their communities under their prevailing conditions. Islamicity indices provide a simple instrument that could help Muslims to take back their religion, re-establish its moral and just foundation, initiate a successful turnaround to build thriving and just communities, and educate non-Muslims about the peaceful and just nature of Islam to restore better relations between East and West.