



Islamicity Indices

Benchmarks to Build Effective Institutions for Political, Social, and Economic Reform and Progress

2020

ISLAMICITY INDEX
COUNTRY REPORT
BANGLADESH
2020

PREPARED BY
HASINA A. KHANOM

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Executive Summary

In recent memory, the world has never been more threatened in such a short period of time. The COVID-19 pandemic has ravaged people's lives, wellbeing, economies, and governments alike. To address the devastating impact on people's livelihoods and the social disruption caused by the pandemic, all actors—including governments, policymakers, business leaders, non-state agencies, and citizens—had to grapple with the simultaneous challenges without a manual to guide them.

In addition to this current pandemic, starting in late 2017, Bangladesh has been dealing with the Rohingya (mostly Muslim minority ethnic group from predominantly Buddhist Myanmar) refugee crisis, which is among the largest, most rapid refugee migrations in recent history. Today, [about 880,000](#) stateless Rohingya refugees live in the world's largest and most densely populated refugee camp, Kutupalong. About half of the refugees are children.

Bangladesh also has a history of devastating natural calamities—such as cyclones, floods, fires, and famous rivers which continuously engulf villages/towns—which the country faces annually. The impact of this devastation is faced mostly by people with lower-middle and lower socio-economic status generation after generation.

Despite facing all these adverse circumstances, [Bangladesh](#) has worked very hard and made remarkable progress in poverty reduction, supported by sustained economic growth. It has been among the fastest-growing economies in the world over the past decade, thanks to a demographic dividend, strong ready-made garment (RMG) exports, and stable macroeconomic conditions created by Nobel laureate Dr. Muhammad Yunus. As a result, Bangladesh reached a lower-middle-income status in 2015 and is on track to graduate from the UN's Least Developed Countries (LDC) list in 2026.

However, 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 is 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.

In recent years, the government of Bangladesh has launched a plan to house all of the country's homeless population that will benefit over 800,000 homeless and destitute families. This plan is being touted as the world's largest housing project for the poor. The vision for this project is to make sure no one will be homeless in Bangladesh.

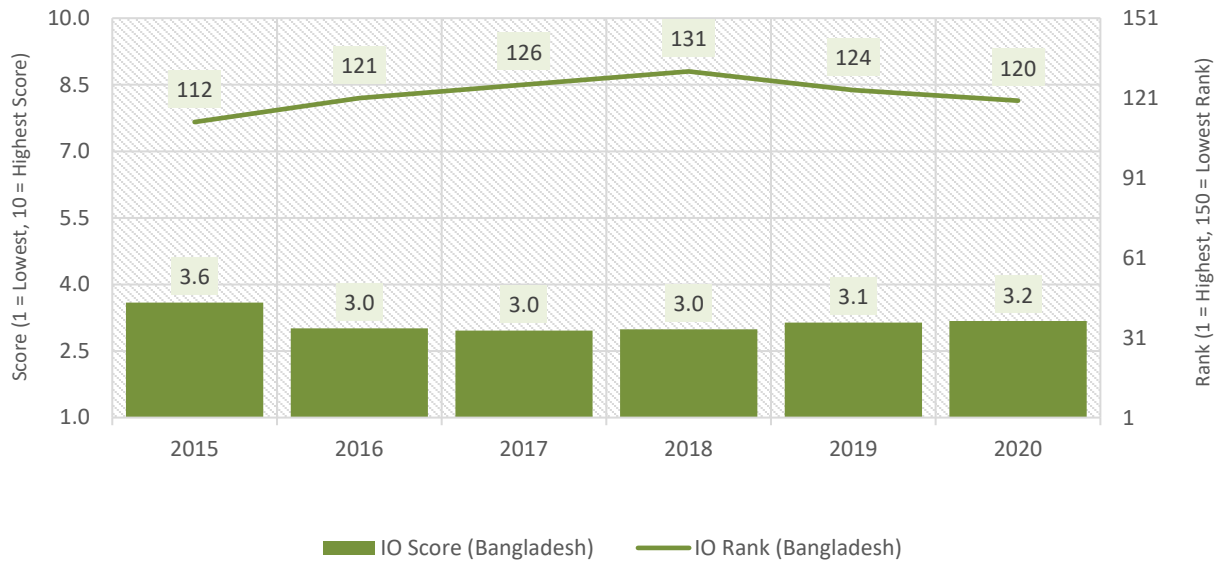
In addition, a major contribution from this current government has been the introduction of a Monthly Allowance Program for older people in April 1998. This benefit is provided without conditions attached to it and financed from the country's national budget.

Bangladesh is the third-largest Muslim majority nation in the world after Indonesia and Pakistan. It ranks 120 out of 151 countries. The country has slightly improved from 124 in 2020 to 120. Much reforms are needed in all aspects of society including the government. Implementing institutional structures that are in line with what Islam recommends to build a civil and just society.

Overall Islamicity Index country score

Consistent with the 2020 overall Islamicity score, except for the International Relations Index, Bangladesh has improved slightly or remained as it was in earlier years in three other indices. Figure 1 below shows Bangladesh’s ranks and scores in the Islamicity composite index between 2015 and 2020. Bangladesh experienced its highest Rank (112) in 2015 and deteriorated in rank until 2018 (131), and began to move in a positive direction starting in 2019.

Figure 1: Islamicity Index (Overall Bangladesh) 2015-2020



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

Figure 1a: Median Islamicity Scores by Year and Country Categories 2017-2020 (10 representing the highest score)

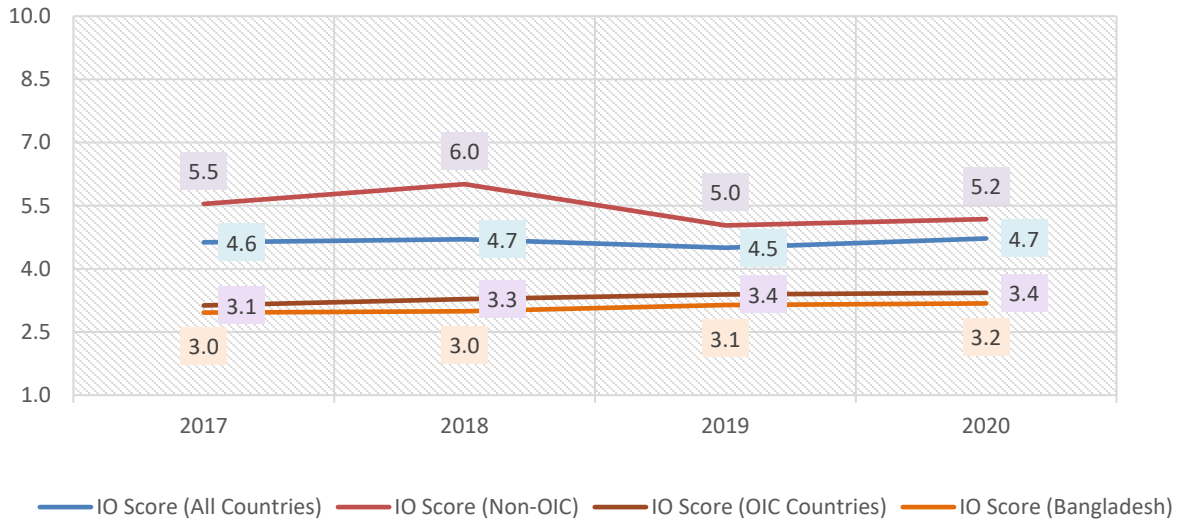
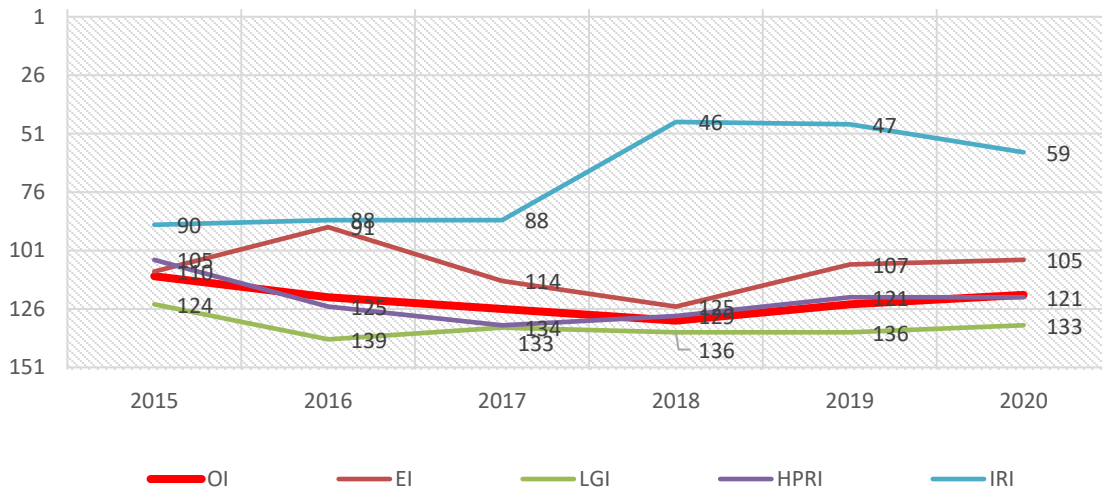


Figure 1b shows the changes, up and down, for the indices across the comparison years.

Figure 1b: Rank by Indices Categories for Bangladesh 2015-2020 (1 representing the highest rank)



ISLAMICITY INDEX COUNTRY REPORT: BANGLADESH

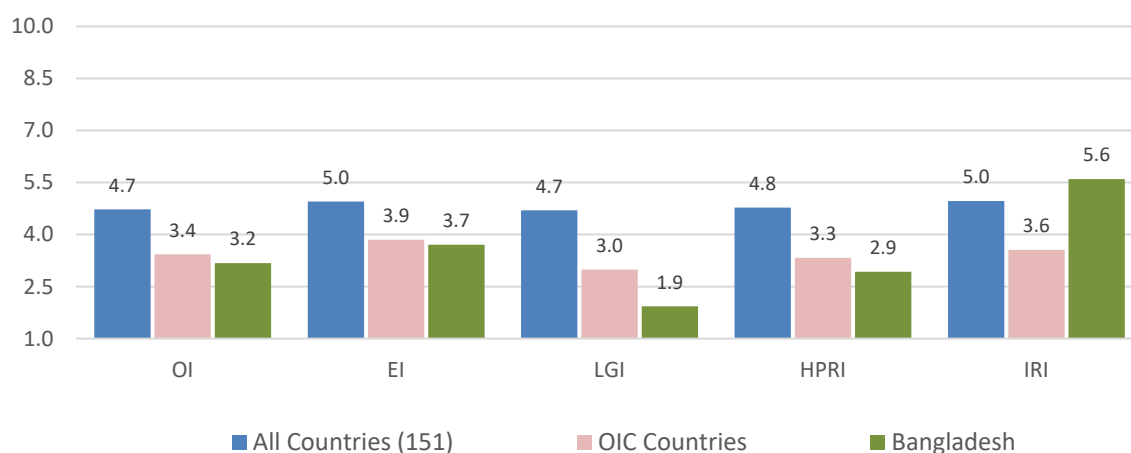
The table below summarizes the 2020 scores for Bangladesh in relation to all the indices and in comparison to other countries, including percentage changes from the year 2019.

Table 1: Median Islamicity Scores in 2020

	OI	EI	LGI	HPRI	IRI
All Countries (151)	4.72	4.95	4.70	4.78	4.97
OIC Countries	3.43	3.85	2.99	3.33	3.56
Non-OIC	5.18	5.06	5.19	5.57	5.40
Bangladesh	3.18	3.71	1.93	2.93	5.60
Percentage Change Relative to 2019 for All Countries	5.0%	1.4%	-1.0%	4.3%	-2.5%
Percentage Change Relative to 2019 for OIC Countries	1.2%	5.5%	-5.4%	7.4%	-8.9%
Percentage Change Relative to 2019 for Bangladesh	0.04%	0.15%	0.04%	0.07%	-0.43%

Figure 2 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.

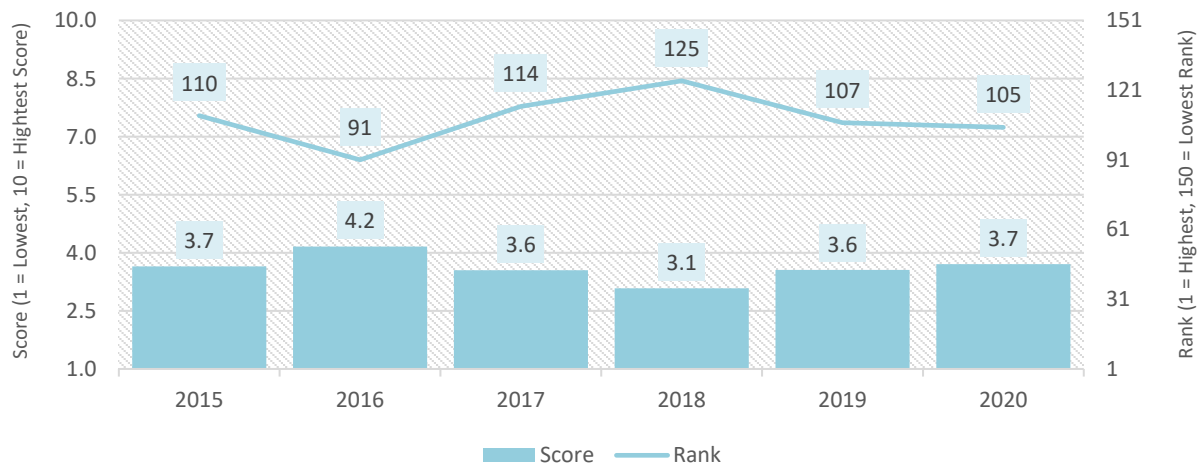
Figure 2: 2020 Median Scores by Indices and Country Categories (10 representing the highest score)



Economic Islamicity Index

Within the past five years, Bangladesh has experienced its highest score in 2016. The Economy score continued to deteriorate until 2018 and started to show improvement in scores for the Economy Index in 2019, but remain below the score for 2016.

Figure 3: Median Economic Islamicity Index Scores and Ranks for Bangladesh 2015-2020



On internal indicators and external economic indicators used by different international agencies, Bangladesh has done well in the international market. According to the World Bank, Bangladesh has made significant progress in poverty reduction, supported by sustained economic growth. The country has been the fastest growing economy in the world over the past decades. The reported GDP growth rate for Bangladesh for 2019 was 8.15% but declined significantly to 2.38% in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. It is classified with the Next Eleven emerging markets in middle-income societies. Both the improvement and part of the decline can be attributed to the strong ready-made garment (RMG) exports and stable macroeconomic conditions. Bangladesh also supplies a large amount of the labor force in the Gulf Arab countries. Remittances received from these workforces also have had a positive impact on the economy.

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 that will protect Bangladeshi workers, and the presence of predatory foreign corporations involved in the sale and manufacture of garments.

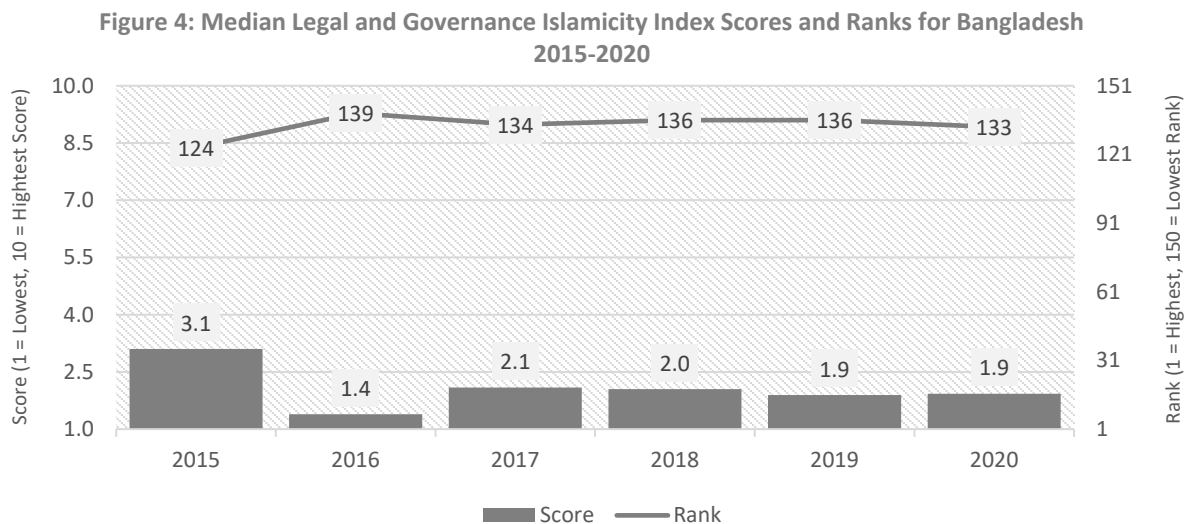
While economic activity in Bangladesh on the international scale is focused on exportable products, the majority of Bangladeshis earn their living from agriculture. The issue of unregulated corporations

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 socio-economic 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 rank dropped slightly in 2018. The rank remained consistent in 2018 and 2019, and slight improvements were made in 2020.



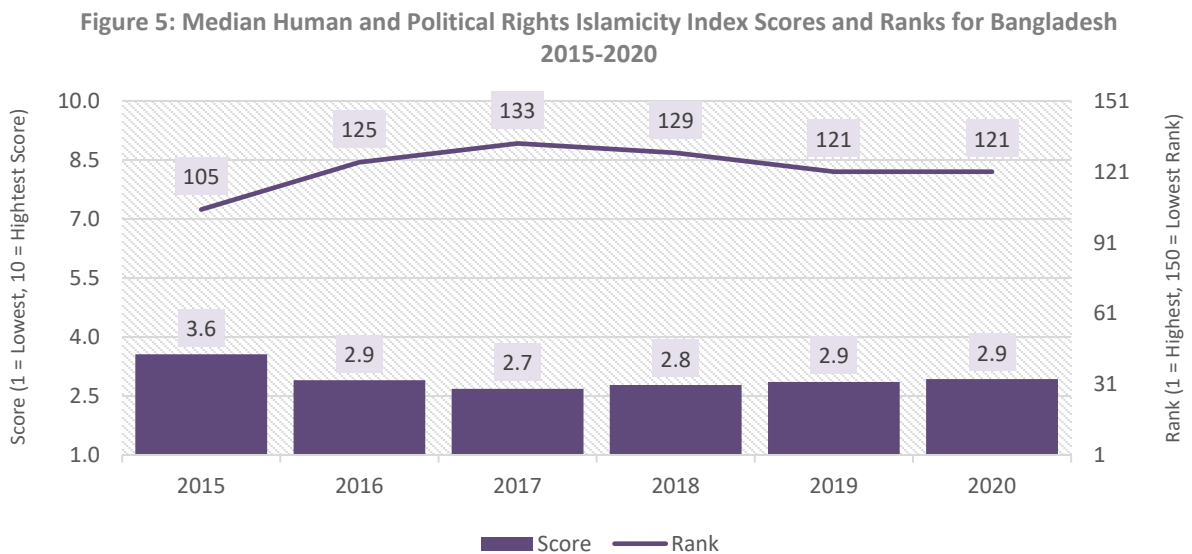
Petty corruption is a notable aspect of daily life in Bangladesh in both the rural and urban sectors of society. It is not uncommon for even the most basic bureaucratic and legal procedures to require the payment of bribes. Petty corruption takes place among those who struggle in their day-to-day realities 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. In recent years, a [parallel legal system](#) has also taken part in improving and expediting the backlogs in the current legal system.

Human and Political Rights

On this scale, Bangladesh has managed to turn around the downward trend that started in 2016 and continues to make slight improvements since 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

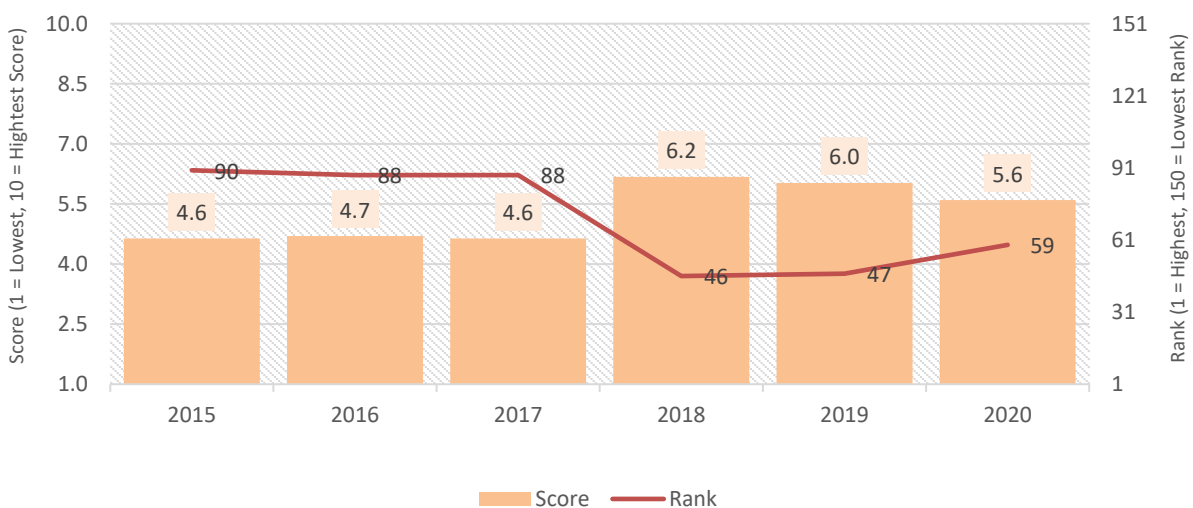
abuses, including forced disappearances. Recent actions taken against bloggers have also prompted fears about the state of the freedom of speech in Bangladesh.

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. The score deteriorated slightly in 2020.

Figure 6: Median International Relations Islamicity Index Scores and Ranks for Bangladesh 2015-2020



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.

Summary and Recommendations

This report would be incomplete without including some comments on the ongoing corruption and organizational issues that continue to hinder the path towards "the good society". Transparency International places Bangladesh in a very poor position in terms of containing corruption. The Global Corruption Barometer shows that 72% of people think government corruption is a big problem, and about a quarter of the people paid a bribe for public service (this may be a deflated statistic since respondents are very wary of the backlash resulting from a criticism of the system).

In addition, human rights violations in Bangladesh have loomed larger and larger from the perspective of international agencies and the press. Amnesty International has indicated that "The Government of Bangladesh is responsible for multiple human rights violations, including unlawful killings and disappearances, arbitrary arrest and detention, and torture." See the full report here: <https://www.amnestyusa.org/countries/bangladesh/>.

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 business people, 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. Strong institutions are needed to improve governance practices, socioeconomic progress, and the well-being of a society.

To be truly efficacious in implementing social reform in Bangladesh, the experiences of Bangladeshi reformists living in the country and invested in its future are crucial to the quest for 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.

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.

As a developing country, Bangladesh needs to continue to address issues with its education system, and undergo various initiatives such as policy reform, increased awareness of fundamental Quranic values, and pedagogical development. Perhaps incorporating fundamental islamic values may help achieve the desired level of growth and improvement.