

Bangladesh - Human Rights Scorecard ¹

Bangladesh is located in South Asia, bordered by India and Myanmar, at the apex of the Bay of Bengal. It is one of the most densely populated nations on Earth. Bangladesh has achieved significant strides in human and social development since independence in 1971, including progress in gender equality, universal primary education, food production, health, and population control. Bangladesh continues to face numerous political, economic, social and environmental challenges, including political instability, corruption, poverty, overpopulation, and global warming.²

Official languages: Bengali and English.

Ethnic groups: 98% Bengali, 2% other.

Government: Unitary parliamentary constitutional republic

- President: Abdul Hamid
- Prime Minister: Sheikh Hasina

Death penalty: Retentionist.

Population: 168.9 millions

Life expectancy: 70.9 years

Under-5 mortality: 40 per 1000

Adult literacy: 61.5 percent



Section 1: Respect for the Integrity of the Person

Respect for the integrity of the individual is the most fundamental of human rights groupings. It guarantees protection of the person to ensure the right to life, and freedom from torture. It also prevents arbitrary detention, and disappearances, and ensures the right to a free and fair trial when accused.

Freedom from arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life



Largely disrespected ³

The constitution provides for the rights to life and personal liberty; however, the media as well as local and international human rights organizations have reported that the government or its agents commit arbitrary or unlawful killings.

Freedom from disappearance



Largely disrespected ⁴

There are several reports of disappearances and kidnappings, some committed by security services. The number of reported disappearances has almost doubled from 2013 to 2014, with around 100 disappeared in 2014. No exact numbers are available for 2015.

Freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment



Largely disrespected ⁵

Although the constitution and law prohibit torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, there are many reports of security forces employing torture and physical and psychological abuse during arrests and interrogations, including electric shocks and rape.

Freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention



Largely disrespected ⁶

The constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, but the law permits authorities to arrest and detain persons suspected of criminal activity without an order from a magistrate or a warrant. Defendants are often not afforded the opportunity for legal representation.

Freedom from denial of fair public trial



Largely disrespected ⁷

Corruption and a lengthy backlog of cases hinder the court system. Extended continuances effectively prevent many defendants from obtaining fair trials. There are frequent reports of witness tampering, victim intimidation, missing evidence, and demands of bribes from defendants.

Freedom from arbitrary interference with privacy, family, home or correspondence



Largely disrespected ⁸

The law does not prohibit arbitrary interference with private correspondence, and security forces are known to monitor private communications. The gov't also conducts surveillance on opposition politicians. There are also reports of police entering homes without proper authorization.

Section 2: Respect for Civil Liberties

Civil liberties are a basic category of internationally recognized human rights. They include the freedoms of expression, assembly, association, education, and religion. These are inalienable rights which should not be breached by government, and should ensure the rights of all, including women and minority groups.

Freedom of speech and press (*Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index*)⁹



Score: 42.95, Rank: 146 / 179 – Highly controlled, limited or intimidated¹⁰

Journalists and bloggers who refuse to submit to censorship risk life imprisonment or the death penalty if they criticize the constitution or Islam. Outspoken secularists are also targeted by Islamist militants.

Freedom from academic censorship



Partially respected¹¹

The gov't has few restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events. There are reports of authorities discouraging research on sensitive religious and political topics that might fuel religious or communal tensions. Academic publications on the independence war are also subject to scrutiny.

Freedom of peaceful assembly and association



Partially respected¹²

The constitution provides for the freedom of assembly and association, and the government generally respects these rights. However, there are reports of governmental actions to limit freedom of assembly during periods of political protest and unrest.

Freedom of religion



Largely disrespected¹³

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, but the police are often slow to protect members of minority religious groups from violence and reluctant to investigate violent incidents. Minority groups, especially Hindus, are often victims of attacks and looting of religious sites and homes.

Protection of refugees and stateless persons



Largely disrespected¹⁴

The government does not fully cooperate with the UNHCR in providing protection to refugees, stateless persons, and other persons of concern. The law does not provide for granting asylum or refugee status, nor has the gov't established a formal system for providing protection to refugees.

Overall protection of civil liberties (*FreedomHouse Civil Liberties Index*)^{15 16}



4 / 7 – Partly free¹⁷

There are many reports of violations of civil liberties in Bangladesh, including harassment and violence against critics of government officials and of Islam as the official state religion. There are also many reports of violence against religious minority groups.

Section 3: Respect for Political Rights

Political rights ensure all members of society are able to influence the political process. The assessment of political rights includes an examination of the electoral process and the selection of representatives, the political empowerment of the general public, the tolerance of dissent, the accountability of government, etc..

Overall protection of political rights (*FreedomHouse Political Rights Index*)¹⁸



4 / 7 – Partly free¹⁹

Election-related violence and intimidation, an uncharacteristically low turnout, and attacks on minority groups marred the 2014 elections. Nevertheless, the Awami League resisted calls for fresh elections. Bangladesh's ongoing political and social unrest continue following the elections.

Section 4: Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The civil, political, economic and social rights exercised within a country are often modulated by the degree of transparency and freedom from corruption. Various international metrics assess transparency and corruption, including the OECD anti-bribery convention, the Bribe Payers Index, and the Open Budget Index.

Transparency and freedom from corruption (*Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index*)²⁰



Score: 25%, Rank: 139 / 168 – Highly corrupt²¹

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, but the government does not implement the law effectively. Human rights groups, the media, and the Anticorruption Commission report government corruption. Officials frequently engage in corrupt practices with impunity.

Section 5: Governmental Response to Criticism

This section deals specifically with the response heads of state have to civil society or international human rights reports.

Governmental attitudes vis-à-vis independent investigations of alleged human rights violations



Largely disrespected²²

The government requires all NGOs to register with the Ministry of Social Welfare. Local and international NGOs working on sensitive topics, such as human rights, indigenous people, Rohingya refugees, or worker rights, face both formal and informal governmental restrictions.

Section 6: Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Legal and social discriminatory practices related to sex, race, creed or sexual orientation, are violations of human rights. Countries with strong civil liberty traditions should have a fair legal system that ensures the rule of law, allows free economic activity, and ensures equality of opportunity for all.

Rights of women (World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index)²³



Score: 69.7 %, Rank: 68 / 142 – Very unequal rights²⁴

Gender-based violence, including acid attacks, remains a serious challenge. Many rape victims do not report the incidents due to social stigma, and prosecution is weak and inconsistent. Women do not enjoy the same legal status and rights as men in family, property, and inheritance law.

Rights of Children (KidsRights Index Overall Score)²⁵



Score: 60%, Rank: 118 / 165 – Somewhat protected²⁶

Despite strong children's rights legislation, there is a general lack of enforcement. Child labour and abuse at the workplace remain problems in certain industries, mostly in the informal sector, and child domestic workers are vulnerable to all forms of abuse at their informal workplaces.

Rights of persons with disabilities



Partially respected²⁷

The Disability Rights Act of 2013 provides for equal treatment and freedom from discrimination for persons with disabilities. However, social and economic discrimination remains a problem. Moreover, government facilities for treating persons with mental disabilities are inadequate.

Rights of national/racial/ethnic minorities (e.g. discrimination, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism etc.)



Largely disrespected²⁸

Violent attacks against religious minority communities continue. There are reports of members of religious minorities being discriminated against in employment and housing. There are many reports from NGOs that national origin, racial, and ethnic minorities also face discrimination.

Freedom from abuse and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity



Largely disrespected^{29 30}

Same sex relations are illegal in Bangladesh, and male to male relations are punishable by imprisonment of 10 years or more. HIV-positive persons can face social ostracism, detention, and denial of inheritance rights, and HIV-positive foreigners are not allowed to enter the country.

Section 7: Workers' Rights

Workers' rights are a group of legal rights relating to labour relations between workers and their employers. At their core are things like the ability to negotiate pay, benefits, terms of employment, and safe working conditions. These rights often devolve from the right to unionize and access to collective bargaining.

Rights to freedom of association and to collective bargaining



Partially respected³¹

The law provides for the protection of the right to join unions and, with government approval, the right to form a union, although restrictions on union registration remain. The law provides for the right to conduct legal strikes but with many limitations.

Freedom from forced or compulsory labour



Partially respected³²

The law prohibits forced or compulsory labour. However, enforcement remains a problem. There are reports of children and adults being forced into domestic servitude and bonded labour that involves restricted movement, non-payment of wages, threats, and physical or sexual abuse.

Freedom from forced labour for children, and a minimum age of employment



Largely disrespected³³

The law regulates child employment, depending on the type of work and the child's age. The minimum age for work is 14, but the law allows for certain exceptions, and is poorly enforced. Child labour is widespread, particularly in the informal sector and in domestic work.

Right to acceptable conditions of work



Largely disrespected³⁴

The government does not effectively enforce minimum wage, hours of work, and occupational safety and health standards in all sectors. Resources, inspections, and remediation are not adequate, and penalties for violations are not sufficient to deter violations.

Right to employment



4.3% - Reasonable unemployment³⁵

Most Bangladeshis earn their living from agriculture. However, population pressure continues to place a severe burden on productive capacity.

¹ A hybrid human rights and freedoms model, leveraging both legal principles and intuitive classifications, has been used for this human rights assessment. The CJPME Foundation has sought to integrate as many independent sources and metrics into its summary analysis as possible. In many cases, for qualitative material pertaining to the respect for a particular right in a country, the CJPME Foundation has drawn on material from Human Rights Watch and the US State Department country reports. Human Rights Watch (HRW) publishes a World Report which assesses the respect for human rights in each country. HRW uses a methodology of local reporting and interviewing, combined with research and analysis to assess the level of respect of human rights. The U.S State Department keeps an updated publication on the state of human rights internationally. Their system of research and accountability draws from the research of official US State Department officials, as well as local civil-society and international human rights organizations.

² Commonly-known information on the country is drawn from various Internet sources, including Google country pages, and Amnesty International. For death penalty see: "Death sentences and executions in 2014." Amnesty International. March 24, 2015. Accessed March 29, 2016.

http://www.amnestyusa.org/pdfs/DeathSentencesAndExecutions2014_EN.pdf<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/001/2014/en/>
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/001/2014/en/> [INACCURATE LINK]

³ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014 Bangladesh." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2015. Accessed March 29, 2016.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=236634#wrapper>.

⁴ Ibid. U.S Department of State. For purposes of the present analysis, a "disappearance" is different than simple arbitrary detention because a "disappearance" is considered permanent.

⁵ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁶ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁷ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁸ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁹ The Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders ranks the level of freedom of information in 180 countries. This is determined through the polling of local NGOs and freedom of expression civil society organizations across the globe. This index is also determined by local correspondents and follow-up work done on reports of infringement to press freedom where ever it takes place. Their methodology looks at six different indicators: 1) Media pluralism, 2) Media independence, 3) Media atmosphere and self-censorship, 4) the Law around media, 5) Media transparency, and 6) Media infrastructure. The score from these six indicators is combined with a rating for the violence against journalists in the country to create an overall score. The CJPME Foundation classifies the Press Freedom Index as follows: 0 – 14.99 (16 countries), Largely free, diverse and independent; 15 – 24.99 (37 countries), Mostly free, diverse and independent; 25 – 29.99 (31 countries), Partially free, diverse and independent; 30 – 39.99 (39 countries), Partially controlled, limited or intimidated; 40 & higher (57 countries), Highly controlled, limited or intimidated. ~~Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders ranks the level of freedom of information in 179 countries. This is determined through the polling of local NGOs and freedom of expression civil society organizations across the globe. This index is also determined by local correspondents and follow up work done on reports of infringement to press freedom where ever it takes place. Their methodology looks at six different indicators: 1) Media pluralism, 2) Media independence, 3) Media atmosphere and self-censorship, 4) the Law around media, 5) Media transparency, and 6) Media infrastructure. The score from these six indicators is combined with a rating for the violence against journalists in the country to create an overall score. The CJPME Foundation classifies the Press Freedom Index as follows: 0 – 14.99 (25 countries), Largely free, diverse and independent; 15 – 24.99 (29 countries), Mostly free, diverse and independent; 25 – 29.99 (32 countries), Partially free, diverse and independent; 30 – 39.99 (49 countries), Partially controlled, limited or intimidated; 40 & higher (42 countries), Highly controlled, limited or intimidated.~~

¹⁰ "World Press Freedom Index." Reporters Without Borders: For Freedom of Information. January 1, 2014. Accessed March 29, 2016.

<https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2014>. <http://rsf.org/index2014/en-index2014.php>

¹¹ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014 Bangladesh." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2015. Accessed March 29, 2016.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=236634#wrapper>.

¹² "Bangladesh." World Report 2014: Bangladesh. January 1, 2014. Accessed March 29, 2016. <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/bangladesh>.

¹³ "Bangladesh." International Religious Freedom Report for 2013. January 1, 2013. Accessed March 29, 2016.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>.

¹⁴ "Bangladesh." World Report 2014: Bangladesh. January 1, 2014. Accessed March 29, 2016. <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/bangladesh>.

¹⁵ Freedom House is an internationally recognized NGO based in the U.S which documents and rates the quality of democratic practice in a given country. Freedom House splits its grading system between the two areas of civil and political rights in a country. On each scale, the Freedom House rating is 1-2.5 (free), 3-5.5 (partly free) and 6-7 (not free).

¹⁶ Freedom House's Civil Liberties index measures things such as a) freedom of expression and belief, b) associational and organizational rights, c) the rule of law, and d) personal autonomy and individual rights. Freedom House rates countries as 1-2.5 (free), 3-5.5 (partly free) and 6-7 (not free). Accessed March 29, 2016 <https://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2014/methodology#.VldwWzHF98F>

¹⁷ "Bangladesh." Freedom in the World 2016: Bangladesh. January 1, 2016. Accessed March 29, 2016. <https://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/bangladesh>.

¹⁸ See footnote about the Freedom House organization above. The Freedom House Political Rights assessment looks at a) the electoral process, b) political pluralism and participation, and c) the functioning of government. Accessed March 29, 2016. <https://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2014/methodology#.VldwWzHF98F>

¹⁹ "Bangladesh." Freedom in the World 2016: Bangladesh. January 1, 2016. Accessed March 29, 2016. <https://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/bangladesh>.

²⁰ Transparency International (TI) publishes a "Corruption Perceptions Index" annually, which is based on independent research and polling. The main categories of corruption are broken down within the index to provide particulars on issues including things such as perceptions of corruption, control of corruption, and financial secrecy. A country receives a score on 100; the higher the score, the less corrupt the society. The CJPME foundation has classified them into categories as follows: 80-100 (11 countries): Very limited corruption; 60-79 (27 countries): Limited corruption; 40-59 (41 countries): Some corruption; 20-39 (80 countries): Highly corrupt; 0-19 (15 countries): Extremely corrupt

²¹ "Bangladesh." Corruption by Country. January 1, 2014. Accessed March 29, 2016. <http://www.transparency.org/country#BGD>.

²² "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014 Bangladesh." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2015. Accessed March 29, 2016. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=236634#wrapper>.

²³ This metric is based on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index. 0.00 denotes inequality between the sexes, and 1.00 denotes fully equality between the sexes. This index looks at four subdomains: economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; and political empowerment. Each country is given a percentage score; the higher the percentage, the better the protections. The CJPME Foundation classed the percentages as follows: 80-100% (5 countries): Almost equal rights; 70-79% (60 countries): Somewhat unequal rights; 0-69% (77 countries): Very unequal rights

²⁴ "Bangladesh." World Economic Forum. January 1, 2014. Accessed March 29, 2016. <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2014/economies/#economy=BGD>.

²⁵ This metric is based on the KidsRights Index Overall Score. This index has five subdomains: life expectancy and maternal mortality; health; education; protection; and child rights environment. Each country is given a percentage score; the higher the percentage, the better the protections. KidsRights classes the countries according to these percentages, and the CJPME Foundation has given each class a term as follows: 70-100% (77 countries): Protected; 60-70% (29 countries): Somewhat protected; 45-50% (33 countries): Slightly vulnerable; 30-45% (12 countries): Highly vulnerable; Lower than 30% (11 countries): Extremely vulnerable

²⁶ "The KidsRights Index: Overall Ranking." The KidsRights Index. Accessed March 29, 2016. <http://www.kidsrightsindex.org/>

²⁷ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014 Bangladesh." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2015. Accessed March 29, 2016. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=236634#wrapper>.

²⁸ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

²⁹ "ILGA World Map." International Lesbian Gay and Intersex Association. January 1, 2014. Accessed March 29, 2016. <http://ilga.org/>. See also Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁰ ILGA, the International, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, was founded in 1978 on the principle of highlighting state sponsored homophobia where it exists around the world. ILGA annually publishes a map with an accompanying report on sexual and gender based harassment, which focuses on both the legal and non-legal acts of state sponsored discrimination.

³¹ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014 Bangladesh." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2015. Accessed March 29, 2016. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=236634#wrapper>.

³² Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³³ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁴ Ibid. U.S Department of State. See also a well-done Wikipedia comparison of wage, income and work week metrics across countries at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_minimum_wages_by_country

³⁵ "Global Employment Trends." International Labour Organization. January 1, 2013. Accessed March 29, 2016. http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/global-employment-trends/2014/WCMS_233936/lang--en/index.htm.