Country Context

Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in reducing poverty. In 1991, 44.2% of the population was below the poverty line – by 2017, the rate dropped to 14.8%. In parallel, life expectancy, literacy rates and per capita food production have increased significantly. A two-party rivalry has had the prime minister role alternate for the last 25 years, largely between the two current heads of these parties, the Awami League's Sheikh Hasina and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party's Khaleda Zia.

Growing political uncertainty and security risks are contributing to weaker governance, placing economic and civil stability in question while potentially interfering with Bangladesh's ability to attract future foreign direct investment and development assistance. Despite these challenges, the government of Bangladesh has welcomed 700,000 Rohingya refugees fleeing Myanmar since July 2017, bringing the total Rohingya refugee population to an estimated 909,000 given earlier waves of violence.

Bangladesh is a relatively violent country in terms of fatalities from political uprisings. The country endures intermittent violence largely related to government actions and political cycles (generally around elections). These trends reflect three mutually reinforcing patterns of instability in the political and security spheres: a national conflict between two political parties, urban public discontent, and separate communal violence that occurs primarily in rural areas.

Selection Indicators

General Statistics: World Bank 2017

- GDP: $249.7bn
- Per Capita Income: $1,470
- Population: 164.7m

Ranking on Recognized Fragility Lists

- OECD States of Fragility: 34
- Fund for Peace Fragile States Index: 32
- World Bank Harmonized List: -
- IEP Global Peace Index: 71
- Early Warning Risk Assessment: 13

Levels of Violence

- Committed by Armed Groups: 109.35
- Gender-Based Violence per 100k: 2926.94
- Violence against Children/Youth per 100k: 171.38

Capacity and Commitment

- Capacity Score: 48

Geographic Region

- South and Central Asia

For more on the GFA: allianceforpeacebuilding.org/globalfragilityact/
Current U.S. Priorities and Foreign Assistance

According to ForeignAssistance.gov, “Bangladesh - the world's eighth most-populous and fourth largest Muslim-majority country - is a key strategic partner for the U.S. in South Asia. After more than two decades of six percent economic growth, Bangladesh's economy continues to grow rapidly. Bangladesh also faces a rise in violent extremism... U.S. assistance to Bangladesh will address persistent challenges in the areas of agricultural productivity and crop diversity, health care, access to quality education, nutrition, vulnerability to natural disasters, governance and the rule of law, supporting a stable democratic environment, and countering transnational security threats. U.S. assistance will continue to focus on expanding economic opportunities for Bangladeshi's in targeted areas, improving governance, and developing social services which will greatly contribute to the Government of Bangladesh's (GOB) goal of becoming a middle-income country by 2021.”

Potential GFA Reforms

Reshape the budget request to more accurately reflect drivers of instability and inequality. According to a USAID evaluation, “the best salve for Bangladesh's violent democracy is transparent and accountable governance.” Yet, democracy and governance programming is 5-10 percent of the U.S. government’s funding to Bangladesh. The refugee crisis is straining a country already vulnerable to governance and climate challenges.

Create a strategy that holistically incorporates other agencies like the Departments of Treasury, Labor, and Commerce to engage with the government and the Bangladeshi business community to promote anti-corruption, youth employment and a more transparent government. Additionally, the strategy must incorporate the private sector themselves who violate human rights.

Force agencies to look comprehensively at how climate exposure will further increase Bangladesh’s fragility and could contribute to conflict dynamics including further displacement and urban poverty. Supporting the government's ability to better respond to climate shocks could also strengthen its legitimacy with its population and contribute to overall stability.

Better address the regional dynamics of the refugee crisis and environmental shocks.

Impact of Fragility & Violence

Hartals (strikes) and riots cause massive economic losses, estimated at 1% of GDP, according to the World Bank.

Human rights advocates have voiced their fear that the often-lawless responses of police forces to violent protests are providing an opportunity for militant groups to attract new recruits from opposition supporters.

Extremist militant groups have emerged in the space created by instability.

Communal violence is especially prominent in rural areas, which are experiencing an increased number of land-grabbing incidents and violent clashes of communal groups who distrust each other which hampers the development of the social cohesion necessary to achieve security.

A reported 55 percent of refugees are children.

Bangladesh’s geographic features and location leave it exposed to numerous natural shocks, particularly floods, flash floods, drought, salinity and cyclones.

The region suffers from drug and human trade.

The Global Fragility Act of 2019 would require the U.S. government to select at least 5-6 candidate countries or regions based on a set of evidenced-based criteria. This document serves as an example of a country that could, but will not necessarily be, selected in the "Prevention" category.