

ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: RELIGION (ISLAM), NATIONALISM, CITIZENSHIP, AND THE COMPLEXITY OF ASEAN WAY NORMS

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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 norms are reflected in conflict resolution efforts. Preliminary results show that religious factors and nationalism often trigger conflict, while citizenship issues can complicate the dynamics of the conflict. ASEAN Way norms, which emphasize the principles of non-intervention, deliberation, and consensus, have sometimes had limited impact in responding to ethno-religious conflicts. It is hoped that this research will provide insight into how ASEAN Way norms can be improved or adapted to more effectively respond to the challenges of ethno-religious conflict in the region. The implications of this research can also help design more effective conflict resolution strategies and support sustainable peace in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: ethnoreligious conflicts, religion (Islam), nationalism, citizenship, ASEAN Way Norms, Southeast Asia

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.ⁱ 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:ⁱⁱ

1. 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.

2. Tensions of ethnic and religious identity: Ethno-religious conflict 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.
3. Religious politics: Political leaders and certain groups may use religion as a tool to strengthen their support base or to create tensions with other groups. Religious politics can play a role in exploiting religious differences for political interests.
4. Claims to sacred territory: 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.
5. The role of media and religious narratives: 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.
6. The role of the state and discriminatory policies: 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.

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.ⁱⁱⁱ

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. 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.^{iv}

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,

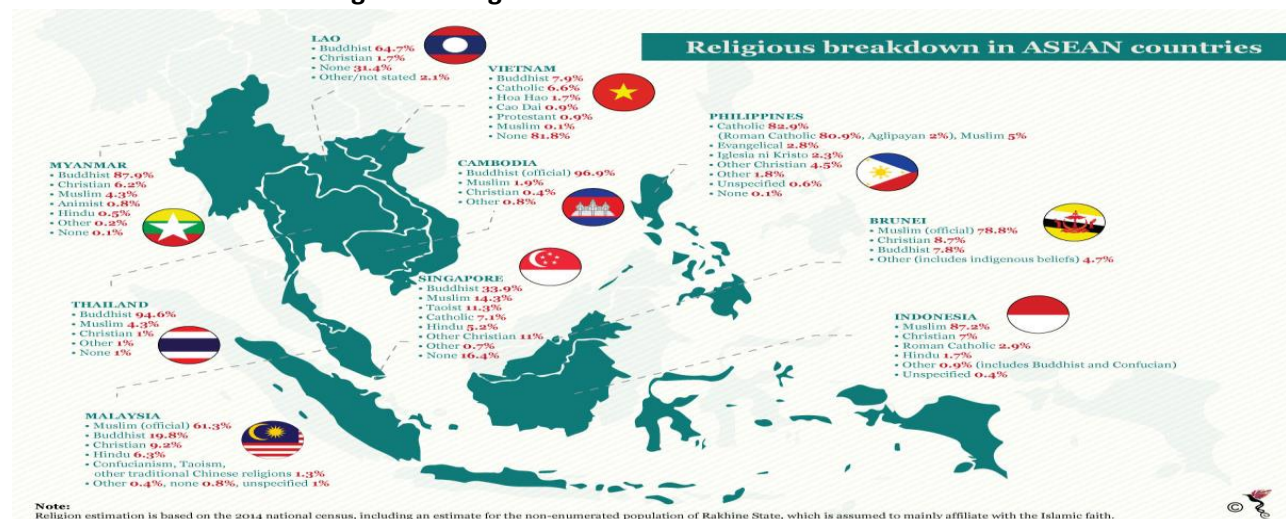
political inclusion, and economic development could be the key to addressing ethno-religious conflicts in the region.^v One of the regional actors who is expected to be able to act as a mediator in resolving various ethno-religious conflicts is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In this context, the existence of the ASEAN Way norm, 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 itself in efforts to achieve the effectiveness of ASEAN's role.^{vi}

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. This research is based on secondary data e.g. books, research results, government publications, journal articles, newspapers, internal institutional records, and internet sites. Based on the perspective of analysis, this research is qualitative research, which according to Jack S. Levy, the method used in international relations studies is a qualitative method. This is because the events related to the study of international relations are still closely related to historical approaches so the research requires analysis with in-depth explanations – one of which is through case studies – so that the research results are more scientifically detailed.^{vii}

RESULTS

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.^{viii} The following is an overview of religious diversity in several ASEAN member countries:

Figure 1. Religious Breakdown in ASEAN Countries



Source: Swaroopini Nair and Shenntyara Mirtha. "Safeguarding the Faith of ASEAN Countries." Accessed December 10, 2023. <https://theaseanpost.com/article/safeguarding-faith-asean-countries>

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 the majority 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, the majority of the population are Buddhists and Christians. Theravada Buddhism dominates in Thailand, with the majority of 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

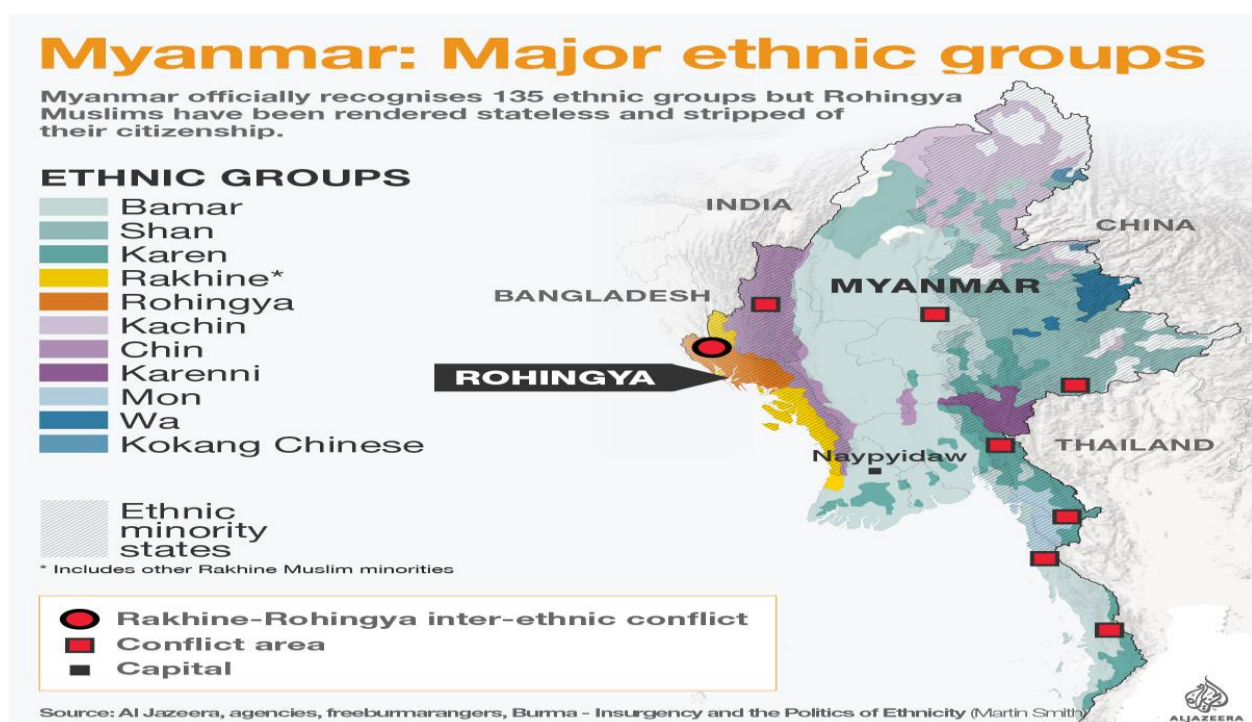
No.		
1.	Conflict in Pattani, Thailand	The Pattani region in southern Thailand has a majority Muslim population, and conflict between the Buddhist-majority Thai government and Muslim separatist groups has persisted for decades. Groups such as the Pattani Liberation Movement (BRN) were involved in a series 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.
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Source: Data was collected by researchers 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 ethno-religious 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: "Myanmar: Major Ethnic Groups and Where They Live," Aljazeera, accessed December 10, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/3/14/myanmar-major-ethnic-groups-and-where-they-live>

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 located 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.^{ix} 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: The State of Southeast Asia 2023 Survey Report, 2023, (Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute), p. 11.

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: The State of Southeast Asia 2023 Survey Report, 2023, (Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute), p. 13.

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.

DISCUSSION

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

Countries in Southeast Asia are characterized as countries with ethnic, 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.^x

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. 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.^{xi}

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.^{xii}

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.^{xiii} 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.^{xiv}

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.^{xv} 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.^{xvi}

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.

Ethno-religious conflicts that occur in Indonesia, such as in Aceh or Poso, can cause polarization of religious identities. This can influence feelings of inclusive nationalism. This conflict has also involved demands for autonomy or even independence, as happened in Aceh. The impact could affect national stability and citizenship. However, specifically for the Aceh conflict, the implementation of national reconciliation efforts, such as the Helsinki Agreement with the Free Aceh Movement, helped strengthen national unity and promote inclusiveness.^{xvii} 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.^{xviii}

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 some Muslim groups feeling less recognized in the national government structure. Meanwhile, the conflict in Rakhine State involving the Muslim-majority Rohingya and the Buddhist-majority Myanmar government has caused a massive refugee crisis and has created international disapproval of the treatment of the Rohingya. The Rohingya crisis gave rise to citizenship controversy while bringing the issue of citizenship to the fore, with many Rohingya considered stateless and not recognized by the government. This creates inequalities in rights and access for these groups.^{xix}

In general, it can be stated that these various ethno-religious conflicts can increase radicalization and extremism in several regions. This could threaten national security and trigger a strong response from the government. These conflicts can create refugee crises, which can affect national stability and create demands regarding citizenship and human rights. In dealing with the impact of ethno-religious conflict, efforts at reconciliation, inter-religious dialogue, and strengthening national institutions to create inclusiveness and justice are very important. Governments and civil society must work together to build strong foundations for national unity and inclusive citizenship across the region.

The Complexity of ASEAN Way Norms 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.^{xx}

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. 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. 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.^{xxi}

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:^{xxii}

1. Citizenship discrimination: 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.
2. Violence and displacement: 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.
3. Rohingya refugee crisis: 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.
4. Attempted genocide: 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.

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.^{xxiii} 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.

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. 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.^{xxiv}

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:^{xxv}

1. Unifier and moral leader: Religion, including Islam, can function as a unifier of society. Religious leaders, such as clerics and religious figures, often have great moral authority. They can act as moral leaders who try to reduce tensions and resolve conflicts by teaching the values of peace, tolerance, and justice.
2. Mediator and peacemaker: Religious figures, especially those respected by the various parties involved in the conflict, can function as mediators and peacemakers. They can help encourage dialogue between groups and create space for peaceful negotiations.
3. Teacher of tolerance and pluralism: Religious education, especially in Islamic educational institutions, can play an important role in teaching the values of tolerance, pluralism, and respect for differences. This can reduce misunderstanding and prejudice between different groups.
4. Proclaimer of human values: Religions, including Islam, are proclaimers of human values. Religious leaders can use religious teachings to emphasize the importance of respecting human rights, peace, and justice. This can be the basis for overcoming ethno-religious conflicts.
5. Participation in the reconciliation process: Religion can play a role in supporting and participating in the national reconciliation process. Religious leaders can help mobilize support from their congregations to support reconciliation efforts and rebuild trust between groups.
6. Engagement in interfaith dialogue: The involvement of religions in interfaith dialogue can create a platform for exchanging ideas, easing tensions, and building trust among adherents of different religions.

However, it is important to note that the effectiveness of the role of religion, especially Islam, and interfaith dialogue as a means of resolving ethnoreligious 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.

CONCLUSION

Ethno-religious conflict in Southeast Asia is a multi-dimensional problem involving religious factors, nationalism, and citizenship issues. These dynamics create complexity that requires deep understanding and a holistic approach. Religion and nationalism are often the main triggers of conflict, creating

inequality, discrimination, and conflicting identities. The critical role of religion and nationalism requires special attention in designing conflict resolution strategies. While citizenship issues provide an important legal dimension in ethno-religious conflicts, conflict resolution must consider fair and equal citizenship rights for all groups involved.

On the other hand, although the ASEAN Way norms contain important principles, such as non-intervention and deliberation, challenges arise in implementing them in conflict resolution. Consensus processes and limited interventions can be obstacles in dealing with ethno-religious conflicts. In this context, ASEAN Way norms need to be adapted to be more responsive to the challenges of ethno-religious conflict. This could include improvements in facilitating interfaith dialogue, promotion of human rights, and conflict prevention efforts. To achieve sustainable peace in Southeast Asia, further steps must focus on strengthening ASEAN Way norms to more effectively address the complexities and challenges of ethno-religious conflicts in this region. Likewise, joint efforts need to be made among ASEAN member countries to address the root causes and encourage inclusion and reconciliation throughout society. In other words, resolving ethno-religious conflicts requires a holistic approach that includes inter-religious dialogue, community empowerment, policy reform, and building an inclusive national identity.

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