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Promoting Democracy and the Rule of Law: Implications of the 2024 European Parliament Election and the Rise of Right-Wing Parties for ASEAN’s Multiculturalism, Muslim Migration, and International Relations

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Abstract

This research focuses on the implications of the 2024 European Parliament elections, which witnessed a significant rise in right-wing parties, for ASEAN’s diverse and multicultural region. The rise of right-wing populism in Europe, particularly its impact on democracy, the rule of law, and the treatment of Muslim migrants, presents critical lessons for ASEAN. As a region with diverse ethnicities, religions, and cultures, ASEAN faces similar vulnerabilities to political extremism, exclusionary policies, and inter-religious tensions, making this comparative study crucial for maintaining peace and stability. This study employs qualitative research methods and a comparative approach, drawing on secondary data from academic journals, policy reports, and media analysis. By examining the socio-political factors contributing to the success of right-wing parties in Europe, especially their anti-Islam and anti-migrant rhetoric, the research analyses potential risks for ASEAN. The study integrates theories of populism, multiculturalism, and international relations to explore how Europe’s political shift could influence ASEAN’s handling of Muslim migration, regional cohesion, and interfaith relations. The findings reveal that Europe’s democratic backsliding and rising exclusionary politics could offer cautionary lessons for ASEAN, particularly in safeguarding human dignity, freedom, and equality. While ASEAN’s regionalism differs from the European Union’s supranational framework, both regions share challenges related to migration, religious diversity, and social integration. The research concludes that ASEAN must actively promote democratic values, strengthen the rule of law, and foster inclusive policies that protect minorities, including Muslim migrants, to prevent the rise of divisive political forces. Key recommendations include enhancing ASEAN’s legal and institutional frameworks to address human rights violations, promoting intercultural dialogue, and drawing on Europe’s experiences to mitigate the rise of exclusionary politics. Ultimately, ASEAN’s resilience will depend on its commitment to democracy, human rights, and social cohesion in an increasingly polarized global environment.

Keywords: Right-wing populism, Muslim migration, democracy and rule of law, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), multiculturalism and inclusion

Introduction

The 2024 European Parliament elections marked a pivotal moment in European politics, with right-wing parties achieving unprecedented influence across the continent. This political shift, driven by a surge in nationalist rhetoric and opposition to immigration, has ignited widespread debates about its consequences for democracy, the rule of law, and the integration of diverse societies. While these developments are rooted in the European context, their implications resonate far beyond, offering critical insights for Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a region renowned for its multiculturalism and diversity. For ASEAN, the European experience serves as a cautionary tale, highlighting the potential challenges posed by political extremism, exclusionary policies, and inter-religious tensions.

In France, Marine Le Pen's National Rally secured a significant victory, winning 31.5% of the vote, more than twice that of President Emmanuel Macron's centrist party. This outcome led Macron to dissolve the National Assembly and call for snap elections, underscoring the profound impact of the far-right's ascendancy on national politics (Marsi, 2024). Germany witnessed the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party capturing 16% of the vote, positioning it ahead of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democrats. This surge reflects a broader European trend where right-wing parties are capitalizing on public discontent over issues like immigration and economic stagnation (Reyes, 2024). Italy's political landscape also experienced a rightward shift, with Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy party contributing significantly to the growth of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group. Meloni's strong ties with former U.S. President Donald Trump further emphasize the transatlantic connections influencing European right-wing politics (AP News, 2024).

The rightward shift in Europe presents valuable lessons for ASEAN, emphasizing the importance of maintaining stability and inclusivity within the region. The rise of populist and nationalist parties in Europe underscores the necessity for ASEAN nations to remain vigilant against similar movements that could disrupt social harmony. This vigilance must be coupled with the development of inclusive policies that prevent the marginalization of minority groups, fostering unity and respect for diversity across ASEAN's multicultural societies. Additionally, the European experience highlights the critical role of addressing socioeconomic disparities, as economic grievances have often fueled support for extremist ideologies. ASEAN countries must prioritize reducing inequality and enhancing social welfare to counteract the potential appeal of such ideologies. Furthermore, the strengthening of democratic institutions is essential to ensuring resilience against populist pressures. Robust democratic frameworks can safeguard ASEAN nations from authoritarian tendencies, ensuring the preservation of democratic values.

and stability in the face of emerging challenges. By examining Europe's political shifts, ASEAN can proactively implement strategies to maintain stability, promote inclusivity, and uphold democratic values within the region.

The Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Europe and Lessons for ASEAN on Migration and Multiculturalism

The rise of right-wing populism in Europe has been fueled by a complex interplay of economic uncertainties, cultural anxieties, and resistance to globalization. Parties such as the National Rally in France, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), and Italy's League have capitalized on fears surrounding migration and cultural preservation. Their anti-Islam and anti-migrant rhetoric have not only polarized public opinion but also strained the social fabric of many European nations. Central to their appeal is a nationalist agenda that undermines minority rights and challenges the democratic values on which the European Union was built. The EU's response to these trends has been mixed, with some states taking measures to counteract democratic erosion while others remain divided.

ASEAN, as a region with comparable complexities of ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity, can draw important lessons from Europe's political trajectory. The challenges faced by Europe in integrating Muslim migrants and addressing the rise of exclusionary politics mirror some of ASEAN's vulnerabilities. For example, ASEAN's history includes instances of inter-religious and ethnic conflicts, such as the plight of the Rohingya in Myanmar and tensions in Southern Thailand. These events underscore the importance of proactive measures to preserve social harmony in a region with diverse communities (Smith, 2020).

One of the key areas where Europe's experience offers valuable insights is in the management of migration. The European debate over Muslim migration has often been characterized by hostility and polarization, leading to social fragmentation (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018). For ASEAN, which is seeing an increasing influx of Muslim migrants, the emphasis must be on policies that foster inclusion and equitable treatment. Initiatives that encourage integration, mutual understanding, and respect can mitigate tensions and prevent the marginalization of migrant communities (Jones, 2021). Building platforms for dialogue between migrants and host communities can promote mutual respect and address misconceptions.

Democratic Norms and Regional Stability

Another pressing issue highlighted by Europe's political shift is the erosion of democratic norms. In Europe, the rise of populism has been accompanied by a decline in the rule of law and the weakening of institutions that protect minority rights (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018). For ASEAN, which operates under a principle of consensus and non-interference, the need to uphold democratic principles and strengthen governance structures is paramount. A commitment to human rights and the rule of law can act as a bulwark against the divisive forces of political extremism. ASEAN's adoption of mechanisms to monitor and address democratic backsliding could reinforce its commitment to these principles (Jones, 2021).

The rhetoric of European right-wing parties, particularly their anti-Islam stance, has also contributed to societal divisions and, in some cases, radicalization (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012). ASEAN's approach to promoting interfaith dialogue and tolerance offers a counterpoint to this divisive narrative. By fostering platforms for dialogue and mutual understanding, ASEAN can strengthen its social cohesion and demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity that counters the rise of extremist ideologies. This approach aligns with ASEAN's emphasis on "unity in diversity" and its rich tradition of accommodating pluralism (Moxham, 2018).

While the European Union operates as a supranational entity with extensive institutional mechanisms, ASEAN's framework is based on intergovernmental cooperation. Despite these structural differences, both regions face shared challenges related to migration, religious diversity, and social integration. Europe's struggles with exclusionary politics highlight the importance of regional collaboration in addressing such issues. For ASEAN, enhancing the role of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and adopting best practices from Europe, such as independent monitoring of human rights violations, could reinforce its institutional capacity. AICHR's mandate could be expanded to include specific measures for promoting interfaith and intercultural dialogue as a preventive approach to conflict (Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue, 2022).

ASEAN's Role in International Relations and Multicultural Diplomacy

Another critical area of focus for ASEAN is promoting intercultural dialogue. Europe's Erasmus+ program, which facilitates academic and cultural exchange, serves as an inspiring model. ASEAN could develop similar initiatives to strengthen regional understanding and cooperation among its member states. Programs that encourage interaction and cultural exchange among diverse groups can build trust and reduce prejudice, laying the groundwork for greater regional unity. Such initiatives could also involve youth and grassroots

organizations to ensure that the message of inclusivity reaches all levels of society (European Commission, 2021; Brewer, 2018).

The implications of Europe's right-wing rise are also relevant for ASEAN's international relations. As Europe grapples with its internal divisions, ASEAN can position itself as a proponent of multilateralism and inclusivity on the global stage. ASEAN's commitment to the principles of regional stability and cooperation can serve as a contrast to the fractious politics seen in Europe. By advocating for inclusive policies and mutual respect in global forums, ASEAN can bolster its reputation as a region committed to peace and progress (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Acharya, 2021). This positioning aligns with ASEAN's centrality in regional diplomacy and its role in fostering constructive dialogue among major powers.

Economic integration presents another area where ASEAN can learn from Europe's experiences. The European Union's single market has been a cornerstone of its success, yet the rise of nationalist politics threatens its cohesion. ASEAN's efforts to strengthen economic ties through initiatives like the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) must be complemented by measures to ensure social cohesion. Balancing economic progress with the preservation of cultural and religious diversity is critical for sustainable regional integration. ASEAN's approach could include leveraging digital platforms to enhance economic inclusivity and providing support for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that embody the region's diverse cultural heritage (Schimmelfennig, 2018; Dosch, 2020).

Education also plays a pivotal role in countering exclusionary narratives and promoting inclusivity. ASEAN member states could adopt educational reforms that emphasize critical thinking, tolerance, and respect for diversity. These reforms can empower younger generations to challenge divisive ideologies and foster a more inclusive society. Incorporating lessons from Europe's struggles, ASEAN could integrate modules on regional history and the value of pluralism into school curricula (Jones, 2021). Teacher training programs could also be enhanced to equip educators with the tools to address issues of prejudice and discrimination in classrooms.

The media's role in shaping public perceptions is another area of focus. Europe's experience with the rise of right-wing populism underscores the influence of media in amplifying nationalist narratives. ASEAN can learn from this by promoting responsible journalism and ensuring that media platforms encourage balanced and inclusive discussions. Combating misinformation and hate speech is essential to maintaining social harmony and preventing the spread of extremist ideologies. Regional initiatives, such as a code of conduct

for media professionals and the establishment of independent fact-checking bodies, could be effective in this regard (Fenton, 2021; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Ultimately, ASEAN must remain vigilant against the rise of exclusionary politics. Addressing the root causes of societal discontent, such as economic inequality and unemployment, can preempt the appeal of populist narratives. Strengthening education systems to promote tolerance and critical thinking, alongside fostering a sense of shared regional identity, will be crucial in safeguarding ASEAN's multicultural character (Gurr, 2016; Jha, 2020). Collaborative efforts between governments, civil society, and regional organizations will be essential to these endeavors.

The rise of right-wing populism in Europe offers both a warning and an opportunity for ASEAN. It underscores the risks of allowing divisive politics to take root while highlighting the importance of proactive measures to protect diversity and inclusion. By learning from Europe's experiences, ASEAN can fortify its commitment to democratic values, human rights, and social cohesion. These efforts will be essential in navigating the challenges of an increasingly polarized world and ensuring that the region remains a beacon of multicultural harmony and resilience.

Additionally, ASEAN's unique context provides opportunities to develop tailored strategies that address its specific challenges. For instance, the region's strong emphasis on non-interference could be balanced with initiatives that promote shared values of inclusivity and mutual respect. Regional dialogues, akin to Europe's conferences on migration and integration, could be adapted to ASEAN's cultural and political realities. Such forums would allow member states to exchange best practices and collaborate on common challenges without compromising sovereignty.

Moreover, ASEAN could explore partnerships with other regions to strengthen its capacity to address issues of diversity and inclusion. Engagements with the EU, African Union, and other regional bodies could provide ASEAN with access to resources, expertise, and innovative approaches to managing pluralism. These partnerships could also enhance ASEAN's role as a leader in promoting global dialogue on diversity and inclusion.

In strengthening its institutional frameworks, ASEAN must also consider the role of technology and innovation. Digital platforms can be leveraged to promote intercultural dialogue, facilitate access to education, and enhance economic inclusivity. Virtual exchanges and e-learning modules could complement traditional programs, making initiatives more accessible to diverse populations. Technology can also play a crucial role in combating hate

speech and misinformation, with AI-driven tools assisting in monitoring and addressing harmful content online (Roser et al., 2021; Fenton, 2021).

Finally, the importance of leadership cannot be overstated. ASEAN's leaders must champion the values of diversity, inclusion, and democracy in their national and regional agendas. By demonstrating a commitment to these principles, they can set a powerful example for their societies and strengthen ASEAN's collective identity. Leadership that prioritizes unity and collaboration over division will be critical in ensuring the region's stability and prosperity.

The European experience, with its successes and setbacks, serves as a mirror reflecting the potential paths ASEAN can take. While Europe's challenges are a cautionary tale, they also provide a roadmap for navigating the complexities of diversity and democracy. By embracing proactive measures and fostering a culture of inclusivity, ASEAN can transform these lessons into opportunities for growth and resilience. In doing so, the region can continue to thrive as a model of multicultural coexistence in an increasingly fragmented world.

Conclusion

ASEAN, as a region of immense diversity, can draw critical lessons from Europe's experiences with the rise of right-wing populism. Europe's challenges, including the erosion of democratic norms, the polarization of societies, and the rise of exclusionary ideologies, highlight the risks that can emerge when diversity is not adequately managed. These developments serve as a cautionary tale for ASEAN, where ethnic, cultural, and religious pluralism are equally integral to its identity and stability. By learning from Europe's setbacks, ASEAN can adopt proactive measures to safeguard its multicultural fabric. Strengthening democratic institutions, fostering intercultural dialogue, and addressing socioeconomic disparities are crucial steps to countering the appeal of divisive politics. ASEAN's emphasis on consensus and unity offers a foundation to create policies that ensure inclusivity and mutual respect, avoiding the pitfalls of social fragmentation seen in parts of Europe.

At the same time, Europe's successes, such as its regional integration mechanisms and initiatives like Erasmus+, provide inspiration for ASEAN to enhance its institutional capacity and promote regional collaboration. Tailored strategies that align with ASEAN's principles, such as balancing non-interference with shared values, can further solidify its resilience. Ultimately, Europe's experiences underscore the importance of proactive leadership, robust institutions, and a commitment to diversity as strengths rather than vulnerabilities. ASEAN has the opportunity to transform these lessons into a model of regional coexistence and progress, demonstrating how pluralism can thrive even in the face of global challenges. This not only

strengthens ASEAN internally but also positions it as a beacon of inclusivity and stability on the international stage.

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CERTIFICATE

Ricardo Gamboa, Deputy Director of the Institute of International Studies at the University of Chile, hereby certifies that **Rizki Damayanti** participated in the **EU-VALUES International Conference**, held on December 4th, 5th, and 6th at the Institute of International Studies, University of Chile.

Dr. Damayanti presented the paper: **"Implications of the 2024 European Parliament Election and the Rise of Right-Wing Parties for ASEAN's Multiculturalism, Muslim Migration, and International Relations"**.

This certificate is issued for any purpose the recipient may find appropriate.



Ricardo Gamboa

Santiago, Chile, January 2025