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*Review*

## Political Islam: A Comparative Study of Malaysia and Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to uncover the history and nuances of political Islam in Malaysia and Indonesia. This research employs a qualitative methodology, specifically library research through content analysis, for its flexibility in systematically analyzing books and journal articles by identifying, coding, and categorizing patterns in the data, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of their similarities and differences. Malaysia, a Southeast Asian federal monarchy, gained independence in 1957 after a history of colonial occupation. Its multiethnic population includes indigenous tribes and international traders, with Islam as the official religion, though non-Muslims practice freely. Traditional values and the Sultan's role as protector of religion are central to Malay society. Political decisions often weigh ethnic and religious factors. Islam's political role in Malaysia has varied, with prime ministers interpreting its influence differently. Debates range from advocating a full Islamic system to separating religion from politics. Policies have driven Islamization in education, art, music, and clothing, affecting party dynamics between Pan-Malaysian Islamic (PAS) and the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). UMNO has maintained Malay Muslim support by integrating Islamic sentiments. In Indonesia, a Muslim-majority nation, implementing Islam in politics is complicated by its diverse population. The Pancasila ideology, aligned with Islamic norms, emphasizes monotheism, justice, unity, consultation, and social justice. Despite deep historical roots, integrating Islamic principles in governance requires tolerance of minority views. Political Islam in Indonesia is diverse, with Islamic parties and new Islamist groups influencing governance. Traditional organizations like *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) and Muhammadiyah face competition from groups using media to reshape religious authority.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The prevailing Western philosophies give rise to political structures and institutions that are in opposition to Islamic philosophies, which maintain that no true value can be defended since it is relative, while Islam aims for a fixed truth (*al-haq*) because it is the source of human welfare

(Rahman, 2024). Muslims require freedom from the framework of Western ideology, hence reforming or reorganizing the current political structures and institutions is insufficient.

Political Islam highlights the impact of Islam in the social and political domains and concentrates on how Islam is understood and applied on a political level. Political Islamists can be broadly classified into two camps: those who want to see Islam interpreted to fit the needs of the modern era, and those who want to see Islam return to its early forms. This begs the question of whether Islam can be reformatted. Examining historically disparate theological and political groups as well as Muslim state practices is crucial to comprehending Islam's conceptions of the state and politics.

Historically, Muslim regimes have discovered a strong link between politics and religion and have frequently used Islam as a means of political legitimacy. The foundation of political Islam is the notion that Islam is misinterpreted and misapplied. This perspective holds that Muslims who misinterpret Islam are the real cause of the problems, not Islam itself.

The future is likely to see the exploitation of religious and ethnic concerns as well. Non-normative political and religious practices will be restricted, and public policymaking informed by identity politics. The democratic system in Indonesia will therefore continue to be illiberal. Similar restrictions will likely be placed on political and religious liberties (Qodir, 2023).

## 2. METHOD

In this research, qualitative methodology, specifically library research through content analysis, will be utilized due to its flexibility in analyzing data (Cavanagh, 1997). This is supported by Rosengren (1981), who states that content analysis describes a family of analytic approaches ranging from impressionistic, intuitive, interpretive analyses to systematic, strict textual analyses. Consistent with that, the researcher applied content analysis due to its systematic method for analyzing books and journal articles. Content analysis involves identifying, coding, and categorizing patterns within the collected data.

In this case, the researcher aims to identify and understand the history of political Islam in Malaysia and Indonesia. By analyzing these sources, the researcher can uncover the differences and similarities of political Islam in the Malaysian and Indonesian contexts, contributing to a deeper understanding of both countries. This approach allows the researcher to draw insights from a wide range of sources, providing a comprehensive view of the subject matter.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1 Political Islam

The advocates of political Islam are generally divided into two main groups. While the first group advocates a return to the early period of Islam, the Asr-i Saadet, the second group supports the interpretation of Islam according to the changing needs of the age. This distinction raises the question of whether reform in Islam is possible. However, it should be noted that the terms "return" or "reform" can be misleading. A return refers not only to an increase in worship, but also to a

greater visibility of religious practices in society. This requires religious belief to be lived not only in the inner world of the individual but also as part of social life. That is, rather than seeing faith as a purely personal matter, an individual wants it to play an active role in society as a whole. Religion is perceived as a reality that guides personal behavior and the individual thinks that he/she has the right to express his/her faith in the public sphere (Roy, 2010:102).

In order to understand the concepts of state and politics in Islam, it is important to study the different theological and political sects and to examine the practices of Muslim states and rulers. In Islamic history, there has been a close connection between religion and politics. However, especially during the reigns of sultanate regimes, the state used religion as a tool to legitimize its activities. The historical Muslim state has long influenced Islamic traditions and formed its own character. The state has often referred to Islam to legitimize itself; however, due to the nature of religion, it has not been possible to monopolize Islam because religion has been a shared belief and experience among individuals (Koklaş, 1995:41).

Political Islam is a current of thought that ideologically interprets Islam within the political system and worldviews Islam. It is based on the idea that Islamic life is lived incorrectly, and that Islam is not understood correctly. According to this approach, the root cause of defeats, backwardness and defeats is not Islam, but misunderstood Islam. As a result of this misunderstanding, Islam was subsequently shaped by society. Therefore, the root cause of the troubles is not Islam, but Muslims who misunderstand Islam (Kara, 2003:199).

### **3.2 Social Politics and Culture in Malaysia**

Malaysia was known as the Muslim majority country adhering to the Shafi'i sect. Aside from that, Islam is the religion of the country, and King is the symbol of the religion. However, being a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, all religions can practice their faith freely. This can be supported by John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, the focal point of Malaysian social and political existence lies in its multiethnic makeup. Following ethnicity and nationality, Islam assumes a ritualistic and occasionally traditionalist role in the societal fabric. Analysts note that religious and political leaders often exhibit less awareness of emerging and contemporary Islamic movements (Esposito & Voll, 1999).

### **3.3 Islam and Malaysia**

There are also records of Muslim traders of Arab or Iranian origin reaching the Kedah region in 877 AD. It is generally believed that the first Muslims to make contact were traders of Arab or Persian origin. However, there is also the view that Islam came to the Malaysian world through Chinese and Indian Muslims (Edip, 1911).

In the late 19th century, the establishment of western-style schools alongside madrasas led to a split between traditionalists and innovators among the Malays. These schools, established by the British, offered a different model of education compared to the madrasas, called Pondok, which were usually supported by the community. From the late 19th century, these madrasas began sending students to countries such as Egypt, Pakistan, India and Mecca. The students who

graduated from these countries pioneered important changes in the political and social life of Malaysia. In particular, these students were influenced by the innovative ideas that were being debated in the Islamic world at the time and supported by scholars such as Muhammad Abduh and Jamal al-Din Afghani. These ideas formed the basis of political Islam in Malaysia (Liow, 2009).

### 3.4 History of Political Islam in Malaysia

Following the independence of the Federation of Malaya from British rule on August 31, 1957, the newly established Federal Constitution enshrined Islam as the state religion through Article 3 (1). However, the exact implications of this provision remained ambiguous, and it is possible they were deliberately left undefined. Although Islam's role in the political landscape of Malaya, and later Malaysia, became an established reality, the specific political functions of Islam have never been definitively determined. Historical records indicate that the framers of the constitution did not intend for this clause to grant Islam a comprehensive role in the governance of the nation-state. However, the lack of clarity also provided political leaders with the flexibility to utilize Islam as a political instrument or choose not to do so. Over time, successive prime ministers of Malaysia have adopted both approaches—either emphasizing Islam as the forefront of the national ideology or marginalizing its role in national affairs (Fernando, 2006).

Since independence, the ruling power structure led by UMNO within the Perikatan, also known as the Alliance, and later transformed into the Barisan Nasional (BN, National Front), has strategically utilized Islamic sentiments to address the challenges posed by PAS and to mitigate intra-Malay competition. UMNO sought to position itself as the primary guardian of Islam in the eyes of the Malay populace, recognizing that Islamic legitimacy was pivotal for its political survival as a party representing Malay Muslims. As the landscape of Islamic politics expanded to encompass non-governmental organizations and independent dakwah movements, UMNO encountered increasingly sophisticated challenges from civil society actors who claimed to fill a perceived gap left by UMNO. To retain control over the Islamic narrative and prevent the emergence of new cohorts of Islamists, characterized by their education, middle-class status, and urban backgrounds, UMNO employed diverse tactics, including coercion, co-optation of Islamist figures, and Islamization programs, as part of a deliberate strategy (Camroux, 1996).

During the era of Malaysia's founding father, Tunku Abdul Rahman, Islam held a marginalized political position. He famously remarked, as cited in von der Mehden (1963), "Unless we are prepared to drown every non-Malay, we can never think of an Islamic Administration." Additionally, he clarified, "This country is not an Islamic state as it is generally understood; we simply declare that Islam shall be the official religion of the State." (Ibrahim et al., 1985; Mehden, 1985).

Upon assuming office in July 1981, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad swiftly initiated a series of projects aimed at solidifying Islam's influence throughout the country. By this juncture, events in the Muslim world, including the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, had catalyzed an Islamic resurgence in Malaysia. This resurgence was further shaped by the

emergence of Islamic movements such as the Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia), Darul Arqam, and Jamaat Tabligh (Nagata, 1984 pp. 83–87; Ahmad, 2002b, p. 87).

When juxtaposed with trials of Islamic governance in various Muslim nations, Islam Hadhari appeared notably liberal by acknowledging previously overlooked aspects of life and segments of the ummah, including women and minorities, while maintaining the fundamental essence and character of Islam unchanged (Bakar, 2006).

Today, Islam Hadhari is no longer heralded as a government slogan, with only Abdullah Badawi occasionally reminiscing about it in media pronouncements (Malaysia, 2012; Borneo Post 2012).

Since assuming office, Najib Razak has introduced the "1Malaysia" initiative, ostensibly aimed "to provide a free and open platform to discuss the issues that deeply concern [Malaysians] as a nation" (Hassan, 2010), although skeptics see it as merely a tactic to regain support from voters disillusioned with the Islamic direction of Abdullah Badawi's tenure. While Najib publicly pledged to uphold Islam Hadhari, he made this commitment solely as a gesture of respect to Abdullah (Habib, 2008).

Recognizing the importance of appeasing stakeholders within state institutions, government entities, UMNO, the bureaucracy, and mainstream media who favor Islamism, Najib has endeavored to align his vision for Malaysia with Islamic principles. This effort included incorporating verses from the Qur'an into his inaugural speech as UMNO president during the party's 2009 General Assembly (Razak, 2009).

### 3.5 Political Islam in Malaysia

There is no disputing the fact that the policies of political Islam have led to significant changes in Malaysian society. In the 1960s, films made by the famous actor P. Ramlee show Muslim Malays living a westernized lifestyle. During this period, the way Muslims dressed was indistinguishable from that adopted by non-Muslims and Europeans in the country. However, the Islamization efforts that started in the 1970s began to bear fruit in the 2000s. During this process, there have been major changes in education, art, music and clothing. Today, Malaysia has competent institutions in areas such as Islamic finance, halal food and the Islamization of knowledge, and is carrying out serious work in these areas. In Malaysian society, the institutionalization of political Islam has generally taken place through the work of the liberal and nationalist UMNO party rather than Islamic parties, and especially through the efforts of Mahathir Mohamad. Mahathir used Islamization as a catalyst for economic development and succeeded in making huge investments in the country in a short period of time (Özay, 2013).

In 1998, the arrest and imprisonment of deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim on bribery and rape charges and Mahathir Mohamad's exit from politics in 2003 marked the beginning of a new era for Malaysia. However, the prime ministers who took office after Mahathir failed to match Mahathir's performance in terms of the country's development. In particular, Najib Razak, who was in office between 2009 and 2018, drew the reaction of Muslim Malays with his privatization of important state companies and his involvement in major bribery cases, as well as granting rights

to other ethnic groups. As a result, Mahathir Mohamad was re-elected in 2018 and Anwar Ibrahim was released. Mahathir Mohamad's statements that he would soon hand over the seat to Anwar Ibrahim indicate that a new era for political Islam in Malay society may soon begin (Gomez, 2007).

### 3.6 Islamic Resurgence and Malay Politics

The overview of PAS-UMNO competition highlights the adaptability of political Islam to varying social and political contexts. Initially, UMNO effectively incorporated elements of the Islamic resurgence, which were traditionally associated with PAS. However, in a subsequent period, despite favorable conditions for PAS, including growing dissatisfaction with UMNO, the party's reluctance to alter its ideology resulted in limited gains, with political advancements in 1999 being reversed by 2004.

From Independence to the 1980s: the growth of a more Islamic agenda within PAS was spurred by the events following the formation of the Barisan Nasional after the 1969 riots, which undermined PAS's ability to differentiate itself through economic nationalism. Initially, PAS leaders joined the BN in the early 1970s with the aim of advancing their Malay-Islamist agenda from within the political establishment. The Islamic resurgence in Malaysia, known locally as *dakwah*, gained momentum in the aftermath of the 1969 riots, influenced by contacts made during the Haj pilgrimage and the teachings of thinkers like Qutb and Mawdudi. Rapid rural-urban migration and expanding urban opportunities for Malays contributed to the movement's spread in the early 1970s, alongside concerns about forging a cohesive modern Malay identity amid perceived vulnerability to Chinese dominance (Funston, 1981; Anwar, 1987).

While officially considered apolitical, the *dakwah* movement, notably ABIM, sought to advocate for Islamic positions in public policy debates. However, the resurgence movement held promise for significant political gains for PAS, as the party had already positioned itself as Islamic, emphasizing Islam as a comprehensive way of life. Moreover, many themes of the resurgence aligned with the political interests of PAS's rural grassroots supporters, traditionally the source of the party's political strength (Richmond: Curzon, 2002, pp. 74–107). Islamist movements have aimed to challenge capitalist development models, criticizing them as overly materialistic and insufficient in delivering the social justice prescribed by Islam (Kepel, 2002).

The focus on Islamic jurisprudence holds significant appeal. Historically, Islamic courts in Malaysia have demonstrated effectiveness in addressing local matters, especially family law, through expedited and informal procedures (Singapore, ISEAS, 2002). During the early 1970s, PAS's ongoing affiliation with the BN constrained its ability to fully leverage the political opportunities presented by the resurgence movement. Additionally, the party grappled with leadership issues, exacerbated by conflicts with UMNO regarding PAS's political leadership in Kelantan by the latter part of 1977 (For details see Crouch, note 14).

PAS exited the BN, and Mohammad Asri was succeeded by Haji Yusuf Rawi, backed by a faction of considerably more radical individuals. UMNO's reaction to the resurgence initially unfolded gradually throughout the 1970s, albeit with early efforts to co-opt and regulate Islamic

discourse. The government established an Islamic Research Institute in 1971, followed by the National Dakwah Foundation in 1974 and the National Fatwah Council in 1978, all operating under the auspices of the Prime Minister's Office (Nair & Ahmad, 1997 note 18).

Ideologically, Mahathir sought to advance a vision of progressive Malaysian Islam that aligned with his broader political agenda. As previously mentioned, the rationale behind the NEP policy was to create economic opportunities for Malays as part of a broader effort toward national industrialization and growth. This approach aimed to implement policies beneficial to all citizens, with a particular focus on uplifting the Malay community. Mahathir consistently argued for the need to address the economic and social backwardness of Malays, advocating for special assistance to facilitate their participation in Malaysian modernization efforts. Mahathir intertwined this emphasis on Malay modernization with a distinct Islamic vision, characterized by Khoo Boo Teik as emphasizing "the power of learning, the quality of thrift, and, above all, the dignity of work." (Teik, 1995 p. 175).

The revival of Islam's prominence hinges on Muslims reclaiming their leadership in technology, expertise, and military strength. There is a risk that Muslims may excessively prioritize outdated traditions and aimless spirituality. As the saying goes, "Allah Subhanahu Wataala does not alter the condition of a people unless they strive to change it themselves." (Mahathir, 1984).

Islam's greatness cannot solely be achieved through prayer or Quranic study. This perspective resonated strongly with segments of the emerging urban Malay middle class. Patricia Sloane offers insight into the linkages between religion and entrepreneurial endeavors among upwardly mobile Malays. She observed that wealth accumulation was viewed as a socially beneficial endeavor, as individual success enabled the extension of opportunities to fellow Muslims, thereby elevating the status and significance of Islam. Moreover, material prosperity was perceived as an indication of divine favor (New York: St Martins Press, 1999).

UMNO has actively promoted Islamic terminology, symbols, and institutions, alongside initiatives such as international conferences and research institutes, to bolster its Islamic credentials. While acknowledging the significance of spiritual matters, UMNO emphasizes compatibility with Malaysian modernity, particularly in the context of economic modernization. To dispel doubts about its approach, UMNO highlights international recognition from other Muslim countries, as evidenced by its participation in the Organization of Islamic Conferences (OIC). Many Muslim nations, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, and various African countries, view Malaysia as a leading Muslim nation committed to advancing Islamic principles, despite PAS's refusal to acknowledge this reality (Deputy Prime Minister, 1982). During the 1980s, Malaysia achieved notable policy successes that aligned with its international recognition as a leading Muslim nation. Notably, Malaysia established the International Islamic University with backing from the OIC, and utilized it, along with government-sponsored think tanks, to invite foreign speakers who could endorse UMNO's approach. Additionally, there was a discernible shift in foreign policy aimed at enhancing Islamic authority through affiliations with the broader Islamic community.

As part of its Islamic agenda, the government implemented various policy. These included establishing an Islamic bank and enacting comprehensive Islamic financial legislation. Additionally, efforts were made to modernize and expand the Islamic legal system, including the introduction of criminal penalties for religious offenses such as alcohol consumption or failure to observe fasting during Ramadan (Forafascinating account of the history and workings of the Islamic legal system in Malaysia, see Peletz, note 16).

An important indication of UMNO's Islamic credibility was the recruitment of Anwar Ibrahim, a prominent leader of a resurgence group, into the party in 1982. This unexpected political move helped solidify UMNO's growing focus on Islamic issues. In contrast, PAS's initial response to the resurgence movement struggled to gain political support. The emergence of new leaders, influenced by the dakwah movement and global Islamism surrounding the Iranian revolution, led to a shift in emphasis towards Islamic governance. Internally, PAS amended its constitution in 1983 to establish an Ulama Consultative Council to ensure policy alignment with Islam. Debates with UMNO became confrontational, with accusations of infidelity and calls for religious struggle from both sides. PAS also adopted a more pan-Islamic rhetoric, prioritizing social justice over Malay preferences. While the party overall favored democratic means to power, a minority fringe espoused more revolutionary ideas. The 1986 election campaign, centered on a radical Islamic platform and the promise of implementing hudud, resulted in PAS's least successful electoral outcome to date.

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed a significant rise in the importance of Islamic issues in Malaysian politics, integral to Malay identity and crucial for attracting Malay votes. UMNO proactively responded to these changes by effectively combining appeals to Islamic and material interests, maintaining support among many Malays influenced by resurgence ideas. This successful integration of Islam into a modern, materially successful Malay identity helped secure backing from the emerging Malay middle class, particularly amidst Malaysia's rapid economic growth. While UMNO's response was not merely one of cooption, it strategically adapted to changing conceptions of Islamic authority to maintain its political authority. Despite PAS's role as opposition, its relatively extreme conception of political Islam limited its appeal beyond traditional Islamic strongholds, especially in the face of UMNO's dominance in promoting Islam and Malay nationalism. Unlike the Middle East, Malaysia's relatively good governance and economic growth undercut support for radical Islamist agendas within PAS. Islamist ideas from outside Malaysia significantly influenced Malaysian politics but were filtered through the political system, emphasizing certain aspects of the Islamist agenda while aligning with UMNO's vision appealing to the affluent middle class, bolstered by Malaysia's rapid economic expansion (Volpi, note 3).

### **3.7 Social Politics and Culture in Indonesia**

The practice of Islam in Indonesia faces challenges despite being the majority religion. Its implementation in politics, bureaucracy, and the mindset of citizens lacks Islamic influence, with anything resembling Islam often labeled as radical. This discourages Muslims from openly

embracing and practicing their faith, fearing social stigma. Multiculturalism, inherent in Indonesia's diverse population, has both benefits and drawbacks. While it can foster unity and solidarity when based on awareness and tolerance, the absence of tolerance can lead to social conflicts. Plural societies, characterized by physical proximity yet social separation due to inherent differences, are vulnerable to such conflicts. In sociology and politics, identity is divided into social and political categories, shaping individuals' positions in society and communities. The political identity of a nation will be explored further in this article (Setyaningrum, 2005).

The Pancasila ideology in Indonesia encompasses five principles: Divinity, Humanity, Unity, Wisdom, and Justice. These principles closely align with Islamic norms and values, serving as guiding principles for Indonesian society. Each principle finds resonance in verses from the Holy Quran, emphasizing the importance of monotheism, justice, unity among diverse communities, consultation in governance, and social justice for all citizens. These principles reflect the integration of Islamic teachings into the foundational values of Indonesian society, promoting a harmonious and just social order (Purnomo, 2016).

Islamic values have been ingrained in Indonesia's history long before its independence, with Muslim scholars and heroes playing integral roles. According to Hermanus Sinung Janutama of the PDM Yogyakarta City Institute of Wisdom and Public Policy, Arab communities began settling in the archipelago around AD 606-699, initially arriving in northern Swarnabumi and spreading across the region to southern China. Among them, companions of Hz. Ibn Masud arrived in Sumatra around 615 AD, settling with the Thoiyk tribe, referred to as Ta Ce or Taceh in Nusantara records, which is present-day Aceh (Janutama, 2013).

Before the colonial era in Indonesia during the 1800s, Islam had already established a significant presence and influence, spreading across the archipelago. Consequently, it's unsurprising that the heroes striving for Indonesian independence were predominantly Muslim, closely tied to the efforts of scholars. Considering the intricacies of identity politics, which encompass ideology, ethnicity, and religion, the Indonesian government inevitably carries Islamic undertones. However, implementing such a notion proves challenging due to Indonesia's pluralistic nature, where the majority ideology should ideally accommodate minority perspectives, given Islam's inherent lack of identity and proprietary sense. Pluralism in Indonesia, or its cultural diversity, underscores the acknowledgment and acceptance of differences within the nation. Addressing the complexity of pluralism and identity necessitates a peaceful ideology. Pancasila, our nation's ideology, serves as a unifying force by accommodating differences, even those present in the Quran, advocating for tolerance amidst diversity. The current predicament lies in the inadequate application of tolerance towards Muslims, whereas Muslims themselves should consistently exhibit tolerance towards minorities.

### 3.8 Islam and Indonesia

The objectives of the Indonesian state, as outlined in the fourth paragraph of the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution, encompass safeguarding the entirety of the Indonesian nation and fostering

the general welfare. Within this framework, the State is mandated to safeguard the rights of citizens comprehensively and ensure their prosperity, which includes upholding citizens' freedom to choose and practice their religion. Islam, being the religion embraced by the majority of Indonesians, has played a significant role in the country's history and quest for independence. Both the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia and the Islamic community have made substantial contributions to governing and upholding the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia. As a universal faith, Islam guides all facets of life, spanning spiritual worship to communal interactions with both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Islam advocates for amicable relations with neighbors, irrespective of their religious beliefs, emphasizing the imperative to treat non-Muslims with fairness and justice. It unequivocally prohibits aggression against non-Muslims unless in self-defense and under just circumstances (Bahrain, 2014). The inherent norms and values of Islam should serve as the foundation for building a society with a noble and honorable identity, particularly considering that Muslims constitute the majority in Indonesia, comprising approximately 85 percent of the total population (Putra, 2017).

The incorporation of Islamic values doesn't necessarily require an overhaul of existing laws and regulations; rather, it can begin with a deeper awareness and understanding among Muslims to fulfill their obligations towards Allah. Those who adhere to Islamic principles demonstrate a noble and upright character. For instance, government officials who uphold Islamic values are less likely to engage in corruption, show respect towards non-Muslims, and uphold ethical standards. When such individuals participate in parliamentary activities, they embody the nation's identity. This identity, although not explicitly defined, becomes ingrained in culture, influencing traditions that are deemed virtuous and exemplary by both Muslims and non-Muslims. If perceived as commendable, these practices are adopted and can shape a positive trajectory for society.

Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world, with 88% of its population being Muslim. The country's founding philosophy "Pancasila" encompasses five principles: Faith in God, humanitarianism, national unity, democracy, and social justice. Islamists insisted on the application of Sharia law to Muslims during the country's founding, but without success. Indonesia, a country of 17,500 islands, has been democratic for the last 22 years but has historically been ruled by a dictatorial regime for half a century. It is estimated that between 500,000 and one million people were killed in a massacre in 1965-1966 with the support of the state and religious groups. Today, Indonesia faces problems despite a democratic regime. There is religious pluralism as well as conflicts between religious groups. For example, the Aceh region is partly under Sharia law, but this is not the case in other parts of the country. Indonesia's religion-state relations are also complex. Although there are political partnerships between the ulema and the state, the country's ulema groups are organized around diverse and independent factions, not centralized structures as in the Middle East. The two leading Islamic groups in the country, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, were established before the establishment of the state and have millions of members (Kitalararası, 2024).

### 3.9 Political Islam in Indonesia

Political Islam in Indonesia is an important component of the country's complex and diverse political landscape. Despite Indonesia being a Muslim-majority country, the political Islam movement cannot be reduced to a single entity. The country has different political and ideological tendencies among various Islamic groups. The fact that Pancasila and democracy are among the core values in Indonesia is an important factor determining the boundaries of political Islam. Islamist movements in the country have to accept the obligation to adapt to the secular structure and democratic principles of the state. This situation allows Islamic movements to organize and be effective in the political sphere in various ways. In Indonesia, political Islam plays an influential role in state governance and policy-making. However, as a result of the diversity of Islamic groups and the secular nature of the state, this influence is often manifested in emphasizing differences on various political and social issues rather than uniting on a common platform. Organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, the two leading Islamic groups in the country, operate effectively in the political arena. However, these groups are also divided into different wings and represent various political views. The dynamics of political Islam's religion-state relations in Indonesia are constantly evolving depending on the country's historical, cultural and political structure. Nevertheless, political Islam remains an important part of Indonesian society and shapes the political and social structure of the country (Kıtalararası, "İslam Dünyasında Reform: Endonezya Türkiye'nin Yapamadığına Talip").

The acceptance of democracy among Muslims in Indonesia is evident through their active participation in elections, dating back to at least 1955. This democratic spirit has led to the emergence of Islamic Political Parties in the country. According to Deliar Noer (1983), a political party serves as a platform for individuals sharing similar ideologies to come together, exchange ideas, and pursue common interests. An Islamic political party, therefore, can be understood as an organized group of Muslims advocating for Islam as the foundation of their struggle to express the aspirations, ideas, and ideals of Muslims within the nation. The formation of Islamic Political Parties is often associated with the effort to institutionalize Islam within Indonesia's political landscape. In the 1955 elections, Islamic political parties, including the Masyumi party, NU party, PSII, PERTI, and PPTI parties, collectively garnered 43.5 percent of Muslim votes. However, in the 1999 elections, considered the second democratic election after 1955, Islamic political parties such as PPP, UN, Justice Party, PNU, PKU, PSII, and PP saw a significant decline in support, receiving only 18.8 percent of the total votes. This marked a decrease of 25.32 percent compared to the 1955 elections. When including the votes of PKB and PAN, which are also Islamic mass-based parties, the combined share of Islamic parties in the 1999 elections was 37.19 percent. This represented a decrease of 6.31 percent compared to the 1955 election results (Umar, 2004 p. 112).

In the 2014 election, Islamic parties collectively received 31.41 percent of the national vote, with PKB at 9.04 percent, PKS at 6.79 percent, PAN at 7.59 percent, PPP at 6.53 percent, and PBB at 1.46 percent. However, this achievement was smaller than their performance in the 1999 elections. Despite Indonesia's predominantly Muslim population, there is no positive correlation

between this and the electability of Islamic parties. In the simultaneous regional elections in December 2015, PDIP won the most regions, followed by Gerindra, NasDem, PAN, PKS, Demokrat, PKB, Hanura, Golkar, PBB, PKPI, and PPP. This indicates that Islamic parties still lag behind nationalist parties in electoral success. Despite the growing Islamization in Indonesian society, factors like candidates' track records and party performance seem to weigh more heavily in political choices. Despite placing cadres in strategic positions through regional elections, Islamic parties have seen their vote shares decline over the years, suggesting that their presence in leadership positions does not necessarily translate to increased electoral support. For instance, PKS's success in placing its cadres in key positions in West Java did not result in a positive correlation with vote share, as the party's representation in the West Java DPRD declined from 14 seats in 2004 to 12 seats in 2014.

At the state level, several Islamic political parties have sought to amend the 1945 Constitution to include the Jakarta Charter and implement Sharia statutes in various regions. However, formalizing Sharia is not the primary focus of this discourse, which has received a positive response from the community. Indonesian voters increasingly prioritize parties that address their unmet needs. Moreover, internal divisions within Islamic parties, such as PPP and PKB, have hindered their progress, contributing to the emergence of splinter groups like PMB and divisions within parties like MCC between "justice" and "welfare" factions. The decline in votes for Islamic parties is partly due to widespread corruption among their figures, which tarnishes the sacred image of these parties based on religious values. This corruption exacerbates their negative perception among voters, making them indistinguishable from other corrupt parties. Islamic parties often resort to questionable means to finance their campaigns, leading to involvement in corruption cases. However, despite these challenges, Islamic parties serve as tools for Islamist moderation, enabling the pursuit of Sharia implementation through democratic channels rather than revolutionary means, as advocated by Dawam Rahardjo.

### 3.10 New Islamist Groups in Indonesia

Following Suharto's sudden fall in May 1998, Indonesia underwent rapid liberalization, led by his vice president B.J. Habibie. This period saw the opening of the country's tightly controlled public sphere, allowing new political parties, media outlets, and civil-society organizations, including those with Islamic ideologies, to operate freely. Previously underground Islamist organizations gained legal recognition, enabling them to engage in proselytization, mobilization, and sociopolitical advocacy without constraints. The Tarbiyah movement, for instance, transformed into a political party known as the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), while also continuing nonpolitical activities through affiliated groups like the Indonesian Muslim Students Action Union (KAMMI). Meanwhile, HTI received legal recognition as a civil-society organization in 2000 (Arifianto, 2020).

HTI declined to reorganize as a political party but gained prominence as one of Indonesia's most mobilized Islamist organizations. It organized frequent populist protests advocating against

corruption, socioeconomic inequality, and the transformation of Indonesia into an Islamic caliphate. The rise of various Islamist movements during the early Reformasi era fostered a "marketplace of ideas" where previously marginalized groups could promote diverse interpretations of Islamic theology through innovative media platforms (Arifianto, 2019).

The proliferation of outlets such as the internet, social media, mosques, campus preaching organizations, and community-based preaching groups has led to a fragmentation of authority in Indonesian Islam. Traditional sources of authority like NU and Muhammadiyah are no longer the sole voices guiding Muslims, as they now have access to alternative sources of Islamic knowledge and perspectives offered by new movements and preachers (Mandaville, 2007).

Islamist groups in Indonesia have effectively utilized the internet and social media to reach millions of followers, while traditional Islamic organizations like NU and Muhammadiyah have not been as active in developing their digital presence, allowing conservative and hard-line Islamist rivals to dominate online proselytization (Akmaliah, 2020).

While traditional Islamic organizations focus on in-person interactions with Muslim youths and use online platforms to strengthen their existing member base, Islamist groups leverage the internet for recruitment, identity-building, and establishing themselves as alternative authorities in Islam, even if not recognized as experts by established religious scholars (Slama, 2017).

Popular Islamist preachers in Indonesia, such as Hanan Attaki, Abdullah Gymnastiar, and Felix Siauw, have amassed millions of followers on Instagram, highlighting their significant influence, particularly among Indonesian Muslim millennials (The data on the Instagram followers of these preachers was calculated by the author on October 3, 2020.)

New Islamist groups and preachers in Indonesia are reshaping religious authority by diversifying sources of influence, moving it away from traditional Islamic organizations like NU and Muhammadiyah (Slama, 102).

## 4. DISCUSSIONS

Several aspects can be classified under Political Islam in Malaysia and Indonesia, including Islamic governance, Islamist movements, and cultural identity. Malaysia, a Southeast Asian nation with a federal monarchy, possesses a complex historical trajectory shaped by colonial occupations until achieving independence in 1957. Its multiethnic population includes indigenous tribes and traders from various regions, with Islam designated as the official state religion. Nevertheless, non-Muslims are permitted to practice their faiths freely. Traditional values, community, and family are deeply embedded in Malay society, with the Sultan esteemed as the protector of religion. Political decisions frequently consider ethnic and religious factors.

### 4.1 Islamic Governance

The advocacy for the implementation of Islamic laws and principles within the Malaysian government and society is evident in the Malaysian Constitution. Article 3 of the Constitution declares Islam as the religion of the Federation, while simultaneously ensuring the peaceful

practice of other religions. Furthermore, Sharia courts are vested with jurisdiction over personal matters for Muslims, including marriage, inheritance, and apostasy, functioning in parallel with civil courts.

On other side, Islamic governance in Indonesia is shaped by the country's pluralistic society and its guiding philosophy, Pancasila, which emphasizes monotheism, justice, unity, consultation, and social justice. Despite Indonesia's status as a Muslim-majority nation, the implementation of Islamic principles in governance is moderated by the need for tolerance and inclusivity of minority perspectives. Political Islam in Indonesia is diverse, with various Islamic parties and organizations, such as NU and Muhammadiyah, influencing policy and social norms. These traditional groups now face competition from new Islamist movements leveraging media to reshape religious authority and promote varied interpretations of Islam, reflecting the dynamic nature of Islamic governance in the country.

#### **4.2 Islamist Movements**

PAS (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia), have been key proponents of political Islam in Malaysia. PAS has actively advocated for the implementation of Sharia law at the state level. The party has governed several states, including Kelantan and Terengganu, where it has endeavored to introduce more comprehensive Islamic laws. The emergence of PAS marked a significant point in Malaysian history, where there was a notable shift towards the adoption and adherence to Islamic teachings and practices among the Malay population.

The role of Islam in Malaysian politics has evolved, with successive prime ministers interpreting its influence within constitutional and political contexts. Although Islam is enshrined as the state religion, its specific functions have varied across administrations, at times being emphasized and at other times marginalized. Debates within Islamic political thought regarding governance ranges from advocating a comprehensive Islamic system to supporting the separation of religious and political matters. Islamic policies have significantly impacted Malaysian society, leading to Islamization efforts in education, art, music, and clothing. The resurgence of Islam in politics has altered dynamics between parties such as PAS and UMNO. PAS initially sought to advocate for Islamic positions within the political establishment but saw its influence wane as UMNO incorporated Islamic sentiments to maintain Malay Muslim support. Islamic issues have become integral to Malay identity and voting patterns, with UMNO combining appeals to Islamic and material interests to retain political authority.

Opposite, Political Islam in Indonesia is diverse, with various ideological tendencies among Islamic groups. Despite this diversity, Islamic parties wield significant influence in governance and policymaking, navigating challenges such as declining electoral support and internal divisions. New Islamist groups have emerged, gaining legal recognition, and utilizing media platforms to promote diverse interpretations of Islam. Traditional Islamic organizations like NU and Muhammadiyah face competition from these groups, which leverage online platforms to reshape religious authority in Indonesia.

### 4.3 Cultural Identity

Malaysia experienced a significant increase in state-led Islamization efforts during Mahathir Mohamad's tenure as Prime Minister (1981-2003, 2018-2020). Policies implemented during this period included the establishment of Islamic institutions, the promotion of Islamic banking and finance, and the greater incorporation of Islamic principles in governance. Under Mahathir Mohamad's leadership, initiatives such as the introduction of Islamic banking, the IKIM radio channel, and the establishment of JAKIM (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia) were launched (Hamid, 2002).

On the otherhand, in Indonesia, despite being a Muslim-majority nation, implementing Islam in politics and society is challenging due to its diverse population. Multiculturalism, while potentially unifying through tolerance, can also lead to social conflicts in its absence. The Pancasila ideology, closely aligned with Islamic norms, serves as Indonesia's guiding philosophy, emphasizing monotheism, justice, unity, consultation, and social justice. Islam has deep historical roots in Indonesia, with scholars and heroes playing pivotal roles even before independence. However, implementing Islamic principles in governance faces hurdles due to the nation's pluralistic nature, necessitating tolerance towards minority perspectives.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Malaysia stands as a unique example of a multiethnic and multireligious society where Islam plays a pivotal role in both governance and societal dynamics. The country's rich history, marked by colonial occupations and eventual independence, has shaped its socio-political landscape, characterized by ethnic diversity and religious pluralism. The evolution of Islamic political thought in Malaysia, spanning classical, medieval, and modern eras, reflects the complex interplay between religion, governance, and society. Scholars and political leaders have grappled with the role of Islam in politics, resulting in diverse interpretations and approaches. The resurgence of Islam's prominence in Malaysian politics has been a significant factor in shaping political dynamics, particularly between parties like PAS and UMNO. While PAS initially sought to advocate for Islamic positions within the political establishment, UMNO strategically incorporated Islamic sentiments to maintain its political authority. This strategic adaptation has allowed UMNO to retain support among Malay Muslims while navigating the complexities of multiethnic politics.

However, the relationship between Islam and politics in Malaysia is far from static. It continues to evolve in response to changing societal norms, political contexts, and global influences. The interplay between Islam, ethnicity, and politics underscores the complexities of governing a diverse nation like Malaysia. Moving forward, Malaysia faces the challenge of balancing the principles of Islam with the values of democracy, pluralism, and inclusivity. The country's leaders must navigate these complexities with sensitivity, ensuring that the rights and freedoms of all citizens, regardless of ethnicity or religion, are protected and respected. Ultimately, Malaysia's journey toward harmonious coexistence and inclusive governance serves as a beacon of hope for other diverse societies grappling with similar challenges. By embracing diversity, upholding

democratic principles, and fostering dialogue and understanding, Malaysia can continue to thrive as a vibrant and inclusive nation in the global community.

Indonesia's experience with Islam in social politics and culture reflects the complexities of managing a diverse, multicultural society. While Islam is the majority religion, its implementation in politics and society faces challenges, including social stigma and conflicts arising from multiculturalism. The Pancasila ideology serves as a unifying force, aligning with Islamic values and guiding Indonesian society towards harmony and justice. Despite deep historical roots, political Islam in Indonesia is diverse and complex, with various ideological tendencies among Islamic groups. Islamic parties play significant roles in governance, but face challenges like declining electoral support and internal divisions. New Islamist groups have emerged, reshaping religious authority through innovative use of media platforms. Moving forward, Indonesia must navigate the tension between Islamic principles and pluralistic values, ensuring tolerance and inclusivity while upholding the nation's foundational principles. Embracing diversity and fostering dialogue among different religious and cultural groups are essential for Indonesia's continued progress and prosperity as a vibrant, inclusive nation in the global community.

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