

Bangladesh: Beyond the Binaries

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Bangladesh, the eighth most populous country in the world, has recently attracted international media attention due to the dramatic rise of militancy tied to transnational terrorist groups. The coverage, unfortunately, followed a familiar pattern of portraying the country's politics as a conflict between Secularism and Islamism on the one hand and a battle between personalities, on the other. Since its independence in 1971, corruption and growing intolerance have reflected the weaknesses of the state and undermined its capacity. The authoritarian tendency of the ruling elites, palpable throughout the past 45 years, was and still is, contrary to the democratic aspirations and sacrifices of its citizens. Interestingly, despite acrimonious politics and poor governance, the country has demonstrated significant economic potential and achieved successes in areas such as female education, population control and reductions in child mortality. Based on his recently published book [Bangladesh: A Political History since Independence](#) (I B Tauris 2016), Ali Riaz examines the political processes that engendered these paradoxical tendencies. He argues that the binary frame used to understand Bangladeshi politics betrays the complexity of the nation's tumultuous journey and future trajectories.