

Southeast Asia's Muslim Majority Democracies Elections and Islamism outside the MENA Region

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Abstract

Islamist parties, their ideologies and tactics reflecting both local cultures and ideas borrowed from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), have long been a part of democratic politics in Muslim majority Southeast Asia. In both Indonesia and Malaysia, Islamist parties compete alongside secular and other parties, and in both states, electoral pressures consistently press Islamist parties toward moderation of their platforms and approaches. However, the specific array of parties, the legacies of prior regimes, the prevailing demographic balance, and other policy imperatives shape Islamism differently in the two states. The experience of these two states offers important insights into the interplay of Islamism and democracy, suggesting key factors to consider in evaluating possible parallels with democratic or democratizing Muslim majority states in the MENA region.

Key words: Islamism, democracy, elections, Malaysia, Indonesia, Southeast Asia, MENA.

Islam reached Southeast Asia by the fourteenth century via the Indian subcontinent, edging from Sumatra, in present-day Indonesia, onward: Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, parts of the Philippines, and Thailand. Muslim minorities can now be found in every state in the region. Southeast Asia's 206 million Muslims represent 18 percent of the global total.¹ Southeast Asian Islam is in many ways distinct; Azyumardi Azra identifies a specific Malay-Indonesian "cultural realm," marked especially by its context of ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity, as one of eight such realms among

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¹ Greg Fealy, "Islam in Southeast Asia: Domestic Pietism, Diplomacy and Security," in *Contemporary Southeast Asia: Regional Dynamics, National Differences*, ed. Mark Beeson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 137-138.

Muslims.² Even within this ambit, contemporary Islam is hardly homogenous in its political forms or implications. This diversity allows comparative exploration of how Islamism manifests politically in different contexts. Clearly, region alone is insufficient as explanation, suggesting important institutional and cultural angles.

However much on the periphery of the “Muslim world,” Southeast Asia always has been tethered to the center. Ties between the Arab world (or the Ottoman Empire more broadly) and the Malay world have been important for centuries, from significant trading routes, to migration and transregional family ties, to education, to the dissemination of ideas about society and leadership. These ties extend well beyond matters of Islam specifically. Singapore’s first chief minister in the 1950s, for instance, David Marshall, was from a family of Persian Jewish traders, and “Malayo-Muslims,” primarily of Arab descent, produced some of the first proto-nationalist publications and organizations among the Muslim community in Singapore and Malaya.³ These connections have been comparatively understudied, although recent work significantly expands our knowledge. One such historically oriented volume, for instance, seeks to understand a “palpable longing for the Middle East by Southeast Asians,” who see the birthplace of Islam as both sacred and connected with their own history.⁴ The focus of contemporary studies, however, tends to be more on relatively recent and marginal terrorist networks than on matters of democratic mobilization and praxis; what Southeast Asian Muslims learn from or coordinate with counterparts in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is presumed apart from, and even contrary to, electoral participation.

That democracy and Islam *are* compatible has been well established. James Piscatori, for instance, notes that elections feature regularly in Muslim majority Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Kuwait, Yemen, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Senegal. In each of these states, Islamists, whom he defines as “Muslims who are committed to political action to implement what they regard as an Islamic agenda,” participate regularly in electoral contests, very much as any other group would. Regardless, he

² The others are Arab, Persian, Turkic, Sudanic/Black Africa, Indian subcontinent, Sino-Islamic, and Western hemisphere. Azyumardi Azra, “An Islamic Perspective of Religious Pluralism in Indonesia: The Impact of Democracy on Conflict Resolution,” in *Religious Pluralism in Democratic Societies: Challenges and Prospects for Southeast Asia, Europe, and the United States in the New Millennium*, ed. K.S. Nathan (Singapore and Kuala Lumpur: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and Malaysian Association for American Studies, 2007), 227-228.

³ William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁴ Eric Tagliacozzo, “Southeast Asia and the Middle East: Charting Directions,” in *Southeast Asia and the Middle East: Islam, Movement, and the Longue Duree*, ed. Eric Tagliacozzo (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2009), 10.

concedes that elections are of dubious quality in most of these states.⁵ Bubalo, Fealy, and Mason home in specifically on how such participation comes to be; that is, how and when Islamists participate in electoral politics, and the extent to which they are “normalized” in the process. Their comparative analysis reveals six common shifts once a party has chosen “participatory, non-violent and non-confrontational strategies”: from the pursuit of an Islamic state guided by *shari’a* to pursuit of “shari’a values” in society; from a focus on Islamist policies to a focus on good governance, albeit consistent with Islamist principles; from a focus on moral messages to a focus on the moral rectitude of the party and its leaders; toward a broader base and greater diversity among party members; toward the rise of a new generation of party leaders, often younger, more worldly, and more open-minded; and toward oscillation between purists and pragmatists rather than overall moderation.⁶

Hence, with due acknowledgement of the salience of political context in setting the tone and pace of relevant processes, we might presume that accession to democratic means mitigates the distinctions among Islamist parties, or between these parties and others. Empirically, though, the distinctions remain substantial.

While they largely fit the sorts of trends Bubalo et al., describe, Southeast Asia’s two Muslim majority democracies, Indonesia and Malaysia, still stand out as outliers—and individually distinctive outliers—in any discussion of Islamism in democratic or democratizing regimes.⁷ Indonesia is edging toward liberal democracy; Malaysia is commonly termed a semi- or pseudo-democracy, or more technically, a competitive electoral authoritarian regime. Neither state accepts Islam as a governing ideology, yet in both, Islamist currents are significant, and Islamist parties are important players. Elections in Indonesia (since the end of Soeharto’s authoritarian New Order regime

⁵ He suggests the tide may be turning in the Middle East, due to a growing “instrumental attachment to the electoral process” given fragmented authority, a discursive shift and emerging normative commitment to elections, and learning via the experience of elections. James Piscatori, *Islam, Islamists, and the Electoral Principle in the Middle East* (Leiden: ISIM, 2000), 2-3.

⁶ Anthony Bubalo, Greg Fealy, and Whit Mason, *Zealous Democrats: Islamism and Democracy in Egypt, Indonesia and Turkey*, Lowy Institute Paper 25 (Double Bay, New South Wales, Australia: Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2008), 109-119.

⁷ I defer to Don Emmerson’s cogent justification for the use of “Islamism” to acknowledge a diversity of individuals and approaches. Non-Islamist Muslims, in contrast, “include secularists whose political commitments are not said to be Islamic, and quietists unattracted to political action of any kind.” Donald K. Emmerson, “Inclusive Islamism: The Utility of Diversity,” in *Islamism: Contested Perspectives on Political Islam*, ed. Richard C. Martin (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 25-29. In the “Islamism with adjectives” approach that Emmerson describes, the variant we see in Indonesia and Malaysia would probably best be termed “democratic Islamism,” rather than a more ideologically specific “liberal Islam.” Donald K. Emmerson, “Broadening Representation,” in *Islamism: Contested Perspectives on Political Islam*, ed. Richard C. Martin (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 134.

of 1967-1998) and Malaysia are more meaningful than in many of the other states which Piscatori cites, and Islamists participate on equal footing with other religious or secular forces, largely to the exclusion of “uncivil” modes of engagement. A closer understanding of the role of Islam in democratic praxis in Muslim majority Southeast Asia, and of the relation between Islamism in this region and in the MENA region, would thus help inform our understanding of the conditions under which Islamist parties participate in elections, and what happens when they do so.

Toward that end, I will first outline the parameters under which Islamists participate in electoral democracy in Southeast Asia’s Muslim majority states: the nature of present-day Indonesian and Malaysian democracy, and the place of Islamist parties within that order. Muslim, and specifically Islamist, political actors do participate, often in rather different ways, throughout the rest of the region. For instance, the extra-electoral, often violent engagement of elements from the Philippines’s Muslim minority (around 5 percent of the population, concentrated on the island of Mindanao) is well-known. And fearing such turmoil, Singapore, with the largest Muslim minority in the region (16 percent), enforces secular politics to the extent of banning any religiously or racially defined parties. However, for purposes of comparison with democratization processes in the MENA region, I limit my focus here to Muslim majority states—Indonesia (approximately 87 percent Muslim), Malaysia (60 percent), and Brunei (63 percent)—and further to democracies, which excludes the last of those three. In the interest of brevity, I will focus, as well, more on *electoral* than extra-institutional engagement. I will then explore what Islamism adds to democracy in these states, and why Islamist identities and ideologies diverge so significantly between them. These findings cannot hope to predict precise trajectories for Islamist politics in present or possible future democracies of the MENA region, but do suggest important dimensions to consider.

Islamism in Muslim Majority Southeast Asia

The overwhelming majority of Southeast Asian Muslims are Sunni, of the Syafi’i legal school. Malaysia is particularly intolerant of other sects, but small numbers of Shi’a, Wahhabi, and other sects (for instance Bani, unique to the ethnic Cham in and around Cambodia) can be found in the region. Levels of piety and ideological orientations vary within and across states. Those distinctions have been carefully elaborated in Indonesia, most famously with Clifford Geertz’s differentiation of *abangan* (traditional, less orthodox) and *santri* (modernist and more pious, generally divided into urban and rural variants) sociopolitical *aliran* (streams).⁸ In Malaysia, too, we may note differences, for instance, in the worldviews and political approaches of

⁸ Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

Muslim urban professionals versus traditional rural Malays. Overall, though, Southeast Asian Islam is known for moderation, tolerance, and a degree of syncretism with the Buddhism and Hinduism that traversed the region before Islam. Violence or other forms of coercion have played comparatively minor roles in religious assertion.

Both Indonesia and Malaysia are institutionally largely secular states, with at least some level of religious freedom. Still, Indonesia requires monotheism, and in Malaysia, Islam is the official religion, ethnic Malays are constitutionally defined as Muslims, and Muslims are barred from conversion, although adherents of other faiths enjoy full citizenship and civil liberties.⁹ Southeast Asia has experienced a revival across all religious traditions since the 1970s, including Islam. While the number of Muslims has remained stable, an increasing proportion is consciously and publicly pious: more men and women now wear so-called “Islamic dress” (more Arab-inspired than indigenous), Islamic symbols have proliferated, books and magazines on Islam have flourished, and ever more Southeast Asian Muslims embark on the *hajj* to Mecca. More, too, have studied in the Middle East and engaged in virtual and real networks with Muslims in other regions—although such connections are not new.¹⁰ Islamists in both states advocate full or partial, and immediate or eventual, implementation of an Islamic state, defined loosely as strict adherence to Islamic law and rule by religious authorities. Specific institutional and other features of the two states, however, mold Islamism in different directions: while both have seen an electoral incentive toward moderation, political Islam thus figures differently in the political systems of these otherwise broadly comparable states.

Indonesia

Home to around 200 million Muslims, Indonesia is the world’s largest Muslim country. While Indonesians are free to practice other religions, Islam has long been tied up with national identity. Indonesia’s first president, Soekarno, argued for the coherence of nationalism, Islam, and Marxism; and among the most significant early nationalist organizations and post-independence parties were (or were outgrowths of) mass Islamic associations that could unite individuals with otherwise disparate identities in a shared anti/post-colonial project. Chief among these were and are the modernist (or *santri*), thirty-million-strong Muhammadiyah, founded in 1912, and traditionalist (*abangan*) Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), founded in 1926 and now with around forty million members.

⁹ Ahmad Ibrahim, “The Position of Islam in the Constitution of Malaysia,” in *Readings on Islam in Southeast Asia*, ed. Ahmad Ibrahim, Sharon Siddique, and Hussain Yasmin (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985).

¹⁰ Fealy, “Islam in Southeast Asia: Domestic Pietism, Diplomacy and Security,” 139.

Still, in the interest of national unity, Indonesia's founding constitution rejected the idea of an Islamic state. The *Piagam Jakarta* (Jakarta Charter), a brief statement in the draft constitution introducing shari'a law for Muslims, was defeated both initially and again upon bids to reintroduce it in 1959 and 1967, for fear that predominantly Christian provinces would secede.¹¹ Instead, article 29 of the constitution declares a state based on belief in one god, but with freedom of worship. And in 1984, the *Pancasila* (Five Principles), Indonesia's national ideology, which likewise mandates only monotheism, was made the *asas tunggal* ("sole foundation") of all sociopolitical organizations for the remainder of Soeharto's New Order regime. Indonesian Muslims' gradual embrace of the Pancasila became a critical underpinning for religious tolerance and pluralism,¹² not least since Muslims in Indonesia have always been heterogeneous. Aiding this drift were also the fact that Islam is largely decoupled from ethnicity, as well as a violent history of Islamist rebellions from the 1940s through the 1960s, which left many ill-disposed toward "Islamic statehood."¹³

Through the New Order period, but especially by the late 1970s, Islam assumed particular salience, coherence, and resilience as a basis for opposition "precisely because Islam was not merely a political movement."¹⁴ As elsewhere, Islam enjoyed a revival in Indonesia starting in the 1970s. In response, angling to expand his base of support, Soeharto spearheaded a remarkable rapprochement with part of the Islamist community in the 1980s, shown in increasing appointments of orthodox Muslim officials and military officers, legal and administrative reforms, relaxation of controls on religious expression, and the formation of the *Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim se-Indonesia* (Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals, ICMI) in 1990.¹⁵ Already by the late 1980s, a section of Indonesian society had endorsed a "formal link between Islamic ideology and the state," although the mandated supremacy of Pancasila ideology had cut short debate.¹⁶ And already observers had noted the democratic potential of Islamist thought. Hefner, for instance, traced the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹² Azra, "An Islamic Perspective of Religious Pluralism in Indonesia: The Impact of Democracy on Conflict Resolution," 231.

¹³ Goenawan Mohamad, "Unnoticed, Democracy Gains in Southeast Asia's Islamic Countries," *YaleGlobal Online*, April 16, 2004, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/unnoticed-democracy-gains-southeast-asias-islamic-countries> (accessed February 10, 2010).

¹⁴ Edward Aspinall, "The Broadening Base of Political Opposition in Indonesia," in *Political Oppositions in Industrialising Asia*, ed. Garry Rodan (London: Routledge, 1996), 221.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 235-236; Fealy, "Islam in Southeast Asia: Domestic Pietism, Diplomacy and Security," 141.

¹⁶ Zifirdaus Adnan, "Islamic Religion: Yes, Islamic (Political) Ideology: No! Islam and the State in Indonesia," in *State and Civil Society in Indonesia*, ed. Arief Budiman, Monash Papers on Southeast Asia No. 22 (Clayton, Victoria: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1990), 466.

complex interactions of the state with matters of Islam, including the rise of a new rank of Islamist leaders who favored pluralism, tolerant accommodation, and democracy—what he framed as “civil Islam”—over more exclusivist understandings of Islamic statehood. While specifics vary, such approaches generally begin “by denying the wisdom of a monolithic ‘Islamic’ state and instead affirming democracy, voluntarism, and a balance of countervailing powers in a state and society.”¹⁷ Even in the late New Order period, then, Islam was a political force, but within narrow bounds.

I focus here on Indonesia in the current democratic period: since the 1997 *Reformasi* movement and 1999 elections signaled the New Order’s end. The extent to which Islam could serve as a “political resource” became immediately clear upon liberalization of the authoritarian regime.¹⁸ Indeed, it was ICMI leader (and Soeharto’s deputy), B.J. Habibie, who took over as interim president in 1998. He enjoyed support from Islamist students and activists, despite his obvious ties to the discredited New Order government. Indonesian Muslims now see Islamic governance as a more viable political—and not just cultural—alternative than in the past, but still within a nonsectarian framework. Advocates resuscitated the Jakarta Charter again in 2001 and 2002, but lacking sufficient support even from NU or Muhammadiyah, withdrew it before the motion came to a vote.¹⁹ Constitutional amendments in 2002 make successful reintroduction of the Jakarta Charter even less likely, given new requirements for amending the constitution. Activists have worked instead toward “creeping shari’aization,” or incorporating shari’a into particular enactments at the federal or provincial level, if wholesale adoption is not to be.²⁰

With the return of democracy, Indonesians rushed to form political parties, launching 181 between May and October 1998 alone—the New Order state had allowed only three broad parties.²¹ Forty-two of these could be classified by their symbols or ideology as *partai-partai Islam*, or *yang berbasiskan*

¹⁷ Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 12-13. For a trenchant critique, especially of Hefner’s claims of antiregime and prodemocratic tendencies among this subset of Islamists, see Edward Aspinall, “Review Essay of Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam, Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*,” *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 35, no. 2 (2002): 99-106.

¹⁸ Bahtiar Effendy, *Islam and the State in Indonesia* (Singapore and Athens, OH: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and Ohio University Press, 2003), 202.

¹⁹ Michael Schuman, “The Politics of Islam,” *Time* (Asia), March 10, 2003, <http://www.time.com/time/asia/covers/501030310/politics.html> (accessed February 10, 2010); M. Syafi’i Anwar, “Political Islam in Post-Soeharto Indonesia: The Contest between ‘Radical-Conservative Islam’ and ‘Progressive-Liberal Islam,’” in *Southeast Asia and the Middle East: Islam, Movement, and the Longue Duree*, ed. Eric Tagliacozzo (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2009), 364-365.

²⁰ Anwar, “Political Islam in Post-Soeharto Indonesia: The Contest between ‘Radical-Conservative Islam’ and ‘Progressive-Liberal Islam,’” 377-378.

²¹ Effendy, *Islam and the State in Indonesia*, 200.

Islam (Islamist), although few had adequate support to sustain themselves; only twenty met the minimum threshold to contest in the 1999 elections.²² The parties' views varied widely: nearly all saw the Qur'an and Sunnah as a moral and political foundation, but only half considered Islam a political ideology and one-quarter opposed imposition of shari'a law for Muslims.²³ While the *Kongres Umat Islam Indonesia* (Congress of the Indonesian Muslim Community) that met in November 1998 had hoped to forge a single party, rifts ran too deep—not just among the aliran of the past, but within these. The NU gave rise to four separate parties, for instance, and the modernist camp was even less cohesive.²⁴ "Power politics" rather than Islamist ideology seemed to dominate.²⁵ Following the 1999 elections, and amid negotiations to select a president, eight Muslim parties overcame their differences to organize a *poros tengah* (central axis). The coalition shifted the balance of power enough to keep Sukarno's daughter, Megawati Sukarnoputri, out of the presidency—really the only aspiration common to all the participating parties, primarily on the grounds of her gender—and to nominate NU's Abdurrahman Wahid as its candidate for president.²⁶ However, the coalition grew less active once Abdurrahman came to power, even when the latter was impeached and succeeded by Megawati two years later.²⁷

Even so, the political parties through which the mass of Indonesians participated in 1999 and even in 2004 and 2009 were largely either New Order stalwarts *Golongan Karya* (Golkar, Soeharto's vehicle), the *Partai Persatuan Pembangunan* (PPP, United Development Party, a state-created amalgam of four Islamist parties), and the *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia* (PDI, Indonesian Democracy Party, the PPP's secular counterpart), or reincarnations or offshoots of parties of the 1950s and 1960s. Moreover, the configuration of parties still bore a clear resemblance to past patterns. In 1955, Soekarno's

²² Arskal Salim, *Partai Islam Dan Relasi Agama-Negara* [Islamic parties and religion-state relations] (Jakarta: Pusat Penelitian IAIN, 1999), 6-8.

²³ Of these parties, 60 percent supported efforts in the 1950s to make Islam the basis of government, but the same proportion saw the Pancasila as now already solidified in that role. Almost three-fourths thought only a man could be president. Fewer than half could name a Muslim state that matched their aspirations; the country with the most "votes" on that score was Iran, with 20 percent. *Ibid.*, 43-52.

²⁴ Marcus Mietzner, "Nationalism and Islamic Politics: Political Islam in the Post-Suharto Era," in *Reformasi: Crisis and Change in Indonesia*, ed. Arief Budiman, Barbara Hatley, and Damien Kingsbury (Clayton, Victoria: Monash Asia Institute, 1999), 173-174.

²⁵ Azyumardi Azra, "The Islamic Factor in Post-Soeharto Indonesia," in *Indonesia in Transition: Social Aspects of Reformasi and Crisis*, ed. Chris Manning and Peter van Diermen (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000), 314.

²⁶ Effendy, *Islam and the State in Indonesia*, 209.

²⁷ Azra, "The Islamic Factor in Post-Soeharto Indonesia," 316-317, and Ken Young, "The National Picture—A Victory for Reform?" in *Pemilu: The 1999 Indonesian Election*, ed. Susan Blackburn, Annual Indonesia Lecture Series No. 22 (Clayton, Victoria: Monash Asia Institute, 1999), 7.

Partai Nasionalis Indonesia (PNI) and the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (PKI) received abangan votes; Masjumi received the urban santri vote, and NU won the rural santri vote. The context in 1999 was clearly different, with more parties and new issues.²⁸ Abangan voters—more numerous than before—chose *PDI-Perjuangan* (PDI-Struggle, led by Megawati) or Golkar; urban santri were divided among Muhammadiyah-connected *Partai Amanat Nasional* (PAN, National Mandate Party), Golkar (for its links with ICMI), or the PPP; and rural santri voted for the NU's *Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa* (Party of National Awakening, PKB) or the PPP. While the old aliran politics could not really manifest itself in the more urban, mobile, educated society of 1999, patterns of mobilization still tended to emphasize loyalties either to modernist Islam or to a traditionalist-nationalist alliance.²⁹ Critics of the resurgence of Islamist political parties feared the less polarized balance fostered by years of depoliticization and Islamists' marginalization would be lost, resulting in myopic political objectives and narrow understandings of Islam.³⁰

Indeed, the place of Islam is complex. Very few parties today publicly advocate establishment of an Islamic state; most would be satisfied with an Islamic society and values.³¹ Three decades of authoritarian rule suppressed demands for shari'a law, leading mass Islamic organizations such as the NU and Muhammadiyah to promote more moderate and pluralist thinking, to stress that democracy and Islam are compatible, and to question whether an Islamic state is necessary.³² Soon after the transition, Muhammadiyah intellectual and PAN leader Amien Rais insisted, "The Islamic state has been put behind them by 95 percent of Muslim leaders and also the rank and file."³³ An August 2003 survey corroborated that of the one-half of Muslim respondents who labeled themselves "devout," 51 percent would support "secular, nationalist-oriented parties" and only 21 percent would vote for parties advocating implementation of shari'a. Among self-identified "secular" Muslims, support for Islamist parties was even lower.³⁴ Some Muslims simply do not believe that Islam

²⁸ Arief Budiman, "The 1999 Indonesian Election: Impressions and Reflections," in *Pemilu: The 1999 Indonesian Election*, ed. Susan Blackburn, Annual Indonesia Lecture Series No. 22 (Clayton, Victoria: Monash Asia Institute, 1999), 12-15, and Stephen Sherlock, *The 2004 Indonesian Elections: How the System Works and What the Parties Stand For* (Canberra: Centre for Democratic Institutions, 2004), 17-20.

²⁹ Young, "The National Picture—A Victory for Reform?" 80-81; Azra, "The Islamic Factor in Post-Soeharto Indonesia"; and Sherlock, *The 2004 Indonesian Elections: How the System Works and What the Parties Stand For*.

³⁰ Effendy, *Islam and the State in Indonesia*, 203-205.

³¹ Arskal, *Partai Islam Dan Relasi Agama-Negara*, 10.

³² Moch N. Kurniawan, "Survey Finds Muslim Voters Favor Pluralism," *Jakarta Post*, November 19, 2003.

³³ Amien Rais, "Islam and Politics in Contemporary Indonesia," in *Post-Soeharto Indonesia: Renewal or Chaos?* ed. Geoff Forrester (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1999), 201.

³⁴ Kurniawan, "Survey Finds Muslim Voters Favor Pluralism," 1.

requires a theocratic state; others were acculturated into such an understanding by decades under Soeharto.³⁵ Even a representative of the Islamist *Partai Keadilan* (Justice Party, PK), explained of the adoption of Islamic law: “These things are very traumatic to most Indonesians. [An Islamic state] is very, very far away.”³⁶

Mindful of these trends, while parties such as the PKB and PAN drew on Islamist constituencies, both ran on broad, inclusive platforms and eschewed an Islamist identity. NU and PKB leader Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), edging more toward the nationalist than Islamist camp, insisted that the party’s name make no explicit reference to Islam,³⁷ while PAN’s Amien Rais, too, opted for a pluralist concept, not least to avoid losing support from secular reform groups with which he had cooperated against Soeharto. This choice left modernists without a charismatic, uniting leader.³⁸ The only truly Islamist party to do well in 1999 was the PPP, and only ten of the twenty “Islamic parties” that ran gained at least one seat.³⁹ Parties supporting shari’a law specifically (the Jakarta Charter) garnered less than 20 percent that year,⁴⁰ then increased their share only to around 21 percent in 2004,⁴¹ before declining to around 16.5 percent in 2009; even adding in parties merely linked to Islamist mass organizations, their combined vote share dropped from 37.5 percent in 2004 to 29 percent in 2009.⁴² Most Islamist parties in all three elections campaigned more on general issues such as corruption and the economy than on Islam *per se*.⁴³

The only Islamist party consistently to improve its result has been *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (Prosperous Justice Party, PKS, successor to PK), which stressed themes of good governance and joined presidential candidate Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s “rainbow coalition,” downplaying its previous ideology modeled on that of Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and the *el-Ikhwan el-Muslimin* (Muslim Brotherhood).⁴⁴ The party still captured just 7 percent of the vote in 2004 (although also making headway at the regional level), then

³⁵ Effendy, *Islam and the State in Indonesia*, 207.

³⁶ Quoted in Schuman, “The Politics of Islam.”

³⁷ Mietzner, “Nationalism and Islamic Politics: Political Islam in the Post-Suharto Era,” 177.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 186-188.

³⁹ Effendy, *Islam and the State in Indonesia*, 214-215.

⁴⁰ Fealy, “Islam in Southeast Asia: Domestic Pietism, Diplomacy and Security,” 140.

⁴¹ Gordon P. Means, *Political Islam in Southeast Asia* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2009), 316.

⁴² Bernhard Plattdasch, “Down but Not Out,” *Inside Indonesia* 97 (July-September 2009), <http://insideindonesia.org/content/view/full/1210/47/> (accessed February 10, 2010).

⁴³ Effendy, *Islam and the State in Indonesia*, 215-216.

⁴⁴ Means, *Political Islam in Southeast Asia*, 316; Anwar, “Political Islam in Post-Soeharto Indonesia: The Contest between ‘Radical-Conservative Islam’ and ‘Progressive-Liberal Islam,’” 378; and Anthony Bubalo and Greg Fealy, *Joining the Caravan? The Middle East, Islamism and Indonesia*, Lowy Institute Paper 05 (Alexandria, New South Wales: Longueville Media, for Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2005), 66-74.

performed marginally better in 2009. While part of the ruling coalition and considered a significant player, the party has had difficulty sustaining support. The shift from an ostensibly apolitical social movement to a pragmatic political party has not been easy, especially as the party's "clean" image has also been sullied by allegations of corruption and incapacity.⁴⁵ Moreover, fissures among Islamist parties have precluded collaborating as a bloc for presidential polls.⁴⁶

Effendy offers one explanation for this pattern: religious adherence in Indonesia has never translated automatically into political affiliation, and Islamist parties suffered the "stigma" of being associated mainly with shari'a, rather than any other clearly articulated program.⁴⁷ Platzdasch suggests a rather different spin: although Islamist parties have been pressed toward the moderate middle to boost support, at the same time, "Islamic agendas are being adopted by so-called mainstream, secular parties."⁴⁸ Evidence of moderation is clearly apparent. More conservative parties and groups, spearheaded by the umbrella *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (Indonesian Ulama Council, MUI), opposed possible reforms to bring shari'a laws in line with egalitarian, democratic ideals, yet MUI explained that it opposed only religious pluralism, or treating all religions as equal, not social or political pluralism.⁴⁹ The pull of Islamism is unclear even in Aceh, a Sumatran province known for its especially strong commitment to Islam, and which waged a movement for regional autonomy or secession from the 1950s until 2005. Islam provided a key frame for mobilization, especially for the *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (Free Aceh Movement, GAM, launched in 1976). The federal government's concessions since the peace agreement have thus included extending shari'a in Aceh. That said, the dispute was not really about Islam *per se* so much as the economic and political marginalization of the province, and implementation of shari'a was not a consistent demand of Acehese activists.⁵⁰ Regardless, local officials in Aceh have pushed their authority to enact shari'a codes, to the point of possibly contravening the federal constitution.⁵¹ The long-term resolution of debates over shari'a in Aceh, as well as, for instance, new antipornography legislation passed in a

⁴⁵ Bubalo, Fealy, and Mason, *Zealous Democrats: Islamism and Democracy in Egypt, Indonesia and Turkey*, 49-50, 62-68.

⁴⁶ Jamie Mackie, "Jigsaw of Jakarta's Presidential Race," *The Australian*, May 13, 2004.

⁴⁷ Effendy, *Islam and the State in Indonesia*, 215-216.

⁴⁸ Platzdasch, "Down but Not Out."

⁴⁹ Means, *Political Islam in Southeast Asia*, 311-313.

⁵⁰ Edward Aspinall and Harold Crouch, *The Aceh Peace Process: Why It Failed* (Washington, DC: East-West Center Washington, 2003), and Edward Aspinall, *Islam and Nation: Separatist Rebellion in Aceh, Indonesia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

⁵¹ Patrick Guntensperger, "Aceh Drops a Sharia Gauntlet," *Asia Times Online*, September 24, 2009, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/KI24Ae01.html (accessed February 10, 2010), and Sarah J. Newman, "Patrolling Sexuality," *Inside Indonesia* 96 (April-June 2009), <http://insideindonesia.org/content/view/1197/29/> (accessed February 10, 2010).

controversially puritanical 2008 bill,⁵² will reveal over time the extent to which Islamism has filtered through the polity.

Amid these other developments, nonparty Islamic associations have likewise proliferated. On one level, the threat of extremist Islamist violence has increased since Reformasi—especially as linked with *Jemaah Islamiah* (JI) and embodied in the bombings in Bali in October 2002 and in Jakarta in August 2003, September 2004, and July 2009. The full extent of al-Qaida’s network in Southeast Asia is impossible to say, however, for many reasons: governments do not want to admit to infiltration even if it happens; discontent was ripe for exploiting after the 1997 financial crisis; Islamic banking networks were loosely regulated; a wide network of Islamic schools operate beyond effective state supervision; and a tradition of hospitality has made agents hard to detect. The network most likely did extend into the region around 1990, however (as discussed further below).⁵³ On a more local level, one group in particular, *Front Pembela Islam* (Islamic Defenders’ Front, FPI), has taken enforcement of Islamic rules into its own hands, for instance on gambling, prostitution, and consumption of alcohol. Yet, most Islamist groups work within moderating democratic processes.⁵⁴ Overall, while a subset of clearly Islamist parties “stand to do well in [the] future,”⁵⁵ electoral processes seem to have taken root and had a general tempering effect, boundary-pushing enactments and actors notwithstanding.

Malaysia

The politics of semidemocratic Malaysia have been organized primarily along “communal,” or racial, lines since even before independence in 1957. However, those lines nearly match lines of religious cleavage. Indeed, the federal constitution states that all Malays must be and remain Muslim. Hence, the two main parties catering principally to Muslims cater also mostly to Malays: *Parti Islam se-Malaysia* (Malaysian Islamic Party, PAS) and the ruling United Malays National Organization (UMNO, from which PAS was an offshoot in

⁵² Helen Pausacker, “Hot Debates,” *Inside Indonesia* 94 (October-December 2008), <http://insideindonesia.org/content/view/full/1153/29/> (accessed February 10, 2010), and Jason Tedjasukmana, “Indonesia’s New Anti-Porn Agenda,” *Time*, November 6, 2008, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1857090,00.html> (accessed February 10, 2010).

⁵³ Means, *Political Islam in Southeast Asia*, 167-169, and Angel M. Rabasa, *Political Islam in Southeast Asia: Moderates, Radicals and Terrorists*, Adelphi Paper 358 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁵⁴ Effendy, *Islam and the State in Indonesia*, 217-220.

⁵⁵ Greg Fealy, “Islamic Politics: A Rising or Declining Force?” in *Indonesia: The Uncertain Transition*, ed. Damien Kingsbury and Arief Budiman (Adelaide: Crawford House, 2001).

the late 1950s).⁵⁶ Democracy is another fundamental structuring principle of Malaysian political life, even if the state is not entirely liberal. “Political Islam” long predates democracy: while attention today tends to focus on contemporary Islamist movements that aim to Islamize Western-style polities, an alternative perspective highlights instead the centuries-old tradition of the *kerajaan*, or feudal “polity of the raja/sultan.” These layered traditions suggest Islam is intrinsic to and accepted within the polity, as part of the prevailing sociocultural background.⁵⁷

Since the colonial period, Muslims have been subject to shari’ a law rather than to secular codes for family and religious matters. The criminal code, in contrast, is uniform for all Malaysians, and implementation of *hudud* penalties (stoning, amputation, and so on) is unconstitutional. As of 1988, the federal constitution was amended to revoke the civil high courts’ jurisdiction to review shari’ a courts’ decisions. However, shari’ a courts are established at the state, not federal, level, albeit operating within parameters set nationally.⁵⁸ Burgeoning recent enactments, particularly at the state level, make it, for instance, a chargeable offense to defy a directive or *fatwa* of the sultan (who serves as head of the religion), *Majlis Agama Islam* (Islamic Religious Council), or mufti—lawmakers neither elected by nor accountable to the Muslim public.⁵⁹ In addition, sects apart from Sunni are banned as “deviant,” and their adherents are subject to detention under the Internal Security Act or other legislation. Most notable in this regard is the *Darul Arqam* movement, which was banned in 1994 for its teachings and its purported antistate proclivities.⁶⁰ Apart from these contested manifestations, though, are also complex mainstream divisions, from Muslims who prefer (alongside most of Malaysia’s non-Muslim

⁵⁶ In contrast to UMNO, PAS not only accepts non-Malay members, so long as they are Muslim, but also campaigned against *assabiyah* (ethnic chauvinism), especially in the 1980s, opposing ethnic discrimination even when to the advantage of Malays. Kamarulnizam Abdullah, *The Politics of Islam in Contemporary Malaysia* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2002), 137, 191.

⁵⁷ Shamsul A.B., “Islam Embedded: ‘Moderate’ Political Islam and Governance in the Malay World,” in *Islam in Southeast Asia: Political, Social and Strategic Challenges for the 21st Century*, ed. K.S. Nathan and Mohammad Hashim Kamali (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005), 107-109.

⁵⁸ Abdullah Saeed and Hassan Saeed, *Freedom of Religion, Apostasy and Islam* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 149-150. For more on the history, jurisdiction, and organization of Malaysia’s shari’ a courts, see Abdul Majeed Mohamed Mackeen, *Contemporary Islamic Legal Organization in Malaya*, Monograph Series No. 13 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1969).

⁵⁹ Norani Othman, “Islamization and Democratization in Malaysia in Regional and Global Contexts,” in *Challenging Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia: Comparing Indonesia and Malaysia*, ed. Ariel Heryanto and Sumit K. Mandal (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 131-132.

⁶⁰ Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, “Political Dimensions of Religious Conflict in Malaysia: State Response to an Islamic Movement,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 28, no. 80 (2000): 32-65.

minority) a secular state, to those seeking a democratic, institutionally secular state imbued with Islamic values, to those intent on full Islamic statehood.⁶¹ Opinions differ, too, on what “Islamic statehood” actually entails, including who could be full citizens of such a state. Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad announced in 2001 that Malaysia already was an Islamic state,⁶² then quickly recanted the announcement. PAS followed with a narrower definition: shari’a law would supersede the constitution, and core policy areas and leadership positions would be reserved for Muslims.⁶³

As the disparity in views implies, Malaysia has long had a significant Islamist political opposition. Since the 1950s, this force has been most clearly embodied in PAS and, especially since the 1970s, in a range of nongovernmental mass organizations. Such activism has generally been contained within legal bounds, from contesting elections to organizing in registered societies for community service and advocacy work. The centrality of civil society is encapsulated in the concept of *masyarakat madani* that surfaced in the 1990s, thanks largely to then deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim, as a model for “Malaysian-style Islamic modernity and civilization.” Under this rubric, civil society supports the government rather than standing autonomously from it; the model accommodates religious values and democracy, but still assumes a state-dominated framework.⁶⁴ The *masyarakat madani* project in some ways aligns with enduring efforts at forging and enforcing a state-directed, modernizing, progressive Islam, rendered as compatible with economic development, technological progress, and nation building.⁶⁵

Malaysian Islamism traces its roots in no small part to influences from the MENA region. The *Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya* (Malay Nationalist Party, PKMM), the first postwar Malay party, with which PAS-progenitor *Majlis Agama Tertinggi* (MATA, Supreme Religious Council) was closely allied, drew its leaders largely from among the Arabic-educated, and espoused Islamic reformism, based on the ideas of Egypt’s Muhammad Abduh, which

⁶¹ Meredith L. Weiss, “The Changing Shape of Islamic Politics in Malaysia,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* 4, no. 1 (2004): 139-173.

⁶² Government of Malaysia, *Malaysia Adalah Sebuah Negara Islam* [Malaysia is an Islamic state] (Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Information, 2001).

⁶³ See *Straits Times*, June 12, 2003; *Malaysiakini*, October 25 and 27, 2002; *Harakah Daily*, May 31 and August 30, 2003; or for deeper analysis, Patricia Martinez, “Malaysia as an Islamic State: An Analysis - Part 1,” *Malaysiakini*, November 15, 2001, and “Malaysia as an Islamic State: An Analysis - Part 2,” *Malaysiakini*, November 16, 2001.

⁶⁴ Norani, “Islamization and Democratization in Malaysia in Regional and Global Contexts,” 126-127; also MINDS, ed., *Masyarakat Madani: Satu Tinjauan Awal* (Ampang, Selangor: Malaysian Institute of Development Strategies, 1997).

⁶⁵ Farish A. Noor, “The Future of ‘Progressive Islam’ in Southeast Asia - Part I,” *Malaysiakini*, March 15, 2003, and David Camroux, “State Responses to Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia: Accommodation, Co-option, and Confrontation,” *Asian Survey* 36, no. 9 (1996): 852-868.

stressed social change and community progress.⁶⁶ PAS's constitution names Islam as the basis of its political struggle. The party's objectives include building a society and government in which Islamic law is implemented, and protecting Islam's honor, independence, and sovereignty. PAS thus espouses *dakwah* (literally, call to Islam), religion as a comprehensive way of life, and strengthening Muslim solidarity. The party cooperates with like-minded organizations and movements—even joining UMNO, which it branded a party of *kafir* (unbelievers) before and since—in the ruling *Barisan Nasional* (BN, National Front) coalition for a short time in the 1970s. Like UMNO, PAS aims to protect Malay language (while also spreading Arabic), to nurture an Islamist culture, and to protect Malaysian Muslims without neglecting others. Yet, PAS has had trouble articulating a clear and consistent vision of how to achieve these goals. Since a change of leadership in the early 1980s, PAS has emphasized leadership by ulama.⁶⁷ At the same time, PAS platforms, and its policies in the states it has governed, have vacillated between aggressively Islamist and idealistically or opportunistically accommodating—causing perennial tensions with the secular partners with which it has allied, especially since the 1990s. Like the PKS in Indonesia, PAS has generally performed better at the polls when it has opted for a more moderate stance; not only are Malaysian Muslims divided in their preference for “hard-line” Islamism, but given local demographics, to do well, especially outside the overwhelmingly Malay east coast, PAS needs also to attract non-Muslim support.⁶⁸

Depending on the political climate and which issues seem tantamount, UMNO and PAS vacillate between ethnic chauvinism and Islamism, although the latter has gained steam since the early 1980s. At that time, pressed by PAS,⁶⁹ UMNO co-opted leading Islamist activist Anwar Ibrahim into the government and adopted a program of *penerapan nilai-nilai Islam* (“inculcation of Islamic values”) in government administration, including such steps as establishing an

⁶⁶ Kamarulnizam, *The Politics of Islam in Contemporary Malaysia*, 133. As in Indonesia in the same period, the early PAS had important links with and sympathies for socialist and even communist organizations and ideologies, too, embodied most clearly in the person of openly leftist party president Burhannudin al-Helmy. Farish A. Noor, “Remembering Pas’ Red Islamist Past,” *Malaysiakini*, February 11, 2003, and Syed Ahmad Hussein, “Muslim Politics and the Discourse on Democracy,” in *Democracy in Malaysia: Discourses and Practices*, ed. Francis Loh Kok Wah, and Khoo Boo Teik (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2002), 85.

⁶⁷ Kamarulnizam, *The Politics of Islam in Contemporary Malaysia*, 92, 134-135.

⁶⁸ Weiss, “The Changing Shape of Islamic Politics in Malaysia,” 158-164.

⁶⁹ Hamayotsu notes another impetus: state religious agencies also function as channels for distributing politically useful patronage, and the state's training and employing an ever-increasing number of ulama and *ustaz* as shari'a court officials, teachers, and civil servants creates that many more clerics who are dependent on the state. Kikue Hamayotsu, “Islamisation, Patronage and Political Ascendancy: The Politics and Business of Islam in Malaysia,” in *The State of Malaysia: Ethnicity, Equity and Reform*, ed. Edmund Terence Gomez (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 229-252.

Islamic university and Islamic banking system, as well as stressing qualities such as fairness and accountability in administration.⁷⁰ The government cultivated closer ties with Muslim nations and urged Muslim solidarity, especially in the face of developments in Afghanistan and Iraq. Part of this program of Islamization, too, included expansion of civil and criminal shari'a laws and amendments to Muslim family laws.⁷¹ Intrinsic to the program is the assumption of "the legitimacy of the state and its religious authorities to unilaterally define the kind of Islam best suited to Malaysia" and to uphold that faith among Muslims, including by coercive, punitive measures in matters Islamic (especially *murtad*, apostasy).⁷²

Starting in the late 1960s, as increasing numbers of young Malays entered higher education at home and abroad—assisted by federal affirmative-action programs designed to uplift the economically disadvantaged Malay mass—an Islamic revival took root in Malaysia. Called *dakwah* and popular especially among university students, the movement has focused primarily on making Muslims better Muslims. The government cracked down on *dakwah* activism in its early days not so much for its Islamist flavor as for its oppositional and left-wing bent: Islamist students joined with socialist student groups and others to stage mass rallies in support of poor farmers, landless urban poor, and the like.⁷³ The government subsequently took steps—recruiting Anwar into UMNO, forming its own *dakwah* organizations, and implementing Islamization policies—to co-opt the movement.

Popular discontent among Malays with the UMNO-led government tends to be channeled into support for PAS or for less enduring Malay-dominated splinter parties. The 1997 Asian economic crisis sparked one such episode: PAS joined with other opposition parties in a *Barisan Alternatif* (BA, Alternative Front) to take on the BN with a platform of social justice and democracy. In the November 1999 general elections, PAS secured control of a second state's government (the predominantly rural, Malay, east-coast state of Terengganu; the party already controlled neighboring Kelantan). However, the party lost ground in the March 2004 general elections after it promoted Islamist social policies and criminal statutes in those two states (sacrificing BA cohesion in the process) and party leaders issued statements of support for the Taliban, raising popular panic over Islamist militancy in Malaysia. On the other hand,

⁷⁰ Syed Ahmad, "Muslim Politics and the Discourse on Democracy," 88.

⁷¹ Norani, "Islamization and Democratization in Malaysia in Regional and Global Contexts," 119.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 127-128.

⁷³ Muhammad Abu Bakar, *Mahasiswa Menggugat: Suatu Analisa Dan Peninjauan Dari Dalam Terhadap Kegiatan Mahasiswa-Mahasiswa Negeri Ini* [Students accuse: An insider analysis and survey of the activities of undergraduates in this country] (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1973).

PAS had tried to broaden its appeal by fielding female candidates for the first time since the 1960s. At the same time, UMNO had already seized more middle ground not only by wooing Malay women itself, but also by decrying corruption and promoting moderate, progressive Islam (packaged afresh as *Islam Hadhari*, or “civilizational Islam”).⁷⁴ In fact, Means suggests that Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi framed Islam Hadhari as a lattice for the same sort of ethos—motivation, spirit of achievement, work ethic, self-reliance, in the context of a moderate, tolerant civil society—that his predecessor, Mahathir, had hoped to achieve through affirmative action policies. His goal was perhaps something of a Weberian Islamic Reformation.⁷⁵ Yet, PAS again moderated its appeal in 2008 and, together with its partners in a new *Pakatan Rakyat* (People’s Alliance), performed better than ever before.⁷⁶

While Malaysia has shown no tendency toward political or religious violence since independence, the country has been a conduit for Jemaah Islamiyah⁷⁷ and other radical networks, and individuals within Malaysia have ties with Afghan *mujahideen* (with whom some fought the Soviets in the 1980s), Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood, and other groups. Eager both to discredit the Islamist opposition and to prevent violent outbreaks in Malaysia, the government has been proactive in weeding out such threats. In mid-2000, the government announced the unearthing of a large arms cache and a violent standoff with members of the 1,800-strong, “deviant” *Al-Ma’unah* sect. Its leader and six of his followers were eventually tried and sentenced to death. The following year, shortly before “9/11,” the government announced its discovery of an onslaught against an underground *Kesatuan Mujahideen Malaysia* (Malaysian Mujahideen Group, KMM), which grew out of a loose association formed in the mid-1980s of graduates of Pakistani, Indian, and Indonesian schools. Some of them were veterans of the Afghan war and seven were also PAS members. Although evidence of the government’s claims was sketchy and the impugning of PAS seemed likely political opportunism, popular fears of radical Islamist militancy has tempered public opposition to the crackdown on such activities, which has ranged from arrests of alleged KMM members, to funneling students from private Islamic schools into better-

⁷⁴ Ibrahim Suffian, “Negotiating the Uneven Electoral Landscape: A Superficial Examination of PAS and Its Performance in the 2004 General Elections,” paper presented at the 4th Malaysian Studies International Conference, Bangi, Malaysia, August 3-5, 2004, 4-8.

⁷⁵ Means, *Political Islam in Southeast Asia*, 368-369.

⁷⁶ Andreas Ufen, “The 2008 Elections in Malaysia: Uncertainties of Electoral Authoritarianism,” *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 4, no. 1 (2008): 161-162.

⁷⁷ According to Fealy, JI is the only extremist group with a “genuine transnational network across Southeast Asia.” While based and strongest in Indonesia, JI has active cells in Malaysia (where it was founded in the early 1990s by two Arab-Indonesian preachers), Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, and possibly Cambodia. Fealy, “Islam in Southeast Asia: Domestic Pietism, Diplomacy and Security,” 147-148.

monitored public schools, to a new compulsory national service scheme for youth.⁷⁸ As in Indonesia, though, the vast majority of Malaysian Muslims remain nonviolent and comparatively moderate in orientation, and the ballot box remains the primary channel for pursuit of political change, including among Islamists also engaged extra-institutionally for social change.

The Place and Contribution of Islamism

While a feature among Southeast Asia's Muslim communities for generations, Islamism has assumed new importance as a political ideology since the mid-1990s, when Islamist organizations and ideologies prospered amid an atmosphere of instability and questioning.⁷⁹ Both Soeharto and Anwar fell victim to the Asian financial crisis, although the scale of Indonesia's transition proved far more vast—and the lingering problems that beset the new democratic state, even a decade on, render Islam only one of several dimensions in dispute. The surge in global terrorism and counter-terrorism since September 2001 and the new centrality of (usually anxious) global discourse about Islamism have made these concerns at the domestic level all the more fraught.

Islam represents a core part of both Indonesian and Malaysian national identity. Its significance beyond the personal level dates at least to the nationalist era, when despite Islam's rejection of *asabiyyah* (sectarianism), religious practice and values helped to unify Muslims against Western occupiers,⁸⁰ and in the anticommunist campaigns of the 1950s-1960s, "when Islam was first perceived to have the dual potential of an anti-Communist ideology which at the same time could contribute to social reconstruction and development in the line of tradition and a new religiously inspired vigour."⁸¹ Islamic resurgence in Indonesia and Malaysia may thus be considered more a practical sociopolitical project than in other Muslim majority states, led by lay intellectuals as part of building the nation-state, and informed by a welter of teachings and traditions—anticolonial, Western, scientific, and more. Accordingly, "paths of Islamization" in Southeast Asia do not simply parallel those of MENA or other states in context, content, or instrumentalities.⁸²

⁷⁸ Some level of Malaysian involvement with JI and al-Qaida seems certain, although the state's KMM-related claims lack persuasive evidence. *Ibid.*, 149. On said claims and reactions to them, see Inter Press Service, September 5, 2005; *Malaysiakini*, September 26, 2001; S. Jayasankaran, "A Plan to End Extremism," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, December 26, 2002-January 2, 2003; also interviews by the author, December 2002, Kuala Lumpur and vicinity.

⁷⁹ Means, *Political Islam in Southeast Asia*, 364.

⁸⁰ Rabasa, *Political Islam in Southeast Asia: Moderates, Radicals and Terrorists*, 8.

⁸¹ Georg Stauth, *Politics and Cultures of Islamization in Southeast Asia: Indonesia and Malaysia in the Nineteen-Nineties* (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag, 2002), 264-265.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 67-68, 265.

A core, complex part of that contingent sociohistorical context in Southeast Asia is ethnicity. Whereas the Muslim community in Indonesia is ethnically, culturally, and otherwise diverse, in Malaysia (as in Brunei and Singapore), the categories “Malay” and “Muslim” are nearly coterminous, and unlike in Indonesia, all ethnic Malays in Malaysia are Muslim. Moreover, particularly in settings such as Indonesia’s Aceh province, religious and other grievances overlap: Acehnese have mobilized both on devotional grounds and as citizens of an oil-rich province that is yet among Indonesia’s poorest. Complicating any reading is the fact that among Indonesians, the Islamist movement was one of few available channels for grass-roots mobilization in the late New Order period, however divided participants’ views on shari’a, the roles of women and men, and more.⁸³

Especially in Malaysia, however, the political expression of Islam has required and fostered a relatively high level of cohesion and enforced conformity among Muslims. Indeed, such homogenization and institutionalization of a state-managed “Sunni orthodoxy” can be traced to the centralization of religious authority for Malays beginning in the colonial period.⁸⁴ As a result, “Freedom of expression in religious matters does not exist in Malaysia ... [whereas] Muslim intellectual culture in Indonesia has been active and democratic.”⁸⁵ What “liberal Islamist” perspectives emerge in Malaysia are most clearly articulated by Muslim feminist and professional women’s organizations—and these come under persistent fire for doing so in both states.⁸⁶ Observing these trends especially on university campuses, Farish Noor lambastes the “juvenile theocracy” increasingly apparent in his home country.⁸⁷ In fact, though, it is not just students: Farish was among six individuals against whom the *Persatuan Ulama Malaysia* (Malaysian Muslim Scholars’ Association, PUM) asked Malaysia’s sultans (who together comprise the Conference of Rulers) to take punitive action for denigrating Islam and the ulama. (Sisters in Islam executive director Zainah Anwar was another.)⁸⁸ On the other hand, whereas manipulation and repression for so much of the New Order period frustrated and radicalized many Indonesian Muslims, Malaysian Islamists lack similar gripes: the Malaysian state has always favored Malay-Muslims, and even more

⁸³ Suzanne Brenner, “Islam and Gender Politics in Late New Order Indonesia,” in *Spirited Politics: Religion and Public Life in Contemporary Southeast Asia*, ed. Andrew C. Willford and Kenneth M. George (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 2005), 94.

⁸⁴ Suzaina Kadir, “Mapping Muslim Politics in Southeast Asia after September 11,” *Pacific Review* 17, no. 2 (2004): 14, 206.

⁸⁵ Norani, “Islamization and Democratization in Malaysia in Regional and Global Contexts,” 122.

⁸⁶ Means, *Political Islam in Southeast Asia*, 373-374.

⁸⁷ Farish A. Noor, “The Taliban in Our Universities,” *Berita PSSH* 7, April 2000, <http://pssmalaysia.tripod.com/articles/farish1.htm> (accessed April 20, 2010).

⁸⁸ *Malaysiakini*, February 22, and March 2, 2002.

so since the 1970s.⁸⁹

Today, Islamist parties in Indonesia and Malaysia alike compete as parties: they play by the rules of the democratic game. In neither case does such engagement appear to be purely instrumental, but rather, an embrace of participatory space to an extent that some might label “post-Islamist,” and which inevitably changes the character of Islamist objectives and approaches.⁹⁰ However, it would be an oversimplification to say that all, or even necessarily most, fall within the sort of “civil Islam” paradigm Hefner describes.⁹¹ Most importantly, as discussed above, this segment of the polity includes parties and factions that aim to install an Islamic state, even if understandings of what that might look like vary, and that are not particularly pluralist in orientation or averse to a degree of coercion in matters of belief and behavior.⁹² Contrary to sites in which Muslim scholars and activists have argued for decades that Islam and democratic processes are compatible (while themselves under authoritarian rule), this issue has been less open to debate in Malaysia and Indonesia. In both states, “an overwhelming proportion of the general public merely assumed that Islam and democracy were indeed compatible.” Reformasi movements in both countries sought reforms to governance on the presumption that democracy could deliver the benefits sought, with Islam no impediment. At the same time, Islamist radicalism—and especially political violence in its name—challenges moderate traditions and practices.⁹³

The place of nonelectoral politics bears mention, and specifically the place of violence. Since “9/11,” not only have Muslims everywhere been pressed to find their place in ascribed and contested typologies,⁹⁴ but also analyses have “tended to view Islam through the prism of terrorism, rather than seeing extremism as but one of many manifestations of Islamic life.”⁹⁵ Importantly, extremist trends elsewhere had little influence on Southeast Asia until the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the late 1970s. That conflict, in which hundreds or even thousands of Southeast Asian Muslims participated, gaining experience with weapons and warfare as well as a heightened sense of solidarity and global Islamic networks, “was critical to the rise of extremism and especially terrorism in Southeast Asia.” Most key radical groups in the region now include veterans from Afghanistan.⁹⁶

⁸⁹ Fealy, “Islam in Southeast Asia: Domestic Pietism, Diplomacy and Security,” 151.

⁹⁰ Bubalo, Fealy, and Mason, *Zealous Democrats: Islamism and Democracy in Egypt, Indonesia and Turkey*, 12-14.

⁹¹ Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*.

⁹² Cf. *ibid.*, 13.

⁹³ Means, *Political Islam in Southeast Asia*, 82, 379.

⁹⁴ Kadir, “Mapping Muslim Politics in Southeast Asia after September 11,” 200.

⁹⁵ Fealy, “Islam in Southeast Asia: Domestic Pietism, Diplomacy and Security,” 137.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 152-153, and Means, *Political Islam in Southeast Asia*, 161-163.

Yet, analysts are divided on the matter of the scope, networks, and objectives of the region's violent fringe—although all do agree that it is a fringe. Among the most alarmist is Zachary Abuza, who insists that those who see radical Islam in the region as home-grown and not part of more menacing terror networks are simply “naïve”; he sees local radicals' links with al-Qaida as thoroughgoing and deeply dangerous.⁹⁷ Angel Rabasa, too, foregrounds terrorist organizations and networks, especially so long as an unsettled Indonesian state proved the “weak link” for counter-terrorism in the region. By now, however, the greater mobilization of moderate Muslims, and the “qualified support” of Islamist organizations for the increasingly consolidated state's anti-terrorist measures have helped to curb the danger.⁹⁸

Other analysts find the litany of connections and threats overstated. Fealy concludes that JI does have high-level contact with al-Qaida leaders, but appears to be operationally quite autonomous and “driven as much by domestic concerns as it is by pan-Islamist sentiment.”⁹⁹ More broadly, John Sidel details “a pattern of demobilization, dissension, disappointment, and disentanglement from state power for Islamist forces in Indonesia and Malaysia in recent years,” alongside a comparable decline for Muslim separatists in the Philippines (Mindanao) and southern Thailand (Patani). In his reading, what terrorist violence has occurred is not a sign of strength, but a last gasp.¹⁰⁰ That said, one might argue that Sidel overstates the decline of both the appeal of Islamism and structures of Islamic authority amid globalization and democratization in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Southeast Asia and the MENA Region: Complex Connections

Southeast Asian Islam has never been detached, culturally or otherwise, from Islamist thought and trends in the MENA region. Most obviously since the 1970s, an Arab-inspired Islamic revival has swept the region, reflected most visibly in new trends in “Islamic” dress and, for example, increasing Arabic influences (from loan words to shifts in pronunciation and spelling) on the Malay language. Organizations and thinkers from the MENA region have likewise played pivotal roles, from the inspiration of Iran's Islamic revolution,

⁹⁷ Zachary Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: Crucible of Terror* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003), 1.

⁹⁸ Rabasa, *Political Islam in Southeast Asia: Moderates, Radicals and Terrorists*, 37.

⁹⁹ Fealy, “Islam in Southeast Asia: Domestic Pietism, Diplomacy and Security,” 148.

¹⁰⁰ John T. Sidel, *The Islamist Threat in Southeast Asia: A Reassessment*, *Policy Studies 37* (Washington, DC: East-West Center Washington, 2007), 3-4. Indeed, it was when the Thai state adopted a lighter touch, liberalizing its relations with the restive Patani region, that insurgency tapered off—only to resurface again when Thaksin curbed that autonomy and empowerment. Meanwhile, Thai Muslims elsewhere in the country are well, and peacefully, integrated into the political order.

to (especially) the work of Hassan al-Banna and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood in both Indonesia and Malaysia, to more recent liaising with Turkey's *Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party, AKP).

Conventional wisdom holds that the rapid movement of mostly rural Muslim youth to urban campuses at home or abroad fostered feelings of anomie, inadequacy, and displacement, encouraging those students to seek empathetic communities. Particularly for students studying overseas, those communities were often populated not only by co-nationals, but also by Muslims from Pakistan, Egypt, and elsewhere, who exposed young Southeast Asians to new and sometimes radical Islamic teachings. Indeed, the increasing number of Southeast Asians studying in the Middle East has been exposed to "more puritanical and radical expressions of the faith," as from Saudi Arabia and Yemen.¹⁰¹ A mix of dakwah activism and *usrah* (study group) methods, together with translation and publication of core texts and participation with transnational revivalist networks—helped to spread ideas and networks through both Indonesia and Malaysia: freshly-radicalized Muslim students returning from overseas thus transmitted their new, MENA-derived ideologies and priorities to a wider base, through schools, universities, mosques, and more.¹⁰² New electronic media and satellite television stations like al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya have further sped information flows among regions.¹⁰³

Whereas the Muslim Brotherhood as propagated by Hasan al-Banna in the interwar years espouses a "Muslim system" guided by the Qur'an rather than by a secular constitution,¹⁰⁴ some of those groups inspired by the Brotherhood in Southeast Asia are among the most prodemocratic. For instance, Malaysia's *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement, ABIM) has been a key player in movements for political liberalization as well as Islamization since its founding in the early 1970s. On the other hand, Indonesia's PKS, initially modeled largely on the Brotherhood, finds the organization of declining relevance now that Indonesia, unlike Egypt, has democratized. PKS has turned instead to Turkey's AKP, "seen as one of the few parties to have successfully evolved from its Islamist roots to being a broad based ruling party with high popular legitimacy," although the latter party has proved reluctant to assist the overtly Islamist PKS.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Fealy, "Islam in Southeast Asia: Domestic Pietism, Diplomacy and Security," 153, and Zainah Anwar, *Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia: Dakwah among the Students* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 1987).

¹⁰² Anwar, "Political Islam in Post-Soeharto Indonesia: The Contest between 'Radical-Conservative Islam' and 'Progressive-Liberal Islam,'" 361-363.

¹⁰³ Fealy, "Islam in Southeast Asia: Domestic Pietism, Diplomacy and Security," 153.

¹⁰⁴ Means, *Political Islam in Southeast Asia*, 153.

¹⁰⁵ PKS has shifted its lens in Malaysia, too, from PAS to UMNO: both are sufficiently Islamist, but only UMNO has experience and continued near-term prospects of being a governing party. In that vein, Bubalo et al., note that PKS seeks similar formal collaboration with the Australian

Still, the writings not just of Hasan al-Banna, but also of fellow Islamist thinkers Sayyid Qutb (from Egypt), Maulana Maududi (Pakistan), and Ayatollah Khomeini (Iran)¹⁰⁶ have been highly influential in Southeast Asia in terms of conceptualizing nationalism as counter to Islam and the ummah, problematizing relations with non-Muslims, elevating the desired place of ulama in government, and encouraging sociopolitical life as modeled on that of the Prophet Muhammad's seventh-century community.¹⁰⁷ Saudi funds helped to transmit many of these ideologies: the country used its new oil wealth to promote its own Wahhabi form of Islam and its own leadership, over the Shia alternative of Iran's iconic revolution. Many of the doctrines of Southeast Asian dakwah movements thus come from Wahhabism, even though practice of the latter is banned in Malaysia. Saudi money flowed to Southeast Asia through the World Muslim League, substantially funding conduits from the International Islamic University in Malaysia to thousands of free or discounted publications (touting not just Wahhabism, but also other Islamist thinkers). The outcome was a divide between "liberal Islam" and "literal Islam," the latter more influenced by Saudi perspectives,¹⁰⁸ or between "radical-conservative Islam" and "progressive-liberal Islam" in post-Soeharto Indonesia, both with roots in and ties to the Middle East.¹⁰⁹

Syafi'i Anwar is one of relatively few to trace the flow of religio-political thought to Indonesia from the Middle East. His formulation stands in sharp contrast to perspectives such as Hefner's, which focus perhaps to a fault on politically liberal trends among Indonesian Muslims. Anwar's radical-conservative groups, inspired both by progenitors among local Islamist movements and by counterparts in the Middle East, tend to associate with and name themselves after radical movements in the latter region. Informed by "a process of ideological transmission from the radical movements in the Middle East to Indonesia," these groups call for a return to *salafism* (Islamic precepts) and shari'a law, participating in large part outside the democratic

and British Labor Parties, the Democratic Party in the United States, and the Chinese Communist Party. Bubalo, Fealy, and Mason, *Zealous Democrats: Islamism and Democracy in Egypt, Indonesia and Turkey*, 70-73.

¹⁰⁶ The example of the Iranian Revolution especially galvanized Indonesian Muslims, both as part of an Islamic resurgence and return to "authenticity" amid rejection of Western ideologies and civilization, but also specifically in terms of a people's ability to oust a despot. Anwar, "Political Islam in Post-Soeharto Indonesia: The Contest between 'Radical-Conservative Islam' and 'Progressive-Liberal Islam,'" 359-360. Malaysia's Anwar, then a prominent dakwah activist, traveled to Iran in 1979, shortly after the revolution; Malaysians were similarly inspired. Judith Nagata, "Religious Ideology and Social Change: The Islamic Revival in Malaysia," *Pacific Affairs* 53, no. 3 (1980): 428.

¹⁰⁷ Means, *Political Islam in Southeast Asia*, 154-157.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 59-61, 152.

¹⁰⁹ Anwar, "Political Islam in Post-Soeharto Indonesia: The Contest between 'Radical-Conservative Islam' and 'Progressive-Liberal Islam.'"

process—specifically with violence—in ways that echo those of Middle Eastern counterparts.¹¹⁰ Bubalo and Fealy, too, trace ideational flows from the Middle East to Indonesia, but see their impact as rather more balanced: exposure to the Muslim Brotherhood, for instance, inspired Indonesian students to join efforts at democratization, even as salafi currents from Saudi Arabia pushed them toward puritanical pursuit of narrowly defined morality and piety.¹¹¹

In fact, in response or simply in step with more radical groups, progressive-liberal groups such as Indonesia's *Jaringan Islam Liberal* (Liberal Islam Network, or JIL, launched in 2001) have formed, as well, advocating *ijtihad* (rational deliberation); consideration of context and purpose rather than literal interpretation of Islamic texts; and a sense of the necessary separation of religion from the inherently profane, human-created state. JIL and its ilk echo earlier efforts in Indonesia (for instance, in the 1960s and 1970s) at Islamic renewal and build on a tradition of “secular Muslims” and civil libertarianism. Yet, these groups also draw from the ideas of liberal Muslim thinkers in the Middle East, Europe, and elsewhere, transmitted both through studies in Egypt, Jordan, and other MENA states and through works in Arabic or translated into Indonesian. The groups garner attention through radio talk shows and similar means, but also by dint of the attacks on them by MUI, vigilante groups, and others; critics find their liberal readings unsupportable.¹¹² On the other hand, evidence of ideational flows in the other direction—from Southeast Asia to the MENA region—seems scant.

Intellectual trends aside, transnational links have more concrete manifestations and may be less one-sided in terms of policy. As Fealy notes, however, in Indonesia and Malaysia alike, the “Islamic component” of foreign policy has been as much about enhancing domestic legitimacy and symbolic posturing as substantive change. Rather, regional considerations—including Indonesia's downplaying Islamic issues that might be difficult for intra-ASEAN relations—and Malaysia's and Indonesia's lesser economic integration with the MENA region than with other regions have counter-balanced domestic and ideological considerations. Both Malaysia and Indonesia participated in the founding meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), launched in 1969 for solidarity and cooperation among Muslim nations, but Indonesia, concerned about its image among Western donors, declined to sign the OIC's charter in 1972 or to allow the Palestinian Liberation Organization

¹¹⁰ For instance, he offers the rather problematic claim, “It is obvious that violent acts such as suicide bombings”—which started to occur after the September 2001 attacks in the United States—“would not previously have taken place in Indonesia, considering that Indonesian Islam has been widely regarded as Islam with a smiling face.” *Ibid.*, 350.

¹¹¹ Bubalo and Fealy, *Joining the Caravan? The Middle East, Islamism and Indonesia*.

¹¹² Anwar, “Political Islam in Post-Soeharto Indonesia: The Contest between ‘Radical-Conservative Islam’ and ‘Progressive-Liberal Islam,’” 369-373, and Means, *Political Islam in Southeast Asia*, 373.

(PLO) diplomatic recognition and representation in Jakarta until 1989. Yet, Soeharto gave foreign policy an Islamist spin starting in the late 1980s, as part of a broader domestic Islamizing turn: he stepped up diplomatic exchanges and visits, established formal relations with Libya in 1991, and helped the OIC broker a peace deal with the Moro National Liberation Front in the Philippines in 1992.¹¹³

While Malaysia was less ambivalent about the OIC, it was only after Mahathir became prime minister in 1981, promising greater attention to the “Islamic bloc,” that the country gave the OIC and Regional Islamic Dawkah Council for Southeast Asia and the Pacific (RISEAP), as well as Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Palestine, and the like, much precedence. In a bid to bolster UMNO’s support after a poor showing in 1999, Mahathir stepped things up further by proposing a common Islamic currency, an interstate banking network, and unified Muslim bloc representation at the WTO.¹¹⁴ He also championed issues of Muslim minorities in Burma and the Philippines within the ASEAN context—albeit like Indonesia, concerned not to alienate partner states by prioritizing ummah over ASEAN and taking the side of co-religionists.¹¹⁵ Both Malaysia and Indonesia, too, are part of the Developing Eight (D8) nations (together with Bangladesh, Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Pakistan, and Nigeria), which held its first summit in 1997.¹¹⁶

Despite these initiatives, economic integration is limited, with no Muslim states among either Malaysia’s or Indonesia’s top five trading partners, although trade ties have increased for both since the 1980s.¹¹⁷ Malaysia, in particular, has avidly developed trade and finance links with the MENA states in recent years, for example through its burgeoning Islamic banking industry. And upon assuming office, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, too, stressed ties with a range of countries—Western, Southeast Asian, and Muslim—aiming both to reintegrate Indonesia into a global economy and to stress its “Islamic identity and cultural heritage.”¹¹⁸ At the same time, Malaysia and Indonesia are loath to endanger their standing in a Western-dominated international trade and financial regime, so tend to temper their stance accordingly, domestic pressures notwithstanding. All told, the concrete, practical ties between Southeast Asia and the MENA region are perhaps less dense and deep than rhetoric might imply.

¹¹³ Fealy, “Islam in Southeast Asia: Domestic Pietism, Diplomacy and Security,” 136-155.

¹¹⁴ Stratfor, “Islamic States Seek Unified Voice,” *WorldNetDaily*, www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=25449 (accessed February 10, 2010).

¹¹⁵ Weiss, “The Changing Shape of Islamic Politics in Malaysia,” 148.

¹¹⁶ Fealy, “Islam in Southeast Asia: Domestic Pietism, Diplomacy and Security,” 143-145.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹¹⁸ Means, *Political Islam in Southeast Asia*, 310.

Conclusions

The impact of the flow of ideas—conceptual as well as strategic—from the MENA region to Southeast Asia has been prolonged and profound, but varied. Malaysian and Indonesian Muslims do not simply accept and enact these ideas wholesale: they are layered over specific local traditions, histories, and political contexts, and compete with alternatives from the West, the region, and secular or non-Muslim fellow citizens. Indeed, as Bubalo and Fealy note, such flows are “less and less a function of specifically Middle Eastern influences than a broader, global process of intellectual exchange and adaptation.”¹¹⁹ As the real differences in political Islam between the two states suggest, contingent local factors hold greater explanatory power than these ideas common to both in determining how Islamism shapes and is shaped by democratic praxis. Specifically, the array of parties on offer; the relative legacy of colonialism, authoritarianism, and other prior regimes; the demographic balance between Muslims and non-Muslims; and the other policy imperatives facing the state mold Islamism and its impacts in practice, urging moderation in both the Malaysian and Indonesian cases, for different reasons. Along these lines, it remains to be seen how much the experience of Islamism as part of Indonesian or Malaysian democracy will influence processes of political liberalization in the Middle East. The influence may start to flow more in that direction if and when the latter states make steps toward democracy, yet Indonesian and Malaysian experience suggests more a set of factors to heed than a specific outcome to expect. An understanding of Islamism in Muslim-majority, democratic Southeast Asia may thus offer a unique lens on developments and challenges in the MENA region, without implying any predetermined outcome.

¹¹⁹ Bubalo and Fealy, *Joining the Caravan? The Middle East, Islamism and Indonesia*, 98.