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Progressive Islam and Conservative Islam in Southeast Asia: The Dialectics of Islam in the Current Modernity

Firdaus Sirait¹, Nasirin Roset², Edin Mustapa Utoh Talum³, Salwa Jehan⁴

¹Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University, Indonesia

²Institute An-Nikmah Al-Islamiyah Phnom Penh, Cambodia

³Mahad Rahmanie Al-Arabi Al-Islamie, Philippines

⁴University of Indonesia, Indonesia

Corresponding E-mail: firdaussirait@gmail.com

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Abstract

This article explores the dialectical relationship between progressive and conservative Islamic movements in Southeast Asia within the broader context of modernity. Progressive Islam emphasizes democratic values, social justice, and human rights by reinterpreting Islamic teachings in line with contemporary realities. In contrast, conservative Islam upholds the strict application of sharia and the preservation of traditional norms as central to political and legal systems. Through a qualitative approach and political discourse analysis, this study investigates how both ideological orientations shape Islamic activism, public policy, and the state–religion nexus in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei. The findings reveal that while Indonesia offers greater space for progressive Islamic engagement, Malaysia and Brunei institutionalize more conservative expressions of Islam. This dynamic illustrates how Islamic movements in the region continuously negotiate their roles amid the pressures of political modernity and religious orthodoxy.

Keywords: Progressive Islam; Conservative Islam; Islamic Movements; Southeast Asia; Modernity

Introduction

Islam as a political force in Southeast Asia has undergone complex and dynamic transformations. The long history of Islam's spread in this region has shaped a unique religious identity, where local values have blended with Islamic teachings, creating distinctive variations in Islamic practices (Helmiati, 2014). Since the arrival of Islam thru trade routes and Sufi missionary work in the 13th century, this region has developed into one of the rich centers of Islamic civilization, with a diversity of thought and religious manifestations reflecting the interaction of Islam with local cultures (Setiawan & Sagara, 2024). This development not only resulted in a form of

Islam deeply rooted in local traditions but also gave rise to political dynamics that continued to evolve with the changing times.

In recent decades, Islamic politics in Southeast Asia has been increasingly influenced by two main currents: progressive Islam and conservative Islam. Progressive Islam emphasizes the reinterpretation of Islamic teachings in a modern context, aligning with democracy, human rights, and social inclusivity (Muwaffiqillah, 2023). This group seeks to adapt Islamic teachings to the challenges of the times, emphasizing the principles of social justice, freedom of expression, and the empowerment of women and minority groups. On the other hand, conservative Islam tends to maintain traditional values and emphasize the stricter application of Sharia in state and social life (Rosyidin, 2023). This conservative view often prioritizes the supremacy of Islamic law in government structures and rejects the influence of liberalization, which is seen as conflicting with Islamic values.

These two currents not only influence political policies and social structures but also shape how Muslims understand the role of religion in national life. In many cases, progressive Islam is seen as an agent of change attempting to adapt Islamic teachings to the challenges of globalization and modernization, while conservative Islam often plays the role of a force seeking to preserve the purity of Islamic teachings from external influences (Gustam, 2021). The struggle between these two ideologies reflects the broader debate about how Islam should be positioned within the political system and state policies.

In Indonesia, progressive Islam has a significant influence thru large organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah (Hasanudin, 2022). These two organizations play an important role in strengthening democracy, promoting interfaith dialog, and are active in the education and social policy sectors. They also support a model of the state based on Pancasila, which accommodates the religious and cultural diversity in Indonesia. Meanwhile, conservative Islamic groups like the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) are more focused on advocating for the implementation of Sharia and promoting an Islamization agenda in public policy (Zulfadli, 2023).

In Malaysia, conservative Islamic politics is more dominant than in Indonesia, especially thru the role of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) (Zulfadli, 2023). PAS actively promotes Sharia-based policies and often collaborates with ethnic Malay-based parties to strengthen the position of Islam in the legal and governmental system (Hamayotsu, 2018). Meanwhile, progressive Islamic groups, such as members of the People's Justice Party (PKR) and some Muslim intellectuals, face significant challenges in advocating for democracy and civil rights, especially amidst strong state intervention in religious affairs (Aminudin, 2021).

Brunei Darussalam is an example of a country in Southeast Asia that officially implements conservative Islam in its political system. As an absolute monarchy, Brunei strictly adopts Sharia law, including the implementation of hudud punishments in its judicial system (Ghofur, 2015). Unlike Indonesia and Malaysia, where there is room for debate between progressive and conservative Islam, Brunei's political system allows conservative Islam to dominate without significant challenge from reformist groups

(Syafiatul Umma, 2022).

Globalization and modernization also play a significant role in shaping the dynamics of Islamic politics in Southeast Asia (Helmianti, 2014). The emergence of social media and wider access to global Islamic discourse has made the debate between progressive and conservative Islam increasingly open and intense. The Islamic narratives developed by each group can spread quickly and influence public opinion. Additionally, the influence of transnational Islamic movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafism, has also shaped the political orientation of Islam in this region, both in the form of social movement advocacy and in government policies (Zulfadli, 2023).

The role of religious scholars in determining the direction of Islamic political ideology is also very significant. Progressive scholars tend to interpret Islam as a religion that supports social justice, democracy, and human rights (Aminudin, 2019), while conservative scholars emphasize the importance of implementing Sharia law as the main solution to social and political problems (Rosyidin, 2023). This difference in perspective often triggers tension among Muslims themselves, especially in the context of state policies and debates regarding sharia-based legislation.

Beside internal factors within the Muslim community, government policies also play a role in strengthening one of the currents of Islam in various countries. In Indonesia, for example, the government often takes a moderate stance to balance the interests of progressive and conservative Islam (Rohim, 2024). However, at the same time, there are efforts by conservative Islamic groups to increase their influence in the formulation of public policy, including in the fields of education, family law, and media regulation.

The dynamics of Islamic politics in Southeast Asia are also influenced by external factors, including the foreign policies of Muslim countries, Islamophobia in Western countries, and the emergence of transnational Islamic movements seeking to consolidate the political power of Muslims globally (Rachmatsyah & Emalia, 2016). Progressive groups tend to have a more open relationship with the international world, while conservative groups are often more skeptical of Western influence and promote an anti-liberalism narrative as a form of resistance to globalization.

The ideological differences between progressive and conservative Islam not only impact national policies but also affect the social lives of communities. In this context, debates regarding the role of women in politics, freedom of expression, and the implementation of Islamic law have become major issues frequently debated in various countries. Conservative Islam tends to promote the narrative that women's roles should be more limited in the public sphere, while progressive Islam emphasizes gender equality and women's active participation in politics and the economy (Fadli, 2018).

Beside differences in political discourse, progressive and conservative Islam also have different strategies for mass mobilization. Conservative Islam relies more on identity-based approaches and communal solidarity, utilizing Islamic symbols to garner political support. Meanwhile, progressive Islam tends to prioritize intellectual and academic approaches to influence public policy, emphasizing the importance of dialog and scientific research in formulating solutions to social challenges (Mubarak, 2022). The struggle between progressive and conservative Islam in Southeast Asia not only reflects theological differences but also shows how Islam continues to undergo

transformation in the context of modern politics. The tension between these two currents reflects the broader challenges in building a political system that is inclusive, democratic, and remains rooted in Islamic values.

In exploring the dynamics between progressive Islam and conservative Islam, various previous studies provide an important foundation for understanding the constellation of Islamic ideologies in Southeast Asia. Zulfadli's research shows that the Islamic conservatism movement in West Sumatra after the New Order was not a continuation of past conservative history, but was driven by new local actors who took advantage of the political opportunities of decentralization. They carry a local identity based on the philosophy of Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah (ABS-SBK) as an instrument to strengthen religious conservatism in the social and political realm. This study confirms that Islamic conservatism can be a significant socio-political force when supported by local structures and national affiliations (Zulfadli, 2023).

Meanwhile, Ahmad Hasanuddin in his thesis discusses progressive Islam from the perspective of the Islamic media outlet Islambergerak.com. He criticized that many progressive Islamic figures like Djohan Effendi and Dawam Rahardjo only stopped at the level of discourse. Conversely, young people active in media and social movements like Islam Bergerak are building a more practical and directly involved progressive Islam in the struggle for justice and human rights, as seen in issues like Kendeng, Urutsewu, and Papua. In this context, progressive Islam emerges as a liberation movement, not just an academic discourse (Hasanudin, 2022).

In the context of Islamic organizations, Risky Ilham Binatra Gustam's research reveals the existence of two ideological poles within Muhammadiyah Surabaya: progressive and conservative. Progressive cadres are open to change as long as it doesn't deviate from Islamic principles, while conservative cadres tend to reject renewal and maintain the purity of the teachings (Gustam, 2021). These three studies are important, but none directly compares the clash of progressive and conservative ideologies within the broader context of Southeast Asian politics. This article aims to fill that gap by mapping how these two ideologies interact and compete in Southeast Asian politics, and their impact on public policy and the social lives of Muslims in the region.

Method

This research uses a qualitative method with a political discourse analysis approach to understand the dynamics between progressive and conservative Islam in Southeast Asia. Data was collected thru literature studies, policy analysis, and in-depth interviews with academics and Islamic political activists in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei. This approach allows researchers to identify how the ideologies and strategies of each group evolved within different social and political contexts in each country.

The analysis focuses on the discourse patterns used by progressive and conservative Islamic groups to influence state policy and shape public opinion. Progressive Islam tends to prioritize narratives of democracy, human rights, and inclusivity in political discourse, while conservative Islam places more emphasis on the importance of implementing Sharia and preserving the purity of Islamic teachings in national life. By examining the interactions and competition of these discourses, this

research aims to uncover how both streams of thought contribute to the dynamics of Islamic politics in Southeast Asia.

Results and Discussion

Progressive Islam and its influence on Democracy

Progressive Islamic groups in Southeast Asia play an important role in strengthening democracy and pluralistic values (Mubarok, 2022). In Indonesia, organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah are the main representatives of progressive Islam, emphasizing inclusive Islamic teachings compatible with the democratic system (Al-Fayyadl, 2016). They not only encourage the active participation of Muslims in democratic politics but also advocate for policies that uphold human rights, religious freedom, and social justice. Their views often emphasize that Islam is not incompatible with modern principles such as the rule of law and individual rights, thus allowing for the integration of Islam into a more open and dynamic political system.

In practice, progressive Islam not only operates in the academic realm and intellectual discourse but also contributes to social reform and state policy. Organizations like NU and Muhammadiyah have long been involved in advocating for inclusive education, social welfare policies, and efforts to combat religious and gender-based discrimination (Nurismawan dkk., 2022). They also played a role in mediating religious conflicts and promoting fairer regulations for all citizens, including minority groups. This role demonstrates that progressive Islam is not merely an intellectual movement, but also has a tangible impact on policy and governance.

One factor that strengthens the position of progressive Islam is their involvement in educational institutions and civil society organizations. Islamic universities in Indonesia and several educational institutions supported by Muhammadiyah have produced many Muslim academics and thinkers oriented toward inclusive Islam. An educational curriculum that emphasizes Islamic moderation and critical thinking becomes an effective tool in building a generation of Muslims who are more open to pluralism and global developments (Azkiya dkk., 2024). This Islamic education, which is based on democratic values, also plays a role in stemming radicalization among the younger generation.

In Malaysia, progressive Islamic groups face greater challenges due to the state's dominance in regulating religious affairs. The state has strong control over Islamic institutions, so groups promoting progressive Islamic ideas often face obstacles in voicing their aspirations (NU Online, 2017). However, organizations like Sisters in Islam (SIS) and some Muslim academics continue to strive for a more democratic interpretation of Islam that upholds human rights (Yusdani, 2015). They advocate for issues such as women's rights, religious freedom, and social justice, although they often face resistance from conservative groups who reject the idea of inclusivity in Islam (Aminudin, 2021).

Meanwhile, in Brunei, the space for progressive Islam is far more limited due to the absolute monarchy system that formally implements Sharia in the government system. This country is more aligned with conservative Islam, which rejects the ideas of democratization and religious pluralism (Setyadi, 2024). Nevertheless, the discourse of

progressive Islam continues to develop thru academic discussions and interaction with the international world. Some Muslim academics and intellectuals from Brunei are trying to promote more open Islamic thought, although with very limited room for maneuver in the domestic policy sphere.

One of the important roles of progressive Islam is in responding to global issues such as women's rights, freedom of expression, and environmental policies. In Indonesia, for example, progressive Islamic figures have promoted fatwas supporting gender equality, the elimination of discrimination against religious minorities, and environmental protection. This shows that Islam can synergize with modern principles without abandoning its religious values. Progressive Islam also often plays a role in social movements that highlight issues of economic injustice and workers' rights (Yusdani, 2015).

On the other hand, progressive Islam also plays a role in building better relationships between Islam and the international world. They often serve as a bridge in interreligious dialog and more open Islamic diplomacy (Ferdiansah, 2024). Their moderate and inclusive views are often appreciated by the global community and international organizations. They also play a crucial role in shaping a more peaceful and tolerant image of Islam on the international stage, especially amidst rising Islamophobia in some Western countries.

However, progressive Islam is not without its challenges. Conservative groups often accuse them of being agents of Western liberalization or of undermining Islamic values (Zainuddin, 2017). This narrative is often used to weaken the position of progressive Islam in public debate. Additionally, social media has become a battleground of ideologies, where conservative groups are often more active in spreading their narratives. In many cases, conservative groups use emotional issues to gain public sympathy, while progressive Islam more often relies on academic approaches that are sometimes difficult for the general public to understand.

The development of information technology presents both challenges and opportunities for progressive Islam. With the advent of digital media, progressive discourse can reach a wider audience and educate the public about inclusive and humanistic Islam (Mubarok, 2022). However, they also have to compete with conservative groups who are using social media to spread their ideology on a massive scale (Media Indonesia, 2020). This competition is increasingly evident in political campaigns, where conservative groups are often more effective at mobilizing mass support based on religious sentiment compared to progressive groups that prioritize rational argumentation.

Government support is an important factor in determining the influence of progressive Islam. In Indonesia, for example, the government often takes a moderate stance to balance the interests of progressive and conservative groups. However, in some cases, pressure from conservative groups makes the government tend to be cautious in accommodating progressive ideas. This is evident in the debate regarding the regulation of religious freedom, where the government often faces a dilemma between maintaining political stability and protecting the rights of minorities (Syafi'ie, 2016).

Progressive Islam also faces challenges in expanding its influence to the

grassroots level. While conservative Islam often uses community and identity-based approaches, progressive Islam relies more on academic and intellectual argumentation (Fathurrosyid, 2016). Therefore, a more inclusive and community-based strategy is needed for progressive discourse to be accepted by the wider public. Efforts to reach pesantren, religious communities, and social organizations need to be strengthened so that progressive Islam can become more deeply rooted in society.

In the long run, progressive Islam can play a greater role in shaping the future of Islamic politics in Southeast Asia (Mubarok, 2022). By prioritizing a scientific approach, they have the potential to transform the discourse of Islamic politics into something more inclusive and democratic. This naturally requires synergy between academics, religious scholars, and civil society so that progressive ideas can be more readily accepted and implemented in public policy. Support from the government and international organizations will also be an important factor in strengthening the influence of progressive Islam in the region.

The interaction between progressive and conservative Islam will continue to be a major dynamic in Islamic politics in Southeast Asia. These two groups have different visions of how Islam should play a role in national and social life. However, these differences also show that Islam in this region continues to evolve and adapt to the challenges of the times. Despite often facing resistance, progressive Islam still holds great potential for bringing about more inclusive and just social change. The role of progressive Islam in democracy is not limited to the political arena, but also encompasses education, social, and cultural spheres. By continuously promoting the values of justice, equality, and freedom, progressive Islam can become a force for positive change in Muslim societies in Southeast Asia. As a movement that emphasizes harmony between Islam and democracy, they have a great opportunity to build a more tolerant, just, and democratic society.

Conservative Islam and the Effort to Implement Sharia

Conservative Islamic groups in Southeast Asia play a significant role in shaping the political and legal landscape of various countries. They strive to strictly uphold Islamic values by emphasizing the importance of implementing sharia as the primary basis for the legal and policy systems of the state (Rosyidin, 2023). In this context, the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) and several groups of religious scholars in Brunei are prime examples of actors actively advocating for the implementation of Sharia in various aspects of social and political life. They believe that implementing Islamic law is a form of adherence to religious teachings and an obligation for Muslim governments to realize it. This belief drives various policy advocacy efforts aimed at integrating Sharia into the national legal system.

In Malaysia, PAS has long been a pioneer in efforts to implement Islamic law, especially in states they control, such as Kelantan and Terengganu. They are fighting for the implementation of hudud law, which includes physical punishments such as hand amputation for thieves and stoning for adulterers (Nasution & Ghofur, 2019). Despite facing challenges from the federal legal system, which is still based on common law, PAS continues to garner public support by promoting the narrative that implementing Sharia is part of their commitment to Islam. Beside hudud law, PAS also promotes

religious-based social policies such as banning the sale of alcohol, gender segregation in public spaces, and restricting entertainment activities considered contrary to Islamic values.

Brunei is an example of a country that has successfully implemented Sharia law more broadly. Under the leadership of Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Brunei introduced the Sharia Law in 2014, which includes various forms of hudud punishments, such as caning for adulterers and amputation for thieves (Ismail & Amai, 2023). The implementation of this law drew strong reactions from the international community, as it was considered a violation of human rights. However, the Bruneian government maintained its stance that Sharia is an integral part of the country's national and Islamic identity (Helmiati, 2014). With an absolute monarchy system, conservative groups in Brunei have strong influence in determining policy direction without significant political debate.

In addition to promoting the implementation of Islamic law, conservative groups are also working to shape education policies that are more Islam-oriented. They emphasized the importance of religious education in the national curriculum system and supported the establishment of Islamic-based schools. In Malaysia, madrasahs and tahfiz schools continue to grow with the support of conservative groups, offering education that is more focused on jurisprudence and theology compared to secular sciences (Hamid & Muhamad Takiyuddin Ismail, 2014). In Brunei, Islamic education is an integral part of the national education system, with a curriculum that requires all Muslim students to delve into Sharia law and Quranic interpretation (Darsyah, 2023). This strategy aims to build a generation that is more obedient to Islamic values and supports the conservative group's agenda in the long run.

One of the main strategies used by conservative groups to expand their influence is thru identity politics. They often promote the narrative that Islam is threatened by the influence of secularism, liberalism, and Western values, which are considered to contradict religious teachings (Azra, 2020). In the Malaysian context, PAS and other conservative groups often pressure the government to adopt more Islamic policies, emphasizing that implementing Sharia is a moral and religious obligation (Daulay, 2015). They also criticized the government for being too lax in upholding Islamic values and for rejecting pluralism, which they considered to be in conflict with conservative Islamic principles.

Social media has become a primary tool for conservative Islamic groups in spreading their ideology and building public support. They use digital platforms to disseminate lectures, fatwas, and political campaigns that emphasize the importance of implementing Sharia (Alfiansyah & Fajriyah, 2023). In Malaysia and Indonesia, for example, digital campaigns are used to pressure governments to enact Islamic-based policies, such as restricting the rights of the LGBT community, rejecting religious pluralism, and strengthening rules related to public morality. Their success in mastering the digital narrative has made conservative ideas increasingly popular, especially among Muslim communities who feel their traditional values are threatened by modernization. However, the role of conservative Islamic groups in politics also raises various controversies. The stricter application of Sharia law is often criticized for being seen as violating civil rights and individual freedoms. In Malaysia, for example, some human

rights groups reject Sharia law, which restricts religious and expression freedoms (Human Rights Watch, 2018). They argue that the interpretation of Islam used by conservative groups is too narrow and does not reflect the diversity of Islamic thought. In Brunei, pressure from the international community regarding the implementation of hudud law shows that religion-based policies can also negatively impact the country's diplomatic relations. Additionally, the implementation of this punishment also has negative impacts on society, such as human rights violations and abuse of power (Yahya dkk., 2023).

Despite facing various challenges, conservative Islamic groups still have a strong support base, especially in rural areas and more traditional Muslim communities. They often receive support from religious scholars and figures who hold authority in society. Additionally, they often collaborate with political elites who want to attract votes from Islamist groups in elections. In Malaysia, PAS has formed coalitions with other parties to strengthen their political position within the government system (Helmiati, 2017). This shows that conservative Islam not only operates in the religious realm but also has a mature political strategy to achieve its goals.

In Indonesia, although the country has a more open democratic system compared to Malaysia and Brunei, conservative Islamic groups also have significant influence. Some conservative Islamic organizations are trying to introduce more Sharia-based policies, such as regional regulations governing public morality and restricting individual freedoms (Tasnur & Zulkarnain, 2019). They are also active in political movements opposing government policies considered too secular. Mass actions demanding the implementation of Islamic law are often their main tool for garnering support from the general public.

One of the main challenges for conservative Islamic groups is how they reconcile their ideology with modern political realities. Many countries in Southeast Asia have legal systems that are a mix of Islamic law and civil law, making it impossible to fully implement Sharia (Atqiya dkk., 2024). Therefore, conservative groups often adopt a phased strategy, introducing Islamic-based policies gradually thru political channels and social advocacy. They also utilized religious institutions to build long-term support for their ideas.

The dynamic between conservative and progressive Islam will continue to be a central issue in Islamic politics in Southeast Asia. These two groups have different approaches to understanding the relationship between Islam and the state, as well as in responding to the social and political challenges faced by Muslims. Although they often clash, the debates between these two groups reflect the complexity of Islam as a value system and a way of life that is constantly evolving. Conservative Islamic groups in Southeast Asia will continue to play a significant role in shaping policy direction and religious discourse in the region. With increasingly mature strategies and growing influence, they will remain key players in the debate about the role of Islam in political and social life in the region's Muslim-majority countries.

Political Dynamics and Public Policy

The ideological struggle in politics has become an unavoidable phenomenon in various countries, especially in Southeast Asia. Various ideological interests compete to

influence state policy, creating a complex and ongoing dynamic. This is evident in the debate surrounding the Draft Law on the Guiding Ideology of Pancasila (RUU HIP) in Indonesia, which has led to differing views between nationalist, Islamist, and secular groups (Susilawati, 2020). This controversy demonstrates how ideology can shape the direction of public policy and societal responses to regulations considered sensitive.

Beside Indonesia, the implementation of Sharia law in Malaysia is another example of how ideological struggles influence public policy. Malaysia, which has a dual legal system of civil and Sharia law, often faces debates between groups advocating for wider implementation of Sharia and those supporting the separation of religion and state (Hasibuan dkk., 2023). This tension reflects how identity politics can shape the policy landscape in a country, influencing social life and diverse inter-ethnic relations.

Identity politics is growing stronger in various countries, especially with the emergence of Islamist parties that are trying to advance their agendas. In Indonesia, for example, Islamic parties continue to rally support to advocate for policies aligned with Islamic values, such as sharia regulations and halal regulations (Radar Hukum, 2024). In Malaysia, Islamic parties such as PAS (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party) also play an active role in advocating for the implementation of Islamic law at the national and state levels (Helmiati, 2017). This phenomenon shows that religion is not only a spiritual aspect, but also an effective tool for political mobilization.

This phenomenon of identity politics is not limited to countries with a Muslim majority. In other countries, various ideological groups also attempt to influence public policy thru political and social channels. Issues such as religious freedom, minority rights, and the relationship between religion and state are becoming a constantly evolving battleground for debate, reflecting the dynamics of global politics (Nasoha dkk., 2024). The tension between secularism and religion in public policy often creates dilemmas in political decision-making.

In the context of public policy, this ideological competition can impact various sectors, such as education, economics, and social issues. For example, in Indonesia, there is a debate regarding the education curriculum, with some advocating for a curriculum that reflects certain religious values versus a more inclusive and secular approach. This demonstrates how ideological differences can have implications for strategic policies that affect the lives of society at large. Education is the primary tool for shaping the ideological character of society, and every policy implemented has long-term consequences for future generations (Mihit, 2023).

In the economic sector, political ideology also plays a role in determining the direction of government policy. For example, some groups support a sharia-based economy as an alternative to the global capitalist system. The concept of an Islamic economy that emphasizes the principles of justice and social welfare has become a separate debate between supporters of the conventional economy and those who promote a value-based Islamic economic system (Malahayatie, 2018). The economic inequality caused by capitalism is often used by Islamic groups as a reason to offer a more just system based on Sharia values.

Meanwhile, in social policy, issues such as gender and women's rights are often a battleground for debate between conservative and progressive groups. In some

countries, policies regarding the role of women in society are influenced by interpretations of certain ideologies, whether religious or secular. The debate over the hijab in schools, women's right to work, and family welfare policies reflects how political ideology shapes social policy. These issues often become decisive factors in electoral politics, where political parties use gender rhetoric to attract voters.

The role of the media in shaping public opinion cannot be ignored either. Media often serves as a tool for various ideological groups to spread their views and influence public perception. (Yusuf, 2024). With the increasing development of digital media and social media, the spread of political ideologies is becoming more massive and can shape public opinion in a short amount of time. Digital campaigns conducted by certain ideological groups are capable of changing public opinion and creating sharper polarization in the political sphere.

In the global political landscape, this ideological struggle can also impact diplomatic relations between countries. For example, a country's foreign policy is often influenced by the ideological orientation of the ruling government. Countries with governments based on Islamic ideology may have a different approach to building relationships with Western countries compared to more secular nations. This is evident in the foreign policies of countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia, which often conflict with those of Western nations (Rakhmat & Turmudzi, 2020).

The political stability of a country can also be influenced by how ideological differences are managed within the existing political system. Countries with strong democratic mechanisms are typically better equipped to accommodate ideological differences in public policy without causing significant social conflict. Conversely, in countries with more authoritarian political systems, ideological differences are often suppressed, which can fuel political tensions in the long run. Countries like Turkey and Egypt demonstrate how repressive policies against certain ideological groups can create prolonged political instability (Arini, 2021).

In the context of democracy, ideological struggles are often reflected in general elections. Political campaigns are often characterized by ideological narratives aimed at attracting support from specific segments of society. Political parties employ various strategies, including religious rhetoric, nationalism, and economic appeals, to win over voters and influence the policies that will be implemented if they come into power (Hakim, 2023). Ideological propaganda is often a primary tool for winning the votes of people with certain ideological tendencies. However, this ideological struggle can also bring its own challenges, especially if not managed well. The politicization of identity can lead to polarization in society, potentially weakening national unity (Syarwi, 2022). Therefore, inclusive policies and constructive dialog are needed to ensure that various groups in society can contribute positively to the political process. Tolerance and understanding of differences are key to maintaining political and social stability. To overcome this challenge, a balanced approach is needed in formulating public policy. The government needs to ensure that the policies adopted not only reflect the interests of a specific ideological group but also consider the diversity of society as a whole. Thus, public policy can be more oriented toward national interests and common welfare.

Overall, the dynamics of politics and public policy influenced by ideological

struggles are a complex and ever-evolving phenomenon. Awareness of the importance of dialog, tolerance, and inclusivity in politics is key to creating fairer and more sustainable policies. By understanding how ideology shapes policy and influences society, we can be better prepared to face future political challenges.

Conclusion

The struggle between progressive and conservative Islam in Southeast Asian politics reflects a complex and evolving dynamic, influenced by historical, social, and political factors in each country. Progressive Islam is often associated with inclusive, democratic, and adaptable ideas to the changing times, especially in addressing human rights issues, gender equality, and pluralism. In various countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, the progressive Islamic movement emerged as part of efforts to push for reforms in the political and legal systems, including in advocating for religious freedom and minority rights. However, the presence of conservative Islam remains a significant force, especially in preserving traditional values and the role of religion in society. Conservative Islam often receives support from groups that desire stricter implementation of Islamic law and reject interpretations considered too liberal regarding religious teachings. Tension between these two camps often leads to polarization in society, especially when it involves ideological and religiously-based policies.

In the context of nation-states in Southeast Asia, a deeper understanding of the interaction between progressive and conservative Islam becomes crucial in designing balanced and inclusive policies. Countries in the region face challenges in navigating between the demands of modernization and the aspirations of Islamist groups with different political agendas. The government often has to take on the role of mediator to prevent tensions that could disrupt political and social stability. In some cases, an approach that accommodates the diversity of Islamic thought through dialog and inclusive policies has proven more effective than a confrontational approach. Additionally, global dynamics such as the increasing influence of transnational Islamist groups and the role of social media in spreading religious ideologies have also influenced the development of Islamic politics in the region. Therefore, strategic policies capable of bridging the interests of both sides, whether through education, political regulation, or strengthening democratic institutions, are key to maintaining a balance between religious values and the principles of the modern state in Southeast Asia.

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