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Religion, Nationalism, and Identity Politics in Southeast Asia: Legitimacy, Pluralism, and Regional Order

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Abstract
Religion has regained political significance in Southeast Asia as identity contestation, public morality, and national legitimacy increasingly intersect in state and societal life. Across the region, religious nationalism has become a major force shaping inclusion, exclusion, and the symbolic boundaries of political community. This article examines how identity politics and religious nationalism structure political order and regional stability in Southeast Asia. It adopts a qualitative and theory-driven approach grounded in constructivism and the sociology of religion in politics. The analysis draws on comparative regional literature, policy discourse, and historical debates on state formation, legitimacy, and pluralism in selected Southeast Asian settings. Attention is directed to the ways religious identity is mobilized in relation to nationalism, governance, and social hierarchy, while also tracing how these processes affect wider understandings of citizenship and belonging. A comparative reading is used to identify recurring patterns as well as context-specific political expressions across the region. Religion emerges as a constitutive element of legitimacy and nationhood rather than a secondary cultural variable. Religious nationalism therefore operates as both a source of political cohesion and a mechanism of boundary-making that can constrain pluralism and deepen exclusion. The article contributes to the field by offering a regionally grounded framework for understanding how religion and nationalism interact in the production of political order in Southeast Asia.

Keyword
religion; nationalism; identity politics; Southeast Asia

1. Introduction

Religion has re-entered the center of International Relations debate after a long period in which mainstream theory treated it as politically residual or analytically secondary. The introduction makes clear that this older secularization assumption is no longer adequate for explaining contemporary global politics, especially in regions where religious identities remain deeply embedded in public life (Neo & Scharffs, 2021). Southeast Asia is particularly important because religion in this region is not simply a private matter of belief, but a historical force shaping nationalism, governance, social hierarchy, and regional interaction. The region's religious diversity has developed over centuries through layered encounters among Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Confucianism, and indigenous traditions (Künkler, 2018). These encounters have

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produced complex political societies in which religion is both a source of moral cohesion and a potential site of social fracture. Such ambivalence gives religion unusual significance in questions of domestic order and interstate perception (Zhao & Hoon, 2024). The introduction therefore positions Southeast Asia as an empirically rich setting for rethinking how religion matters in international and regional politics.

The central problem emerges from the fact that identity politics and religious nationalism are no longer confined to domestic electoral competition or internal cultural debate. They increasingly shape state legitimacy, public diplomacy, conflict narratives, and perceptions of regional stability across Southeast Asia (Hamayotsu, 2020). Religious identity is politically potent because it can mobilize majorities, define minorities, and mark the symbolic boundaries of the nation. When that identity is fused with ethnic belonging, contestation over faith becomes inseparable from contestation over political membership and national authenticity (Mala et al., 2022). This dynamic has direct real-world relevance because it influences how states manage diversity, how communities respond to exclusion, and how neighboring countries interpret each other's internal religious politics. It also matters because religion can support both peacebuilding and polarization, depending on the institutional and discursive environment in which it is activated (Fadlan & Saputra, 2017). The introduction emphasizes that the issue is not whether religion matters, but how it is mobilized and what political effects follow from that mobilization. That problem gives the article a strong regional and theoretical relevance beyond single-country analysis.

A substantial body of scholarship has already established several important points that frame the discussion. International Relations theory has historically marginalized religion, especially within Realist and Liberal traditions that privileged secular state behavior and rational institutional logic (Bagh & Das, 2022). More recent scholarship has challenged that omission by recognizing religion as a transnational force shaping governance, conflict, peacebuilding, and moral authority. The literature on Southeast Asia has also demonstrated that religion in the region is historically dense, politically embedded, and often interwoven with ethnic formations (Setiawan et al., 2025). Existing studies further show that postcolonial nation-building frequently intensified rather than dissolved ethno-religious boundaries, because state-building projects often privileged dominant identities while subordinating minorities. Research on Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Myanmar, and Thailand has already documented how religion can legitimize state projects, energize civil society, or sharpen communal conflict (Makhmudjanovna, 2025). There is therefore a strong foundation for treating identity politics and religious nationalism as serious analytical categories rather than exceptional disturbances. What is already known, then, is that religion operates as a durable structure of political meaning in Southeast Asia rather than as a fading cultural residue.

What remains less clearly specified is how these patterns should be theorized at the regional level and how they should be incorporated into International Relations without relying on Western assumptions about secular modernity. Existing literature often offers rich national case descriptions, yet the broader theoretical synthesis remains incomplete. Many accounts describe religious nationalism as a domestic ideological strategy, but stop short of explaining how it affects inter-state perception, regional security, and diplomatic positioning. Other works acknowledge the rise of religion in world politics, but do not adequately capture Southeast Asia's distinctive state-religion configurations (Makhmudjanovna, 2025; Wibisono et al., 2019). The introduction suggests that the region cannot be understood through simple binaries such as secular versus religious, liberal versus illiberal, or private faith versus public politics. Those binaries obscure the hybrid

institutional arrangements through which states like Indonesia and Malaysia negotiate religion, modernity, and legitimacy (Thao, 2024). The unresolved question is therefore not only empirical but conceptual: how can International Relations theory explain a region where religion is constitutive of political order without being reducible to theocracy or formal clerical rule. That unresolved issue marks the article's move from descriptive literature review to a sharper theoretical agenda.

The research gap lies in the insufficient integration of identity politics, religious nationalism, and regional stability within a constructivist reading of Southeast Asian international relations. Constructivism provides the most promising point of departure because it treats identity, norms, and social meaning as constitutive of political behavior rather than as mere reflections of material interests. Yet even constructivist work has not always gone far enough in accounting for the historical layering of religion, ethnicity, colonial rule, and postcolonial legitimacy in Southeast Asia. The introduction points out that religious identity is often inseparable from ethnic identity, meaning that questions of belief are simultaneously questions of belonging, citizenship, and political hierarchy. This entanglement complicates state behavior, because governments are not just responding to material threats but also to socially produced expectations about who belongs to the nation and what moral order should prevail (Yilmaz & Morieson, 2022). Existing theory has therefore captured part of the problem but not the full regional texture of it. The gap is not an absence of discussion about religion, but an absence of an adequately contextualized framework linking religion to state identity, diplomacy, and regional order. A more region-sensitive constructivist synthesis is needed to explain how these processes unfold in Southeast Asia.

Filling that gap is theoretically justified because constructivism is especially well suited to analyzing how shared meanings shape interests, policies, and perceptions. In Southeast Asia, states do not act within a culturally empty environment, but within historically sedimented fields of religious symbolism, civilizational memory, and majoritarian expectation (Liow, 2016a). Religious nationalism matters here because it does not merely express preexisting identities; it actively produces political categories through which state authority and social difference are interpreted. A constructivist approach can clarify how such categories become normalized, contested, and institutionalized in foreign policy and domestic governance alike (Febriansyah et al., 2024; Liow, 2016a). The introduction also implies that Western secular frameworks cannot fully explain these dynamics because Southeast Asian state-religion relations developed through different colonial trajectories and different postcolonial compromises. That is why theoretical refinement is necessary rather than optional. The article justifies its intervention by arguing that the region's political realities require a framework attentive to social construction, not only to formal institutions or strategic calculation. The coherence of the project lies in connecting identity formation, religious legitimacy, and regional politics within one analytical vocabulary.

From that basis, the article is organized around a set of interrelated research questions that emerge logically from the introductory discussion. How do identity politics and religious nationalism shape domestic stability and inter-state relations in Southeast Asia. In what ways does religious identity become politically mobilized as a source of power, resistance, or exclusion within national settings (Satibi et al., 2022). Why do some state projects of religious moderation or harmony generate legitimacy, while others produce skepticism, contradiction, or backlash. How do colonial legacies and postcolonial nation-building continue to structure present-day relations between religion, ethnicity, and state authority. What does constructivist theory reveal about the role of religious norms and

identity in shaping regional political behavior (Chong, 2010). Why do dominant International Relations paradigms remain only partially equipped to explain Southeast Asia's religious politics. These questions do not seek to test a narrow causal claim, but to clarify the conceptual and political conditions under which religion becomes central to regional order. Their value lies in turning a broad theme into a focused analytical agenda.

The urgency of these questions is heightened by the current regional climate, where religious resurgence intersects with majoritarianism, democratic stress, transnational polarization, and renewed contestation over pluralism. Identity politics and religious nationalism now affect not only minority protection and domestic cohesion, but also diplomatic image, soft power, and the credibility of state narratives abroad (*Secularism, Religion, and Democracy in Southeast Asia*, 2020). Governments increasingly invoke moderation, harmony, or civilizational values as part of their international posture, yet these claims are vulnerable when domestic exclusions remain visible. The introduction therefore treats urgency not as rhetorical emphasis, but as an empirical condition in which the costs of conceptual weakness are politically significant. A poor theoretical grasp of religion in Southeast Asia can lead to simplistic policy assumptions, shallow comparative analysis, and the continued misreading of regional dynamics through imported secular models (Nurdiansyah, 2024). The article's contribution begins at this point by insisting that religion must be analyzed as a constitutive dimension of political order rather than as an occasional cultural variable. It also contributes by repositioning Southeast Asia as a site of theoretical production rather than merely a source of illustrative cases. That move allows the argument to speak both to area studies and to wider debates in International Relations.

A further contribution lies in the effort to make the discussion flow from the region's own historical and political realities rather than from externally imposed theoretical templates. The introduction frames Southeast Asia not as an exception to International Relations theory, but as a region that exposes the limits of theories built on secular and Eurocentric assumptions (Ahmed, 2011). By centering the overlap of religion, ethnicity, and nationalism, the article opens a more precise conversation about legitimacy, state identity, and regional stability. It also creates room to interpret peacebuilding, conflict, and diplomacy as processes shaped by moral claims and symbolic boundaries, not only by institutions or strategic interests. Such a framing is especially important in a region where the same religious tradition can be mobilized for moderation, exclusion, solidarity, or violence depending on political context. The article's relevance therefore extends beyond the immediate topic of religious nationalism. It intervenes in a broader debate over how International Relations should understand pluralism, political identity, and the social foundations of order in non-Western settings. The paragraphs that follow are anchored in that agenda, which is why the discussion remains focused on the conceptual stakes of the problem rather than moving prematurely into empirical resolution.

2. Research Method

This article employs a qualitative research design grounded in interpretive social inquiry and comparative regional analysis to examine how identity politics and religious nationalism are constructed, mobilized, and institutionalized in Southeast Asia (Dzwigol, 2024). A qualitative approach is appropriate because the central object of analysis consists of meanings, narratives, symbols, and political claims that cannot be adequately captured through numerical measurement alone (Toker, 2022). The analytical framework is informed primarily by constructivist theory, particularly its emphasis on identity, norms, and socially produced understandings of political order, while also incorporating insights

from scholarship on nationalism, religion in International Relations, and postcolonial state formation (Esterberg, 2001).

This framework makes it possible to analyze how religious and ethnic identities are articulated in political discourse, how they become attached to state legitimacy, and how they influence broader regional dynamics. The design works effectively for this research because the topic requires close attention to historical context, discursive formation, and the contingent relationship between religion, power, and political belonging. Rather than treating religious nationalism as a fixed variable, the qualitative design allows it to be examined as a socially constructed and context-dependent process. The comparative orientation also strengthens the design by making it possible to identify patterned similarities and differences across Southeast Asian settings without reducing those settings to a single uniform model. Such an approach is therefore well suited to a research problem that is conceptual, historically embedded, and politically layered.

The data are drawn from a combination of academic literature, policy documents, constitutional and legal texts, public speeches, official government statements, reports from regional and international institutions, and credible secondary sources addressing religion, nationalism, and political development in Southeast Asia. Data collection was conducted through purposive and document-based selection, focusing on materials that directly address the relationship between religious identity, state discourse, political legitimacy, and regional order (Chand, 2025). The units of analysis are discursive and institutional expressions of identity politics and religious nationalism, including state narratives, elite political claims, legal formulations, and public debates relevant to Southeast Asian cases discussed in the article.

The primary instrument used in the analysis is a qualitative coding framework designed to classify recurring themes such as religious legitimacy, national identity, pluralism, exclusion, state authority, and regional implication (Mohajan, 2018). These themes function as the main analytical dimensions through which the documentary material is organized and interpreted. Trustworthiness was ensured through source triangulation, conceptual consistency, close reading across multiple types of texts, and careful alignment between the research questions, theoretical framework, and coding categories. Reliability was strengthened by maintaining a transparent analytical procedure and applying the same thematic criteria across the selected materials, while validity was supported by using sources that are directly relevant to the core concepts and regional focus of the article. Ethical standards were maintained by relying on publicly accessible materials, avoiding distortion or selective misrepresentation of sensitive religious and political issues, and observing informed scholarly caution regarding confidentiality, even though the study did not involve direct human subjects or require formal informed consent procedures (Bhangu et al., 2023).

3. Result and Discussion

Religion and nationalism in Southeast Asia operate through a mutually constitutive relationship rather than through separate institutional or ideological domains. Political belonging is often framed through religious language, while religious identity acquires greater force when it is linked to the nation, the moral order, and the legitimacy of state authority. Across the region, religion functions not merely as a symbolic resource but as a politically active structure through which claims about citizenship, authenticity, and public order are articulated. This pattern is particularly visible in states where the historical formation of the nation involved close alignment between dominant communities and official narratives of collective identity. In such settings, religion

contributes to the emotional and moral vocabulary through which the nation is imagined and defended. The regional significance of this pattern lies in its persistence across diverse institutional arrangements and demographic contexts. Identity politics therefore appears not as an episodic departure from political normality, but as a recurrent mechanism in the reproduction of national order. The analytical task is to explain how this entanglement shapes legitimacy, exclusion, and stability in different Southeast Asian settings.

A major dimension of this dynamic concerns the use of religion as a source of political legitimacy. Governments, ruling coalitions, and influential political actors frequently invoke religious values to reinforce public authority and to present policy choices as morally grounded rather than merely strategic. Religious symbolism enhances claims to authenticity because it connects power to transcendent meaning, historical continuity, and collective obligation. This process is particularly effective when political elites portray themselves as guardians of the moral community rather than as ordinary office holders. Legitimacy in such settings is strengthened not only through law or electoral mandate, but also through resonance with dominant religious narratives. State discourse may therefore draw on religion to justify regulatory interventions, moral campaigns, or national projects presented as expressions of civilizational duty. Such practices do not eliminate contestation, but they alter the terms on which contestation occurs. Political authority becomes harder to challenge when it is embedded in the language of sacred responsibility and communal protection.

Religious nationalism also functions as a boundary-making process that distinguishes insiders from outsiders within the national community. Political membership is often defined not only by citizenship in the legal sense, but by conformity to dominant cultural and religious norms that determine who appears fully representative of the nation. In plural societies, such processes generate layered inclusion, where minorities may be formally recognized while still being symbolically positioned at the margins of national belonging. Religious difference can then be interpreted as a sign of incomplete loyalty, cultural distance, or moral ambiguity (Khamdan et al., 2024). This logic becomes especially pronounced when nationhood is narrated as historically rooted in the faith tradition of the majority. Public discourse may elevate the majority religion as the ethical foundation of social harmony while casting minority claims as potentially disruptive or insufficiently authentic. Boundary-making of this kind does not always rely on direct legal exclusion. It can be reproduced through education, public rituals, political speech, and institutional hierarchies that normalize a dominant religious conception of the nation (Nasoha et al., 2025).

The regional pattern becomes clearer when viewed across different Southeast Asian national settings. Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and the Philippines each present distinct constellations of colonial inheritance, demographic composition, and state-religion configuration, yet all reveal the political force of religious identity in structuring nationalism (Idi et al., 2020). In Indonesia, the negotiation between pluralist state ideology and Islamic political aspiration creates a dynamic field in which national identity remains open but continually contested. Malaysia reflects a more formalized alignment between religion, ethnicity, and state legitimacy, especially through the relationship between Malay identity and Islam in public institutions. Myanmar and Thailand reveal how Buddhist-majoritarian narratives can become central to debates over citizenship, national security, and social order (Muchtar et al., 2025). The Philippines, despite its different colonial and religious trajectory, also demonstrates how religion remains embedded in political legitimacy and moral authority. These variations indicate that the regional pattern is not one of uniformity but of recurring entanglement. Religious

nationalism travels through different institutional forms while retaining a shared capacity to define the nation in moral and civilizational terms.

A persistent tension emerges between pluralism as a constitutional or civic principle and majoritarian identity as a lived political force. Many Southeast Asian states formally endorse coexistence, religious freedom, or national unity across diversity, yet public discourse often privileges the faith tradition associated with the dominant historical community (Liow, 2016b). This tension becomes politically consequential when pluralism is defended in abstract terms while majoritarian norms shape everyday governance and symbolic recognition. Minorities may be included within the constitutional framework but remain vulnerable to suspicion, unequal representation, or pressure to conform to majoritarian moral expectations. The result is not always overt conflict, but a more diffuse hierarchy of belonging in which some groups appear naturally aligned with the nation and others are treated as conditional participants. Such hierarchies affect policy debates, institutional practice, and the legitimacy of dissenting voices. They also shape how states respond to claims framed in the name of religious protection, public morality, or national identity. Religious nationalism thus becomes a key site where the promises and limits of pluralism are negotiated.

Table 1. Comparative Dimensions of Identity Politics and Religious Nationalism in Southeast Asia

Analytical Dimension	*Main Pattern*	*Political Effect*
Religious legitimacy	Religion is invoked to validate authority, law, and public policy	Strengthens state and elite claims through moral language
Boundary-making	National identity is defined through dominant religious-cultural markers	Produces layered inclusion for majorities and symbolic exclusion for minorities
State management of religion	Accommodation and control vary by regime structure and historical formation	Shapes contestation, stability, and forms of governance
Regional implication	Religion and nationalism remain closely intertwined across multiple cases	Influences regional perceptions of order, pluralism, and legitimacy

The structure presented in Table 1 clarifies that religious nationalism operates through several interconnected mechanisms rather than through a single ideological formula. Religious legitimacy, boundary-making, and state management form a linked field in which political authority is moralized, collective identity is delimited, and public order is regulated. The table also demonstrates that variation in institutional form does not eliminate the broader regional pattern. States manage religion differently, yet the political effects remain comparable in that dominant religious narratives continue to shape perceptions of legitimacy and belonging. This supports the wider argument that religion should not be treated as an external supplement to nationalism, but as one of its constitutive dimensions in Southeast Asia. The comparative structure further shows that the regional significance of these dynamics lies in their recurrence across cases with otherwise different constitutional arrangements. Political outcomes are not identical, but the organizing logic remains recognizable. Religious nationalism is therefore best understood as a patterned form of political ordering rather than as isolated rhetoric tied to a few exceptional cases.

This discussion aligns with earlier scholarship that challenged the assumption that religion has become marginal in modern political life. Work in International Relations and comparative politics has already shown that religious symbols, institutions, and identities continue to shape legitimacy, conflict, and state formation. Studies of Southeast Asia have likewise documented that religion cannot be reduced to private belief because it is deeply woven into public authority and national narratives. The present analysis extends these insights by foregrounding the regional significance of identity politics and by emphasizing the constitutive relationship between religion and nationalism. Rather than treating religion as a mobilizational resource occasionally used by political actors, the discussion identifies it as a framework through which the nation is defined and defended. This perspective also refines constructivist scholarship by showing how shared meanings are stabilized not only through norms and discourse, but through historically sedimented moral hierarchies. The contribution to existing literature lies in its insistence that religious nationalism is a core process in the making of political order. Such a view helps explain why debates over faith, morality, and belonging continue to carry high political stakes in the region.

The implications for International Relations theory are substantial because mainstream approaches have often treated religion as secondary to material interests, institutional design, or secular ideology. Such assumptions are difficult to sustain in Southeast Asia, where political order is shaped by narratives of sacred history, moral community, and majoritarian protection. Constructivism offers a more suitable starting point because it allows identity, belief, and symbolic meaning to be treated as constitutive forces in state behavior and regional politics. Even so, constructivist analysis must be sharpened by closer attention to colonial histories, postcolonial state formation, and the entanglement of religion with ethnicity and citizenship. Without that contextual depth, theory risks reproducing overly abstract accounts of identity that miss the distinct moral vocabularies of the region. The discussion therefore pushes International Relations beyond secular reductionism while also warning against simplistic culturalism. Religion matters not because Southeast Asia is exceptional or premodern, but because political communities everywhere are shaped by contested meanings of order and belonging. The regional cases make that reality especially visible.

The relevance of this discussion for contemporary governance lies in its implications for pluralism, democratic stability, and minority protection. Where political legitimacy is closely tied to dominant religious identity, governments face strong incentives to regulate public life in ways that privilege majority norms. Such pressures may appear stabilizing in the short term because they align the state with widely shared moral language. Yet they can also narrow the space for equal citizenship by placing minorities in a position of symbolic vulnerability. Public institutions may then become arenas in which recognition is distributed unevenly according to religious proximity to the national ideal. This affects educational narratives, legal priorities, public morality campaigns, and responses to dissent. The governance challenge is not limited to overt sectarian conflict. It also includes the quieter reproduction of asymmetrical belonging through institutional routines that appear neutral while carrying majoritarian assumptions. Identity politics and religious nationalism thus remain central to the political management of diversity in Southeast Asia.

Several strengths and limitations emerge from this discussion. Its main strength lies in the comparative and theoretically integrated treatment of religious nationalism as a regional phenomenon rather than as an isolated domestic issue. By connecting constructivist theory with Southeast Asian political realities, the discussion moves

beyond descriptive catalogues of religious conflict and offers a more systematic account of how legitimacy and exclusion are produced. At the same time, the scope of the analysis is constrained by the uneven density of regional cases and by the need to balance theoretical breadth with contextual specificity. The political expression of religious nationalism differs significantly across states, which means that any regional synthesis risks smoothing over local complexity. Another limitation concerns the instability of public discourse itself, since narratives of identity and legitimacy shift across electoral cycles, policy debates, and social crises. An unexpected aspect of the discussion is the extent to which religion can operate as both a stabilizing and destabilizing force. The same moral framework that legitimizes order can also deepen boundary-making and intensify exclusion when deployed in majoritarian terms.

Further research would benefit from deeper country-specific analysis alongside broader regional comparison. Closer examination of legal discourse, education policy, party competition, and public rhetoric could clarify how religious nationalism is institutionalized across different settings. Comparative work between Muslim-majority and Buddhist-majority contexts would be especially valuable for identifying both common mechanisms and distinctive trajectories. More attention should also be given to the relationship between digital media and religious nationalism, particularly in the circulation of moral claims, identity threats, and populist narratives. Such inquiry would help explain how symbolic boundaries are reproduced in rapidly changing communication environments. There is also scope for stronger engagement with policy practice, especially regarding pluralist governance, constitutional design, and minority safeguards. Scholars and policymakers alike require frameworks that can account for religion as a constitutive part of public life without naturalizing exclusionary nationalism. The continuing salience of identity politics in Southeast Asia makes such work essential for understanding how political order is imagined, contested, and maintained.

4. Conclusion

Religion and nationalism in Southeast Asia are bound together through a political relationship that shapes legitimacy, belonging, and the management of diversity. The discussion has emphasized that religion is not a peripheral cultural variable, but a constitutive dimension of how national identity is imagined and how political authority is justified. Religious legitimacy strengthens state and elite claims by embedding power in moral language, while religious nationalism defines the symbolic boundaries of the nation by distinguishing majorities from minorities in uneven ways. Across different Southeast Asian settings, these processes operate through distinct institutional forms, yet they reproduce a broadly comparable pattern in which religion contributes to the ordering of public life. The tension between pluralism and majoritarian identity remains central because formal commitments to inclusion often coexist with hierarchical modes of recognition. Such dynamics help explain why identity politics continues to shape governance, public morality, and the political status of minority communities across the region. The broader significance of the discussion lies in clarifying that religious nationalism is neither episodic nor accidental, but a recurring mechanism in the production of political order in Southeast Asia.

The article contributes to the field by integrating constructivist theory, religion in International Relations, and Southeast Asian political analysis into a single framework for understanding identity politics and religious nationalism. Its main conceptual value lies in treating religion and nationalism as mutually constitutive rather than analytically separable, thereby moving beyond approaches that reduce religion to symbolism or

instrumental mobilization. This perspective strengthens International Relations scholarship by challenging secular assumptions that continue to marginalize religion in explanations of political order and regional dynamics. It also contributes to Southeast Asian studies by repositioning the region as a site of theoretical refinement rather than simply a repository of empirical variation. The comparative discussion demonstrates that religious nationalism can only be understood adequately when colonial legacies, postcolonial state formation, and the social production of legitimacy are examined together. In that sense, the article offers a more context-sensitive account of how moral authority, national identity, and governance interact. The contribution is therefore both theoretical and regional, with implications for broader debates on pluralism, legitimacy, and the social foundations of political community.

Future research should extend the analysis through deeper comparative work across a wider range of Southeast Asian cases and through more focused examination of the institutional settings in which religious nationalism is reproduced. Greater attention to legal discourse, education systems, party competition, media narratives, and everyday bureaucratic practice would help clarify how majoritarian norms become normalized within different political orders. Comparative inquiry between Muslim-majority, Buddhist-majority, and more religiously mixed settings would also strengthen understanding of which mechanisms are regionally shared and which are context-specific. There is further need to examine how digital media transform the circulation of religious identity, moral panic, and symbolic exclusion in contemporary Southeast Asia. Such work would be especially important for understanding how identity politics evolves under changing communication infrastructures and democratic pressures. Closer engagement with questions of constitutional protection, minority rights, and pluralist governance would also enhance the practical relevance of future scholarship. Advancing this research agenda remains important for explaining how religion continues to shape political membership, state legitimacy, and regional stability in one of the world's most diverse political regions.

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