

PREFACE

In 2015, we published a book—*Islamicity Indices: The Seed for Change*—and now barely two years later we are following it up with another book with *Islamicity Indices* again in the title! Why? These indices continue to receive widespread attention in Muslim countries, especially among Muslim youth who are crying out for political, social, and economic reforms in their quest for more freedom, social progress, and economic prosperity.

To be most helpful, these indices require continuous improvement and updating. Indices are work in progress. The indices reported in our earlier book are for one year, 2015, affording no historical perspective on how countries have performed over time and limited indication on which policies are helpful and which are harmful to progress. In this book, we provide historical trends dating back to 2000. Additionally, we hope that this volume provides an improved and better benchmark for Muslims to assess their individual performance and that of their communities, to hold their governments accountable, and to peacefully work for institutions that would serve as the foundation for thriving Muslim communities.

In light of conditions in many Muslim countries—dictatorial and autocratic governance, little or no personal freedoms, massive abuse of human rights, sub-par economic performance, social and cultural stagnation, economic and social injustice, and virulent rhetoric of a few thousand Muslim extremists—there can be no doubt Muslim countries need reform. A standard Muslim excuse for past failures is foreign exploitation and foreign support for illegitimate rulers. While foreigners have, in

part, contributed to the current state of many Muslim countries through intervention and support for autocratic rulers, Muslims must acknowledge that they have the principal role in the evolution of their communities and their shortcomings. At the same time, while placing the major responsibility of failed Muslim societies and Muslim extremism on Muslims could be understandable, its extension to Islam and its teachings by Islamophobic observers has no basis whatsoever and poisons better inter-faith relations. There are a few Muslims who are terrorists and they could be called Muslim terrorists or Muslim extremists, but Islam is a religion and there are no Islamic terrorists or Islamists. Westerners do not refer to other atrocities by the presumed religion of their perpetrators, so why do so in the case of Muslims? Why disparage a religion and 1.7 billion Muslims? Western politicians and their advisors only show their ignorance and stoke fires for political advantage when they make the connection to Islam or label Islam as a “dark” religion.

It was in this setting that we started to develop Islamicity Indices—to assess which societies reflected the teachings of the Qur’an and to gauge their performance relative to this benchmark. In other words, which societies *practiced* what Islam preached in the Holy Qur’an and through the practice of the Prophet? The Prophet is reputed to have said, “Faith without commensurate action is like a body without a head.” Thus we wanted to know to what extent Islamic teachings were practiced and prevalent in Muslim societies; in other words, “how Islamic were individual Muslim countries?”

Our goal was not to determine if Muslims pray five times a day or if they attend Friday sermons, but to provide a benchmark to assess whether societies adhere to the political, social, and economic teachings of Islam, such as providing a scaffolding of justice and affording individuals freedom and equal opportunities to develop, and to suggest institutional reforms and policies that would enhance their political, social, and economic performance. Be this as it may, some observers may be unhappy with our results because we do not give weight to the Five Pillars of Islam and to other factors that they might deem as important.

We appreciate any and all comments and in response would make a number of comments and suggestions. Such indices can always be improved and must be updated to be relevant, so we invite all helpful comments and suggestions. We believe that we have captured most of the important teachings of Islam that affect the well-being

of a community, but again we are always open to helpful suggestions. We have done our best to find data and indicators that represent these teachings and again recognize that improvements will come with time. However, there is one inescapable fact—the Muslim World is not flourishing and the problem is not with Islam but with Muslims who are not practicing the guidelines of the Holy Qur'an and the interpretations of the Prophet (sawa).

We have been heartened by the publicity and the many comments we have received. While the publicity has been global, from Muslim and non-Muslim affiliated sources and from all forms of media—television, radio, print, and numerous social media outlets—the individual comments have come from Muslims. These diverse comments have confirmed the need to continue our work. At one extreme, where we have received the overwhelming majority of reactions and feedback, Muslims have said that while they appreciate the details of our work, its message and how it might be used to achieve reforms, the broad results have been long obvious to them. They see much more freedom, justice, and equality of opportunities to develop—the hallmarks of what Islam preaches—in much of the West than in any Muslim country. A few Muslims have also added that our message cannot be even discussed in the Muslim majority country where they live. At the other extreme, a few Muslims have dismissed our work precisely because we do not give weight to the Five Pillars of Islam. To our mind, there is so much more to Islam—in the Holy Qur'an and the practices of the Prophet—than the Five Pillars. It is these teachings, their indicated actions, and their impact on a Muslim community that we have tried to capture in these indices.

In between these two extremes, some Muslims have raised words of caution. While they agree that Muslim countries need foundational reforms, they feel that reforms will entail upheaval and instability as witnessed during the Arab Spring. Although they want change, they do not want their country transformed into another Syria! They want the turmoil phase circumvented. We totally understand and sympathize with these concerns and can offer only limited words of comfort. Yes, most oppressive rulers will not go away peacefully. Yes, effective opposition forces have been so decimated in Muslim countries that even if rulers would peacefully step aside there would be a vacuum of governance. Yes, foreign powers will continue to espouse human rights and democracy but meddle and support dictators who invariably make matters worse.

Yes, the status of Muslim countries is a product of decades and centuries of path-dependent abusive policies and practices that cannot be reversed quickly.

There is hope. If these indices, or some variant thereof, become widely debated and accepted by Muslims the world over, they would unite reform-minded Muslims across the world. They would provide an international benchmark and standard, supported by an international community of Muslims who know no national boundaries. Such a movement and recognized benchmark would be difficult for a tyrant in any Muslim country to dismiss and would provide the foundation for meaningful reforms. At the same time, it would become much harder and risky for foreign powers to intervene and derail effective transformation of Muslim countries because of the wider impact on their national interest. A credible, peaceful, and recognized international movement for reform would be established with the goal of reformation and development of Muslim communities. These indices could then provide a framework and benchmark for reform, with a transparent and realistic timetable for reforms that should be customized to each Muslim country's history, culture, and special circumstances. In this way, it may be possible to avoid much of the turbulent upheavals that have been a by-product of the Arab Spring.

But we must emphasize something that we will repeat many times in this volume—all reforms begin with Muslims. Muslims must take back their religion from self-interested rulers and clerics. They have to study and debate the Qur'an and the practice of the Prophet to determine their application to their time and circumstance. To be successful in understanding the Holy Qur'an, the practice of the Prophet and their implementation in their times, Muslims must enjoy Allah's gift of freedom that no man can take away. They must develop the self as recommended in Islam. Positive change can only come about when Muslims study their religion and accept its responsibilities.

In the peaceful pursuit for reforms, this volume represents our improved and updated results with scores and ranking of countries dating back to 2000. We hope that this work affords the useful benchmark, approach, and policies for Muslims to begin peacefully reforming their countries. We have a website that reports ongoing activities (<http://islamicity-index.org/wp/>). We plan to enhance our website to allow interactive access to all information (including the data used for

subcomponents), which are too extensive and voluminous to report in this book. To insure the continuity of this endeavor, we are in the process of establishing a foundation to oversee this work for years to come.

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Reformation and Development in the Muslim World

Islamicity Indices as Benchmark

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