

## BANGLADESH

### SUMMARY

With the exception of the International Relations Index, Bangladesh has done poorly with respect to the Islamicity indices in comparison with both Muslim and Non-Muslim nations. Furthermore, the country has had an uneven performance across all indices during the years under consideration (see Table 1 below). Despite the country’s recent categorization as a middle-income nation, a societal focus on individual economic well-being, alongside a persistent structural divide between rich and poor persons (the middle class being nearly invisible), may be to blame for a broad lack of responsible sustainability. Economic mobility is a target for many who live in the country, but it remains a dream for most.

Significant structural factors can be said to affect religious socialization among Muslims in Bangladesh. Aside from informal environments in which Islamic beliefs and practices are encountered, many children are exposed to ideas of Islam through “Islamiyat” classes commonly taught at primary and secondary levels of schooling. Furthermore, the existence of a long-term Bangladeshi diaspora in the Gulf States—drawn predominantly from rural populations, made to work in exceedingly deplorable conditions, and remitting payments to their families still in the country—has increased the influence of alien visions of Islam among Bangladeshis. This disruptive determination of Islam’s meaning, fueled by petrodollars and theories of racial supremacy, continues to have deleterious effects on any attempt to articulate Islam as a moral phenomenon rooted in Bangladeshi history and society.

The table below summarizes the 2018 scores for Bangladesh in relation to all the indices and in comparison to other countries, including percentage changes from the years 2016, and 2017.

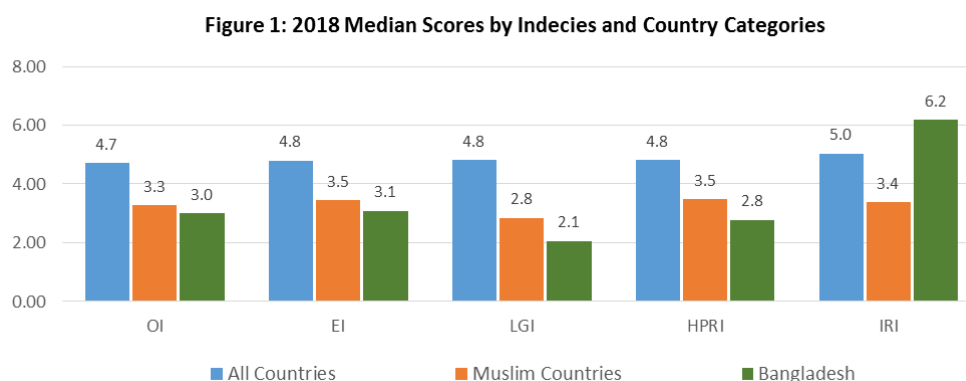
**Table 1: Median Islamicity Scores in 2018**

	OI	EI	LGI	HPRI	IRI
All Countries (153)	4.70	4.80	4.82	4.81	5.03
Muslim (OIC) Countries	3.28	3.45	2.84	3.47	3.37
Non-Muslim (non-OIC) Countries	6.01	7.14	6.98	4.63	3.82
<b>Bangladesh</b>	<b>2.990</b>	<b>3.080</b>	<b>2.050</b>	<b>2.780</b>	<b>6.180</b>
Percentage Change Relative to 2017 for All Countries	1.60	1.54	2.47	0.40	1.66
Percentage Change Relative to 2017 for Muslim Countries	4.79	-9.08	1.89	11.70	-7.41
<i>Percentage Change Relative to 2017 for Bangladesh</i>	<i>1.01</i>	<i>-13.24</i>	<i>-1.91</i>	<i>3.73</i>	<i>33.19</i>
<i>Percentage Change Relative to 2016 for Bangladesh</i>	<i>-0.66</i>	<i>-25.96</i>	<i>47.48</i>	<i>-4.14</i>	<i>31.49</i>

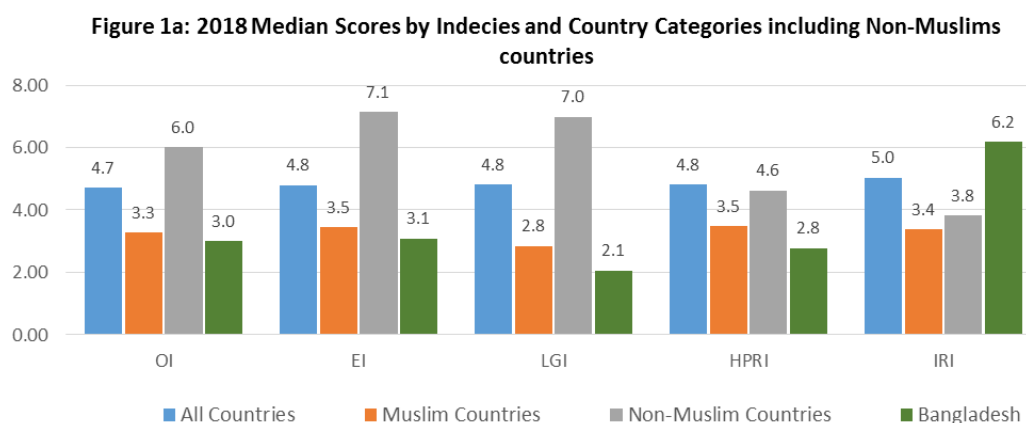
The failure of socioeconomic elites in Bangladesh to reflect societal priorities has been inhibiting efforts in civil society at broad-based social reform. An attitudinal shift among such elite classes would go far in helping, rather than hindering, such efforts.

### Scores and Ranks

Figure 1 reflects a graphical representation of the information relayed in the summary, and where Bangladesh’s scores in all of the indices, with the exception of International Relations, are below across the spectrum.

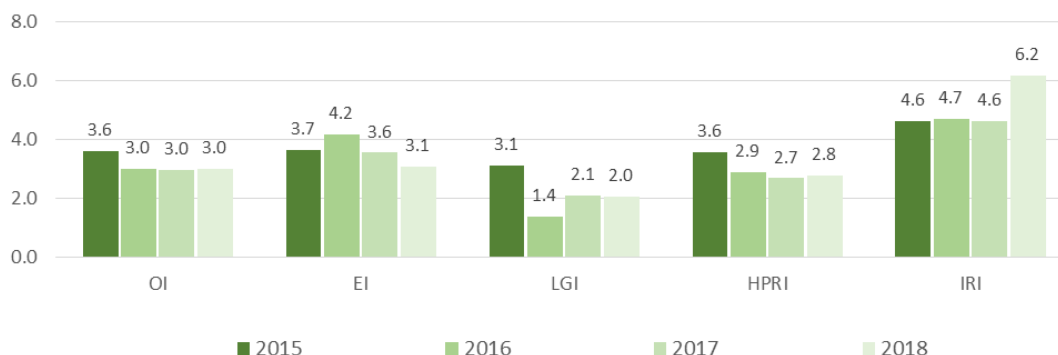


When the data is parsed, Bangladesh is seen to perform poorly in comparison with non-Muslim countries (the exception, as noted before, is in the International Relations index). The country scores are comparable to those of other Muslim countries, suggesting that a general issue with pursuing Islamic values in Muslim countries (Figure 1a).



Across the years, scores for Bangladesh on all indices, save for International Relations Index (which jumped higher in 2018), have either diminished or fluctuated (Figure 1b). In the overall picture, compared to the data from 2017, Bangladesh has improved slightly in 2018. However, the country has done worse in 2018 compared to 2015 and 2016, with scores falling from 3.6 to 3.0.

**Figure 1b: Median Scores by Indices Categories for Bangladesh - 2015-2018**



### **Economy**

There was an improvement in scores for the Economy Index in 2016, but they decreased again for the remaining years, with the 2018 score remaining below that for 2016.

On external economic indicators used by different international agencies, Bangladesh has done well in the international market. According to the IMF, Bangladesh was the second-fastest growing economy in the world in 2016 with a 7.1% GDP growth rate. It is classified with the Next Eleven emerging markets in middle-income societies.

The international market is centered on exports such as textiles, jute, and seafood. Historically, the toxic combination of two economic factors has had a detrimental effect on societal wellbeing: the governmental failure to implement labor laws which will protect Bangladeshi workers, and the presence of predatory foreign corporations involved in the sale and manufacture of garments.

While economic activity in Bangladesh on the international scale is focused on exportable products, the majority of Bangladeshis earn their living from agriculture. The issue of unregulated corporations has caused significant issues for agriculturalists over the past decades, with entities such as Monsanto taking advantage of lax governmental oversight to introduce harmful GMO and products into the landscape. In addition, the ever-expanding issue of climate change has had an immediate effect on rural Bangladeshi economics, with increased salinization and coastal storms serving as direct causes of internal displacement.

Experiments in microcredit and small loans — ideas indigenous to Bangladeshi society, championed by Nobel Laureate Dr. Muhammad Yunus and his Grameen organization — over the past decades have resulted in increased socioeconomic empowerment and mobility for members of several rural communities. They have had a particularly positive effect on Bangladeshi women, enabling various sustainable enterprises and small businesses.

### ***Legal and Governance***

After the notably sharp drop in 2016, Bangladesh has made slight improvements in the Legal and Governance Index in 2017, but once again the score dropped slightly in 2018.

Petty corruption is a notable aspect of daily life in Bangladesh in both rural and urban sectors of society. It is not uncommon for even the most basic bureaucratic and legal procedures to require the payment of bribes. Petty corruption takes place among those who struggle in their day-to-day realities largely due to need, while the corruption engaged in by the elite occurs out of greed.

Civil society in Bangladesh today remains active and vibrant in attempting to meet the challenges of reducing corruption. Through myriad mediums — educational programs, literary productions, and legal associations — such activists are on the front lines of attempting to better Bangladeshi society. While entrenched interests oppose any such reform efforts, the awareness and open discussion of societal issues brought forward by reform-minded individuals and organizations remains crucial.

### ***Human and Political Rights***

On this scale, Bangladesh has managed to turn around the downward trend that started in 2016 and has made slight improvements in 2018.

Structural violence is commonplace in Bangladesh, evinced by phenomena including sweeping housing fires, lack of workplace oversight, child labor, and instances of highway robbery. This same structural violence is quite visible in the arena of gender equality and women’s rights, with LGBTQ+ communities in particular suffering from legalized inequality. Structural violence is also present in the experiences of non-Bengali speaking communities, some of whom are displaced persons from regions such as Bihar and Myanmar. Despite the long-term existence of refugee communities in various regions of Bangladesh, non-Bengalis continue to face legalized discrimination, with even the pursuit of basic education outside refugee camps remaining forbidden by law. The recent genocide against the Rohingya in neighboring Myanmar has led to a deepening of these human rights issues.

Aside from structural violence, instances of sociopolitical violence and repression have flared in recent years. Certain law enforcement agencies, in particular, have been accused by members of Bangladeshi society and the international community alike of having perpetrated human rights abuses, including forced disappearances. Recent actions taken against bloggers have also prompted fears about the state of the freedom of speech in Bangladesh.

While Bangladeshi society remains a largely patriarchal one, several key political and economic positions have been held by women in recent years, including the leadership of the nation. In addition, efforts by Grameen and other organizations have significantly contributed to improving economic independence and levels of education in rural Bangladesh.

**International Relations**

This is the only index for Bangladesh that demonstrates significant improvement across the comparison years, with a sharp rise in 2018.

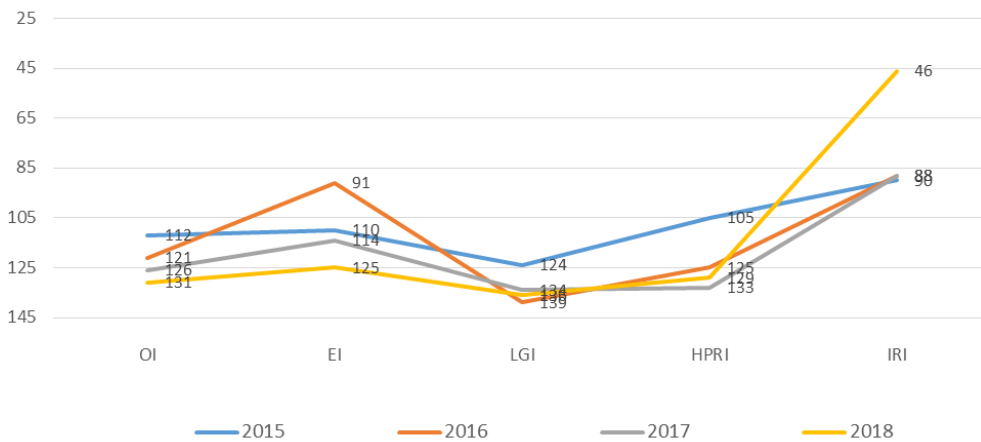
As mentioned above, Bangladesh maintains strong economic ties with foreign nations, including the United States, which is the single largest market for Bangladeshi garments. The relationship is one of convenience for foreign corporations due to factors of cheap and unregulated labor. The United States is also one of the largest sources of direct foreign investment in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has several significant regional relationships, including strong ties with the neighboring state of India. These ties are rhetorically founded upon a shared culture with the population of the Indian state of West Bengal; however, they are also maintained by socioeconomic relationships along both governmental and nongovernmental axes.

The improvement in Bangladesh’s scores for this index may be related to the Bangladeshi military’s longstanding participation in the United Nations Peacekeeping Forces, trained locally and deployed internationally. The country is the single largest contributor of soldiers to these forces. However, whether this contribution deserves unequivocal commendation should be called into question, as there have been human rights abuses alleged against UN Peacekeepers in general and Bangladeshi soldiers deployed abroad in particular.

Figure 2 shows the changes, up and down, for the indices across the comparison years.

**Figure 2: Rank by Indecies Categories for Bangladesh - 2015-2018  
(1 representing the highest rank)**



## **Conclusion**

The will for reform in Bangladesh is present across multiple sectors of society. Evidence of it can be found in the works of Bangladeshi activists, educators, social businesspeople, and others. However, the identification of persistent issues in Bangladeshi society is not an end in and of itself for reform efforts, but merely a beginning. The question of how to alter widespread habits which have become ingrained in societal practice demands an answer. While many individuals may agree in principle with Islamic values, this awareness does not necessarily translate to altered daily practices. This cognitive dissonance is far from unique to Bangladeshi society; for example, the acknowledgement of environmental problems and simultaneous refusal to alter basic habits (such as plastic usage) is just one proof for the universal persistence of bad habits among human beings.

To be truly efficacious in implementing social reform in Bangladesh, public and private institutions must come up with answers to this question. The experiences of Bangladeshi reformists living in the country and invested in its future are crucial to the quest for those answers. Supporting and partnering with such individuals and organizations must be the first step for foreign and international groups who wish to stand as their allies. Through such alliances, not only will reformists be able to fruitfully access the experiences of others, but local actors may in turn be able to better contribute to the urgent need for global and universal reform.

Ultimately, to address this issue means providing the basic daily securities due to all persons for the people of Bangladesh. The fundamental principle being argued here can be illustrated with reference to early Muslim society. Following the passing of the Prophet Muhammad, a famine struck parts of the Hejaz region, at which point the political authorities in Medina ordered the legal punishment for thievery to be temporarily suspended. Upon the famine’s end, normal laws were implemented once more. The guiding rationale was that so long as there were extraordinary circumstances which threatened personal livelihoods, the regular implementation of standards and laws was not possible. We must recognize that the long history of colonial dominance and neoliberal exploitation has created such extraordinary circumstances in Bangladesh and many other parts of the world, and that only by addressing these global problems on a structural level — as a global community which transcends issues of nationality and confession when it comes to reform — can any real change take place.