

Bangladesh Atrocity Risk Assessment: The Challenges Ahead for the New Government

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Executive Summary

After years of increasingly repressive and autocratic rule, Bangladesh experienced its first broadly free and fair election in nearly two decades in February 2026, during which voters also passed a referendum to adopt the ambitious 'July Charter' suite of constitutional and political reforms. These developments are important signs of the country's increased political openness and its ability to navigate a tense election period without triggering widespread political unrest or mass violence. While these developments are encouraging, political transitions are often fragile periods that can bring heightened risk of atrocity crimes.

Drawing on the United Nations Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes and consultations with a Bangladesh-based expert advisory panel, this report assesses the conditions contributing to atrocity risks in Bangladesh and concludes that, despite some signs of emerging resilience, **the country remains at high risk of political violence that could lead to atrocity crimes**. Bangladesh's history of mass atrocities, entrenched political polarization, institutional weaknesses, and unresolved grievances continue to shape a volatile risk environment. The report identifies seven key drivers of ongoing atrocity risk: unaccountable and militarized public security forces; existence of radical Islamist networks; zero-sum politics and disputes among political actors; the vulnerability of minority communities; increased mob violence; media support for or amplification of hate speech and incitement to violence; and the growing pressures associated with climate change, migration and displacement, including in relation to increased insecurity of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. While the current political opening presents important opportunities for democratic reform and accountability, targeted prevention efforts are necessary to address these structural drivers of risk and reduce the likelihood of future atrocity crimes in Bangladesh.

Introduction

Atrocity crimes, which include war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing, evolve over time due to a complex interplay of risk factors that increase the likelihood of their occurrence. These factors may include political instability, social tensions, economic inequality, identity-based discrimination, and a history of intergroup conflict, all of which contribute to an environment where specific groups may become vulnerable targets.¹

As security and governance conditions worsen and societal divisions deepen, violent actors exploit vulnerabilities, systematically targeting specific political, ethnic, religious, or cultural groups. These atrocities arise from a mix of individual motivations, institutional failures, propaganda, and a breakdown of law and order. Recognizing how these factors interact is essential for identifying early warning signs and preventing future atrocity crimes.

Although Bangladesh currently does not appear to be at imminent risk of mass atrocities, there are credible grounds for concern. According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's *Countries at Risk for Intrastate Mass Killing 2025-26: Early Warning Project Statistical Risk Assessment*, Bangladesh ranks 18th of 168 countries (3.8 percent likelihood), placing it among the top thirty countries in the model considered to be at high risk of experiencing a new intrastate mass killing over that period.² Because of the time-lag in the data (where data from 2024 informs the risk modelling for 2025-26), the model does not fully capture the political transition that followed the mid-2024 student-led uprising and the ouster of Sheikh Hasina's repressive and authoritarian Awami League government, which had governed for the previous 15 years. Bangladesh's largely peaceful February 2026 election—its first broadly free and fair national election in nearly two decades—together with voter approval of the landmark constitutional and political reform package known as the July Charter,³ are also promising signs of resilience to mass violence.

At the same time, periods of democratic transition are inherently precarious⁴ and are associated with heightened risk of political instability and mass atrocities.⁵ Many of the underlying drivers of political violence in Bangladesh persist and could intensify amid a transitional period of heightened political competition, institutional fragility, and unresolved grievances linked to past abuses.

This report identifies and assesses key conditions that contribute to the ongoing risk of atrocity crimes in Bangladesh, with the aim of encouraging targeted prevention efforts in the new administration. The

¹ United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, *Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes: A Tool for Prevention*, New York: United Nations, 2014.

https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/genocide_framework_of_analysis-english.pdf.

² United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Countries at Risk for Intrastate Mass Killing 2025–26: Early Warning Project Statistical Risk Assessment Results," *Early Warning Project*, 15 December 2025,

<https://earlywarningproject.ushmm.org/reports/countries-at-risk-for-intrastate-mass-killing-2025-26-early-warning-project-statistical-risk-assessment-results>.

³ Shafi Md Mostofa, "The July Charter: A New Beginning for Bangladesh's Democratic Future", *The Diplomat*, 27 October 2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/10/the-july-charter-a-new-beginning-for-bangladeshs-democratic-future/>.

⁴ Sarah Yerkes and Erica Hogan, "Preventing Backsliding in New Democracies," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 29 July 2025, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/07/preventing-backsliding-in-new-democracies>.

⁵ Stephen McLoughlin, "Understanding Mass Atrocity Prevention during Periods of Democratic Transition," *Politics and Governance* 3, no.3 (2015): 27–41. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v3i3.318>.

report is informed by the risk factors identified in the United Nations Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes and consultations with a Bangladesh-based expert advisory panel.⁶ The advisory panel were introduced to qualitative and quantitative atrocity risk assessment frameworks and asked to analyze and assess atrocity risks in Bangladesh as the country emerges from a protracted period of authoritarian rule and gross human rights violations.

The risk assessment finds that, while the developments over the past year may signal Bangladesh's improved capacity to prevent and withstand violence, Bangladesh remains at high risk of mass atrocities. Considering Bangladesh's political history and the post-uprising trends, the report identifies seven key issues that continue to drive political violence and exacerbate atrocity risks in Bangladesh (see Appendix 1 for a mapping of these risks in relation to the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes):

1. Unaccountable and militarized public security forces
2. Existence of radical Islamist networks
3. Zero-sum politics and disputes among political actors
4. Vulnerability of minority communities
5. Increased mob violence
6. Media Support for Hate Speech and Incitement to Violence
7. Pressures linked to climate change, migration and displacement, including the vulnerability of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

Before examining these issues, the report begins with a brief historical overview of mass atrocities and political violence in Bangladesh from its independence until present day. Research consistently shows that countries with a history of prior genocide or mass atrocities since the end of World War II are more prone to recurrent mass violence, particularly where grievances are unaddressed, impunity persists, and state institutions are weak or unaccountable.⁷ Bangladesh's historical experience of mass atrocities is therefore an important structural risk for future atrocities, and context for understanding why atrocity prevention should be an ongoing concern and priority in the country.

⁶ The panel includes Dr. Kajalie Shehreen Islam, Associate Professor in the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at the University of Dhaka; Nazmul Ahasan, Executive Editor of Netra News; Professor Dr. Sk. Tawfique M. Haque, Director of the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance; and Mamun Abdullahi, Executive Director of the Dacca Institute of Research and Analytics.

⁷ Scott Straus, *Fundamentals of Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention* (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2016), <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/reports-and-resources/fundamentals-of-genocide-and-mass-atrocity-prevention>.; Ernesto Verdeja, "Predicting Genocide and Mass Atrocities", *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 9, no. 3 (2016): 13-32. <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/gsp/vol9/iss3/5/>

Background: Mass Atrocities and Political Violence in Bangladesh

The independent state of Bangladesh emerged from a nine-month liberation war against Pakistan in 1971, which involved severe atrocities, including ethnic cleansing, widespread sexual violence, and systematic attacks on civilians. While the majority of victims were Bengali Muslims, Hindus were especially targeted for mass killing and forced displacement. Following the war, violence persisted, particularly against Urdu-speaking individuals who faced killings and confinement in camps. In the 1970s, the government created the paramilitary group Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini, which targeted political opponents. Subsequent decades were characterized by military-backed rule, ongoing persecution of dissenters, and an insurgency in the Chittagong Hill tracts, leading to significant loss of life and the displacement of indigenous people. Additionally, religious minorities, especially Hindus, suffered attacks during communal violence, prompting many to flee to India for safety.

Even though democracy was restored in the early 1990s, the two major political parties — the Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) — opted for fierce zero-sum politics. Political parties abused the state's resources to feed their cronies and systematically persecuted their political opponents, which led to increasing polarization within society over the following decades, contributing to the rise of jihadist militancy. In response to this threat, security forces were granted unchecked authority to combat militancy and terrorism, which resulted in their actions resembling those of death squads.

Bangladesh entered a renewed phase of state-sponsored violence under Sheikh Hasina's Awami League-led regime (2009-August 2024), particularly after it abolished the Caretaker Government provision from the Constitution in 2011. Introduced in 1996 to ensure election integrity, the provision required the temporary transfer of power to a non-partisan caretaker government within 90 days of an election. Its removal allowed the incumbent regime to oversee elections, thereby dismantling provisions for electoral checks and balances and effectively ensuring the Awami League's victory in future elections. Under Hasina, paramilitary forces and intelligence agencies, once created to check militancy and terrorism, were deployed to target opposition activists and dissenters, which resulted in over two and a half thousand deaths from staged crossfires from 2009 to 2022 and hundreds of enforced disappearances.

In mid-2024, students launched protests against discrimination under the Sheikh Hasina regime. The regime responded with a brutal crackdown, which triggered the 'July Uprising'. The crackdown, carried out by security officials who enjoyed impunity over the decades, claimed around 800 lives in less than a month. The crackdown represented the most acute episode of political violence since Bangladesh's independence war,⁸ and according to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human

⁸ Ruma Paul and Krishna Das, "Bangladesh's ousted PM Hasina sentenced to death for student crackdown," *Reuters*, 18 November 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/bangladeshs-ousted-pm-hasina-convicted-students-crackdown-case-2025-11-17/>; Kamran Reza Chowdhury and Sudepto Salam, "Yunus-led interim Bangladesh govt sworn in; diverse members include 2 student leaders," *Radio Free Asia*, 8 August 2024, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/bangladesh-yunus-cabinet-08082024194039.html>.

Rights, may have constituted crimes against humanity.⁹ The protests snowballed into a mass uprising by August 5th, leading to the collapse of the Sheikh Hasina regime.

Following the fall of the Hasina regime and the fleeing of its top security officials, a transitional interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus was formed in August 2024. It was tasked with restoring stability, pursuing accountability for atrocities during Hasina's regime; and preparing for a credible election and transfer of power.¹⁰ During the transitional period, violence threatened to spiral out of control—widespread mob violence was reported across the country, with incidents tripling by 2025 compared to 2023, according to the Bangladeshi human rights organization Ain O Salish Kendra.¹¹ While many mob attacks often derived from local disputes and criminal allegations, dozens of local shrines, newspapers, cultural institutions, and minority communities were also targeted by radical Islamist groups in several mob incidents.¹² Several radical Islamist preachers were also freed from prison, at least one of whom was sentenced to jail for inspiring followers to kill freethinkers and writers in the 2010s.¹³

In summary Bangladesh's political legacy is messy, bloody and violent. Political mistrust is embedded in its political culture, with a history of severe human rights abuses and state-sanctioned violence. Like a pendulum the country has swung between autocracy and democracy since its inception. Therefore, its recent transition to a fragile democracy, without key institutional reforms, expose the country to an ongoing risk of future atrocity crimes.

Analysis of atrocity risk factors for 2026

1. Unaccountable and militarized public security forces

Since gaining independence, Bangladesh's security forces have been major perpetrators of atrocity crimes. In the 1970s, the Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini, a paramilitary force aligned with the Awami League, was accused of killing thousands of opposition activists. From the late 1970s onward, security forces and military intelligence agencies began to interfere in politics, often detaining opposition politicians.¹⁴

In 2004, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), an elite police unit, was established under the leadership of military officials who lacked basic policing training. Operating under the guise of "crossfires," this unit

⁹ Aaqib Md Shatil, "Counting the Monsoon Massacre," *Netra News*, 31 July 2025, <https://interactive.netra.news/monsoon-massacre>.

¹⁰ "Muhammad Yunus returns to Bangladesh to lead interim government," *Al Jazeera*, 8 August 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/8/muhammad-yunus-returns-to-bangladesh-to-lead-interim-government>.

¹¹ Mizanur Rahman, "Death by Mob," *Netra News*, 11 February 2026, <https://interactive.netra.news/year-of-mob>.

¹² Shakhawat Liton, "The Rise of Mobocracy in Yunus' Time," *The Business Standard*, 22 February 2026, <https://www.tbsnews.net/features/panorama/rise-mobocracy-yunus-time-1366551>.

¹³ Mayank Kumar, "Who Is Jashimuddin Rahmani, pro-al-Qaeda chief of Islamist Outfit Freed by interim Bangladesh govt," *The Print*, 27 August 2024, <https://theprint.in/world/who-is-jashimuddin-rahmani-pro-al-qaeda-chief-of-islamist-outfit-freed-by-interim-bangladesh-govt/2240641>.

¹⁴ "Ignoring Executions and Torture," *Human Rights Watch*, 18 May 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/05/18/ignoring-executions-and-torture/impunity-bangladeshs-security-forces>.

eliminated hundreds of individuals.¹⁵ Inspired by RAB, other security forces began to adopt staged crossfires as a strategy to kill people with links to opposition parties, particularly after 2009. Within 15 years, these actions resulted in the deaths of over two and a half thousand individuals, including hundreds of political activists.¹⁶

After the lopsided 2014 election in Bangladesh, boycotted by all opposition parties, the Awami League strengthened its hold over society. In addition to increasing surveillance on dissenters¹⁷ and orchestrating widespread enforced disappearances with the support of military-dominated intelligence agencies,¹⁸ the government permitted the police to acquire large stockpiles of military-grade rifles without any public oversight.¹⁹ These weapons were used against unarmed protesters in subsequent years, most notably during the 2024 protests.

Bangladesh's laws mandate the security forces to report to the Home Minister, while the intelligence agencies report solely to the Prime Minister. For decades, governments in Dhaka have been accused of politically manipulating the security forces,²⁰ and the security officials who are accused of committing crimes against humanity are often rewarded instead of being held accountable, fostering a culture of impunity within these forces. Furthermore, the parliament, which is meant to hold the government accountable for such actions, often serves merely as a rubber stamp for the ruling party due to the winner-take-all nature of the political system.²¹

As of May 2026, the government has not reversed its policy allowing police and other security forces to use military-grade rifles. The elite police unit, the RAB, continues to operate under the command of military officials, despite facing human rights-related Magnitsky sanctions from the United States. The persisting militarization of security forces, combined with the lack of accountability for officials accused of crimes, poses a significant risk of future atrocity crimes. These may include large-scale attacks on civilians with lethal weapons, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearances.

2. Existence of radical Islamist networks

In Bangladesh, approximately 91% of the population is Muslim, with the majority being Sunni Muslims. Although Bangladesh is a Muslim-majority country, its governments have predominantly operated

¹⁵ "‘Crossfire’: Continued Human Rights Abuses by Bangladesh’s Rapid Action Battalion", *Human Rights Watch*, 10 May 2011. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2011/05/10/crossfire/continued-human-rights-abuses-bangladeshs-rapid-action-battalion>.

¹⁶ Nazmul Ahasan, "BODY COUNT: Extrajudicial Killings in Bangladesh," *Netra News Interactive*, 13 November 2023. <https://interactive.netra.news/extrajudicial-killings-bangladesh>.

¹⁷ "The Digital Police State: Surveillance, Secrecy and State Power in Bangladesh," *Tech Global Institute*, 2025. <https://techglobalinstitute.com/research/the-digital-police-state>.

¹⁸ "Where No Sun Can Enter: A Decade of Enforced Disappearances in Bangladesh," *Human Rights Watch*, 16 August 2021. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/08/16/where-no-sun-can-enter/decade-enforced-disappearances-bangladesh>.

¹⁹ Mohammad Suman and Zyma Islam, "Bangladesh Police: Equipped to inflict heavy casualties," *The Daily Star*, 9 August 2025. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/investigative-stories/news/bangladesh-police-equipped-inflict-heavy-casualties-3959046>.

²⁰ David Jackman and Mathilde Maitrot, "The Party-Police Nexus in Bangladesh," *The Journal of Development Studies* 58, no. 8 (2022): 1516–1530. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2022.2055463>

²¹ Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, "Article 70 Of the Constitution of Bangladesh: Implications for the Process of Democratisation," *BISS Journal* 31, no.1 (2010): 1-24. <https://www.biiss.org/article/article-70-of-the-constitution-of-bangladesh-implications-for-democratisation>

under secular laws inherited from the British colonial era, with only a few exceptions, and have achieved notable progress in human development. However, in the early 1990s, following the Afghan civil war, radical Islamist networks gained influence in Bangladesh, led by former Mujahedin fighters. Mufti Abdul Hannan founded Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B) and planned bomb attacks to establish a theocratic state from 1999 to 2005.²² Around the end of the 1990s, Shaikh Abdur Rahman, inspired by Ibn Taimiyyah and Maulana Maududi, launched Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), which carried out bomb attacks on government offices, courts, and cultural organizations in the early 2000s.²³

From 2005 onwards, the successive governments cracked down on the Jihadist militant groups, dismantling their operations for the next few years. However, from 2013, being inspired by radical Salafi preachers, such as Jasimuddin Rahmani, the Jihadist group Ansar Al-Islam Bangladesh, an affiliate of Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent, killed around 30 freethinkers, writers, publishers, and religious leaders of minority sects.²⁴ Besides, in 2015, ISIS set foot in Bangladesh, murdering an Italian aid worker, and in July 2016, militants linked to the group killed over 20 people during a hostage crisis in a restaurant in Dhaka.²⁵ In response, the government raided several militant dens, and killed and arrested several key figures.

During the upheavals of 2024, several militants escaped from prisons, and radical Islamist preachers, such as Jasimuddin Rahmani, were released. This led to the reemergence of leaders who sought to implement strict policies and rally their followers.²⁶ The Islamists mobilized and organized several major rallies to oppose progressive policies and reforms. Taking advantage of this situation, the largest Islamist party in the country, Jamaat-e-Islami, united various major Islamist parties under a single platform in October 2025.

In December 2025, following months of incitement against secular institutions by groups aligned with radical Islamists, an angry mob ransacked and set fire to the offices of two prominent newspapers—*Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Star*—while 28 journalists were inside the buildings.²⁷ The mob also targeted cultural institutions such as Chhayanaut and Udichi. Just moments before the assault, two student leaders from Jamaat's student wing incited their followers to shut down these newspapers and cultural organizations.²⁸

²² "Countering Jihadist Militancy in Bangladesh," *International Crisis Group*, 28 February 2018, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/rpt/asia-pacific/bangladesh/295-countering-jihadist-militancy-bangladesh>.

²³ "The Threat from Jamaat-UI Mujahideen Bangladesh," *International Crisis Group*, 1 March 2010, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/rpt/asia-pacific/bangladesh/187-threat-jamaat-ul-mujahideen-bangladesh>.

²⁴ Emma Graham-Harrison and Saad Hammadi, "Inside Bangladesh's Killing Fields: Bloggers and Outsiders Targeted by Fanatics," *The Guardian*, 12 June 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/11/bangladesh-murders-bloggers-foreigners-religion>.

²⁵ Tim Lister, "ISIS Attack in Bangladesh Shows Broad Reach as 'Caliphate' Feels Pressure," *CNN*, 4 July 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/07/03/asia/bangladesh-isis-al-qaeda>.

²⁶ Aaqib Md Shatil, "An Ideologue Returns with a Louder Voice," *Netra News*, 11 May 2026, <https://netra.news/2025/mufti-jasimuddin-rahmani-returns/>.

²⁷ "Mob Attacks on Star, Prothom Alo Scripted: Star-Dismislab Analysis," *The Daily Star*, 24 February 2026, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/investigative-stories/news/mob-attacks-star-prothom-alo-scripted-4113416>.

²⁸ Mamunur Rashid, "Jamaat Reacts to Shibir Leader's Threat to Shut down The Daily Star, Prothom Alo," *The Daily Star*, 20 December 2025, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/politics/news/jamaat-reacts-shibir-leaders-threat-shut-down-daily-star-prothom-alo>.

Following the rise of hardline Islamist groups in post-uprising Bangladesh, violence against women²⁹ and incidents of cyber harassment significantly increased.³⁰ While it is difficult to ascertain at this stage whether the rise of Islamist groups has directly contributed to the increase in violence against women and girls, their strong opposition to efforts aimed at recognizing the rights of women and girls and prosecuting gender-based violence is evident. From radical groups such as Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh to moderate Jamaat, Islamists lambasted the reforms proposed by the Interim Government's Women's Affairs Reform Commission. The chief of Jamaat, a physician by profession, when defying the idea of marital rape, even went on to redefine rape as an 'immoral' act between the perpetrator and the victim, effectively denying the victims justice.³¹

The continuous denial of the rights of women and girls by Islamists, even among the ranks and files of Jamaat, is an integral part of their value system, where the visibility of women and girls in public places is seen as a moral collapse.³² As a result, in the 2026 election, no Islamist party, including Jamaat, nominated any woman candidate to contest.

Despite this, a rising Islamist tide became evident in Bangladesh's political landscape, as Jamaat and its Islamist allies secured over 35% of the votes. This marked an unprecedented increase of more than 20% in the Islamist vote bank, significantly higher than their historical average of around 10%.³³

Notable trends, therefore, of the transition period are the political consolidation of radical Islamist networks that have a history of stoking violence and are intolerant of free speech, rights of women and girls, and liberal views, and the increase in the Islamist vote bank, making them the largest opposition group. Radical groups with ideologies that promote discrimination, exclusion, or violence—including intensified gender-based violence—pose an ongoing risk of atrocity crimes.³⁴

3. Zero-sum politics and disputes among political actors

A recurring and critical risk factor in Bangladesh is the nature of politics, often described as zero-sum, as election winners enjoy unchecked access to the state's resources³⁵ and can abuse power to

²⁹ Naznin Akhter, "Rape Cases Rise 27pc in One Year," *Prothom Alo*, 8 March 2026, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/zcblw1s1zn>.

³⁰ "Women Face Rising Cyber-Bullying: Murshid," *BSS News*, 25 November 2025, <https://www.bssnews.net/news/335739>.

³¹ Shaila Shobnam, "Women without Power: The Politics of Purdah, Jamaat and Maududi's Legacy," *The Daily Star*, 11 February 2026, <https://www.thedailystar.net/slow-reads/big-picture/news/women-without-power-the-politics-purdah-jamaat-and-maududis-legacy-4103626>.

³² Irfan Ahmad, "Cracks in the 'Mightiest Fortress': Jamaat-e-Islami's Changing Discourse on Women," In Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella (eds.), *Islamic Reform in South Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2014). <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139382786.013>

³³ Masum Billah, "From Marginal Force to Opposition Party: The Rise of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami," *The Business Standard*, 15 February 2026, <https://www.tbsnews.net/features/panorama/marginal-force-opposition-party-rise-bangladesh-jamaat-e-islami-1361786>.

³⁴ Sarah Teitt, "Centralising Gender in Mass Atrocity Prevention: A Tool for Action in the Asia Pacific Region," *Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect and Asia Pacific Partnership for Atrocity Prevention*, 2019, <https://appap.group.uq.edu.au/files/1129/APR2P%20Gender%20Report%202019%20FINAL.pdf>.

³⁵ According to Transparency International, Bangladesh ranks 150/182 countries on its 2025 global Corruptions Perceptions Index, and this High-Level corruption is considered a key cause of declining democracy, instability and human rights violations. Corruption is also listed as Risk Factor/Indicator 3.5 in the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes. See *Corruption Perceptions Index 2025*, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2025> and https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/genocide_framework_of_analysis-english.pdf.

persecute the political opposition.³⁶ Hence, after the 2024 uprising, the Muhammad Yunus-led interim government proposed a set of reforms to be implemented by future governments, following consultations with all major political groups, including the youth leaders who became the face of the 2024 uprising, except the deposed Awami League. But, following the 2026 election, which effectively restored democracy in Bangladesh, disagreements between the ruling alliance led by BNP and the opposition alliance led by Jamaat resurfaced.

The election was won by the BNP, which secured a two-thirds majority in parliament, enough to amend the constitution to incorporate the agreed-upon constitutional reform ideas that were endorsed by a majority of voters. However, the sincerity of BNP in adopting reforms that may end the culture of zero-sum politics is in question. While the BNP-led government vowed to adopt the reform through parliamentary procedures,³⁷ where it will have an upper hand in the discussions, the opposition, led by Jamaat and young leaders of the uprising, is demanding that the government form a special Constitution Reform Council to incorporate the reforms,³⁸ a body that lacks a legal basis according to legal experts.³⁹

Another critical issue is the Awami League question. The political party that collapsed following the fall of the Sheikh Hasina regime, which still appears to be popular among around 20 percent of the electorate, was banned by an ordinance in March 2025 after a protest led by the National Citizen Party (NCP) (student leaders of the 2024 uprising), with support from Jamaat and Jihadists.

This stand-off presents a risk of atrocity crimes, particularly when viewed in the context of past political crises, which led to attacks on civilians by opposition groups and human rights violations by security forces. In 2005-2006, the Awami League blocked transportation for weeks in protest against the ruling BNP-led government's constitutional amendment, which aimed to alter the retirement age for Supreme Court justices, a change which was seen as an attempt to appoint a favorable Chief Advisor for the 2007 national elections.⁴⁰ In October 2006, a confrontation in Dhaka between the BNP-led alliance's Jamaat and Awami League activists resulted in the death of at least six Jamaat members, lynched by Awami League supporters. Many civilians and political activists also died due to attacks from opposition parties and police excesses nationwide.⁴¹

Similarly, from 2011, after the Awami League-led government abolished the caretaker government provision, the opposition, led by the BNP, demanded its restoration. The ruling party ignored these demands and proceeded with elections under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. In response, the BNP-led

³⁶ "Beyond the Election: Overcoming Bangladesh's Political Deadlock," *International Crisis Group*, 4 January 2024, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/rpt/asia/south-asia/bangladesh/336-beyond-election-overcoming-bangladeshs-political-deadlock>.

³⁷ "We Will Implement the July Charter to the Letter: Salahuddin Ahmed," *Prothom Alo*, 17 February 2026, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/politics/3mkn2f2spr>.

³⁸ "Early Snag for Constitution Reform Council," *The Daily Star*, 18 February 2026, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/early-snap-constitution-reform-council-4108826>.

³⁹ "A 270-Day Obligation for Constitutional Reform Is Practically Impossible," *Prothom Alo*, 2 November 2025, <https://en.prothomalo.com/opinion/interview/ro6t003zfu>.

⁴⁰ "Restoring Democracy in Bangladesh," *International Crisis Group*, 28 April 2008, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/rpt/asia-pacific/bangladesh/151-restoring-democracy-bangladesh>.

⁴¹ "12 Killed in Bangladesh Clashes," *Al Jazeera*, 28 October 2006, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2006/10/28/12-killed-in-bangladesh-clashes>.

alliance, including Jamaat, isolated Dhaka for weeks before the election. The year 2013 witnessed a tragic escalation in violence, resulting in around a thousand deaths due to attacks by opposition activists on public properties and retaliatory actions by security forces against protesters, often in violent confrontations.⁴² An estimated five hundred people died that year in the incidents linked to political conflicts.⁴³ The persecution of opposition activists, however, continued after the election as well, and the death toll rose over the next few years. Besides, hundreds of political activists linked to BNP and Jamaat also fell victim to enforced disappearances throughout the 2010s.⁴⁴ Moreover, deliberate kneecapping of opposition activists became a key strategy for the security forces to quell protests.⁴⁵ Until the fall of Sheikh Hasina, officials who ordered and executed these atrocities acted with near-total impunity, under the tacit support of the government.

The situation remains tense. With a two-thirds majority in parliament and after receiving around 50% of the total votes in a fair and credible election, it is highly unlikely that the BNP will submit to the demands of the Jamaat-led opposition alliance regarding the reforms, which will also create discontent with the youth and the uprising leaders who were an integral part of the reform process. In addition, following the ban on the Awami League, the 2026 election saw a turnout of 60 percent, lower than the turnouts in 2001 and 2008, when 75 percent and 87 percent of voters cast their ballots, respectively. The lower turnout in 2026 suggests that a significant portion of voters felt disenfranchised due to the absence of the Awami League. Hence, there is a possibility that the supporters of the Awami League, in the long run, may take to the streets if the ban is not lifted, acting on their sense of injustice due to the collective punishment and disenfranchisement. On the other hand, lifting the ban on the Awami League will likely prompt protests by Jamaat and the uprising leaders, and chaos may ensue between Awami League supporters and followers of Jamaat and NCP. Given Bangladesh's history of political conflict and the ruling party's tendency to use security forces to suppress political opponents, often facilitating atrocity crimes, disputes over post-election reforms and the Awami League question present a significant ongoing risk of atrocity crimes.

4. Vulnerability of minority communities

Religious minorities—especially Hindus, Ahmadiyyas, Christians, and Buddhists—along with indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), are often perceived as politically or culturally “other” in Bangladesh, where 91% of the population is Sunni Muslim. As a result, members of minority communities, both religious and ethnic, are common targets for large-scale attacks and persecution, especially during volatile transition periods.

⁴² “Bangladesh: Rights Violations 2013,” *Ain O Salish Kendra*, 2014, <https://www.askbd.org/ask/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Human-Rights-Violation-Report-2013.pdf>.

⁴³ “Over 500 killed in political violence in Bangladesh in 2013,” *ABC News*, 1 January 2014, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-01-01/an-over-500-killed-in-political-violence-in-bangladesh-in-2013/5180634>.

⁴⁴ “Where No Sun Can Enter,” *Human Rights Watch*, 16 August 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/08/16/where-no-sun-can-enter/decade-enforced-disappearances-bangladesh>.

⁴⁵ “No Right to Live,” *Human Rights Watch*, 29 September 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/09/30/no-right-live/kneecapping-and-maiming-detainees-bangladesh-security-forces>.

Following the 2024 Bangladesh uprising, over a thousand homes and businesses belonging to minority communities, primarily Hindus, were attacked during a month-long wave of retaliatory violence.⁴⁶ Additionally, Human Rights Watch reported that members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community also faced assaults.⁴⁷ These incidents mirror previous instances in Bangladeshi history, where political instability has led to attacks on minorities, with religion often acting as a divisive factor in broader political and social grievances. Major political events, especially national elections, have sparked communal violence, significantly impacting Hindus. In 2001, after the election, Hindus were persecuted in large numbers across the country, and many were even raped by Jamaat and BNP activists who consider the Hindus to be sympathizers of the Awami League.⁴⁸ Similarly, in early 2014, as the election neared, Hindus faced intimidation and attacks, and Hindu temples were vandalized or destroyed. The decision of some communities not to boycott the elections led to violence in areas like Malopara, where false rumors spread by Jamaat activists incited large-scale attacks on Hindus. In Gopalpur village alone, around 500 Hindu families lost their homes due to the violence.⁴⁹

Widespread attacks on minority communities often lead to both internal and external displacements in large numbers. Hindus constituted almost one-fourth of Bangladesh's total population in 1951, but this share declined to 13.5 percent after the liberation war of 1971.⁵⁰ The percentage of Hindus further declined to only 7.95%.⁵¹ While a host of factors, including low fertility rate, may have impacted the share of the Hindu population in Bangladesh, researchers blamed international migration as a key factor too.⁵² According to the Dhaka University-based professor Abul Barkat, over 200,000 Hindus leave Bangladesh each year, and the exodus increases during times of crisis.⁵³ Pew Research Centre found that Bangladesh is the second-most common origin of Hindu migrants. About 1.6 million Hindus born in Bangladesh now live elsewhere, accounting for 12% of all Hindu migrants.⁵⁴

While religious minority groups face persecution mostly from political and local actors, the ethnic minority communities of Bangladesh are being persecuted by the military and security forces. Hundreds of indigenous people have died in clashes with the military in the Chittagong Hill Tracts since the 1970s.⁵⁵ Despite the peace agreement signed in 1997, which allowed the indigenous communities

⁴⁶ Angie Zheng, "Risk of Mass Atrocities: What to Watch in Bangladesh," *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, 29 May 2025, <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/blog/risk-of-mass-atrocities-what-to-watch-in-bangladesh>.

⁴⁷ Meenakshi Ganguly, "Vandalism, Attacks Follow Bangladesh Prime Minister's Exit," *Human Rights Watch*, 8 August 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/08/vandalism-attacks-follow-bangladesh-prime-ministers-exit>.

⁴⁸ "Under Threat: The Challenges Facing Religious Minorities in Bangladesh," *Minority Rights Group*, 17 November 2016, <https://minorityrights.org/resources/under-threat-the-challenges-facing-religious-minorities-in-bangladesh>.

⁴⁹ Hindus in Bangladesh," *Minority Rights Group*, July 2018, <https://minorityrights.org/communities/hindus>.

⁵⁰ M. Moinuddin Haider, Mizanur Rahman, and Nahid Kamal, "Hindu Population Growth in Bangladesh: A Demographic Puzzle," *Journal of Religion and Demography* 6, no.1 (2019): 123–148. <https://doi.org/10.1163/2589742X-00601003>.

⁵¹ "Preliminary Report on Population and Housing Census 2022." *Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics*, September 2022. <https://bbs.gov.bd/pages/static-pages/6922e0ff933eb65569e297dc>

⁵² Ranjith Kumar K C, "Bangladeshi Migration to India—The Causal Factors at the Origin," *Artha Journal of Social Sciences* 19, no.4 (2020): 63–83, <https://doi.org/10.12724/ajss.55.4>.

⁵³ "With Current Rate of Migration, No Hindus Will Be Left in Bangladesh after 30 Years: Expert," *The Indian Express*, 22 November 2016, <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/world-news/with-current-rate-of-migration-no-hindus-will-be-left-in-bangladesh-after-30-years-expert-4389761>.

⁵⁴ Stephanie Kramer and Yunping Tong, "Hindu Migrants around the World," *Pew Research Center*, 19 August 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2024/08/19/hindu-migrants-around-the-world>.

⁵⁵ Aftab Ahmed, "Ethnicity and Insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts Region: A Study of the Crisis of Political Integration in Bangladesh," *The Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 31, no.3 (1993): 32–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662049308447665>. See also Bhumitra Chakma, "The post-colonial state and minorities:

to enjoy greater autonomy, the Chittagong Hill Tracts continue to remain a highly militarized area with three cantonments and numerous checkpoints—presenting an ongoing risk of violence and abuse by security forces, particularly sexual and gender-based violence.⁵⁶ Most notably, in recent years, security forces have detained and killed members of the Bawm indigenous community, in an intensified counterinsurgency campaign that *Netra News* described in September 2025 as “collective punishment” and a “quiet, grinding war...without precedent in recent decades”.⁵⁷

Discrimination against and persecution of minorities presents an ongoing high risk of atrocity crimes, particularly when assessed alongside other risk factors, including: a security apparatus that operates with near-total impunity, deep political polarization, political consolidation of radical Islamist networks, and increased mob violence.

5. Increased mob violence

After the 2024 uprising in Bangladesh, the leadership of the security forces that had supported the ousted Sheikh Hasina regime fled the country. This departure led to an environment of lawlessness across the nation, resulting in a surge of mob violence. Angry mobs targeted individuals suspected of being associated with Sheikh Hasina’s political party, the Awami League, often with impunity.⁵⁸

Reports indicated that mob attacks occurred in 45 of the 64 districts, leading to at least 138 confirmed fatalities in 2025, a significant increase from fewer than 40 in 2023, according to Ain O Salish Kendra.⁵⁹ Most deaths from mob violence were linked to allegations of theft, robbery, and other crimes, with only one reported fatality motivated by religious reasons, as per data collected from newspapers. Due to limited resources for tracking such violence, it is believed that these figures are likely underreported.

Along with the increase in deaths due to mob violence, the number of incidents also rose significantly. Apart from individuals with alleged criminal links, establishments, such as Sufi shrines, temples, offices of prominent newspapers, and cultural organisations, were also targeted. In the four-month period between August 2024 and mid-January 2025, as many as 44 attacks were reported on Sufi shrines by the police.⁶⁰ A local BNP leader was killed during a clash in Kishoreganj, an eastern district of the country, in September 2024, when he intervened after a mob tried to attack a shrine in the Kuliarchar

ethnocide in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh”, *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 38, no. 3 (2010): 281-300. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2010.489746>.

⁵⁶ Glen Hill, “Muscular Nationalism, masculinist militarism: the creation of situational motivators and opportunities for violence against Indigenous peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 24, no.4 (2022): 519-543. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2022.2030780> ; On the linkages between militarized security checkpoints and risk of sexual violence, see: Early Warning Indicators of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, *Stop Rape Now*, 2011, <https://www.stoprapenow.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Matrix-Early-Warning-Indicators-of-CRSV-Online-Version.pdf>

⁵⁷ Marzia Hashmi Momo and Denim Chakma, ““We always live in fear”: In Bangladesh’s Hills, Army’s Quiet War on Bawm Nation,” *Netra News*, 1 September 2025, <https://netra.news/2025/bangladesh-army-indigenous-bawm>.

⁵⁸ “Muslim Man’s Brutal Murder Falsified as Hindu Man Killing,” *The Business Standard*, 15 January 2025, <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/muslim-mans-brutal-murder-falsified-hindu-man-killing-1043691>.

⁵⁹ Mizanur Rahman, “Death by Mob,” *Netra News*, 11 February 2026, <https://interactive.netra.news/year-of-mob>.

⁶⁰ “40 Shrines Attacked in over 5 Months,” *The Daily Star*, 18 January 2025, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/40-shrines-attacked-over-5-months-3802111>.

area of the district.⁶¹ A similar attack on a shrine in Rajbari, a southern district, claimed another life in September 2025, by an Islamist mob. In February 2026, a local research group, Maqam, reported that at least 97 similar attacks on Sufi shrines had taken place since the 2024 uprising, which resulted in at least three deaths and 468 injuries.⁶²

Although Bangladesh's laws guarantee religious freedom, the customs of this predominantly Sunni Muslim nation in South Asia are largely influenced by the teachings of Sunni Islam, which often differ from Sufi interpretations. This ideological divide has led to clashes in the past; however, the coordinated widespread attacks on around one hundred Sufi shrines over a year and a half are unprecedented in recent history.

Researchers found that the majority of these attacks were carried out by mobs organized under the banner of "Tawhidi Janata" (a Mass united under Allah) with suspected involvement from political activists. The radical Sunni Islamist group Islami Andolan Bangladesh, along with the now largest opposition party Jamaat-e-Islami, which promotes a political version of Islam advocated by Sunni Islamist leader Abul Ala Maududi, was responsible for most of the attacks.⁶³ In some instances, activists from the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) were also found to be involved. Only 11 of the 97 incidents were investigated by the police, according to Maqam, which suggests that the mob largely operated with impunity and the victims were unable to seek justice despite the attacks being reported in the media.

Though it should be noted that there are fewer reports of mob violence coming out under the current elected government, mob violence remains embedded into Bangladeshi culture and the seeming social and systematic tolerance for this type of violence present an ongoing risk that mob attacks could ignite into more systematic violence and atrocity crimes.

6. Media-related violence, including hate speech and incitement

Freedom of the press, which includes all forms of media, is a core value in every democracy. However, historical evidence demonstrates how violent actors have exploited media to facilitate genocidal attacks and crimes against humanity in various regions around the world. In places like Rwanda and Bosnia, the media was manipulated by perpetrators to incite violence and justify their criminal actions. Additionally, with the rise of new media, social media has become a tool for violent actors to disseminate hate speech and incite violence against vulnerable communities, thereby laying the groundwork for genocide or crimes against humanity.⁶⁴

⁶¹ "Miladunnabi Rally: BNP Leader Killed in Kishoreganj," *The Daily Star*, 17 September 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/miladunnabi-rally-bnp-leader-killed-kishoreganj-3704961>.

⁶² "Only 11 Cases Filed over 97 Shrine Attacks since Aug '24," *The Daily Star*, 3 February 2026, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/only-11-cases-filed-over-97-shrine-attacks-aug-24-4097156>.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Matt Schissler, "Beyond Hate Speech and Misinformation: Facebook and the Rohingya Genocide in Myanmar," *Journal of Genocide Research* 27, no.3 (2024): 445-470, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2024.2375122>.

Bangladesh is not immune to the manipulation of traditional media and social media by influential actors, often to justify their acts. During the military-backed regime of 2007-08, intelligence agencies fed the media with news targeting politicians, businessmen, and human rights activists to force politicians to retire from politics and to undermine democracy. A similar feat was seen during the Sheikh Hasina regime, especially from 2013, when the media was used to justify attacks on opposition groups. Even during the 2024 uprising, media outlets were often focused more on the loss of public and private properties than on the hundreds of lives lost. Social media also has been persistently manipulated through disinformation to promote hate and violence against minorities.⁶⁵

In post-uprising Bangladesh, violent actors disguised as mobs of ordinary citizens have repeatedly blocked the entrances of media outlets and burned down two newspaper offices, as they felt that the two media outlets were not portraying them favorably and were, according to them, serving Indian interests.⁶⁶ These attacks have been aimed at coercing media houses to speak in their preferred languages and to justify their actions. Intelligence agencies are reported to run influence operations through media owners and journalists in favor of political governments.⁶⁷

In Bangladesh, where a large population with low media literacy navigates through thousands of content each day,⁶⁸ the tendency of the intelligence agencies and other violent actors to coerce the media and force them to create justification for their actions poses a critical structural risk of atrocities. The convergence of politically manipulated media, suppressed independent journalism, and digitally amplified incitement presents a risk of atrocity crimes.

7. Pressures linked to climate change, migration and displacement, including the insecurity of Rohingya in Bangladesh

Experts from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have predicted that rising sea levels and coastal erosion could lead to a loss of 17 percent of Bangladesh's land surface and 30 percent of its food production by 2050.⁶⁹ Climate change is also causing the Himalayan glaciers to melt, which feeds Bangladesh's river systems. This melting leaves large areas of the country more vulnerable to devastating floods, which also contribute to land loss and erosion, prompting many to migrate.⁷⁰

Natural disasters and climate change lead to significant displacement, livelihood losses, and resource scarcity. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, over the past 10 years, natural disasters have displaced roughly 110,000 people from Bangladesh each year on average and will

⁶⁵ Mubashar Hasan, Geoffrey Macdonald and Hui Hui Ooi, "How Facebook Fuels Religious Violence," *Foreign Policy*, 4 February 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/02/04/facebook-tech-moderation-violence-bangladesh-religion/>.

⁶⁶ Mubashar Hasan, "Why Mobs in Bangladesh Attacked the Offices of Daily Star and Prothom Alo," *The Diplomat*, 29 December 2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/12/why-mobs-in-bangladesh-attacked-the-offices-of-daily-star-and-prothom-alo/>.

⁶⁷ Mubashar Hasan and Mushfique Wadud, "Re-conceptualizing safety of journalists in Bangladesh," *Media and Communication*, 8, no.1 (2020): 27–36. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v8i1.2494>

⁶⁸ Management and Resources Development Initiative, "News Literacy in Bangladesh: National Survey," UNICEF, 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/reports/news-literacy-bangladesh>.

⁶⁹ International Monetary Fund. Asia and Pacific Dept. "Bangladesh: Selected Issues." *IMF Staff Country Reports* 15, no. 304 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.5089/9781513514314.002>

⁷⁰ Rayees Ahmed, "Decoding the Fate of Himalayan Glaciers under Climate Change: Impacts, Challenges, Research Gaps, and Policy Pathways," *Evolving Earth* 3 (2025): 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eve.2025.100082>

continue to displace more in the years to come as sea levels rise and more floods cause erosion and land loss.⁷¹

Internal climate migration is putting significant pressure on cities such as Dhaka, Chattogram, and Khulna, leading to overcrowding and limited public services in informal settlements. Displaced populations are often unfairly viewed as competitors for resources, which can lead to tensions between migrant and host communities and the exploitation of climate or disaster-displaced persons by various groups, and make them vulnerable to modern slavery. According to a study conducted by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) in 2025, of the internal migrants surveyed, who were displaced due to environmental issues, 92% reported experiencing at least one form of modern slavery, and 52% faced three or more forms.⁷² With the possibility of the impacts of climate change getting worse, internal and external displacement may continue in the following years, sparking local tensions and making a large part of the displaced population vulnerable to modern slavery—which, under certain circumstances, can constitute a crime against humanity under the Rome Statute.

In addition to the vulnerability of internally displaced communities, the Rohingya refugee population in Cox's Bazar and Bhasan Char face ongoing insecurity and atrocity risks. Bangladesh has been hosting Rohingya refugees for decades, particularly after a series of genocidal attacks by Myanmar's state forces in 2016-17 forced over a million Rohingya to seek refuge in Bangladesh. Intense fighting between the Arakan Army and state forces in Myanmar's civil war front in Rakhine State prompted another wave of Rohingya refugees, with an estimated 150,000 Rohingya fleeing to Bangladesh from early 2024 to mid-2025.

Conditions for the Rohingya community in Bangladesh have become even more precarious in recent years, due to a combination of rising violence and insecurity in refugee camps, tensions with host communities, and ongoing restrictions on movement, education, and livelihoods. Drastic cuts to humanitarian funding under the second Trump administration have slashed food assistance and reduced access to essential services in camps. At the same time, Bangladesh has continued to resist the integration of Rohingya refugees into society, leaving them with limited access to formal education and employment opportunities. Recent years have also seen a growing presence of armed actors and criminal networks operating within and around the camps, with law enforcement increasingly concerned about refugee gangs or armed groups involved in human trafficking⁷³ and smuggling yaba (methamphetamine) pills from Myanmar into Bangladesh.⁷⁴ Women and girls face an increased risk

⁷¹ Mohammad Tarikul Islam, "Disaster and Climate-Induced Migration in Bangladesh: A Potential Threat to Human Security," Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, 22 September 2025, <https://hhi.harvard.edu/news/2025/09/disaster-and-climate-induced-migration-bangladesh-potential-threat-human-security>.

⁷² Ritu Bharadwaj, Devanshu Chakravarti, N. Karthikeyan, Shakirul Islam, and Urmi Jahan Tanni, "Exposed and Exploited: Climate Change, Migration and Modern Slavery in Bangladesh," *International Institute for Environment and Development*, February 2025, <https://www.iied.org/22604iied>.

⁷³ Abu Morshed Chowdhury (Khoka), "Human Trafficking by Sea: A Growing Crisis," *The Business Standard*, 21 April 2026, <https://www.tbsnews.net/thoughts/human-trafficking-sea-growing-crisis-1417381>

⁷⁴ Mohammed Nuruzzaman and Abdul Wohab, "The Security Impact of the Rohingya Refugee Crisis on Bangladesh and Regional States: A Securitization Theoretical Perspective," *International Journal of Asian Studies* (2026) online first. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479591426100709>.

of forced marriage and sexual and gender-based violence,⁷⁵ while young men and boys are at risk of forced conscription and exploitation by armed groups who have been active in arming the Rohingya youth to fight against the Arakan Army in Myanmar. Growing desperation and insecurity in the camps has also contributed to a rise in Rohingya refugees attempting perilous sea journeys in search of safety and livelihoods elsewhere.⁷⁶

Bangladesh faces mounting pressure to respond to these security concerns, yet it lacks a dedicated legal framework to protect the rights of refugees or asylum seekers and is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol. The absence of formal legal protections renders Rohingya communities vulnerable to arbitrary restrictions, detention, and abuses by state security actors. This risk is compounded by the growth of illicit economies, criminal gangs, and armed groups in camps, as these factors can compel coercive responses by Bangladeshi authorities, whose security forces are known for employing ‘crossfire’ tactics and carrying out extrajudicial killings of Rohingya.⁷⁷ Together, these dynamics make the plight of the Rohingya community in Bangladesh both an ongoing serious human rights concern and a risk for atrocity crimes.

Factors affecting atrocity risk and the likelihood of escalatory violence

Though the risks outlined above are significant, Bangladesh has made some progress in addressing the structural drivers of atrocity crimes, especially in recent years. After the fall of the Sheikh Hasina regime, the interim government released political prisoners from opposition parties, most notably the BNP and Jamaat, though it arrested politicians and journalists linked to the Awami League. Bangladesh also became a signatory to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance in 2024—perhaps signaling a political commitment to address what has become a widespread form of political violence and serious human rights violation in Bangladesh that heightened risk for other abuses, such as sexual violence, torture and murder.

There has also been some headway in accountability for past atrocities, though not without issues. Commissions of Inquiry were established to investigate the atrocities committed by security officials, including military personnel. These commissions published reports detailing the incidents and outlining the command responsibilities of these crimes. Despite facing criticism regarding failing to meet fair trial standards, a domestic tribunal examined the atrocities that occurred during the 2024 uprising and sentenced former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the Home Minister to capital punishment. The tribunal is also investigating several high-ranking security officials from the deposed regime. To some extent, these actions helped address the prevailing culture of impunity among security officials.

⁷⁵ “Trapped in Silence: Report on the GBV of Rohingya Women and Girls,” Seoul and Cox’s Bazar: *Asian Dignity Initiative and Rohingya Human Rights Center*, 31 December 2025, <https://rohingyahumanrightscenter.org/download/report-on-the-gbv-of-rohingya-women-and-girls/>.

⁷⁶ “Rohingya Boat Departures Nearly Double in a Year as Aid Cuts and Insecurity Force Families Out of Camps,” *Save the Children*, 23 April 2026, <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/rohingya-boat-departures-nearly-double-year-aid-cuts-and-insecurity-force-families-out-camps>.

⁷⁷ Anbarasan Ethirajan, “Rohingya: Gang Violence Stalks World’s Largest Refugee Camp,” *BBC*, 25 August 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-66569013>.

As a result, CIVICUS, which ranked Bangladesh's civic space as Closed in 2023, ranked the country as Repressed in 2024, marking a slight improvement.⁷⁸ Together, these reforms and political developments suggest some additional safeguards in Bangladesh for protecting human rights and preventing instability that could lead to mass violence, notwithstanding that the current period remains highly vulnerable and uncertain.

Conclusion

The trajectory of violence and political instability in Bangladesh reveals a pattern where structural risk factors, deeply embedded in state institutions, political culture, and social dynamics, create recurring conditions that lead to atrocity crimes. Since its independence, Bangladesh has experienced cycles of repression, militarization, political polarization, and communal targeting, each element reinforcing the others. Although the country has shown resilience and achieved notable socio-economic progress, these gains are vulnerable to reversal unless meaningful institutional reforms and accountability measures are implemented.

The militarization of public security forces and long-standing impunity for extrajudicial killings pose a critical threat in Bangladesh. The rise of radical Islamist networks and increasing mob violence, particularly against minority communities, signals a troubling normalization of vigilantism and intolerance. The political resurgence of Islamist groups may also make women and girls more vulnerable to gender-based violence and targets of atrocity crimes. Zero-sum political competition risks escalating disputes into human rights violations. Minorities, especially Hindus, Ahmadiyyas, Christians, Buddhists, and indigenous peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts can be particularly vulnerable during political transitions. Natural disaster-related displacement further exacerbates social tensions and resource competition, and the insecurity to the Rohingya refugee community in Bangladesh creates conditions conducive to atrocity crimes.

Addressing the prevailing structural risks requires a host of reforms, including an overhaul and demilitarization of the security forces to hold them accountable, the restoration of judicial independence, political consensus on governance and reforms, the increased protection of minority rights and women's rights, and proactive counter-extremism strategies. The challenge ahead for the new BNP government is to consolidate reform gains while preventing political repression or retaliation, curbing localized violence, and ensuring the protection of all communities during this fragile transition period. In the absence of meaningful reforms and robust accountability measures, Bangladesh continues to face substantial risk that political violence could escalate to large-scale atrocities.

⁷⁸ "Bangladesh: Interim government commits to human rights reforms as they release activists, protesters and investigate past crimes", CIVICUS Monitor, 30 October 2024, <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/7811-bangladesh-interim-government-must-do-more-to-protect-fundamental-freedoms-and-strengthen-accountability>

Appendix 1: Bangladesh Atrocity Risks and the United Nations Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes

Bangladesh Atrocity Risks	UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes Risk Factor and Indicators
<p>1. Unaccountable and militarized public security forces</p>	<p>Risk Factor 2: Record of serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 2.2: Past acts of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes or their incitement. • Indicator 2.3: Policy or practice of impunity for or tolerance of serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, of atrocity crimes, or of their incitement. • Indicator 2.5: Continuation of support to groups accused of involvement in serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including atrocity crimes, or failure to condemn their actions. • Indicator 2.6: Justification, biased accounts or denial of serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law or atrocity crimes. • Indicator 2.8: Widespread mistrust in State institutions or among different groups as a result of impunity. <p>Risk Factor 3: Weakness of State Structures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 3.4: Lack of effective civilian control of security forces. • Indicator 3.5: High levels of corruption or poor governance. • Indicator 3.6: Absence or inadequate external or internal mechanisms of oversight and accountability, including those where victims can seek recourse for their claims. <p>Risk Factor 5: Capacity to Commit Atrocity Crimes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 5.1: Availability of personnel and of arms and ammunition, or of the financial resources, public or private, for their procurement. <p>Risk Factor 7: Enabling circumstances or preparatory action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 7.3: Strengthening of the security apparatus, its reorganization or mobilization against protected groups, populations or individuals.
<p>2. Zero-sum politics and disputes among political actors</p>	<p>Risk Factor 1: Situations of Armed Conflict or Other Forms of Instability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 1.5: Political instability caused by disputes over power or growing nationalist, armed or radical opposition movements. • Indicator 1.7: Economic instability caused by scarcity of resources or disputes over their use or exploitation. • Indicator 10.1: Social instability caused by resistance to or mass protests against State authority or policies. <p>Risk Factor 2: Record of Violations of Human Rights or International Humanitarian Law</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 2.2: Past acts of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes or their incitement. • Indicator 2.7: Politicization or absence of reconciliation or transitional justice processes following conflict. • Indicator 2.8: Widespread mistrust in State institutions or among different groups as a result of impunity.

	<p>Risk Factor 3: Weakness of State Structures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 3.1: National legal framework that does not offer ample and effective protection, including through ratification and domestication of relevant international human rights and humanitarian law treaties. • Indicator 3.3: Lack of an independent and impartial judiciary • Indicator 3.4: Lack of effective civilian control of security forces. • Indicator 3.5: High levels of corruption or poor governance. • Indicator 3.6: Absence or inadequate external or internal mechanisms of oversight and accountability, including those where victims can seek recourse for their claims. <p>Risk Factor 4: Motives or Incentives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 4.1: Political motives, particularly those aimed at the attainment or consolidation of power. • Indicator 4.2: Economic interests, including those based on the safeguard and well-being of elites or identity groups, or control over the distribution of resources. • Indicator 4.8: Politicization of past grievances, tensions or impunity. • Indicator 4.9: Social trauma caused by past incidents of violence not adequately addressed and that produced feelings of loss, displacement, injustice and a possible desire for revenge. <p>Risk Factor 8: Triggering Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 8.4: Abrupt or irregular regime changes, transfers of power, or changes in political power of groups. • Indicator 8.5: Attacks against the life, physical integrity, liberty or security of leaders, prominent individuals or members of opposing groups. Other serious acts of violence, such as terrorist attacks. • Indicator 8.12: Acts related to accountability processes, particularly when perceived as unfair.
<p>3. Existence of radical Islamist networks</p>	<p>Risk Factor 1: Situations of Armed Conflict or Other Forms of Instability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 1.5: Political instability caused by disputes over power or growing nationalist, armed or radical opposition movements. <p>Risk Factor 4: Motives or Incentives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 4.7: Ideologies based on the supremacy of a certain identity or on extremist versions of identity. <p>Risk Factor 5: Capacity to Commit Atrocity Crimes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 5.3: Capacity to encourage or recruit large numbers of supporters from populations or groups, and availability of the means to mobilize them. • Indicator 5.7: Financial, political or other support of influential or wealthy national actors. <p>Risk Factor 7: Enabling circumstances or preparatory action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 7.9: Increased serious acts of violence against women and children, or creation of conditions that facilitate acts of sexual violence against those groups, including as a tool of terror. • Indicator 7.13: Increased politicization of identity, past events or motives to engage in violence. • Indicator 7.14: Increased inflammatory rhetoric, propaganda campaigns or hate speech targeting protected groups, populations or individuals. <p>Risk Factor 8: Triggering Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 8.7: Acts of incitement or hate propaganda targeting particular groups or individuals.

<p>4. Vulnerability of minority communities</p>	<p>Risk Factor 2: Record of Violations of Human Rights or International Humanitarian Law</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 2.1: Past or present serious restrictions to or violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, particularly if assuming an early pattern of conduct and if targeting protected groups, populations or individuals. • Indicator 2.2: Past acts of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes or their incitement. • Indicator 2.3: Policy or practice of impunity for or tolerance of serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, of atrocity crimes, or of their incitement. • Indicator 2.4: Inaction, reluctance or refusal to use all possible means to stop planned, predictable or ongoing serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law or likely atrocity crimes, or their incitement. • Indicator 2.5: Continuation of support to groups accused of involvement in serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including atrocity crimes, or failure to condemn their actions. • Indicator 2.6: Justification, biased accounts or denial of serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law or atrocity crimes. • Indicator 2.7: Politicization or absence of reconciliation or transitional justice processes following conflict. • Indicator 2.8: Widespread mistrust in State institutions or among different groups as a result of impunity. <p>Risk Factor 3: Weakness of State Structures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 3.1: National legal framework that does not offer ample and effective protection, including through ratification and domestication of relevant international human rights and humanitarian law treaties. • Indicator 3.6: Absence or inadequate external or internal mechanisms of oversight and accountability, including those where victims can seek recourse for their claims. <p>Risk Factor 4: Motives or Incentives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 4.5: Real or perceived threats posed by protected groups, populations or individuals, against interests or objectives of perpetrators, including perceptions of disloyalty to a cause. <p>Risk Factor 6: Absence of Mitigating Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 6.1: Limited or lack of empowerment processes, resources, allies or other elements that could contribute to the ability of protected groups, populations or individuals to protect themselves. • Indicator 6.11: Lack of an early warning mechanism relevant to the prevention of atrocity crimes. <p>Risk Factor 7: Enabling Circumstances or Preparatory Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 7.8: Increased violations of the right to life, physical integrity, liberty or security of members of protected groups, populations or individuals, or recent adoption of measures or legislation that affect or deliberately discriminate against them. • Indicator 7.14: Increased inflammatory rhetoric, propaganda campaigns or hate speech targeting protected groups, populations or individuals. <p>Risk Factor 8: Triggering Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 8.7: Acts of incitement or hate propaganda targeting particular groups or individuals. <p>Risk Factor 9: Intergroup tensions or patterns of discrimination against protected groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 9.1: Past or present serious discriminatory, segregational, restrictive or exclusionary practices, policies or legislation against protected groups. • Indicator 9.3: History of atrocity crimes committed with impunity against protected groups.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 9.4: Past or present serious tensions or conflicts between protected groups or with the State, with regards to access to rights and resources, socioeconomic disparities, participation in decision making processes, security, expressions of group identity or to perceptions about the targeted group. • Indicator 9.5: Past or present serious tensions or conflicts involving other types of groups (political, social, cultural, geographical, etc.) that could develop along national, ethnical, racial or religious lines. • Indicator 9.6: Lack of national mechanisms or initiatives to deal with identity-based tensions or conflict.
<p>5. Increased mob violence</p>	<p>Risk Factor 2: Record of Violations of Human Rights or International Humanitarian Law</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 2.3: Policy or practice of impunity for or tolerance of serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, of atrocity crimes, or of their incitement. • Indicator 2.4: Inaction, reluctance or refusal to use all possible means to stop planned, predictable or ongoing serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law or likely atrocity crimes, or their incitement. • Indicator 2.6: Justification, biased accounts or denial of serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law or atrocity crimes. <p>Risk Factor 4: Motives or Incentives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 4.5: Real or perceived threats posed by protected groups, populations or individuals, against interests or objectives of perpetrators, including perceptions of disloyalty to a cause. • Indicator 4.9: Social trauma caused by past incidents of violence not adequately addressed and that produced feelings of loss, displacement, injustice and a possible desire for revenge. <p>Risk Factor 7: Enabling Circumstances or Preparatory Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 7.8: Increased violations of the right to life, physical integrity, liberty or security of members of protected groups, populations or individuals, or recent adoption of measures or legislation that affect or deliberately discriminate against them. • Indicator 7.13: Increased politicization of identity, past events or motives to engage in violence. • Indicator 7.14: Increased inflammatory rhetoric, propaganda campaigns or hate speech targeting protected groups, populations or individuals. <p>Risk Factor 8: Triggering Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 8.7: Acts of incitement or hate propaganda targeting particular groups or individuals. <p>Risk Factor 11: Signs of widespread or systematic attacks against any civilian population</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 11.1: Signs of patterns of violence against civilian populations, or against members of an identifiable group, their property, livelihoods and cultural or religious symbols.
<p>6. Media-related violence, including hate speech and incitement</p>	<p>Risk Factor 6: Absence of Mitigating Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 6.2: Lack of a strong, organized and representative national civil society and of a free, diverse and independent national media. <p>Risk Factor 7: Enabling Circumstances or Preparatory Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 7.14: Increased inflammatory rhetoric, propaganda campaigns or hate speech targeting protected groups, populations or individuals. <p>Risk Factor 8: Triggering Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 8.7: Acts of incitement or hate propaganda targeting particular groups or individuals. <p>Risk Factor 11: Signs of widespread or systematic attacks against any civilian population</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator 11.4: Use of the media or other means to provoke or incite to violent acts.

	<p>Risk Factor 12: Signs of plan or policy to attack any civilian population</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator 12.8: Facilitating or inciting violence against the civilian population or protected groups, or tolerance or deliberate failure to take action, with the aim of encouraging violent acts.
<p>7. Pressures linked to climate change, migration and displacement, including insecurity of Rohingya in Bangladesh</p>	<p>Risk Factor 1: Situations of Armed Conflict or Other Forms of Instability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator 1.3: Humanitarian crisis or emergency, including those caused by natural disasters or epidemics. Indicator 1.7: Economic instability caused by scarcity of resources or disputes over their use or exploitation. Indicator 1.9: Economic instability caused by acute poverty, mass unemployment or deep horizontal inequalities. <p>Risk Factor 3: Weakness of State Structures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator 3.1: National legal framework that does not offer ample and effective protection, including through ratification and domestication of relevant international human rights and humanitarian law treaties. <p>Risk Factor 2: Record of Violations of Human Rights or International Humanitarian Law</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator 2.1: Past or present serious restrictions to or violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, particularly if assuming an early pattern of conduct and if targeting protected groups, populations or individuals. Indicator 2.6: Justification, biased accounts or denial of serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law or atrocity crimes. <p>Risk Factor 4: Motives or Incentives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator 4.5: Real or perceived threats posed by protected groups, populations or individuals, against interests or objectives of perpetrators, including perceptions of disloyalty to a cause. Indicator 4.6: Real or perceived membership of or support for armed opposition groups, by protected groups, populations or individuals. <p>Risk Factor 6: Absence of mitigating factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator 6.9: Lack of interest, reluctance or failure of United Nations Member States or international or regional organizations to support a State to exercise its responsibility to protect populations from atrocity crimes, or to take action when the State manifestly fails that responsibility. Indicator 6.10: Lack of support by neighbouring States to protect populations at risk and in need of refuge, including by closure of borders, forced repatriation or aid restrictions. <p>Risk Factor 7: Enabling Circumstances or Preparatory Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator 7.10: Imposition of life-threatening living conditions or the deportation, seizure, collection, segregation, evacuation, or forced displacement or transfer of protected groups, populations or individuals to camps, rural areas, ghettos or other assigned locations. <p>Risk Factor 8: Triggering factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator 8.1: Sudden deployment of security forces or commencement of armed hostilities. Indicator 8.9: Sudden changes that affect the economy or the workforce, including as a result of financial crises, natural disasters or epidemics.