

Peace in Plurality: Religious Homogeneity and Social Instability in Southeast Asia

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Abstract

The goal of this paper is to review the existing literature on the relationship between religious homogeneity and social instability and exclusion in Southeast Asia and to study the connection between them. After a brief introduction, the literature review covers the relevant perspectives on the interplay between religious diversity and aggregate stability, highlights the role of religiosity, and analyzes prominent theories behind religiously inspired conflict. The study employs a cross-sectional, most similar systems estimating case study design that compares the sample countries of Thailand and Malaysia. While the most significant result of the study is the highlighting of the robust direct positive relationship between religious homogeneity and social exclusion, the role that religious homogeneity plays on social instability has not been supported as thoroughly. Acknowledging the findings of this study could aid countries within Southeast Asia in processing how future social conflicts might be affected by religious makeup.

Key Words: Religious Homogeneity, Social Instability, Social Exclusion, Southeast Asia

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Introduction

Diversity has long been a central topic in the field of international relations, but an oversaturation of research focused solely on specific facets of diversity have left the literature ironically unified in the perspectives being espoused. The purpose of this paper is to add nuance to the conversation surrounding diversity and its role in the social stability of nations by proposing an answer to the research question “How does religious homogeneity affect social exclusion and instability in South East Asia?” Researching an answer to this particular question will work to isolate the effect of religious diversity apart from the more often studied ethnic and linguistic varieties and will identify how stability can often come at the cost of social exclusion in more homogenous nations. By studying the differences in social factors of Malaysia and its more religiously homogenous neighbor Thailand, this paper aims to identify the connection between religious representation and its 2nd and 3rd order effects on the social factors of a nation. The following section will consist of a review of the literature on the role of religion and religious diversity in the shaping of social trends, broken down into prominent schools of thought on the subject. Next, the paper will discuss the overall research design utilized, state the theory and proposed hypotheses, and offer insight into the concepts and variables used. Following that will be a descriptive analysis section that breaks down the data collected during the study, and a section dedicated to the overall findings of the study and a brief discussion of how they relate to the original research question and proposed theory. Finally, the paper will culminate with a conclusion that reviews the content involved, summarizes the main points, highlights the practical implications of the research, and offers possible directions for future research.

Literature Review

Religious belief plays a significant enough role in the interactions between individuals, groups, and nations to factor heavily in the literature of IR, with its connections to conflict and peace being of particular significance. While some key models or schools of thought have managed to gain widespread acceptance, the general rule has been that there are almost as many perspectives on religion's role as there are studies on the subject. Key divisions exist between those who view religion more as a tool for conflict instigation and those who see it primarily as a tool for conflict management, as well as between those who see religious diversity as more of a help or a hindrance to social prosperity and unity. Even the salience of religious diversity and religiosity are cause for argument, with the importance of their role varying greatly from author to author. This review aims to highlight exactly what makes religion's role so controversial in IR and the arguments put forth by the competing schools of thought. While the sections below are designed to be inclusive, the review writ large is far from comprehensive, and as broad of a subject as this calls for a sacrifice of nuance at times. The schools of thought below focus on the effects of religion and religious diversity on other societal factors and are supported by an appropriately diverse set of research models; Time-series quantitative research is used alongside logical arguments within descriptive case studies to solidify proposed connections between religion and conflict or prosperity. These sections show just how varied thought on the role of religion can be, with the first viewing it as largely unimportant.

Faith as a Negligible Factor

With the list of proposed sources of instability and intergroup violence being incredibly lengthy, it is no surprise that some have come to view religion's role as irrelevant. These authors

place far more importance on factors such as ethnicity (Bormann, Cederman, & Vogt, 2017), economic prosperity, equity, or political ideology (Annett, 2001, Anyanwu, 1982, and Nilsen, & Hara, 2017). While the spread of this belief is difficult to track, as the lack of religion as a variable is far from conclusive negative proof, many largescale projects have highlighted the seemingly negligible role of religion in the study of societal trends (Cordesman, 2019, Fosu, 1992, and Leiden, 1965). Some see faith as a secondary motive or identifier in most groups of interest (Bormann, N., Cederman, L., & Vogt, 2017, and Nilsen, & Hara, 2017), while others yet view it as nothing but a confounding variable that historic studies simply failed to control for (Cordesman, 2019). Ultimately, this view has fallen out of favor in most relevant circles as the twin waves of growing religious revival and globalism have produced countless in-depth studies on the ways in which religion shapes the individuals and societies around it.

Identity Through Belief

One major way in which religious beliefs have been shown to effect societal factors has been through the concept of identity. Studies of varying design have connected the importance of identity through religion with the behavior states and individuals are willing to partake in (Bognár, 2017, Kinnvall, 2004, and Weissbrod, 1983). Some have proposed that identity is usually formed through common social mechanisms, but that religion can serve as a substitute (Bognár, 2017). Regardless of how religious belief becomes an integral facet of an individual or group's identity, the result is believed to be an increase in instability and a generally negative affect on the societies that feature religious belief as a major aspect of shared identity (Riedl, 2012 and Seul, 1999). A major subdivide exists in this strain of thought over whether more homogeneity in the religious identity of a nation leads to less opportunities for conflict or if it

simply emboldens believers of the majority religion to act out against minorities. A common application of religious identity is the creation of in vs. out groups, which certainly serves as the basis for intra and international conflict. (Gomes, 2013) supports the belief in the unifying power of a homogenous religious identity, while (Hirschl & Shachar, 2018) see religious identity as negatively related to stability at any level of analysis.

Religious Revival in Public

A major strain in the literature on religion follows the growing religious revival in multiple regions, which has affected the way in which public life is enacted in numerous countries. As this trend follows that of the growth of international democracy which was widely believed to have ended around 2006, the reaction has been to create a connection between a decrease in individual freedoms and the growth of religious based conflict. Multiple studies have theorized that a decrease in religious freedoms have led to violent division and conflict based on religious revival (Driskell, Embry & Lyon, 2008, Ferrara, 2011 and Grim & Finke, 2011). The spike in religious movements that highlight the “fall” of their society and the failure of democracy has therefore been connected to the ill-planned decisions of nations to deal with religious diversity or those who exist outside the societal norm. This connection has found fault in both secular democracies, as well as nations with state-religions cracking down on minority faiths (Grim & Finke, 2011). In this manner, it is the reaction to religious groups that lack national control that causes a resurgence of more religious fervor and interfaith violence. While the connection between the two accepted trends above is far from tenuous, those who highlight it have rarely made such solid cases for whether this says anything about the direct role of religious diversity.

Response to Grievances

One of the most widely accepted models for the rise of social instability and even the development of insurgencies has been the grievance model, which posits that unrest stems from the grievances of groups experience some variation of deprivation (Basedau, Fox, Pierskalla, Strüver & Vüllers, 2017). While only a small minority of the quantitative and case studies dedicated to this model focus or mention religion, the basic pattern remains the same: minority groups experience a disparagement between their expectations and their actual treatment in their larger society, resulting in an increase in unrest and conflict. (Fox, 1999 and) identify this pattern in regards to religious groups across multiple regions featuring varying combinations of religious groups. While in-depth studies by (Dowd, 2015, Hoffman & Jamal, 2014 and Fox, J. (1999) have made the perspective more robust, dissenting opinions like that of (Basedau, Et Al., 2017 and Kilavuz, 2020) and others aim to disprove the connection between religious discrimination and instability. (Basedau, Et Al., 2017) even attempts to break down part of the accepted pattern, finding a statistically significant connection between cases of discrimination and higher levels of grievance, but showing no such connection between such grievances and political violence. This study effectively challenges the intellectual monopoly of the grievance model and the importance of deprivation in minority cases. Anecdotal evidence and the results of its logistic regression show that opportunities through minorities' relative size and state capacity play a much larger role than previous models account for. This very finding is also mentioned in multiple other studies, even if their overall findings differed greatly (Huber, & Basedau, 2018 and Ogwang, 2020).

Post-colonialism and Formative Rifts

While some theories largely dismiss the role of religion in favor of other explanatory factors for societal unrest, others incorporate religious divides and many others into an overarching theory on why some nations continue to experience internal conflict. This theory posits that the instability experienced in countries with differing groups that feature a plural history is simply engrained in their cultural DNA (Bose, 2003). The main concept is that these divides are “formative rifts” which have existed prior to the creation of the nation and that are therefore far more difficult to eliminate than most would anticipate (McAtackney & Palmer, 2016, and Van der Veer, 2002). It would then follow that the diverse nature of a nation at the time of its creation is a far more important factor in its later stability than the level of religious homo or heterogeneity it later developments. This theory has been especially poignant in the case of post-colonial nations, where outside forces have led to the awkward consolidation of often disparate linguistic, ethnic, and religious groups. (Van der Veer, 2002) argues that the study of such postcolonial nations cannot be divorced from the international aspects that shaped them and that religion is no exception. The role of religion in these post-colonial nations has only grown, as well as the role of religious imagery and wording in political life. These trends have grown into the transnational space and threaten to increase violence (Mohamedou, 2018). Multiple studies under this school of thought have argued that the study of South Asian nations must include a focus on colonial history, the current global environment, and the growing and international role of religious movements (Bose, 2003, and Van der Veer, 2002).

Growing Pains

A school of thought similar to that of formative rifts is that of cultural growing pains, wherein growing instability is caused by a middling period of religious diversification, rather

than being inherited from a country's origins. The idea is that as a religiously homogenous nation begins to experience diversification due to outside factors, the normative and power-based shifts that occur will temporarily throw off the cultural balance of the nation (Kanas & Martinovic, 2017 and Tamney & Condran, 1980). This period of change will inevitably lead to an increase in instability and cases of exclusion, but will subsequently lead to a final period of more stable pluralism. Cases in support of this pattern have been highlighted in multiple regions, with the case of Indonesia even being made in Southeast Asia (Basedau & Koos, 2015 and Tamney & Condran, 1980). This approach appears to lack widespread support and would most likely benefit from an increase in application to understudied regions to add further validity. It is important to note that although this theory hinges on the connection between instability and religious diversification, it ultimately sees pluralism as a more stable structure than the original homogeneity seen in case nations.

Increased Friction Points

One major school of thought in support of the connection between increased religious heterogeneity and instability is that of cultural "friction points". The main concept of the school is that nations with more diverse religious populations feature increased opportunities for negative interactions between differing groups that are often at odds over resource competition (Arianti, Sobirin, Yaoren, Mahzam, Bashar, Chalermripinyorat, & Nasir, 2020). These "friction points" add to aggregate distrust and eventually lead to widespread instability and the organized exclusion of less represented groups (Hirschl & Shachar, 2018 and Gomes, 2013). While this theory has been backed by multiple quantitative studies, a few key cases have revealed some controversial issues. (Dowd, 2016) revisits the author's last attempt at explaining the

interreligious violence in Nigeria and finds that a subnational follow-up study revealed the most heterogeneous regions where actually the most peaceful. These findings and others point to the importance of applying analysis at multiple aggregate levels to determine the robustness of original findings.

Zealot Influence

Studies under this school of thought apply Rene Girard's mimetic theory of desire to the connection of religious zealots and violence in international relations. The power of zealots is said to be the power of mimetic desire, which unifies individuals into galvanized groups and provides outsiders as scapegoats for shared frustrations (Basedau, Pfeiffer & Vüllers, 2016 and Troy, 2013). These concepts fit into realist theory if some concessions are made for constructivist aspects. Religion is often shown to be a form of identity politics (much like in the identity section above) in the first and second image (man and state), but to only have indirect consequences on the third image (war). While the mimetic model is not always mentioned directly, the following tenants of this approach are routinely included in relevant studies: individuals seek purpose and unity in times of uncertainty or imbalance, their actions increase this said imbalance until a truer sense of unity is reached, only for this unity to eventually devolve again due to the recurrence of uncertainty. While this approach focuses mostly on the importance of religious zeal (religiosity), it often ties this increase in zeal to the empowering nature of religious homogeneity, which emboldens members of the majority group to act out against minority groups more feverishly and without fear of repercussions (Basedau, Pfeiffer & Vüllers, 2016 and Qurtuby, 2012). This model also touches on the concept of counterterrorism, as minority groups that are unable to seek purpose and positive social change through the

political and cultural pathways made accessible through pluralism instead seek them from asymmetric tactics against the more powerful religious majority (Arianti, Et Al., 2020).

Religious Economy Model

This model places religious groups in an economic framework, which sees them competing for “customers” and space in a market place of ideas (Bankston, 2003). Many studies based on this model work to connect variables such as social stability or human development to the level of religious freedom in a nation (Maoz, & Henderson, 2020). This often results in a supposedly strong connection between religious heterogeneity and positive trends in economic development and social stability, but there are key areas that have been left unexplored by the model thus far. This model highlights the importance of religious heterogeneity in shaping religious freedom, but neglects to include non-religious groups and movements that can affect this and quality of life. Thus, the role of secularism is largely overlooked, but the case against religious homogeneity is made abundantly clear. Many relevant studies seemingly show that religious diversity increases religious freedom as well as human security, and additionally find a strong correlation between larger populations and less religious freedoms (Grim & Finke, 2011 and Maoz, & Henderson, 2020).

Current Paper’s Role in Literature

While the literature on the connection between religion and conflict/instability is clearly robust and varied, there currently exist gaps in need of further explanation. One such gap involves the connection between religious homogeneity and social instability and exclusion. Much work has been done to show how increased religiosity can lead to stronger social divides,

but less conclusive work has been done on the role that religious diversity plays. This paper aims to further add validity to the connection between religiously homogenous regions/nations and the presence of conflict and exclusion between the represented faith groups. While studies on the subject have been conducted with nuanced results in regions like East Africa (Dowd, 2016) and the United States (Brown & Brown, 2011), these and other similar studies have almost exclusively focused on areas saturated with two or three religions or on minor sectarian splits. In focusing on the highly eclectic region of Southeast Asia, this study aims to highlight the different outcomes experienced by similar countries that feature strikingly different levels of religious representation. While nations like the Philippines and Thailand feature monolithic religions in the form of Catholicism and Buddhism respectively, neighboring states like Malaysia and Indonesia record a much more balanced religious make-up with representation from every major faith and even smaller groups endemic to the area. By utilizing nations from this diverse region, this paper will add to the results of previous studies that drew from more simplistic samples. This paper will also fill the much-needed role of exploring how religious diversity, or a lack thereof, affects aggregate levels of social exclusion. By highlighting the interplay between stability and exclusion, this study examines how stability in homogenous nations may come at the cost of the social exclusion of minority groups. This study also works to differentiate between the multiple forms of diversity and analyze the specific role of religious diversity, as the current literature predominantly focuses on ethnic diversity and fails to account for nuance. This imbalance in the literature has been stated succinctly by (McCauley, 2017) and is accounted for in the cases chosen for this study. Ultimately, the goal of this research is to increase understanding of how religious homogeneity affects social instability and exclusion, especially in the region of Southeast Asia; a subject which has yet to be covered directly.

Research Design

Research Question, Theory, and Hypothesis

This paper seeks to answer the following research question: how does religious homogeneity affect social exclusion and instability in South East Asia. The proposed theory of this paper is that increased levels of religious homogeneity marginalize existing minority faith groups by robbing them of traditional forms of representation and protection and by emboldening those in the majority faith to undertake informal methods of discrimination against them, thus increasing social instability and exclusion. The logic of this theory is that more pluralistic nations like Malaysia tend to feature a more egalitarian strain of governance and are more often forced to offer legitimate methods of representation to the various faith groups represented. This ensures that the grievances of all faith groups are given some level of official recognition and even the possibility of resolution, while the government and ruling majority in more homogenous countries like Thailand have far less of an incentive to offer any existing minority faith groups formal venues for representation and inclusion. Instead of leading to a state of peace, this religious homogeneity would thus lead instead to higher levels of exclusion of minority groups and a resulting increase in instability. While little direct research on the subject has been undertaken, other possible answers can be extrapolated from the research. It could be that increased chances of conflict naturally come with the sort of interactions between religious groups seen at the political and social levels in more diverse nations. It is also worth noting that the sense of impunity that comes with having a significant religious majority may lead to more severe tactics that work to suppress acts of rebellion. The first possible answer is handled through the use of multiple indexes for measuring the dependent variables so that their relationship with

the independent variable is made clearer and more robust. The second is accounted for by the examination of social exclusion alongside social instability, since any attempts to curtail insurrection by the government that would decrease instability would have some effect on the level of exclusion. By observing how religious homogeneity effects both instability and exclusion, this paper ensures that peace and equity are given equal consideration. Malaysia and Thailand were chosen as sample nations for this comparative case study because of the natural controls that exist between the two, since both nations are in the same region, are both members of ASEAN, are constitutional monarchies, have similar population sizes, have comparable land areas, and share most of the same economic and diplomatic ties. These natural controls account for the more ambiguous theories that state that the role of religious diversity is unclear or unknowable. The alternative hypothesis for this paper is as follows: Religious homogeneity has a direct positive relationship with social exclusion and instability in Southeast Asian Nations. Thus, the null hypothesis that the paper aims to disprove is that religious homogeneity has no significant effect on social exclusion and instability in Southeast Asian Nations.

Explanation of Method

This paper makes use of a cross-sectional comparative case study to observe the role that religious diversity plays in the social aspects of two sample nations. The unit of analysis is the nation-state and the two nations being compared are Thailand and Malaysia. The abundance of natural controls that exist between the two countries make this causal case study a most similar systems estimating design. This design and choice of cases highlight how one of the most discernable differences between the two countries is their level of religious diversity in order to limit the number of possible explanations for the difference in their levels of social exclusion and

instability. While Malaysia still maintains a Muslim majority, it also features populations of each major religion and several indigenous faith groups. Thailand on the other hand, is almost exclusive Buddhist and features very few religious minority groups with Islam being the only one accounting for over 1% of the population (Table: Religious diversity index scores by country, 2020). The choice to compare countries, rather than subnational regions, was made to account for aggregate instability, rather than risking selection bias by focusing on specific regions experiencing conflict. A cross-sectional design was chosen over a time-series one for the case study, since levels of religious diversity have remained relatively stable across Southeast Asia, with only a few examples like Indonesia experiencing a notable shift in demographics over the last few decades (Arianti, Et Al., 2020 and Tamney & Condran, 1980).

Conceptual Definitions

This section will offer conceptual definitions for the following terms that this study makes frequent use of: Religious diversity, religious homogeneity, religiosity, social exclusion, social instability, major religion, indigenous faith group, and grievance. All of the above concepts are defined in ways commonly used in the literature, with the exception of social exclusion and indigenous faith groups, which have no consistent definition in the current literature. Religious diversity is defined as the presence of multiple religious groups within a population, with religious homogeneity then being a notable lack of religious diversity (Dowd, 2016). This paper defines social exclusion as the isolation of groups through the denial of formal representation and self-efficacy. This exclusion can take multiple forms, but this paper focuses specifically on demographic pressure and group grievance. Social instability is defined as the lack of security from threats, decreased political stability, and the presence of infighting and

conflict within a population (Anyanwu, 1982, Fosu, 1992, and Grim & Finke, 2011). The term “major religion” is defined as one of the five world religions of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism (Bognár, 2017). This study defines “indigenous faith groups” as minority religious populations endemic to specific tribal groups or nations, in this case the various tribes of Malaysia. Finally, the definition of grievance used in this paper is the shared and public airing of issues over identity, e.g. ethnicity, religion, social class (Basedau Et Al., 2017).

Identification of Variables

The primary causal/independent variable (X) for this study is Religious Homogeneity (RELHO), while the two dependent variables (Y) for this study are Social Instability (SOIN) and Social Exclusion (SOEX). Both dependent variables were chosen for the study, since past research has mostly failed to account for the presence of a “false peace” that exists when homogenous nations achieve stability on the surface, but only as a result of the systematic exclusion of minority groups. The most significant control variables are linguistic homogeneity (LINHO) and Ethnic Homogeneity (ETHO). These controls are noteworthy as it is rare for countries to feature a mix in levels of different forms of diversity, leaving the current literature lacking in the isolated study of the impact of religious diversity. The choice of Thailand and Malaysia as cases serves this purpose well, as they both share similar levels of ethnic and linguistic diversity, but display vastly different levels of religious diversity.

Measurement of Variables

Independent Variable (X)

RELHO: The causal variable of religious homogeneity is operationalized using multiple forms of measurement. The first is an inverse of the PEW Research Group Religious Diversity Index (RDI), which is itself an inverse of the Herfindahl-Hirshman Index applied to the distribution and mixture of religion in a given population. This is achieved by squaring and summing the share of the eight major religious categories chosen and taking the inverse before dividing the product by 875 to place it within a scale of 0-10. The second form of measurement is the inverse of Alesina et al's religious fractionalization score. These quantitative measurements are used to add validity to the overall qualitative narrative, which is also bolstered through the use of news articles, surveys, and journal articles. This choice was made to avoid the over complication of the research design through the introduction of time series data on stability and exclusion.

Dependent Variables (Y)

SOIN: The first dependent variable of social instability is measured using similar methods as the causal variable, but makes use of three indexes, all of which are pulled from TheGlobalEconomy.com. The first index measures security threats and considers threats to a state, such as bombings, attacks and battle-related deaths, rebel movements, mutinies, coups, or terrorism. The Security Threat Index also takes into account serious criminal factors, such as organized crime and homicides, and perceived trust of citizens in domestic security. The second index measures political stability based on perceptions of the likelihood that the government will be destabilized or overthrown by unconstitutional or violent means, including politically-motivated violence and terrorism. The index is an average of several other indexes from the Economist Intelligence Unit, the World Economic Forum, and the Political Risk Services, among

others. The final index measures state fragility based on the vulnerability in pre-conflict, active conflict and post-conflict situations. The index comprises twelve conflict risk indicators that are used to measure the condition of a state at any given moment: security apparatus, factionalized elites, group grievance, economic decline, uneven economic development, human flight and brain drain, state legitimacy, public services, human rights and rule of law, demographic pressures, refugees and IDPs, and external intervention. These indexes add validity to trends identified in the examination of social instability in both countries based on articles and surveys on the region.

SOEX: The second dependent variable of social exclusion is measured using the Fractionalized Elites Index and Group Grievance Index on TheGlobalEconomy.com. The first considers the fragmentation of state institutions along ethnic, class, clan, racial or religious lines, as well as and brinksmanship and gridlock between ruling elites. The second focuses on divisions and schisms between different groups in society – particularly divisions based on social or political characteristics – and their role in access to services or resources, and inclusion in the political process. Similar qualitative methods to those described in the sections above were also implemented to identify how social exclusion has affected the two case countries.

Control Variables (Z)

ETHO: the first control variable of ethnic homogeneity is operationalized using the inverse of Alesina et al's ethnic fractionalization score, which are calculated for 190 countries using information from the Encyclopedia Britannica.

LINHO: the second control variable of linguistic homogeneity is operationalized using the inverse of both Fearon’s Ethnic Fractionalization Index and Alesina et al’s linguistic fractionalization score. The prior is based on a measurement of similarity between spoken languages in a country, with 1 equating to the entire population speaking two unrelated languages and 0 equating to the whole country speaking the same language; The latter follows the same methodology as Alesina et al’s ethnic fractionalization score described above.

Descriptive Analysis

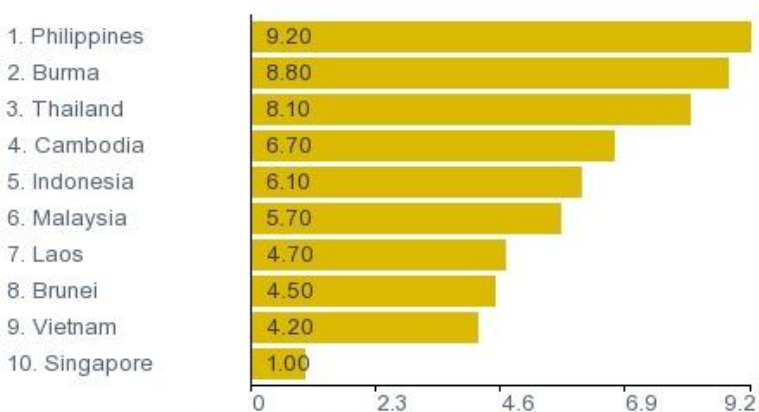
Southeast Asia serves as one of the most diverse regions across multiple metrics, with major disparities also existing between countries. The presence of security threats serves as just one example of this, with the difference in scores between the Philippines and Singapore serving showing the drastic nature of the differences that can exist (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Security threats index scores for all ASEAN nations

Security threats index, 0 (low) - 10 (high), 2020

(index points, Source: Fund for Peace, TheGlobalEconomy.com)

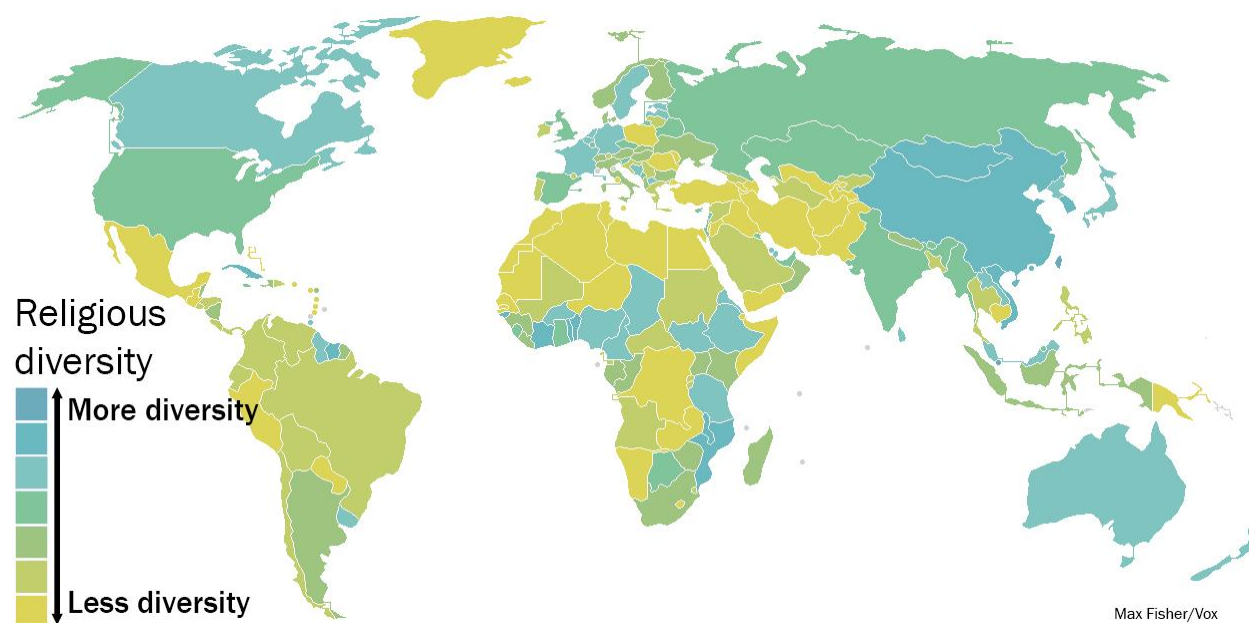


Source: TheGlobalEconomy.com, Fund for Peace, TheGlobalEconomy.com

Southeast Asia is also regarded as the most religiously diverse region on the planet, as can be seen in the following illustration of data collected by the PEW Research Group on religious diversity (Figure 2). Only West Africa comes close to the level of diversity on display, but even in this region, the variety of religious groups represented is lacking by comparison (Fisher, 2014).

Figure 2

Religious diversity by country



Although the overall trend is obvious, there do exist drastic differences in levels of religious representation between neighboring countries. Such is the case with Malaysia and Thailand, as can be seen in the PEW Research Center's Religious Diversity Index (Figure 3).

Figure 3

PEW Research Center's Religious Diversity Index (RDI) scores for Southeast Asia

Country	RDI	Percent Christian	Percent Muslim	Percent Unaffiliated	Percent Hindu	Percent Buddhist	Percent Folk Religions	Percent Other Religions	Percent Jewish	2010 Country Population
Brunei	4.8	9.4%	75.1%	0.4%	0.3%	8.6%	6.2%	0.1%	< 0.1%	400,000
Cambodia	0.7	0.4%	2.0%	0.2%	< 0.1%	96.9%	0.6%	< 0.1%	< 0.1%	14,140,000
Indonesia	2.6	9.9%	87.2%	< 0.1%	1.7%	0.7%	0.3%	0.1%	< 0.1%	239,870,000
Laos	5.4	1.5%	< 0.1%	0.9%	< 0.1%	66.0%	30.7%	0.7%	< 0.1%	6,200,000
Malaysia	6.3	9.4%	63.7%	0.7%	6.0%	17.7%	2.3%	0.2%	< 0.1%	28,400,000
Philippines	1.6	92.6%	5.5%	0.1%	< 0.1%	< 0.1%	1.5%	0.1%	< 0.1%	93,260,000
Singapore	9.0	18.2%	14.3%	16.4%	5.2%	33.9%	2.3%	9.7%	< 0.1%	5,090,000
Thailand	1.5	0.9%	5.5%	0.3%	0.1%	93.2%	< 0.1%	< 0.1%	< 0.1%	69,120,000
Timor-Leste	0.1	99.6%	0.1%	< 0.1%	< 0.1%	< 0.1%	0.1%	< 0.1%	< 0.1%	1,120,000
Vietnam	7.7	8.2%	0.2%	29.6%	< 0.1%	16.4%	45.3%	0.4%	< 0.1%	87,850,000

To gain a clearer understanding of the level of religious homogeneity in the case countries, their respective RDI scores can be inverted. Thailand then holds a score of 8.5 for religious homogeneity, being the third most homogenous in the region with the second largest majority of Buddhists. Malaysia shows the third lowest level of homogeneity, with a score of 3.7. Despite its larger Muslim majority, Malaysia displays some of the highest percentages of minority religions, while Thailand has only one minority (Islam) that accounts for more than one percent of the total population. These trends are also supported by the data presented in (Alesina, Et Al., 2003), where an inverse of their religious fractionalization scores shows Malaysia to have a homogeneity score of 0.3343 and Thailand to have the second highest score in the region of 0.9006. It is important to note the disparity in levels of religious homogeneity between the two case nations, as they vary far less in their levels of ethnic and linguistic diversity. A similar inversion of the results of (Alesina, Et Al., 2003) shows Malaysia to have an ethnic homogeneity score of 0.412, with Thailand being one of its closest partners in the region, having a score of

0.3662. A natural control between the two nations also exists in the form of linguistic fractionalization, with a final inversion of the results of (Alesina, Et Al., 2003) showing Malaysia to have a linguistic homogeneity score of 0.403, with Thailand again showing a similar score of 0.3656. These results are further backed by the results of the other major analysis of national linguistic diversity, (Fearon, 2003). This study's ethnic fractionalization score is based on the diversity of spoken languages within a country, with its inverse showing further similarities in the level of linguistic homogeneity between the two case countries. Using this method, Malaysia has a score of 0.404 and Thailand one of 0.569; both of which are within the middle third of the regional scores.

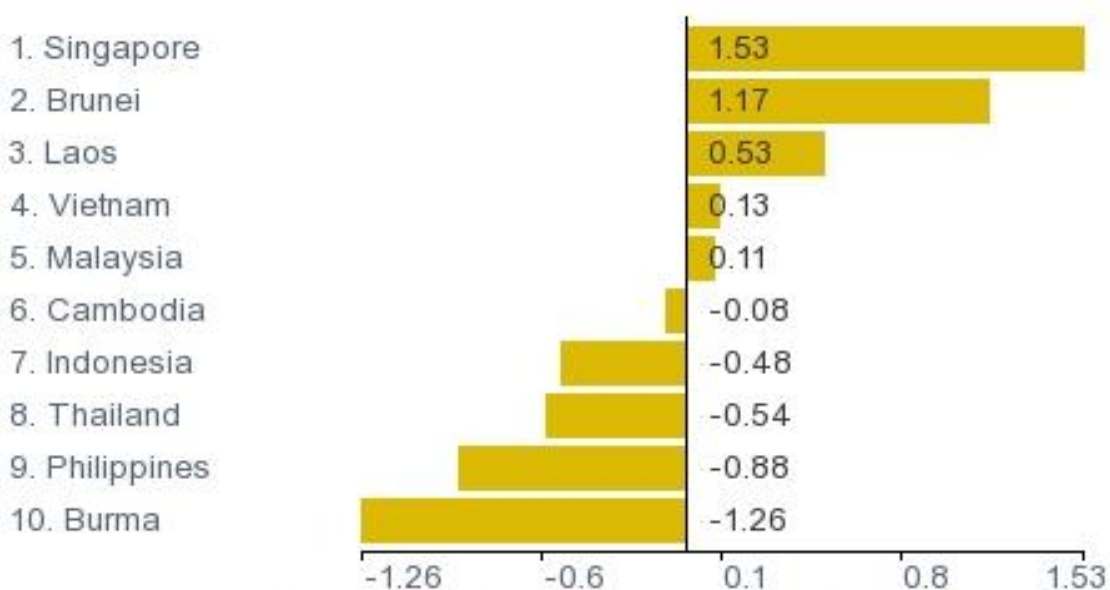
With religious homogeneity identified as one of the most significant differences between the otherwise similar cases of Thailand and Malaysia, the dependent variables can now be observed. In regards to social instability, three indexes can be examined to create a baseline understanding of the differences between the two nations. The first index is displayed in Figure 1., which shows Thailand to have the third highest score in the region of 8.10, while Malaysia displays a middling score of 5.70 (Security threats index in ASEAN, 2020). Both (Arianti, 2020) and (Nilsen & Hara, 2017) cover the growing Islamic insurgency in the Southern Thai region of Patani, which exemplifies the connection between religious homogeneity and social instability. The insurgency is identified as gaining motivation from multiple sources, but while (Hasenclever & De Juan, 2007) sees religion as ambivalent to political conflict, the insurgency's political goal of secession has been found to be inseparable from its religious grievances, since its members have long suffered at the hands of the Buddhist majority. This leads to the second measure of social instability, political instability, since the constitutional monarchies of Thailand and

Malaysia have had dealt with religion in vastly different ways. To start, the figure below shows the political stability scores of all Southeast Asian nations.

Figure 4

Political stability index for all ASEAN nations

Political stability index (-2.5 weak; 2.5 strong), 2019
(points, Source: The World Bank, TheGlobalEconomy.com)



Source: TheGlobalEconomy.com, The World Bank, TheGlobalEconomy.com

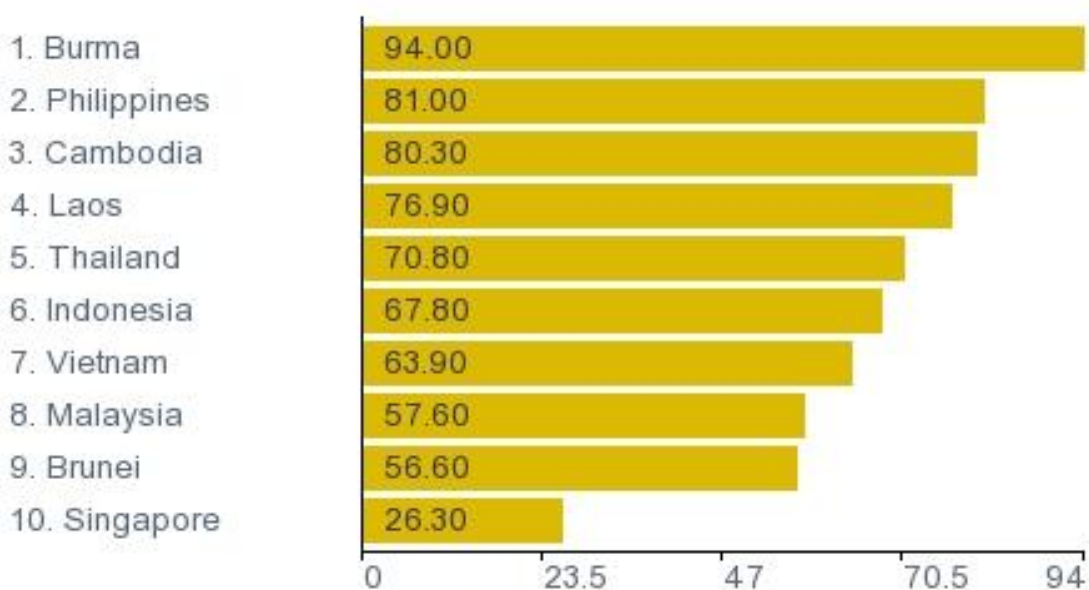
Although low relative to nations like Singapore, Malaysia clearly displays a higher score than Thailand, even as the prominent role of Islam in national politics sometimes causes disruption between groups (Arianti, 2020 and Political stability in ASEAN, 2019). The insurgency in Patani has been a key factor in the political turmoil of Thailand with the split between royalists and anti-royalists often focusing on the role of the majority Muslim region. This ties into the final

quantitative assessment of social instability, which utilizes the Fragile State Index from The Fund for Peace (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Fragile state index for ASEAN nations

Fragile state index, 0 (low) - 120 (high), 2020
(index points, Source: Fund for Peace, TheGlobalEconomy.com)



Source: TheGlobalEconomy.com, Fund for Peace, TheGlobalEconomy.com

Although far less robust than the differences in the previous two indexes, the scores for Malaysia (57.60) and Thailand (70.80) are still notable (Fragile state index in ASEAN, 2020). The similarity in these scores is most likely due to a combination of the similar economic factors faced by both nations as members of ASEAN and the rise in Islamic terrorist threats in both nations as a direct result of the fall of the IS Caliphate in the late 2010's (Arianti, 2020 and

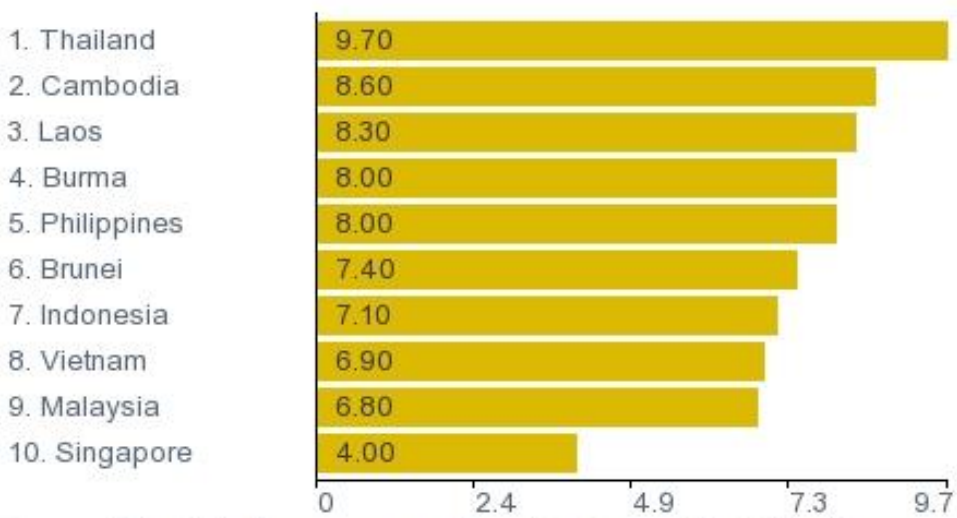
Chulov, 2019). Although this might appear to work against the theory of the paper, it actually serves as the introduction of the second dependent variable, social exclusion.

As stated in the conclusion to the literature review, previous studies on the relationship between religious diversity and social instability have failed to account for the possibility of a “false peace”. The popular line of thinking is that the apparent stability seen in homogenous nations shows the negative results of diversity, but these studies routinely focus solely on ethnic diversity and disregard the confounding variable of social exclusion. This study operationalizes social exclusion through the use of the Fund for Peace’s Factionalized Elites Index and Group Grievance Index. The first index (Figure 6) accounts for the divisions in a nation’s institutions along religious, ethnic, linguistic, or gender lines.

Figure 6

Factionalized elites index scores for ASEAN nations

Factionalized elites index, 0 (low) - 10 (high), 2020
(index points, Source: Fund for Peace, TheGlobalEconomy.com)



Source: TheGlobalEconomy.com, Fund for Peace, TheGlobalEconomy.com

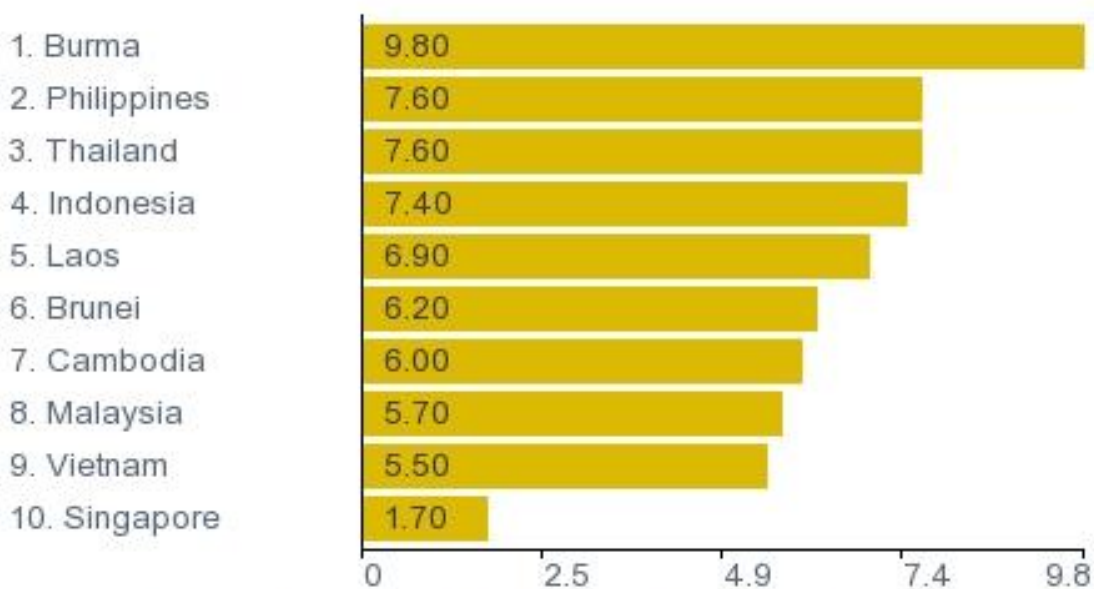
Thailand tops the list with a score of 9.70, while Malaysia is second from the bottom with a score of 6.80 (Factionalized elites index in ASEAN, 2020). This reflects a major separation between the lives of those who belong to the minority groups within Thailand and those in the military and government who predominantly come from the Buddhist majority (Ferrara, 2011). While other factors like the role of the royalists and ties to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) certainly play a role in the stratification and disproportion of the Thai government, the complete lack of representation of minority groups in law and authority can be argued to have the biggest impact (Busbarat, 2018). This division has allowed the Thai government to exercise significant control of the excluded minority groups, leading to periods of apparent stability, but the reaction of the Muslim minority in the south over the last few decades has shown that this stability has come only as the result of widespread discrimination and oppression (Busbarat, 2018). This reaction and others have shown how the grievances held by minority groups as a result of large scale social and political exclusion can routinely undermine the level of stability obtained by more homogenous nations. The second index shows this reality by analyzing levels of group grievances due to a lack of inclusion or social benefits (Figure 7).

Figure 7

Group Grievance Index for ASEAN nations

Group grievance index, 0 (low) - 10 (high), 2020

(index points, Source: Fund for Peace, TheGlobalEconomy.com)



Source: TheGlobalEconomy.com, Fund for Peace, TheGlobalEconomy.com

Thailand again ranks in the top three nations with a score of 7.60, while Malaysia is yet again in the bottom three with a score of 5.70 (Group grievance index in ASEAN, 2020). Nations like Malaysia and Singapore that offer far more chances for social and political representation than their neighbors often experience far less grievances from minority groups who are given official venues to communicate issues and affect tangible change (Abdul Rahman, & Mohd Khambali, 2013). The connection between the grievances expressed by religious minorities would then be amplified in more homogenous nations like Thailand, where the presence of a large religious

majority would allow power elites to virtually ignore the desires of minority communities (Annett, 2001 and Basedau, Et Al, 2017). This relationship between the ruling elites of Thailand and its religious minorities was made clear when former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra formalized peace talks with the group responsible for the insurgency in the south, the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), only for the decision to be widely condemned by the military. Aside from this event, the Thai government has avoided formal peace talks in the past so as not to internationalize the conflict or add legitimacy to the group (Arianti, 2020 and Busbarat, 2018). These findings are supported by studies like (Grimm & Finke, 2011) that find that the price for denying religious freedom is too high, and that the rise of religious fervor and movements cannot be curtailed by discriminating against minority religions.

The nation of Malaysia has dealt with high levels of instability in the past, but delineates from the example of Thailand in that the cases of more visible instability are more often handled through formal channels, like the political theater or social media (Azra, 2006). Malaysia has dealt with its fair share of issues stemming from religious conflict, but studies like (Abdul Rahman & Mohd Khambali, 2013) have established that the pluralistic nature of Malaysian society and government allow for such open conflict to prevent largescale suppression and social exclusion. Finally, more diverse nations like Malaysia may experience more sporadic shifts in power and a less unified central government, but their religiously homogenous neighbors appear far more prone to full blown coups (Maoz & Henderson, 2020 and McCauley, 2017). Despite the appearance of frequent debate in Malaysia, surveys conducted by multiple sources show that over 92% of citizens polled are proud to live in a multi-ethnic and multicultural nation, over 80% felt that widespread religious freedom exists within Malaysia, and 82% feel their nation is socially stable (Is there religious freedom in Malaysia?, 2017 and Izzuddin, 2020).

Findings & Discussion

In regards to the research question of “How does religious homogeneity affect social exclusion and instability in South East Asia?”, the null hypothesis that religious homogeneity has no significant effect on social exclusion and instability in Southeast Asian nations can be rejected. The alternate hypothesis that religious homogeneity has a significant effect on social exclusion and instability in Southeast Asian nations., however, requires further validation before it can be accepted. While the analysis does not clearly support the causal relationship expected between religious homogeneity and social instability, the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable of social exclusion was shown to be robust. A clear delineation was not drawn between the levels of social stability in both case nations, as levels of stability can be shown to be comparable depending on the definition and method of operationalization used for the dependent variable. That being said, social exclusion was clearly connected to religious homogeneity and shown to be a confounding variable that had not been accounted for in previous studies on the subject. Based on the analysis, the theory that increased levels of religious homogeneity marginalize existing minority faith groups by robbing them of traditional forms of representation and protection and by emboldening those in the majority faith to undertake informal methods of discrimination against them, thus increasing social instability and exclusion, can be said to be further substantiated by the analysis of the study. These results are in slight contrast to the literature on the relationship of diversity and stability, as most studies have focused explicitly on ethnic diversity, but are consistent with multiple established schools of thought on the effects of religious diversity on various social aspects.

Recommendations & Conclusion

This study sought to analyze the relationship between religious homogeneity and social instability and exclusion in Southeast Asia. The literature on the role of diversity in conflicts was reviewed and found to be lacking in clear delineations between forms of diversity, with most emphasis being placed on ethnic diversity. Further review of the literature on the role of religion in social stability and exclusion presented multiple schools of thought, with many establishing a clear connection between the control of religious freedom and increased conflict and disenfranchisement. The study itself employed a cross sectional most similar systems estimated case study research design using the case nations of Malaysia and Thailand. The qualitative narrative crafted from multiple surveys, articles, and indexes yielded notable results. While the null hypothesis was thoroughly rejected, more work is needed before the alternative hypothesis can be accepted, or before a more accurate answer to the research question can be substantiated. While still in need of further research, the given results support the theory that increased levels of religious homogeneity marginalize existing minority faith groups by robbing them of traditional forms of representation and protection and by emboldening those in the majority faith to undertake informal methods of discrimination against them, thus increasing social instability and exclusion. The practical implications of these results are as follows: Southeast Asian governments should be cognizant of the effect their relationship with religious pluralism may have on their future stability, partner nations may benefit from forecasting the effect of changes in religious demographics, and militaries with a vested interest in the region should pay increased attention to trends in social exclusion in regards to a lack of religious diversity. While the results are promising, this study should mainly serve as a starting point for further research into two specific areas: research specifically focused on religious homogeneity, rather than

ethnic diversity, and the role of social exclusion in studies of diversity. The region, and the world, will continue to adapt to the effects of globalization, but recognizing how they will adapt can lead to a more stable and equitable future for both.

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