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# Reporting **Religion**

DILEMMAS OF PUBLIC DISCOURSE

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Comparison of Political Attitudes Among  
those who do and do not Maintain a  
Religious Social Identity in  
Contemporary Southeast Asian Societies

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# Is there a rise in religiosity in Asia?

- Figures on rise in religiosity is unavailable
- Our impression that there is a rise in religiosity is possibly based on what happens in segments of the population
- We think about increasing religiosity because we expect that religious ideas and institutions would severely decline because of modernity – their very persistence then seems to denote a rise in religiosity

# Implication of rise in religiosity on state-society relations

- Even if religiosity is not on the rise, religion is assuming an increasing public role in politics and civic life in Asia, particularly Southeast Asia
- We expect that people with heightened religiosity may subscribe to different norms and values about how their societies should be managed compared to the rest of the population.

# Are 'religious' people different?

- In their level of trust that state institutions will act for the good of society?
- In their beliefs in the usefulness of democratic government and their satisfaction in the use of their democratic rights?
- In their sense that they are able to influence the government?
- In their rating of the effectiveness of government to handle different aspects of society?
- In their level of national pride?

# Aims of Presentation

- Provide insight on whether ‘religious’ people are different using data from Asia Barometer 2007-2008
- Focus on 5 Southeast Asian countries – Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand

# 'Religious' people

- Religious affiliation may not be too useful as a concept to differentiate between people
- Using measures of regularity of prayer is also problematic
- In this presentation the difference between groups is based on whether respondents indicated that religion was an important part of their social circle.

- Social identity theorists argue that the social groups which are important to a person provides him/her a sense of social identity.
- Such an identity has substantial bearing on behaviour and attitudes.



# Proportion who claim religion as important part of their social group

	Indonesia	Malaysia	Philippines	Singapore	Thailand
(%)	61.7	51.9	60.7	33.6	26.6

# Religious affiliation of those who report religion as important part of their social group

	Indonesia	Malaysia	Philippines	Singapore	Thailand
Roman Catholic (%)	2.8 (2.1)	0.4 (1.0)	82 (85.8)	8.3 (5.0)	0.8 (0.6)
Protestant Christian (%)	5.0 (4.0)	1.5 (1.8)	14 (10.9)	15.8 (11.7)	0.4 (0.2)
Muslim (%)	89.5 (91.9)	79.6 (62.7)	1.3 (1.0)	39.5 (21.4)	3.5 (1.7)
Buddhist (%)	0.0 (0.1)	11.8 (23.2)	0.0 (0.0)	19.5 (30.1)	95.5 (97.4)
Hindu (%)	2.8 (1.8)	5.6 (7.2)	0.0 (0)	9.5 (9.0)	0.0 (0.1)
Taoist (%)	0.0 (0.0)	0.8 (2.8)	0.0 (0.1)	5.2 (8.5)	0.0 (0.0)
Others (%)	0.0 (0.1)	0.4 (0.2)	2.5 (1.9)	2.3 (1.7)	0.0 (0.0)
No religion (%)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (1.1)	0.0 (0.2)	0.0 (12.8)	0.0 (0.0)

Figures in parenthesis ( ) indicate proportion in total sample for country

## Proportion of country sample by religious social identity who state that they pray or meditate daily

	No religious social identity	Religious social identity	Total
Indonesia	86.2 %	86 %	86.1%
Malaysia	62.7%	87.1%	75.5%
Philippines	73.5 %	78.3 %	76.4%
Singapore	34.1%	75.1%	48.0%
Thailand	20.6%	28.2%	22.6%

Proportion of country sample by religious social identity who state that it is very important for a religious institution or professional to be involved in a birth

	No religious social identity	Religious social identity	Total
Indonesia	10.6 %	14.4 %	12.9%
Malaysia	43.6%	67.2%	56.0%
Philippines	77.6 %	81.5 %	80.0%
Singapore	20.4%	33.5%	24.8%
Thailand	12.9%	15.0%	13.5%

Proportion of country sample by religious social identity who state that it is very important for a religious institution or professional to be involved in a wedding

	No religious social identity	Religious social identity	Total
Indonesia	69.0 %	78.5 %	74.9%
Malaysia	63.2%	75.2%	69.5%
Philippines	74.0 %	79.9 %	77.6%
Singapore	26.0%	48.4%	33.6%
Thailand	22.5%	31.2%	24.8%

Proportion of country sample by religious social identity who state that it is very important for a religious institution or professional to be involved in a death

	No religious social identity	Religious social identity	Total
Indonesia	73.5 %	85.5 %	80.9%
Malaysia	74.1%	83.2%	78.9%
Philippines	69.0 %	73.4 %	71.7%
Singapore	33.4%	50.9%	39.3%
Thailand	86.0%	85.0%	85.7%

# Level of trust that state institutions act for the good of society

- Measured by asking respondents to rank on a 5 point scale their level of trust of various institutions
- Institutions include central and state government, legal system, police, Parliament, public education system, public health system

	Trust state institutions
Indonesia	-
Malaysia	+
Philippines	ns
Singapore	ns
Thailand	ns



## Preference for non-democratic political system for the country

- Measured by asking respondents to rate different political systems on its helpfulness for the country
- Political systems included authoritarian rule, technocratic/bureaucratic/military
- Scale also based on a negative opinion on democratic political system

	Preference for non-democratic system
Indonesia	ns
Malaysia	ns
Philippines	ns
Singapore	+
Thailand	ns

# Satisfaction of level of democratic rights in the country

- Measured by asking respondents to rate their satisfaction on different democratic rights
- Rights include voting, participation in any kind of organization, freedom to gather and demonstrate, being informed about the work and functions of government, freedom of speech, ability to criticise the government

	Satisfaction of democratic rights
Indonesia	-
Malaysia	+
Philippines	+
Singapore	+
Thailand	ns

# Rating of government effectiveness in handling society

- Measured by asking respondents to rate how well they thought their government was dealing with issues.
- Issues included economy, political corruption, human rights, unemployment, crime, public services, ethnic conflict, religious conflict, environmental problems, immigration

	Rating of government effectiveness
Indonesia	-
Malaysia	+
Philippines	+
Singapore	ns
Thailand	ns

# Sense of political powerlessness

- Measured by asking respondents to rate their agreement on statements such as
  - Generally speaking, people like me don't have the power to influence government policy or actions
  - Government officials pay little attention to what citizens like me think
  - Politics and government are so complicated that sometimes I don't understand what's happening

	Political powerlessness
Indonesia	-
Malaysia	-
Philippines	-
Singapore	ns
Thailand	ns



# National Pride

- Measured by asking respondents

How proud are you of being (Singaporean, Indonesian, Malaysian etc)?

	National Pride
Indonesia	ns
Malaysia	+
Philippines	ns
Singapore	+
Thailand	ns

## Proportion of Singaporeans and Malaysians by religious social identity who state that they are very proud of their nationality

	No religious social identity	Religious social identity
Singapore	49.3 %	60.3 %
Malaysia	47 %	75 %

# Comparison of those hold religious social identities and those who do not

	Trust state institutions	Preference for non-democratic system	Satisfaction of demo rights	Rating of gov effectiveness	Political powerlessness	National Pride
Indon	-	ns	-	-	-	ns
Malaysia	+	ns	+	+	-	+
Philip	ns	ns	+	+	-	ns
Sing	ns	+	+	ns	ns	+
Thailand	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns

# Are observable differences between groups present after controlling for demographic variables?

- Control for educational, income, age and gender.
- Ordinal regressions

## Comparison of those hold religious social identities and those who do not after controlling for demographic variables

	Trust state institutions	Acceptance of non-democratic system	Satisfaction of democratic rights	Rating of government effectiveness	Political powerlessness	National Pride
Indon	-	ns	-	- (ns)	-	ns
Malaysia	+ (ns)	ns	+ (ns)	+	-	+
Philip	ns	ns	+	+	-	ns
Sing	ns	+	+ (ns)	ns	ns	+ (ns)
Thailand	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns