

Article

The Complexity of ASEAN Way and Norms in Addressing Islam-Rooted Conflicts in Southeast Asia

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Abstract

This research aims to investigate ethno-religious conflicts in the Southeast Asia region with a focus on the role of religion (Islam), nationalism, and citizenship issues, as well as to understand the complexity of resolving these conflicts within the framework of ASEAN Way norms. This research combines qualitative approaches and policy analysis to provide a comprehensive picture of the interactions between conflict factors and regional norms. The research methodology includes analysis of ASEAN policy documents and case studies of selected conflicts in the region. Qualitative analysis will be used to explore community perceptions and experiences regarding conflict, while policy analysis will examine how ASEAN Way is reflected in conflict resolution efforts. Preliminary results show that religious factors and nationalism often trigger conflict, while citizenship issues can complicate the dynamics of conflict. The ASEAN Way, which emphasizes the principles of non-intervention, deliberation, and consensus, has limited impact in responding to ethno-religious conflicts. This research will provide insight into how the ASEAN Way can be improved to be more effectively respond the ethno-religious conflict in the region. The implications of this research can also help design more effective conflict resolution mechanism and support sustainable peace in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Ethno-Religious; ASEAN Way, Islam, Nationalism, Citizenship

INTRODUCTION

War in a religious context is often referred to as religious war or ethno-religious conflict. This occurs when religion is used as a basis for group identity, and religious differences then become a source of serious disagreement. Ethno-religious conflict is a phenomenon that can influence and be analyzed in the study of international relations. This kind of conflict includes dynamics involving ethnic and religious differences at the national level or across national borders, and the consequences can be felt in relations between countries (Liow, 2020). The role of religion itself as a source of ethno-religious conflict in the study of international relations can be understood through several dimensions involving differences in religion, belief, and ethnic identity. Some of its important aspects include the formation of group identity, tensions of ethnic and religious identity, religious politics, claims to sacred territory, the role of media and religious narratives, as well as the role of the state and discriminatory policies (Bertrand, 2018).

In the context of the formation of group identity, religion is often the main pillar in forming group identity. Groups with different religions may feel they have unique identities and feel threatened by groups with different religious beliefs. This can create conflict dynamics between groups in society. The ethno-religious conflict then often arises from tensions between different ethnic groups and adherents of different religions. These differences can create inequality, discrimination, and mutual suspicion between groups, worsening ethno-religious relations. Political leaders and certain groups also may use religion as a tool to strengthen their support base or to create tensions with other groups. In other words, religious politics can play a role in exploiting religious differences for political interests (Liow, 2020).

The fact that ethno-religious conflicts are often related to claims over territory or places considered sacred by certain religious groups. Control of these territories can be a source of tension and conflict, especially if the claims conflict with those of other religious groups. Meanwhile, media and religious narratives can play an important role in shaping people's perceptions and understanding of ethno-religious conflicts. Unbalanced reporting or derogatory narratives can increase tension and conflict. In addition, countries that adopt discriminatory policies based on religion can create inequality and ethno-religious tensions. This discrimination can be a source of conflict and instability in international relations (Reid & Goh, 2020).

However, it is important to note that ethno-religious conflict is not always inherent or natural in religious differences. Political, economic, and social factors also play an important role in shaping conflict dynamics. Regarding political factors, the use of religious politics by certain leaders or groups to gain power or mobilize political support can exacerbate ethno-religious tensions. Religious divisions in political systems, especially if they are not inclusive, can be a source of discontent and conflict. Economic inequality and access to economic resources are also often linked to ethno-religious conflict. These inequalities can create tensions between groups competing for resources, jobs, or land. Meanwhile, social tensions and differences in culture, identity, or social norms can also contribute to ethno-religious conflict. Social discrimination and inequality in terms of social rights can create dissatisfaction and anger among certain religious groups (Saidin & Yusoff, 2020).

One region that is seen as potentially experiencing ethno-religious conflict is Southeast Asia. Several factors that can explain Southeast Asia's vulnerability to ethno-religious conflict include ethnic and religious diversity, a history of colonialism and ethnic conflict, identity politics and social exclusion, as well as armed conflict, and controversial borders. Due to ethnic and religious diversity, Southeast Asia does have a very diverse population. Countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand have different ethnic and religious groups. This diversity, while a wealth, can also be a source of tension if not managed well. The history of colonialism in this region has also played a role in shaping the political boundaries and ethnic identities that underlie several conflicts (Saidin & Yusoff, 2020). Ethnic and religious separation during the colonial period also left lasting tensions. There is also the fact that several countries in Southeast Asia experience identity politics that emphasize religious and ethnic differences. The

implementation of policies that favor one particular ethnic or religious group and discrimination against other groups has contributed to creating tension and conflict. In the end, several armed conflicts in Southeast Asia, such as the conflict in Pattani (Thailand) or Mindanao (Philippines), also show a significant ethno-religious dimension. Apart from that, controversial border disputes have also contributed to ethno-religious conflicts (Camilleri & Schottmann, 2017).

Specifically, Southeast Asia then became the stage for various ethno-religious conflicts involving Islamic groups. Such conflicts are often complex and related to history, ethnicity, religion, and political factors. Therefore, a deep understanding of the historical context and local dynamics is critical to overcoming conflict and achieving sustainable peace. A holistic approach involving intergroup dialogue, political inclusion, and economic development could be the key to addressing ethno-religious conflicts in the region (Trijono, 2021). One of the regional actors who is expected to be able to act as a mediator in resolving various ethno-religious conflicts is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In this context, the existence of the ASEAN Way, which refers to a unique approach or style in the way ASEAN operates and makes decisions, is seen as the key to ASEAN's success and resilience over the years in building a stable and peaceful region in Southeast Asia. However, the existence of the principle of non-interference, which is one of the main characteristics of the ASEAN Way, has become a complexity in efforts to achieve the effectiveness of ASEAN's role (Limpo & Beauty, 2022).

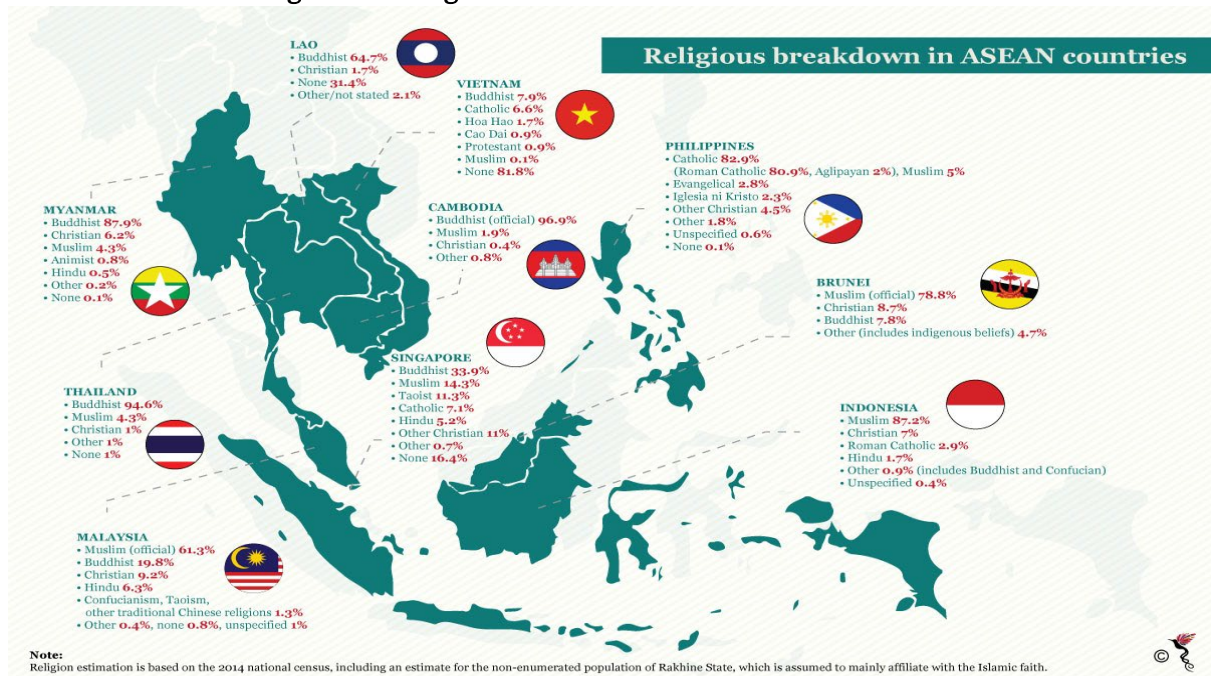
Recent studies have highlighted the complex interplay of factors contributing to ethno-religious conflicts in Southeast Asia. For instance, Bertrand (2018) emphasizes the role of historical grievances and political exclusion in fueling contemporary conflicts. His research suggests that unresolved historical issues continue to exacerbate tensions in multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies. Similarly, Liow (2020) discusses the influence of political Islam and how it intersects with ethnic identities, contributing to the complexity of conflicts in the region. Additional research by Reid and Goh (2020) examines the impact of socio-economic disparities on ethno-religious tensions. They argue that economic inequality often overlaps with religious and ethnic divisions, creating fertile ground for conflict. Furthermore, Tan (2021) explores the role of external actors and their influence on local conflicts, suggesting that international interventions can sometimes exacerbate rather than mitigate tensions. Despite these insights, there remains a significant gap in understanding the specific mechanisms through which ASEAN's principles and policies influence ethno-religious conflict dynamics.

Based on the explanation above, this research will specifically attempt to highlight how religion (Islam) has become a source of ethno-religious conflict that occurs in various regions in Southeast Asia. In this context, it is important to discuss how religion is intertwined with nationalism and citizenship in several regions of Southeast Asia that are prone to conflict. This research will also discuss how the existence of ASEAN is related to the complexity of ASEAN Way norms, especially the principle of non-interference, in resolving various ethno-religious conflicts. Also discussed is the latest public opinion regarding ASEAN's role.

DISCUSSION

ASEAN member countries have quite significant religious diversity. The diversity of religions among ASEAN member countries creates a diverse and complex religious landscape in the region. Factors such as history, culture, and demographics have contributed to this diversity. Although the majority of ASEAN countries have a majority of the population belonging to a particular religion, there are also significant religious minorities in some countries (Emmers, 2017). The following is an overview of religious diversity in several ASEAN member countries:

Figure 1. Religious Breakdown in ASEAN Countries



Source: Nair, S, and Mirtha, S. (2017)

Figure 1 above contains facts regarding religions which are the majority and minorities in ASEAN countries. The majority of Brunei's population adheres to Islam, and Islam is the country's official religion. Theravada Buddhism is the majority religion in Cambodia, with approximately 96.9% of the population identifying as Buddhists. There are also minorities of Muslims and traditional religions. Indonesia has quite a large religious diversity. Although, the majority of Indonesia's population is Muslim, there are also large communities of Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists. Some regions in Indonesia, such as Bali, have a majority Hindu population. Theravada Buddhism dominates in Laos, where most Laotians identify as Buddhists. Malaysia has religious diversity with most of the population being Muslim. However, there are also significant communities of Buddhists, Christians and Hindus. Myanmar has significant religious diversity. Theravada Buddhism is the majority, but there are also minorities of Islam, Christianity, and traditional religions. The Philippines has a majority Catholic population, largely due to the Spanish colonial period. There is also a significant Muslim community, especially

in the Mindanao region. Singapore is a multi-religious society with a diversity of religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Taoism. However, most of the population are Buddhists and Christians. Theravada Buddhism dominates in Thailand, with most Thais identifying themselves as Buddhists. There is also a Muslim minority, especially in the southern region. Meanwhile, in Vietnam, Mahayana Buddhism and traditional Vietnamese religion play an important role in the country. Apart from that, there are also small communities of Catholics and Protestants.

Based on the fact of religious diversity in ASEAN, there is also the fact that Islam has a significant influence in Southeast Asia, and there are several ethno-religious conflicts in this region involving Muslim groups or communities. Some examples of ethnoreligious conflicts involving Islam in Southeast Asia include:

Table 1. Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Southeast Asia

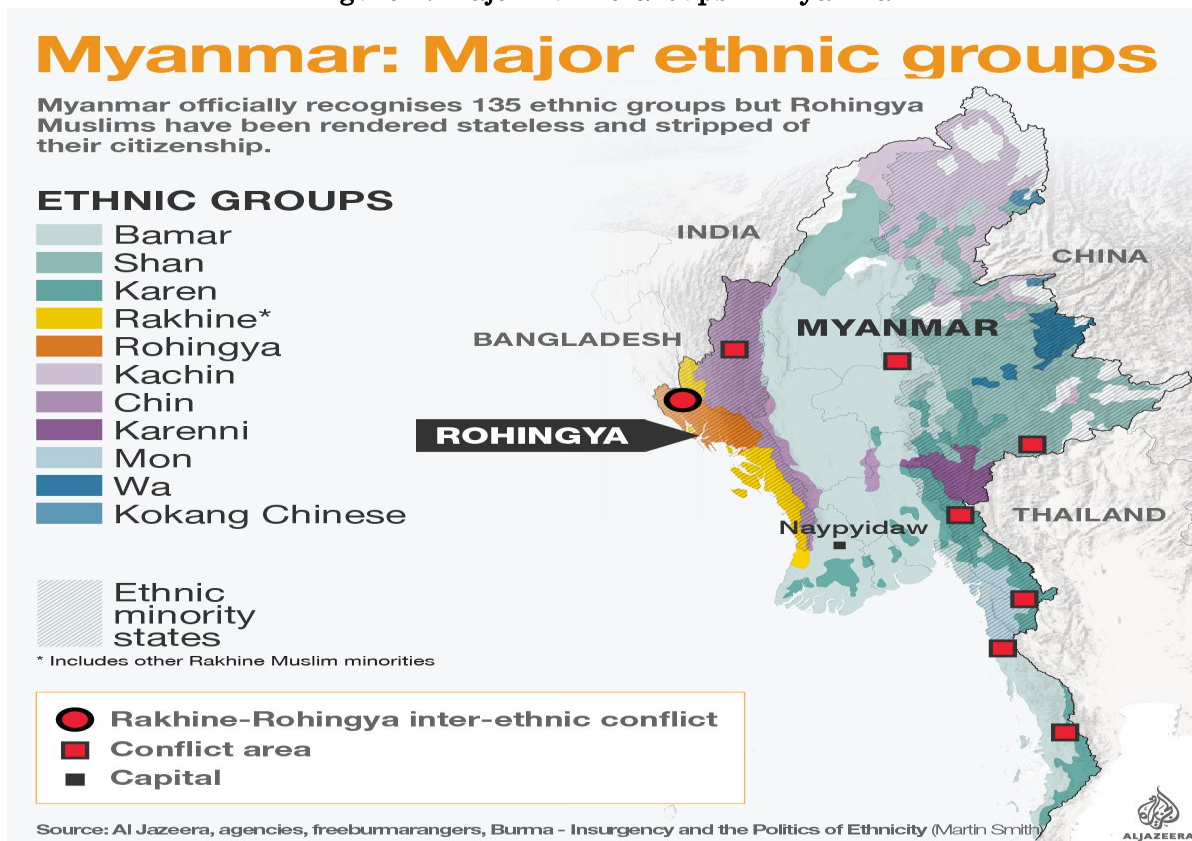
No.		
1.	Conflict in Pattani, Thailand	The Pattani region in southern Thailand has a majority Muslim population, and conflict between the Buddhist-majority Thai government and Muslim separatist groups has persisted for decades. Groups such as the Pattani Liberation Movement (BRN) were involved in a series of attacks and bomb attacks.
2.	Conflict in Mindanao, Philippines	The conflict in Mindanao involves various Muslim groups, including the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Abu Sayyaf. This conflict involves issues of autonomy and political rights for Muslim communities in the region. Despite peace agreements such as the Bangsamoro Peace Agreement in 2014, challenges continue.
3.	Conflict in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia	The ethnoreligious conflict in Poso, Central Sulawesi, in the late 1990s to early 2000s involved tensions between Muslim and Christian groups. Armed groups such as Laskar Jihad were involved in this conflict, which claimed lives and created instability in the region.
4.	Rohingya crisis, Myanmar	The conflict in Rakhine State involves the Rohingya ethnic group, the majority of whom are Muslims, who experience systemic discrimination and violence from the Buddhist-majority Myanmar government. This conflict has caused a massive refugee crisis, with thousands of Rohingya fleeing to Bangladesh and neighboring countries.
5.	Conflict in Aceh, Indonesia (Before the Peace Agreement)	The conflict in Aceh between the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) was essentially an ethno-religious conflict, with the majority of Aceh's population adhering to Islam. This conflict ended with the Helsinki Agreement in 2005 which granted broad autonomy to Aceh.

Source: Data was collected from various secondary data

Table 1 above shows that Southeast Asia, including ASEAN member countries, has a complex history in terms of ethno-religious conflicts. Several examples of ethno-religious conflict in the region involve tensions between different ethnic and religious groups. One of the ethnoreligious conflicts that has emerged in the Southeast Asia region is the conflict in Rakhine State, Myanmar, involving the Rohingya ethnic group. This ethno-religious conflict cannot be separated from the fact that Myanmar has many ethnic and religious groups that inhabit its territory. Some of these ethnic and religious groups have rich

histories and cultures, and a number of them have been involved in armed conflict with the Myanmar government. Several significant ethnic and religious groups in Myanmar as seen in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2. Major Ethnic Groups in Myanmar



Source: Aljazeera (2017).

Figure 2 above shows that the Bamar (Burmese) ethnic group is the majority ethnic group in Myanmar, and they dominate politically and culturally. The country's capital, Yangon, and former capital, Mandalay, are in areas predominantly inhabited by the Bamar people. Meanwhile, the Rohingya are a Muslim ethnic group whose majority live in Rakhine State, in western Myanmar. They have faced discrimination and violence, and conflicts in the region have attracted international attention.

One of the regional actors who is expected to be able to play a role in resolving various ethno-religious conflicts in the Southeast Asia region is ASEAN, although the complexity of the ASEAN way norms adopted by ASEAN is seen by the ASEAN public as having made ASEAN ineffective in carrying out its role. Regarding this, a survey was conducted involving 1,308 Southeast Asians. Respondents came from 5 affiliation categories: (a) academia, think-tankers, and researchers; (b) business or finance representatives; (c) civil society, NGO, or media representatives; (d) government officials; and (e) regional or international organizations personnel (ASEAN Studies Centre, 2023). The survey results show the following:

Figure 3. ASEAN Public Perspective Regarding the Effectiveness of ASEAN's Role

2023					
Country	ASEAN is becoming an arena of major power competition and its member states may become major power proxies	ASEAN is becoming increasingly disunited	ASEAN is elitist and disconnected from ordinary people	ASEAN is slow and ineffective, and thus cannot cope with fluid political and economic developments, becoming irrelevant in the new world order	ASEAN is unable to recover from the pandemic
ASEAN	73.0%	60.7%	46.6%	82.6%	37.2%
Brunei	80.0%	42.5%	37.5%	88.3%	51.7%
Cambodia	84.3%	59.7%	44.8%	70.9%	40.3%
Indonesia	73.6%	54.5%	59.5%	86.8%	25.6%
Laos	40.2%	63.6%	66.4%	70.1%	59.8%
Malaysia	72.6%	60.5%	53.2%	80.6%	33.1%
Myanmar	55.7%	72.2%	59.1%	77.4%	35.7%
Philippines	76.8%	57.6%	39.4%	84.8%	41.4%
Singapore	83.2%	70.2%	31.7%	89.9%	25.0%
Thailand	72.9%	56.9%	51.4%	84.0%	34.7%
Vietnam	90.4%	69.1%	22.8%	93.4%	24.3%

Source: ASEAN Studies Centre, Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute (2023).

The survey results above show that Southeast Asians continue to express their disappointment with the effectiveness of the ASEAN. 82.6% of Southeast Asians say that the regional organization is "slow and ineffective, and thus cannot cope with fluid political and economic developments." Specifically related to resolving the Rohingya crisis, slightly more than a third of regional respondents (38.1%) want to see ASEAN engage in independent dialogue with all key stakeholders, including with the shadow National Unity Government, to build trust. There are also other views expressed by respondents regarding solutions that ASEAN can take in resolving the Rohingya crisis as shown in the following survey results diagram:

Figure 4. What ASEAN Must Do to Move the Myanmar Issue Forward

Country	Engage in independent dialogue with all key stakeholders, including the National Unity Government, in Myanmar to build trust		Mount a coordinated and unified response with international partners		Utilise harder methods to effectively curtail the SAC		Expel Myanmar from ASEAN		Not interfere	
	2022	2023	2022	2023	2022	2023	2022	2023	2022	2023
ASEAN	37.8%	38.1%	24.4%	15.1%	19.6%	18.0%	9.8%	13.7%	8.4%	15.2%
Brunei	50.9%	34.2%	24.5%	15.0%	15.1%	23.3%	5.7%	22.5%	3.8%	5.0%
Cambodia	43.2%	17.2%	21.0%	9.0%	16.0%	13.4%	4.9%	13.4%	14.8%	47.0%
Indonesia	42.7%	50.4%	24.4%	12.4%	22.1%	24.0%	6.9%	9.9%	3.8%	3.3%
Laos	36.4%	40.2%	31.8%	12.1%	2.3%	1.9%	6.8%	2.8%	22.7%	43.0%
Malaysia	34.8%	41.1%	15.6%	15.3%	19.3%	20.2%	16.3%	16.1%	14.1%	7.3%
Myanmar	22.0%	36.5%	9.1%	18.3%	43.4%	15.7%	21.4%	7.8%	4.0%	21.7%
Philippines	38.8%	41.4%	38.5%	18.2%	11.5%	21.2%	4.5%	15.2%	6.8%	4.0%
Singapore	33.3%	34.6%	23.9%	19.7%	23.9%	20.2%	14.4%	18.8%	4.5%	6.7%
Thailand	39.3%	34.7%	26.5%	18.1%	21.4%	21.5%	10.3%	20.1%	2.6%	5.6%
Vietnam	36.8%	50.7%	28.5%	12.5%	20.8%	18.4%	6.9%	10.3%	6.9%	8.1%

Source: ASEAN Studies Centre & ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute (2023).

The various data and survey results above show that ethno-religious conflict in Southeast Asia is often a serious problem that is not only related to religious aspects but also involves dimensions of nationalism, ethnic identity, and citizenship. Examples of ethno-religious conflicts in Southeast Asia, such as the conflict in the Pattani region in Thailand, the conflict in Mindanao in the Philippines, and the conflict in Rakhine State in Myanmar, reflect the complexity of this problem.

Islam, Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Southeast Asia, and its Impact on Nationalism and Citizenship

Countries in Southeast Asia are characterized by multi ethnicity, religious, and cultural diversity. Indonesia is a country with very high cultural diversity. It includes more than 300 ethnic groups speaking more than 700 languages and dialects. Some of the largest ethnic groups in Indonesia include Javanese, Sundanese, Batak, Minangkabau, and Balinese. Islam is the majority in Indonesia, but there are also communities of Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and traditional beliefs. Malaysia is a multiethnic country that includes three main ethnic groups, namely Malays, Chinese, and Indians. Apart from that, there are indigenous groups in Sabah and Sarawak such as the Kadazandusun, Dayak, and Iban. Malaysia also has various religions, including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Thailand has various ethnic groups such as Thai, Karen, Lisu, Akha, and many others. The majority of Thailand's population identifies as Thai, but there are also minority groups such as ethnic Chinese and Muslims in the south. Vietnam has a diverse culture that includes ethnic groups such as Kinh (Vietnamese), Tay, Hmong, Cham, and many more. Vietnamese is the official language, while the dominant religion is Buddhism. The Philippines is a very diverse country, with more than 175 ethnic groups. The majority of Filipinos are of Malay descent, but there are also Chinese, Spanish, and American influences in Filipino culture. The Philippines has many languages and dialects, with Tagalog as the official language (Rüland et al., 2021).

There is also Myanmar which has significant ethnic diversity, including the Bamar (Burmese), Karen, Kachin, Chin, Rohingya, and many more. Buddhism is the majority in Myanmar, but there are also communities of Muslims, Christians, and traditional religions (Holt, 2019). Cambodia has a rich culture with a strong Khmer history. The majority of Cambodia's population is ethnic Khmer, but there are also minority ethnic groups such as the Cham and Vietnamese exiles. Buddhism is the main religion in Cambodia. Brunei has a large portion of the population who are ethnic Bruneian Malays, with the majority being Muslim. Singapore is a very ethnically and culturally diverse country. The majority of the population is of Malay, Chinese, and Indian descent, with various religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity. Laos has several ethnic minorities such as the Hmong, Khmu, and Akha, in addition to the Lao ethnic majority. Theravada Buddhism is the main religion in Laos. Lastly is Timor-Leste which has various ethnic groups including Timorese, Malays, Chinese, and Portuguese. Catholicism is the dominant religion in Timor-Leste (Suntana & Tresnawaty, 2021).

It cannot be denied that the ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity of the countries in Southeast Asia, while being one of the region's riches, can also become a source of ethno-religious conflict if not managed well. Various ethno-religious conflicts in this region often involve tensions between different religious and ethnic groups. Islam, which is the majority religion in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei, but on the other hand is a minority religion in Myanmar, Thailand, and the Philippines, has contributed to a series of ethno-religious conflicts that are still ongoing in this region (Liow, 2020).

Conflict in Pattani, Thailand, for example. The Pattani region in southern Thailand has a majority Muslim population. This conflict involves economic and political inequality, as well as religious and cultural differences between the Muslim population and the Buddhist majority. Groups such as the Pattani Liberation Movement (BRN) were involved in a series of attacks against the Thai government. This conflict continues with varying levels of intensity (International Crisis Group, 2019). Next, there is the conflict in Mindanao, Philippines, which involves the struggle of Muslim groups for autonomy and political rights. The region does have a history of economic inequality and ethno-religious tensions between Muslims and the Catholic majority in the Philippines. There are independence movements such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Abu Sayyaf which are involved in this conflict with the Philippine government. In 2014, a peace agreement was agreed that granted autonomy to the Bangsamoro region (Hutchcroft, 2018).

In Indonesia, there were also two ethno-religious conflicts, namely the conflict in Poso, Central Sulawesi, and the Aceh conflict. The ethno-religious conflict in Poso, Central Sulawesi, is a conflict involving tensions between Muslim and Christian groups. This conflict mainly occurred in the late 1990s to early 2000s. Armed groups such as Laskar Jihad have become involved in this conflict, exacerbating its complexity and intensity. Meanwhile, the Aceh conflict is one of the most famous ethno-religious conflicts in Indonesia. Aceh has a majority population that adheres to Islam, and some Acehnese people feel that their religious and cultural identity is ignored by the central government. In this regard, the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) is a group that wants Aceh's independence. The conflict reached its peak in the early 21st century before the government and GAM reached a peace agreement in 2005 that granted Aceh broad autonomy (Legionosuko et al., 2020). Lastly, there is the Rohingya conflict in Myanmar. The conflict in Rakhine State involves the Rohingya ethnic group, the majority of whom are Muslims, who face discrimination and violence from the Buddhist-majority Myanmar government. This conflict involves religious and ethnic dimensions. This conflict has caused a massive refugee crisis, with thousands of Rohingya fleeing to Bangladesh and neighboring countries (Chaudhury & Samāddāra, 2018).

Although the various conflicts above involve Muslims and Islam, it is important to note that Islam as a religion is not intrinsically a source of ethno-religious conflict. On the other hand, conflicts involving Islam in several countries in Southeast Asia are often influenced by contextual and complex factors, such as politics, history, and socio-economics. Therefore, it is more important to see how these various ethno-religious conflicts can have a significant impact on nationalism and citizenship in several regions

of Southeast Asia. In other words, ethno-religious conflicts involving religion (Islam) in Indonesia, the Philippines, Myanmar, and Thailand can have a significant impact on nationalism and citizenship in each country. To understand the root causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Southeast Asia, it is crucial to analyze the interplay between historical, socio-economic, and political dynamics. For instance, in the Pattani conflict, historical grievances stemming from the annexation of the Pattani Sultanate by Siam (now Thailand) in the early 20th century have left enduring resentments among the Malay Muslim population (Funston, 2020). These historical injustices have been compounded by socio-economic disparities, as the Pattani region remains one of the poorest in Thailand, with limited access to education and economic opportunities for its Muslim population. These conditions have fostered feelings of marginalization and fueled identity-based grievances (International Crisis Group, 2019).

Similarly, the Mindanao conflict in the Philippines is deeply rooted in colonial and post-colonial history. Spanish and American colonization disrupted indigenous Muslim governance structures and introduced policies that marginalized Muslim communities (Lara, & Schoofs, 2016). Land ownership disputes and economic inequalities have perpetuated these tensions in the post-independence era. Moreover, the involvement of militant groups like Abu Sayyaf and the emergence of radical ideologies have further complicated peace efforts (Hutchcroft, 2018).

The Rohingya crisis in Myanmar exemplifies how state policies and nationalist narratives can exacerbate ethno-religious tensions. The denial of citizenship rights under Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law and systematic discrimination against the Rohingya have institutionalized their statelessness. This has been exacerbated by ultra-nationalist Buddhist rhetoric, which portrays the Rohingya as outsiders and a threat to national identity (Chaudhury & Samāddāra, 2018). These policies have not only led to large-scale displacement but have also attracted international criticism and shaped Myanmar's international relations (Ibrahim, 2018).

Broader implications of these conflicts include the potential for radicalization among marginalized groups, which can spill over into regional security concerns. For example, the transnational nature of Islamist militant networks has linked local grievances in Pattani and Mindanao to global jihadist movements. Additionally, the refugee crisis stemming from the Rohingya conflict has placed a strain on neighboring countries like Bangladesh and has become a significant point of discussion in ASEAN's regional stability and human rights agenda (Singh, 2020).

Efforts to address these conflicts require a multifaceted approach that includes economic development, education reforms, and political inclusion. Strengthening interfaith and inter-ethnic dialogue can also play a vital role in promoting mutual understanding and reducing tensions. Regional organizations such as ASEAN can serve as platforms for facilitating dialogue and advocating for human rights, although their effectiveness is often limited by non-interference principles (Jones, 2012).

The same thing also happened to the conflict in Mindanao, Philippines, where this conflict could create instability that affected feelings of nationalism and citizenship in the

Philippines. The Bangsamoro Peace Accord, which aims to grant greater autonomy to the Muslim region of Mindanao, has influenced the structure of the national government and could have an impact on the concept of citizenship. Likewise, the conflict in Pattani also influenced nationalism and citizenship by creating instability in the region. The conflict in Southern Thailand has had an impact on identity politics, with Malay Muslim communities asserting their cultural and religious identity in response to policies perceived as assimilationist by the Thai government. This has led to tensions between central governance and local autonomy, further complicating efforts to integrate the region into the broader Thai polity.

In all these cases, ethno-religious conflicts have reshaped the discourse on nationalism and citizenship, pushing governments to reconsider their approaches to governance, inclusion, and regional stability. Understanding these root causes and broader implications is essential for crafting effective policy responses that promote peace and development in Southeast Asia.

The Complexity of ASEAN Way in Resolving Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Southeast Asia

"ASEAN Way" refers to a series of norms, principles, and approaches that are characteristic of the dynamics of relations between ASEAN member countries. Although ASEAN aims to create peace, stability, and cooperation in the region, the ASEAN Way approach sometimes faces complexity in resolving ethno-religious conflicts in Southeast Asia. Some of the complexities that may arise include those related to non-intervention and the principle of sovereignty, commitment to consensus, priorities for political stability, limited legal tools and mechanisms, issues of national sensitivity and identity, and limited conflict resolution capabilities (Oishi, 2019).

One of the main aspects of the ASEAN Way is the principle of non-intervention and respect for national sovereignty. While this promotes a position of non-interference in a country's internal affairs, at the same time, it can become an obstacle in dealing with ethno-religious conflicts involving issues of human rights and minority protection. The ASEAN Way also emphasizes decision-making through consensus. This can become complex in ethno-religious conflict situations where there are differences of opinion or disagreement between ASEAN members in assessing or responding to a conflict (Yukawa, 2018). There is also political stability, which is a top priority in the ASEAN Way, and sometimes this can result in an emphasis on conflict resolution that maintains the status quo while avoiding open confrontation. This approach may not always address the root causes of ethno-religious conflict. Ethno-religious issues are also often highly nationally sensitive and related to identity. ASEAN member states may be reluctant to intervene in issues that are considered too internal or related to national identity (Jones, 2019). Also important is the fact that ASEAN has a limited history of conflict resolution, especially when involving ethno-religious issues. The lack of a successful track record in responding to such conflicts may create doubts about ASEAN's ability to deal with the complexities of such conflicts (Akins, 2018).

In fact, for example, the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar has become a big test for ASEAN in carrying out its role. Some important issues of the Rohingya crisis that should be of concern to ASEAN include citizenship discrimination, violence and displacement, the Rohingya refugee crisis, and attempted genocide (Yusuf, 2018). Regarding the citizenship discrimination issue, in 1982, the Myanmar government passed the Citizenship Law which effectively excluded Rohingya from citizenship. This makes them one of the ethnic groups that is not officially recognized in Myanmar.

Meanwhile, since the beginning of the 21st century, especially in 2012, the Rakhine State region has witnessed conflict between the Rohingya community and the non-Muslim population, resulting in violence, killings, and massive displacement. Many Rohingya fled to neighboring countries, especially Bangladesh. The Rohingya refugee crisis reached its peak in 2017 when Myanmar's military offensive against Rohingya rebel groups led to mass displacement. More than half a million Rohingya fled to Bangladesh in a short time, creating one of the world's largest refugee crises. Regarding this situation, some parties, including human rights bodies and UN officials, have described the Myanmar military's actions as an attempted genocide against the Rohingya. The Myanmar government denies these accusations, calling the military operation a response to attacks by the Rohingya rebel group (Kim, 2017).

In short, the Rohingya issue has attracted international attention, sparked international condemnation of the Myanmar government, and called for action to resolve the conflict and protect human rights (Askandar, 2021). Despite several diplomatic efforts and humanitarian assistance carried out by ASEAN and its member countries, the crisis is still ongoing and requires a comprehensive and sustainable solution. In this context, ASEAN's response has been criticized as insufficient, particularly regarding the lack of direct action against Myanmar's government due to the principle of non-interference. For example, although ASEAN established the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) to provide aid to affected communities, its scope remains limited to humanitarian assistance without addressing systemic discrimination against the Rohingya population (Davies, 2019).

On the other hand, public participation in efforts to resolve ethno-religious conflicts in the Southeast Asia region involves the active role of civil society, religious groups, educational institutions, and individuals in helping to reduce tensions, build dialogue, and create an environment that supports peace. However, in the ASEAN context, several challenges and limitations need to be overcome to strengthen public participation in resolving ethno-religious conflicts. For example, this is related to freedom of opinion, where several countries in the Southeast Asia region have restrictions on freedom of opinion and association (Kurlantzick, 2020). These restrictions can hinder the active participation of civil society and individuals in advocating for peace and conflict resolution. Effective public participation also requires inclusion and fair representation of various groups in society. However, some community groups, especially minorities, have not been well represented in the conflict resolution process.

The media also plays an important role in shaping public opinion, where media that is neither neutral nor polarized can exacerbate tensions and limit constructive dialogue. In this case, independent and responsible media is needed to support positive public participation (George, 2019). In addition, ASEAN has played a mediating role in other ethno-religious conflicts in the region, such as those in southern Thailand and Mindanao, Philippines. In southern Thailand, ASEAN's principles facilitated informal dialogues that complemented national peace processes, even though its official role was limited. In Mindanao, the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (AIPR) has supported capacity-building initiatives and shared best practices for conflict resolution and reconciliation (Caballero-Anthony, 2018).

In the context of the complexity faced by regional organizations such as ASEAN and limited public participation in efforts to resolve various ethno-religious conflicts, religion (Islam) can play an important role as a solution and means of resolving ethno-religious conflicts in the Southeast Asian region. The following are several examples of the role of religion, especially Islam, in efforts to resolve conflicts in the region, including unifier and moral leader, mediator, and peacemaker, teacher of tolerance and pluralism, proclaimer of human values, participation in the reconciliation process, as well as engagement in interfaith dialogue (Islam, 2023).

Religion, including Islam, can serve as a powerful unifier of society, with religious leaders acting as moral authorities who strive to reduce tensions and resolve conflicts by promoting values of peace, tolerance, and justice. Esteemed religious figures often function as mediators and peacemakers, facilitating dialogue and peaceful negotiations among conflicting parties. Through religious education, especially in Islamic institutions, the values of tolerance, pluralism, and respect for differences are imparted, helping to mitigate misunderstandings and prejudices between diverse groups. Furthermore, religions are heralds of human values, with leaders emphasizing respect for human rights, peace, and justice, which is crucial for addressing ethno-religious conflicts. In the reconciliation process, religion plays a supportive role, with leaders mobilizing their followers to endorse reconciliation efforts and rebuild intergroup trust.

Additionally, interfaith dialogue, encouraged by religious participation, provides a vital platform for exchanging ideas, easing tensions, and fostering trust among adherents of different faiths (Warner & Sacks, 2018). For instance, interfaith dialogue initiatives led by Islamic and Christian leaders in Mindanao have played a critical role in fostering reconciliation and trust-building among communities affected by decades of conflict. Similarly, Islamic organizations in Indonesia, such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, have promoted the values of tolerance and pluralism, contributing to the broader regional discourse on religious harmony (Feener & Daly, 2016).

However, it is important to note that the effectiveness of the role of religion, especially Islam, and interfaith dialogue as a means of resolving ethno-religious conflicts in the Southeast Asia region may vary depending on various factors, including local context, the impact of the conflict, and the level of involvement of the parties involved. Enhancing ASEAN's institutional mechanisms, promoting greater public participation,

and integrating the role of religion into conflict resolution strategies are critical steps toward achieving sustainable peace in the region (Acharya, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Ethno-religious conflicts in Southeast Asia are multifaceted issues that arise from the intersection of religion, nationalism, and citizenship. These conflicts are exacerbated by historical grievances, socio-economic inequalities, and discriminatory state policies, as demonstrated in cases such as the Pattani conflict in Thailand, the Mindanao conflict in the Philippines, and the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar. Islam, as a significant religious presence in the region, plays a complex role, serving both as a source of identity in conflicts and as a potential bridge for peacebuilding and reconciliation.

The analysis reveals that ASEAN's normative framework, particularly the ASEAN Way, offers both opportunities and challenges in addressing these conflicts. While its principles of non-interference and consensus-building ensure regional stability, they also limit decisive action in situations requiring urgent intervention. This limitation is evident in ASEAN's response to the Rohingya crisis, where humanitarian efforts have fallen short of addressing systemic discrimination and statelessness.

To enhance its effectiveness, ASEAN must adapt its norms to include mechanisms for proactive conflict resolution, such as fostering interfaith dialogue, promoting inclusive policies, and strengthening regional legal frameworks. Furthermore, integrating public participation and leveraging the moral and unifying role of religion—particularly Islam—can contribute to sustainable peace. In conclusion, addressing ethno-religious conflicts in Southeast Asia requires a holistic approach that combines institutional reforms within ASEAN, empowerment of civil society, and the promotion of tolerance and mutual understanding. By doing so, the region can move closer to achieving lasting stability and cohesion amidst its rich diversity.

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