



MALASYIA

Religious Freedom Landscape Report



TABLE OF CONTENTS



| | |
|--|----|
| INTRODUCTION _____ | 4 |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS _____ | 11 |
| OVERVIEW: KEY CHALLENGES _____ | 13 |
| BACKGROUND: RELIGIOUS, DEMOGRAPHY & HISTORY _____ | 14 |
| CHALLENGES TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ____ | 21 |
| STRENGTHS, OPPORTUNITIES & NEEDS ____ | 33 |
| ACTION ITEMS _____ | 35 |
| MAJOR RELIGIOUS ACTORS: MALAYSIA ____ | 38 |
| MALAYSIA SWOT ANALYSIS _____ | 39 |
| PEW RESEARCH CENTER REPORT _____ | 43 |
| ENDNOTES _____ | 45 |



INTRODUCTION

Religion has been integral to the spirit and culture of humanity for millennia.¹ The cradle of multiple ancient religions, South and Southeast Asia remains one of the world's most religiously diverse and spiritually vibrant regions on earth. At the same time, all too many of its two and a half billion people suffer on account of their religion. The South and Southeast Asia Action Team, an arm of the Religious Freedom Institute (RFI), exists to advance religious freedom for all people throughout this vast region, especially those who are most persecuted. This landscape report on Malaysia constitutes an important step towards achieving that goal and represents the combined expertise of numerous scholars and analysts.

The purpose of this report on Malaysia's religious freedom landscape is to determine where and in what ways this fundamental human right is being preserved and promoted, where it is being violated, and what governments, civil society organizations, and communities can do to strengthen this foundational freedom for the future well-being of Malaysia as well as South and Southeast Asia as a whole. RFI aims to assess where the terrain is rough and treacherous, as well as where it is smooth and pleasant. Only once you know the landscape and identify a favorable route, any experienced traveler knows, can the journey begin.

The RFI's South and Southeast Asia Action Team focuses on eight of the

most populous and strategically significant countries in South and Southeast Asia: Bangladesh, Burma (Myanmar), India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Indonesia and India in particular are the two most populous, economically robust, and strategically significant countries in the region. Together these eight countries have a population of about 2.2 billion people, comprising 86 percent of the regional population (about 2.5 billion) and 28 percent of the total world population (about 7.8 billion).² The whole regional population comprises about 32 percent of the world population. South and Southeast Asia is home to the four largest Muslim populations in the world (Indonesia, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh), 99 percent of the world's Hindus, and almost all of the world's Buddhist-majority countries.³ In other words, that is more than 1.15 billion Hindus, 825 million Muslims, and over 80 million Buddhists, as well as about 72 million Christians.⁴

The region is also home to some of the most religiously restricted societies in the world, even while several of its countries maintain reasonably robust democratic institutions and dynamic civil societies. For example, Polity IV's democracy index rates Indonesia and India as "democracies," with high levels of political competition and restraints on executive power, and Freedom House rates both countries as "partly free" electoral democracies.



About the Religious Freedom Institute

Securing religious freedom for “everyone, everywhere”—for Buddhists in Bangladesh as much as Muslims in Maryland—is the mission of the RFI. An independent, nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C., RFI is committed to achieving broad acceptance of religious liberty as a fundamental human right, a source of individual and social flourishing, the cornerstone of a successful society, and a driver of national and international security. It achieves this goal by convincing stakeholders in select regions that religious freedom can help them achieve their own goals—political, economic, strategic, and religious.



Accordingly, RFI’s action teams establish a presence in strategic regions across the globe in order to build coalitions and local and regional networks to make religious freedom a greater priority—and ultimately a lived reality—for governments, civil society, religious communities, businesses, and the general public. Each of these sectors of society has a crucial stake in the future of the religious freedom landscape in their country. Drawing on the research of its associated scholars as well as the cumulative body of scholarship produced by its predecessor project, the Religious Freedom Project at Georgetown University, RFI makes an evidence-based case to these and other important sectors and stakeholders that the freedom of religious belief and practice is a principle they can and should embrace in order to benefit themselves and their societies.



Foundational to RFI’s outlook is the recognition that religion is an integral feature of human nature and an irreducible component of human flourishing. Human beings, who are religious animals just as profoundly as they are political animals or conjugal animals, have always asked religious questions, and persist in asking these questions as much as they ever have: Who am I? Where did I come from? What is the meaning and purpose of existence? What is the nature of ultimate reality? The search for the best answers to these questions, and the attempt to align

one's reason, will, and whole being with ultimate or transcendent reality as best as one can discern it, is what we generally call religion. Religious freedom, then, is the most fundamental and distinctively human of all freedoms because it reflects the most basic and characteristically human of all strivings—the striving not only to know the truth, but to *place one's whole self in alignment with the whole truth about the whole of Reality*. As such, religious freedom has at least four distinct dimensions.

The first of these “religious freedoms” reflects the intellectual and spiritual dimension of religion, and requires that all people should be free to use their natural powers of discernment, reason, and intuition to seek and explore the truth about ultimate reality in all of its depths. The second of these freedoms reflects the dimension of doing or practice. It means that all people should be free to engage the truths they have learned from theoretical inquiry and act on them with authenticity and integrity. In other words, this dimension of religious freedom involves engaging one's conscience and will to align oneself as fully as one can with the truths one discovers about transcendent reality. Third, the social dimension means that all people must be free to share the truths they discover about ultimate reality with others, and to join with those of like mind and spirit to live them out. Fourth, the civil or political dimension means that all people should be free, both individually and communally, to express their religious beliefs in civil and political society, and to formulate and propose visions of the common informed by these beliefs. Included here is the right to create and operate religious institutions that reflect a religious community's foundational principles and defining mission.

From a broader perspective, the aforementioned dimensions represent aspects of what might be considered the liberty wing of religious freedom. That is, religious freedom in full requires that people enjoy the liberty to embrace and express whatever beliefs about religion—including unorthodox beliefs or beliefs that differ from traditional religious



claims—most accord with the dictates of their own conscience, without direct, coercive interference by government or non-government actors.

At the same time, religious freedom requires another wing—the wing of equality—in order to take full flight and make it possible for all individuals and societies to achieve both the basic good of religion as well as other components of human flourishing. The equality wing of religious freedom requires that people be free from arbitrary discrimination or unequal treatment because of their beliefs about religion. Violation of religious equality—as through the infliction of systematic discrimination on particular individuals or groups merely because of their religious beliefs or identities, or the creation of a climate of hatred or intolerance of certain people because of religion—is unjust and illegitimate even when it does not directly block or limit one’s free exercise of religion.

One reason is that arbitrary discrimination or unequal treatment is incompatible with the demands of human dignity, which all human beings equally share by virtue of their common humanity. As sources as diverse as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, and the Declaration on Religious Liberty of the Roman Catholic Church recognize, human dignity is the proximate ground of religious freedom as well as all fundamental human rights, and it is the ground, furthermore, of every person’s entitlement to equal justice.⁵ Another reason is that gross violations of religious equality are incompatible with the vision of a society animated by

a dynamic pluralism in which all citizens can share their religious and moral insights with each other. Only within a framework of basic equality can people of all religious perspectives draw on their distinct convictions and unique “spiritual capital” both to contribute to the common good and to enrich the perspectives of their fellow citizens.

Religious freedom is thus a fundamental and capacious right that deserves secure protection in law and widespread respect in culture. On paper if not in practice, this idea has been widely accepted by the international community. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance (Article 18).

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status (Article 2).⁶

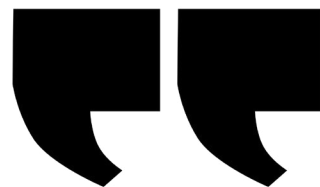
The mission of the Religious Freedom Institute is motivated by the conviction that religious freedom in full—in its equality dimension and in each of its liberty dimensions—is a natural, universal, and inviolable human right that is grounded in

the inherent dignity of every human being. At the same time, because religious belief and practice are such central components of human life and flourishing, religious freedom is also a powerful driver of a wide array of social goods, including democracy, civil liberty, stability, economic prosperity, equality of women, and security.

RFI activities are further premised on the reality that religious freedom tends to be strong and enduring only when it is embedded in a society's moral and religious culture as well as its legal and political structure. Religious freedom actors must pursue not only top-down institutional reform but also bottom-up persuasion, education, and mobilization. If religious freedom is promoted only by governments and is not practiced at the level of local communities, it remains an empty ideal. On paper, most of the world's national constitutions recognize religious freedom as a fundamental right in one form or another. The reality remains, however, that the vast majority of the world's population lives in countries with high or very high government or social restrictions on religion and the trendlines over the past decade appear to be worsening.⁷

Religious freedom will be a reality for “everyone, everywhere” only when it enjoys grassroots support and is articulated, practiced, and spread at the level of local and national communities and traditions. Advancing religious freedom while respecting local and national contexts entails adopting approaches to articulating and justifying religious freedom that are credible and compelling within local perspectives. In fact, RFI's South and Southeast Asia Action Team seeks to identify and cultivate seeds of religious freedom that are already present in the region's own spiritual and cultural soil. As this Malaysia landscape report underscores, the soil of South and Southeast Asia tends to be fertile and receptive insofar as all of its countries and cultures enjoy histories and traditions of vibrant religious pluralism.

As the example of Malaysia highlights, embedding religious freedom in both political structures and moral and spiritual cultures requires an approach



The mission of the Religious Freedom Institute is motivated by the conviction that religious freedom in full—in its equality dimension and in each of its liberty dimensions—is a natural, universal, and inviolable human right that is grounded in the inherent dignity of every human being.

Religious Freedom Institute



that works across multiple sectors—religious, political, legal, cultural, and educational. It requires identifying and mobilizing networks of actors that are willing to contribute resources and effort in a coordinated fashion. Among these actors, RFI's South and Southeast Asia Action Team strives to be a partner that joins with others on a footing of equality and mutual respect, and that works collaboratively towards the goal of religious freedom for "everyone, everywhere," in South and Southeast Asia and beyond.

RFI's South & Southeast Asia Action Team

RFI pursues its mission and vision through teams of scholars and other experts working to advance religious freedom in a particular region or issue area. This *Malaysia Religious Freedom Landscape Report* is one of eight religious freedom landscape reports by the South and Southeast Asia Action Team (SSEA-AT) on our eight focus countries of Bangladesh, Burma (Myanmar), India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Building on the analysis in these reports, SSEA-AT is committed to advancing religious freedom across South and Southeast Asia. SSEA-AT seeks first and foremost to build mutual trust and partnerships with local religious freedom actors and entities across the region. Currently, the team has accumulated hundreds of such contacts, including over 275 individuals and more than 200 organizations. These contacts comprise an invaluable foundation and support network, which makes it possible to develop a shared assessment of the religious freedom landscape in South and Southeast Asia as well as a shared action plan that seeks to cultivate religious freedom from the ground up. RFI's ongoing engagement efforts in the region include private meetings with religious and political leaders, activists, and other religious freedom actors and organizations; private meetings with legislators and government officials; public events and grassroots outreach; conflict resolution initiatives; policy formation and analysis; humanitarian relief and/or development services; and educational initiatives.

The purpose of the SSEA-AT's country landscape reports is to survey the current state and future trajectory of religious freedom in the region. Specifically, each country landscape analysis, including the present Malaysia report:

- ◆ Assesses the religious freedom environment in terms of the favorability of political, socio-cultural, religious, economic, and historical conditions; the leading threats and obstacles to advancing religious freedom given these conditions; the major opportunities or enabling conditions for advancing religious freedom; and the positions of leading political and religious actors vis-à-vis religious freedom. Each report focuses on a given country's religious freedom *capabilities* as well as its religious freedom *challenges*.
- ◆ Assesses the state of empirical knowledge and research on religious freedom, including any significant gaps that may exist.

- ◆ Assesses the education system with respect to religious freedom, including the extent to which religious freedom concepts are integrated into primary, secondary, and higher education curricula.
- ◆ Identifies key religious freedom actors (individuals, organizations, and initiatives) already in place, and actors that might engage in religious freedom activities if given the opportunity, resources, and rationale to do so.
- ◆ Assesses the comparative strengths and weaknesses of these actors.
- ◆ Identifies the major gaps or missing elements in their activities.
- ◆ Evaluates the status of communication in the region, including the primary communicative mechanisms by which the views of elites and public opinion are shaped and disseminated.

Based on the findings in the landscape reports, SSEA-AT has developed a Regional Action Plan that lays out a comprehensive strategy for advancing religious freedom in South and Southeast Asia, with RFI as a partner working in close and equal partnership with other actors. The Regional Action Plan includes:

- ◆ A strategic assessment of the status of religious freedom in the region, based on the findings of the landscape reports.
- ◆ A strategy to leverage political, socio-cultural, religious, economic, and historical factors that are conducive to the promotion of religious freedom throughout SSEA.
- ◆ A strategy to operationalize networks of existing religious freedom actors.
- ◆ A strategy to overcome or neutralize obstacles to the advancement of religious freedom.
- ◆ A strategy to identify and encourage new actors, including religious and political leaders, to advance religious freedom.
- ◆ A strategy to expand the quality and scope of freedoms enjoyed by inhabitants of various countries throughout the region.
- ◆ Recommendations on how funders can most strategically invest to advance religious freedom in the region.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Please note that all of the South and Southeast Asia Action Team's religious freedom landscape reports have been made possible by the generous funding of Templeton Religion Trust. In the drafting and framing of this report, we also gratefully acknowledge the generous financial support of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom through its Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy. Any errors of fact or interpretation are, however, the sole responsibility of the report's primary authors. The landscape reports are the result of the collective effort of the entire SSEA Action Team, which is comprised of the following:

- ◆ **Director:** Timothy Shah
- ◆ **Associate Director:** Rebecca Samuel Shah
- ◆ **Project Managers:** Liris Thomas and Ana Spevak
- ◆ **RFI Associated Scholars:** Tehmina Arora, Chad Bauman, Robert Hefner, Farahnaz Ispahani, Paul Marshall, Daniel Philpott, Yamini Ravindran, Benedict Rogers, Nilay Saiya, and Eugene Yapp
- ◆ **Research Assistants:** Luke Adams, Michael Gioia, and Matt Mills
- ◆ **Research Interns:** Sachal Jacob and Sarah Thomas

Though they are not responsible for the ultimate form or content of the reports, outside researchers who contributed invaluable and extensively to the reports include Thomas Dinham (Indonesia); Dicky Sofjan (Indonesia and Malaysia); Josiah Ponnudurai (Malaysia and Indonesia); Luke Wagner (Nepal); and Sara Singha (Pakistan). In addition, Michael Gioia worked indispensably—and indefatigably—to edit, re-write, format, and incorporate extensive feedback into all the reports over several intense weeks in the summer of 2019.

We also acknowledge the meticulous and diligent editorial work by RFI's communications team. Communications director Nathan Berkeley and communications manager Cecilia Leatherman edited, revised, and refined the country landscape reports in various versions and iterations over the last 12-18 months.

Finally, the editors of the report want to single out Matt Mills, a rising junior at Baylor University, for special gratitude. Matt served as our primary research assistant on all of the landscape reports in the final six months of their drafting, redrafting, and publication. He did far more than an ordinary research assistant, contributing immeasurably to the conceptualization and drafting of the landscape report introduction as well as to the careful proofreading and formatting of the entire manuscript. His work was consistently meticulous and his demeanor unfailingly cheerful. The document could not have assumed the form that it did, when it did, without Matt's superb efforts.



OVERVIEW

KEY CHALLENGES

Malaysia's Constitution protects religious freedom; however, the rights and interests of religious minorities are often challenged by "Islamist" political movements.⁸ The authority of Shariah courts, which is of inferior jurisdiction to civil courts, is growing, and there are cases where non-Muslims have been denied access to justice due to the ambiguity in the dual jurisdiction of the civil and Shariah courts. Both state and societal actors have interrupted the worship of religious minorities, and in some cases impinged upon religious speech. The state has also worked to alter

the demographics of historically Christian regions. Notable cases of Christian leaders being abducted, including Pastor Raymond Koh, have been handled poorly by law enforcement, causing concern within Malaysia's Christian community.⁹

The Malaysian state is actively involved in Islamic affairs within the country and has worked to sideline minority forms of Islam through regulations on religious activity and detaining Shias and other Muslim minorities in religious "rehabilitation centers."



BACKGROUND

RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY & HISTORY

Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population of Malaysia at 31.8 million (as of July 2018).¹⁰ According to the 2010 Malaysian census, 61.3 percent of the population practices Islam; 19.8 percent Buddhism; 9.2 percent Christianity; 6.3 percent Hinduism; and 1.3 percent Confucianism, Taoism, or other religions.¹¹ Shi'a, Ahmadiyya, and Al-Arqam groups are deemed 'deviant' by Islamic authorities and are banned in Malaysia.¹²

Ethnic Malays, who are defined by Malaysia's Federal Constitution as "Muslims" from birth, account for approximately 63.1 percent of the population in Peninsular Malaysia and 55 percent of the total population. Rural areas – especially in the east coast of peninsular Malaysia – are predominantly Muslim, and Islam is the largest religion in all states except Sarawak, where Christianity is the majority religion (a majority of a

population of approximately 200,000). There are also large Buddhist minorities in the states of Penang and Selangor, while the second east Malaysian state of Sabah has a large Christian minority.¹³ In December 2015, the Pew Center's report on global restrictions on religion gave Malaysia a Government Restriction Index (GRI) score of 8.0 (very high) and a Social Hostilities Index score of 5.4 (high).¹⁴

Politicization of Religion

Malaysia's high scores on Pew's religious freedom indices can be traced to a history of politicizing religion and infusing Islamic values and norms into the social-political organization of the state.¹⁵ This process of Islamization began more than 30 years ago and was undertaken intentionally by the government and the Islamic bureaucracy. The purpose was to revitalize Islamic culture and politics in Malaysia to realize an "Islamic civilization."¹⁶ Over time, this state-led



Islamization process gave rise to a political ideology which Joseph Liow argues is “premised on the primacy of Islam as an organizing principle for government.” For Liow, this is “most profoundly expressed in political competition between [The United Malays National Organization (UMNO)] and [The Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS)],” which both anchor their support in Malaysia’s Muslim community, thus threatening to harm the rights and interests of Malaysia’s large population of non-Muslims.¹⁷ Competition between UMNO and PAS began when the latter broke off from the former in 1955. In 1959, PAS was the first Islamist party in Southeast Asia to gain representation through electoral means. A brief coalition between UMNO, PAS, and other Malaysian parties existed after the 1969 riots against Chinese Malaysians, leading to affirmative action and state preferences for the ethnic Malay community.¹⁸

The controversies discussed in this report, such as apostasy cases and the use of

the term “Allah” among non-Muslim minorities, illustrate the increasingly challenging religious freedom landscape in Malaysia. They highlight how state-led Islamization has begun to severely impact the lives of non-Muslim minorities in Malaysia. Amidst these controversies, both UMNO and PAS seek to gain “political legitimacy through the brandishing of religious credentials.”¹⁹ This has largely worked in favor of UMNO, which held power prior to the 2018 elections. Traditionally, UMNO is seen as the guardian of the faith that is more Islamic and in line with a multicultural Malaysian society than its PAS counterpart. As part of its role in upholding Islam, UMNO has always held itself as truly “defending the Islamic faith against any perceived attack, whether on Islam or Malay identity.”²⁰

It is important to keep in mind that, despite recent Islamization, Malaysian society remains inclined toward social pluralism. The Malaysian Federation was formed as a delicate balance between



the majority Malays, ethnic Chinese (the largest minority and mostly Buddhist), and a number of other ethnic and religious minorities, including Malaysian Indians and indigenous peoples. While Malays and Islam were given special constitutional status in Malaysia, the forefathers of Malaysia aspired to see Malaysians of different ethnic compositions and religious affiliations come together as one nation while attempting to keep their distinctive ethnic and religious identities. That Malaysia has experienced minimal violence and racial tensions in the course of its economic development and modernization is a testament to Malaysia's success story as an "experiment in pluralism."

Since the recent elections, Malaysians are now beginning to hear the voices of more moderate and progressive religious leaders, scholars, civil society actors, NGOs' activists, and politicians. These groups, which this report discusses in detail, support Malaysia's robust tradition

of pluralism, and oppose efforts to erode it. They are beginning to call for an Islam that is in keeping with the "higher objective/purpose of Islam" (*maqasid sharia*) that respects the rights and interests of non-Muslims as citizens of the country. Such a view of Islam in Malaysia is in keeping with the universal principles of equality and represents an opportunity for strengthening religious freedom in the country.

The Legal Context

I: The Constitution

The Constitution of Malaysia²¹ is the supreme law of the Federation as stipulated in Article 4(1). Article 3(1) states: "Islam is the religion of the Federation; but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation." The special status accorded to Islam by Article 3(1) has become a centerpiece of political and judicial debate in light of the Islamic resurgence in Malaysian society. Historical evidence shows that the framers of the Malaysian Constitution wrote Article 3(1) with the understanding that Malaysia could still be a secular state.²² That Malaysia is a secular state was reiterated in the Malaysia Agreement of 1963 (addressed in the next section) between the Crown and Sabah, Sarawak, Singapore, and Malaysia. Despite this agreement, the influence of Article 3(1), among others, has gradually eroded over the last few decades as interpretations emphasizing Malay-Muslim supremacy have become dominant.²³

Another relevant provision is Article 12(2), which allows for individual states "to establish or maintain or assist in establishing or maintaining Islamic institutions or provide or assist in providing instruction in the religion of

Islam and incur such expenditure as may be necessary for the purpose.”

Article 11 of the Constitution deals specifically with religious freedom, as follows:

- ◆ (1) Every person has the right to profess and practice his religion and, subject to Clause (4), to propagate it.
- ◆ (2) No person shall be compelled to pay any tax the proceeds of which are specially allocated in whole or in part for the purposes of a religion other than his own.
- ◆ (3) Every religious group has the right— (a) to manage its own religious affairs; (b) to establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes; and (c) to acquire and own property and hold and administer it in accordance with law.
- ◆ (4) State law and in respect of the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur, Labuan and Putrajaya, federal law may control or restrict the propagation of any religious doctrine or belief among persons professing the religion of Islam.
- ◆ (5) This Article does not authorize any act contrary to any general law relating to public order, public health or morality.

Article 11 provides for the freedom of religion for every person, including Muslims. Notably, there is a significant difference between the words used in the Malaysian Constitution and those in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The Constitution of Malaysia uses the words “profess and practice” but not “freedom of thought and conscience”

and “freedom to change one’s religion or belief,” as upheld in the UDHR. The Constitution thus empowers the state to prohibit citizens from converting out of Islam or to one of the disfavored Muslim minority sects. It should be noted, however, that there are certain state enactments that allow a person to leave Islam with the fulfillment of certain stipulated conditions.²⁴

When interpreting Article 11, it is inevitable that Article 160 comes into consideration. Article 160 defines an individual of the Malay race as a “person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, [and] conforms to Malay custom...” This definition of a Malay – which brings together language, ethnicity, and religion – is artificial and problematic. The article was intended as a legal definition but has been construed to mean that just as a Malay cannot change his or her ethnicity, he or she also cannot change his or her religion. Under such an understanding, to change one’s religion is to stop being a Malay.²⁵ This interpretation invariably limits the application of Article 11’s rights and protections and justifies restrictions and prohibitions placed upon words or acts deemed as propagation of non-Muslim religion upon Malays.

The other provision that impinges on religious freedom is Article 121(1A) of the Constitution. This article separates the jurisdictions of the civil and Shariah courts. Civil courts thus have no authority over Islamic matters as spelled out in Schedule 9 of the State List, which specifies the jurisdiction of the Shariah courts as pertaining to Islamic personal law and private matters involving the practice of Islam by Muslim citizens. The existence of this Article also challenges

religious freedom in that it makes it very difficult for those who wish to leave Islam, or who have been wrongly categorized as Muslims, to escape the jurisdiction of Shariah courts. Questions of conversion are now solely within the jurisdiction of the Shariah courts. Civil courts have repeatedly refused to hear conversion cases, owing to the interpretation given to Article 121(1A) that the civil courts have no jurisdiction to determine anything pertaining to Islam, thus nullifying the right of individuals to practice and profess their religion as stated under Article 11(1). Non-Muslims involved in cases related to Islamic family law (such as unilateral conversion) also have no legal recourse under this interpretation of Article 121(1A).

II. Malaysia Agreement of 1963

The Malaysia Agreement of 1963²⁶ marked the political union of Malaya with the states of Singapore, North Borneo (Sabah), and Sarawak as a federation of states. Articles 3(3) and 161C and D in the Federal Constitution extend several concessions on religious freedom to North Borneo and Sarawak. Article 3(3) requires that states without a ruler make the *Agong* the head of Islam in the state. However, Sabah and Sarawak were excluded from this Article under the 1963 agreement. Article 161C (1) limited the financing of Islamic institutions while 161D limited the state's ability to control missionary work.

All three of these Articles were repealed as part of the Constitutional Amendment Act 1976 (Act 354), with no explanation offered in the parliamentary reports.²⁷ These repeals undermined the original intentions of the Malaysia Agreement of 1963 by eliminating Constitutional guarantees for religious freedom that

acknowledge the special position and interests of Sabah and Sarawak.

Islamic affairs in each of Malaysia's states and in the Federal Territories are administered by state Islamic councils (*Majlis Agama Islam*) and state Shariah courts. Shariah courts in Malaysia ostensibly do not have jurisdiction over non-Muslims or over matters of civil law. However, under the constitutional amendment of Article 121(1A) in 1988, the civil courts now no longer have "jurisdiction in respect of any matter within the jurisdiction of the Shariah courts." This has created uncertainty as to whether the jurisdiction of the civil courts is superior to the Shariah courts and the nature of the boundaries between the two court systems generally.²⁸

The authority of the Shariah courts is nonetheless bound by statute – the Shariah Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act 1965 (Act 355) limits the maximum punishment that Shariah courts can impose. At present, the act confers jurisdiction upon the Shariah courts to adjudicate on offenses against the precepts of Islam with punishment of imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years; or with any fine not exceeding five thousand ringgit; or with whipping not exceeding six strokes; or with any combination of the above.

In May 2016, a Private Member's Bill was tabled by the PAS as a motion for debate in the *Dewan Rakyat* (Lower House of the Malaysian Parliament).²⁹ The bill, formally referred to as the Shariah Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) (Amendment) Bill 2016, was aimed at broadening the jurisdiction of the Shariah courts by removing the current upper limit on punishment of the Shariah courts to dispense with matters relating to offenses against the

precepts of Islam in accordance with Islamic jurisprudence. The powers this bill would confer on the Shariah courts would be too broad. Without proper checks and balances, these courts may be prone to abuse. As a result, this bill has attracted criticism from large swaths of the Malaysian Parliament and society, including Muslims.

Several attempts to table this amended bill in Parliament were unsuccessful. The jurisdiction of the civil courts has already been limited to matters purely outside the domain of Islam, and the bill threatens to elevate the jurisdiction of the Shariah courts to rival that of the secular courts.

III. International Law

Malaysia is one of the few countries not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

IV. Legal Landscape: Islamic Law

The Islamic law of each state in Malaysia is prescribed in state enactments and must be approved by state legislature before being presented before the *Sultan* or *Agong*. Among these state enactments are laws which prescribe different punishments for propagating other religions to Muslims. The states of Penang, Sabah, and Sarawak as well as the Federal Territories do not have formal legislations pertaining to restrictions on propagation, although non-Muslims are still prohibited from proselytizing to Muslims under Article 11(4) and 11(5) (pertaining to public order). State legislation pertaining to the control of propagation of non-Islamic religions is listed on page 16.³⁰

Article 3(2) of the Constitution confers the ruler of every state with authority over Islam. The *Agong* (King) is the head

of Islam in states without rulers (Penang, Malacca, Sabah, and Sarawak), as well as the Federal Territories. As per the Malaysia Agreement 1963, the *Agong* was not considered the head of Islam in Sabah and Sarawak until 1976, when Article 3(3) was amended to include the two eastern Malaysian states. Islamic affairs are managed by each state's Islamic Religious Council and Shariah Court (the Federal Territories have their own Islamic department). Any laws and *fatwas* regarding Islamic affairs are first proposed by the state *fatwa* committee (comprising members appointed by the state's *sultan*). The *fatwas* must then be vetted by the state legislative assembly before being approved by the *sultan*.³¹ Once a *fatwa* is published in a state gazette, it becomes part of Islamic law and is legally binding for all Muslims in the state. There is also a National Fatwa Committee comprised of the *muftis* from all the individual states and other Muslim scholars as appointed by the *Agong*.³²

As part of its effort to reorganize and streamline the religious authorities, the UMNO-led government had renamed the Centre for Islam (*Pusat Islam*) as the Malaysian Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM) in 1997, which was then placed under the authority of the prime minister.³³ As a federal body, JAKIM has the authority to oversee the implementation of Islamic laws, but only with respect to the Federal Territories. Although it does not have the power to issue *fatwas* on its own, the Department acts as the secretariat for the National Council of Islamic Affairs, the national coordinating body of the state Islamic councils. JAKIM's responsibilities also include implementing programs for the advancement of Islam.

State Legislation pertaining to Control & Restriction of the Propagation of Non-Islamic Religions

| State(s) | Enactments | Date of coming into force | Relevant provisions prohibiting use of certain words & expressions | Punishment |
|----------------|---|--|--|--|
| Terengganu | Control & Restriction of the Propagation of Non-Islamic Religions Enactment, 1980 | April 1, 1986 | Section 9 & Parts I & II of the Schedule | Fine of RM1,000 |
| Kelantan | Control & Restriction of the Propagation of Non-Islamic Religions (sic) Enactment, 1981 | Jan 1, 1987 | Section 9 & Parts I & II of the Schedule | Fine not exceeding RM10,000 or jail not exceeding five years or both AND whipping. (As amended by the Control & Restriction of the Propagation of non-Islamic Religions (Amendment) Enactment, 2007 which came into force on July 20, 2007 |
| Selangor | Non-Islamic Religions (Control of Propagation Amongst Muslims) Enactment, 1988 | July 8, 1988 | Section 9 & Parts I & II of the Schedule | Fine not exceeding RM1,000 |
| Kedah | Control & Restriction of the Propagation of Non-Islamic Religions Enactment, 1988 | Oct 1, 1988 | Section 9 & the Schedule | Jail not exceeding three years & for a second & subsequent offence, jail not exceeding four years |
| Malacca | Control & Restriction of the Propagation of Non-Islamic Religions to Muslim Enactment, 1988 | Jan 1, 1990 | Section 9 & Parts I & II of the Schedule | Fine of RM1,000 |
| Perak | Control & Restriction of the Propagation of Non-Islamic Religions Enactment, 1988 | *Info not available at the time of publication | Section 9 & Parts I & II of the Schedule | Fine not exceeding RM5,000 or jail not exceeding two years or both |
| Pahang | Control & Restriction of the Propagation of Non-Islamic Religions Enactment, 1989 | March 1, 1990 | Section 9 & Parts I & II of the Schedule | Fine not exceeding RM5,000 or jail not exceeding two years or both |
| Johor | Control & Restriction of the Propagation of Non-Islamic Religions Enactment, 1991 | Feb 1, 2003 | Section 9. No schedule, but prohibited to use "any of the words of Islamic origin or any of its derivatives or variations" | Fine not exceeding RM5,000 or jail not exceeding two years or both |
| Perlis | Control & Restriction of the Religious Doctrine & Belief which is Contrary to the Religion of Islam Enactment, 2002 | Jan 1, 2007 | Section 9 & Parts I & II of the Schedule | Fine not exceeding RM5,000 or jail not exceeding one year or both |
| Negri Sembilan | The Control & Restriction (The Propagation of Non-Islamic Religions Amongst Muslims) (Negri Sembilan) Enactment, 1991 | April 5, 2007 | Section 9 & Parts I & II of the Schedule | Fine not exceeding RM5,000 or jail not exceeding six months or both |

CHALLENGES TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Significant violations of religious freedom in Malaysia have been well documented in the annual Human Rights Report of the local activist group, Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM).³⁴ SUARAM's reports name *Islamization* as the main motivator behind increasing restrictions on religious freedom. Interviews with Christian leaders also cite Islamization as the main threat to the religious freedom of minorities in Malaysia.³⁵ Though by no means exhaustive, some of the most recent restrictions on religious freedom in Malaysia include: the right to use the word "Allah," restrictions on conversion and "apostasy," persecution of "deviant" Muslim sects, the Bill to Amend Act 355, abductions and disappearances of minority leaders and activists, government-supported Islamization of East Malaysia and proselytization of

indigenous Christians, social intolerance against Christians, discriminatory business practices, and intimidation and persecution of progressive Muslim thinkers.

While by no means exhaustive, this list surveys many of the major religious freedom challenges in Malaysia.

The Right to Use the Word "Allah" ("Public Order" Supersedes Religious Freedom)

Do non-Muslims have the right to use the word Allah? On 23 June 2014, the Federal Court of Malaysia refused to hear the appeal of the Catholic Church challenging the prohibition against the use of the word "Allah" by non-Muslims to refer to God. Article 11(4), state restrictions on propagation amongst

Muslims, and a decision made by the Federal Government on 19 May 1986 all allow restricting certain words in non-Muslim publications.³⁶ The ban, which was overturned by a 31 December 2009 decision of the Kuala Lumpur High Court after having been instituted in 2007, was upheld by the Court of Appeal on 14 October 2013.

This case dealt with the use of “Allah” in the *Catholic Herald*. The Home Ministry’s case against the *Catholic Herald* was not based on Article 11(4) or any state law, but rather that the Herald, in using the word “Allah,” had refused to comply with the ministry’s order to restrict the use of the term “Allah” in the interests of public order and security under the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984.³⁷

While the Appeal’s Court ruling appears to provide a legal precedent for banning the Christian usage of the term “Allah” altogether, the decision was interpreted by the government and others as merely applying to the *Catholic Herald* and not to other Christian publications.³⁸ This interpretation was in line with a 10-point solution issued by the government in 2011 concerning the usage of the word “Allah” in Malay language Bibles. The ten-point solution clarified that there would be no restriction on Malay language Bibles in Sabah and Sarawak, while Malay Bibles in the Peninsula would need to be stamped as a “Christian Publication” with a cross printed on the front covers.³⁹

However, critics are skeptical of the interpretation that the Court of Appeal’s decision applied to only the *Catholic Herald*.⁴⁰ The Court declared that the use of “Allah” is not essential or

integral to the Christian faith and went on to say that any non-Muslim religious practices must now be tested against the potential for perceived offense to Muslims.

The sincerity of the government’s commitment to the 10-point solution and the scope of the ruling of the Court of Appeals was immediately tested by the raid on the Bible Society of Malaysia (BSM) by Selangor state religious authorities (JAIS) in January 2014. During the raid, JAIS confiscated 351 Malay language Bibles that contained the word “Allah,” even though BSM had complied with the 10-point solution issued by the government in 2011 by imprinting the Bibles with a cross and the words “Christian publication” on the cover. The raid on the BSM was justified under Section 9 of the Selangor Enactment, an open-ended provision that prohibits the use of certain words that are deemed sensitive to Muslims on the assumption that the banned words relate to missionary activities.

Unilateral Conversion & Apostasy (Tensions between Civil and Shariah Courts)

The Indira Gandhi case of unilateral conversion of minors highlights the tension between the authority of civil and Shariah courts, illustrating how the Shariah court system can impact non-Muslims in Malaysia. Sometime in 2009, K. Pathmanathan, a Hindu, is said to have forcibly taken his three children from his wife, M. Indira Gandhi. Mr. Pathmanathan then embraced Islam and converted all three of his children in that same year. The conversions were done without the knowledge or consent of their mother. The Shariah

Court of Perak then awarded Mr. Pathamanathan custody over all of his children by claiming that they could not be raised by a non-Muslim. Ms. Indira proceeded to file a suit in the Ipoh High Court, which declared the conversion certificates of her three children null and void. However, this decision was overturned by the Court of Appeals in December 2015, which argued that the High Court's decision violated Article 121 of the Constitution and Perak state law.

The Appeals Court held that civil courts have absolutely no authority over Islamic matters, the pivotal issue being “not whether or not the Majlis Agama Islam (Islamic religious council) has jurisdiction, but whether High Court has jurisdiction, further saying that the subject matter of conversion to Islam in Indira's case is clearly outside the latter's legal competency.”⁴¹ This holding threatened to bar Gandhi from accessing any legal forum – “she cannot go to the Shariah court because she's not a Muslim,” and yet “cannot challenge it in the civil court because it's a ‘Muslim’ affair.”⁴²

In May 2016, the Federal Court, the country's highest court, granted Gandhi permission to appeal the judgment, and ultimately ruled in her favor, nullifying the unilateral conversion of her children to Islam on the grounds that the conversion was affected without the consent of both parents and that the process of conversion of the three children did not follow the procedures laid down under the Shariah enactments.⁴³ However, it remains to be seen whether future cases will be decided similarly. The threat remains that non-Muslims could be left without legal recourse in matters related to conversion.



Apostasy, or conversion from Islam, raises similarly thorny questions regarding the jurisdiction of Shariah courts. While official conversions of Malay-Muslims out of Islam are almost unheard of, there also exists the question of whether non-Malay children who were converted to Islam by their parents but never practiced it are allowed to leave the faith. In a series of cases, civil courts have ruled that any cases of apostasy must be directed to the Shariah courts.⁴⁴ In contrast, the High Court of Sarawak permitted Rooney Rebit, a professing Christian, to convert out of Islam under similar circumstances to previous cases. In this particular case, the Court considered the case a constitutional rather than a jurisdictional issue. While acknowledging that the Shariah courts had jurisdiction over issues of



conversion, the Court argued that it was apparent that Rooney was never a Muslim in the first place (one does not need to practice Islamic law to know that a person does not practice Islam). However, the law here remains sufficiently murky such that non-Muslims may continue to be subjected to the judgment of Shariah courts.

Minors converting from Islam remains a contested issue as well. In January 2018, Malaysia's highest court overturned prior precedent and held that minors could only convert with the permission of both parents.⁴⁵

In addition, along with growing intolerance to apostasy, Malaysian religious leaders have incited growing intolerance against atheists. In response to a fall 2017 Facebook posting by the

Canadian non-profit Atheist Republic,⁴⁶ Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Shahidan Kassim said, "I suggest we track them down and identify each of them."⁴⁷ Similarly, on 23 November 2017, Dr. Asyraf Wajdi Dusuki, Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department in charge of religious affairs, said that Article 11 of the Constitution's reference to "Belief in God" makes atheism unconstitutional. He continued, "The Government can draw up any legal provisions necessary to prevent such beliefs and doctrines, which is deemed to be a threat to the sanctity of Islam."⁴⁸ Mufti of Negeri Sembilan State claimed that Islam prescribes death for Muslims who become atheists, though he said that Shariah courts could not implement the punishments.⁴⁹

Persecution of "Deviant" Muslim Sects

The Malaysian government maintains a close relationship with Sunni Muslim authorities in the country, which risks proscribing minority sects within Islam. JAKIM heavily restricts the content of Islam: it plays a role in governing mosques, influencing the content of sermons, conveying political messages, and preventing certain imams from speaking. Fifty-six groups are currently considered "deviant" by JAKIM.⁵⁰ Such "deviant" groups include Shia Muslims, Ahmadis, and Al-Aqram. Members of such groups are subject to measures including mandatory religious rehabilitation, monitoring of religious activities, restricting of proselytization, arrests while participating in religious activities, and barriers in constructing houses of worship. Moreover, deviant groups are potentially subject to fines and imprisonment under Shariah law, which varies by state.⁵¹

Reports indicate that dissenters are detained in mandatory "rehabilitation centers," which "teach and enforce government-approved Islamic practices," and cannot leave until they complete a program of religious practices.⁵² Punishments for deviant practices include fines and up to three years imprisonment.⁵³

In 1996, the National Fatwa Counsel declared Shia Islam to be officially deviant,⁵⁴ overruling a 1984 fatwa pronouncing it acceptable.⁵⁵ Because Shias must practice their faith in secret, the exact number of Shia Muslims in Malaysia is unknown, but estimates range from the tens to hundreds of thousands. While many Shia Muslims

fleeing instability in the Arab world arrive in Malaysia, Shias have been subject to discrimination, fatwas, and even accusations of terrorism despite evidence to the contrary. Most recently, 50 Pakistani nationals were arrested by the Selangor Islamic Department (JAIS) in October 2016.⁵⁶ The arrests came despite a 2010 fatwa by JAIS exempting foreign nationals from the ban against Shi'ism.⁵⁷

Many Shia publications remain banned under the Communications and Multimedia Act of 1998, which "criminalizes online and network communications that are considered 'obscene, indecent, false, menacing or offensive in nature with intent to annoy, abuse, threaten or harass another person.'"⁵⁸ According to a 2012 Pew survey, only 35 percent of Sunni respondents in Malaysia believed Shia were Muslims (though 43 percent did not know what Shia is or did not know whether they were Muslims or not).⁵⁹ Of course, such trends are not confined to Malaysia but rather reflect the broader Sunni-Shia tensions across the Muslim world.⁶⁰

Shia Muslims participating in events surrounding the Ashura holiday, remembering the death of Husayn ibn Ali, have been detained or arrested in such celebrations.⁶¹

Ahmadis make up a relatively small community in Malaysia.⁶² They are nevertheless under increasing pressure from state religious authorities. Ahmadis are prevented from holding Friday prayers and are denounced by government and non-government groups.⁶³ In some cases local authorities have permitted billboards in front of

Ahmadi headquarters to proclaim that “Ahmadis are not Muslims.”⁶⁴

The Bill to Amend Act 355

The Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) has long pushed for the implementation of Hudud law – a strict strand within Shariah imposing severe punishments on specific religious offenses – in the state of Kelantan. PAS’ efforts to impose the punishments prescribed under Hudud law have, however, been unsuccessful due to the Shariah Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act 1965 (amended 1984), also known as Act 355, which enforces an upper limit on punishments.⁶⁵ A proposed amendment to Act 355 was finally tabled in Parliament on 24 November, which would allow the Shariah courts to mete out punishments of up to 30 years imprisonment, RM 100,000 fines, and 100 strokes of the cane. These increased punishments would allow Shariah courts in PAS controlled Kelantan to begin enforcing some aspects of Hudud law.

The non-Muslim community has voiced concerns regarding the possibility that the increased punishments could be applied to non-Muslims due to the fuzzy jurisdictional boundaries between civil and Shariah courts with respect to offenses such as apostasy and the aforementioned conversion cases. The bill was tabled, receiving no debate or vote in Parliament.

Abductions & Disappearances

Another source of concern is the disappearances of four Malaysian faith-based workers: Pastor Raymond Koh, Pastor Joshua Hilmy and his wife Ruth,

and Amri Che Mat.⁶⁶ Public awareness regarding the disappearances began following the abduction of Pastor Koh, on 13 February 2017 in what appeared to be a well-funded and professionally conducted operation. A CCTV clip showing his abduction by a convoy of motorcycles and black SUVs has been circulated widely. The abduction of Pastor Koh has also brought attention to other reported disappearances, all of which occurred in November 2016. Witnesses claim that Amri Che Mat was abducted in a similar manner to Pastor Koh, with his car being boxed in by five vehicles before he was taken away.⁶⁷ Although there is no proof these abductees were targeted specifically because of their faith, there had been speculation and allegations that Pastor Koh was proselytizing to Muslims; Joshua and Ruth Hilmy were Malay-Muslim converts to Christianity, and Amri Che Mat preached Shia Islam.⁶⁸

The professional manner of these abductions and the “uncharacteristically casual” approach taken by the police has prompted fears that the state may somehow be involved in these disappearances.⁶⁹ The Malaysian Human Rights Commission (SUHAKAM) has identified the Special Branch of the Malaysian Police as responsible for the “enforced disappearances.”⁷⁰ In any case, the Inspector General of Malaysia’s police has told reporters to “shut up” and stop reporting on the case.⁷¹ He has also called for a stop to candlelight vigils organized by Christians nationwide, claiming that these activities only threaten the safety of Pastor Koh. To date, the police have offered no substantial updates on any of the disappearances, and Pastor Koh’s family has completely lost trust in the



police after it emerged that the police were focused on investigating claims that Pastor Koh was proselytizing to Muslims.⁷² In the light of the SUHAKAM inquiry suggesting that the disappearances of Pastor Koh and Amri Che were coordinated by Malaysian Police, the government has constituted a special panel to investigate and bring to justice those responsible. Civil society groups have criticized the composition of the special panel.⁷³

The unsatisfactory police response to this situation has raised concerns for the security of faith-based workers and human rights defenders. Human rights activist Thomas Fann stated, “We say that there is a high probability there have been enforced disappearances,

which means that the state may be directly or indirectly involved... we have a reason to believe that there is a relationship because they are all faith-based workers.”⁷⁴ In the long run, this lack of confidence in the police may impinge on the safety of human rights defenders working on religious freedom.

Islamization of East Malaysia & Proselytization of Indigenous Christians

Upon the formation of the Federation of Malaysia, leaders from Christian-majority Sabah and Sarawak were concerned that their religious freedom would be encroached in joining a Muslim-majority nation. In order to safeguard

the religious freedom of minority groups, the Malaysia Agreement of 1963 included special guarantees for religious freedom in Sabah and Sarawak. However, recent state-backed efforts to convert Christians in those states to Islam and alter the local religious demography have undermined the spirit of the Agreement. Since the 1970s, Muslim refugees and migrants from the Philippines' Mindanao region, Indonesia, and even Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, have altered Sabah's ethnic and religious composition to the point where the once Christian majority has been reduced to a minority. The UMNO-led government used these migrants, some of whom are Muslim converts, to gain votes in exchange for giving them Malaysian identification documents (IDs) – effectively, the party increase their political support in the region by granting citizenship in exchange for votes.

The Kairos Research Centre writes that the former Chief Minister of Sabah, Tun Mustapha Harun, “effected large scale conversions of non-Muslim *bumiputera*,” while the Federal Government and civil service purportedly gave citizenship to Pakistanis, Indians, and Indonesians, among others as long as they were Muslims, in order to obtain votes and consolidate Malay Muslim power in Sabah.⁷⁵

These developments follow the repeals of Articles 3(3) and Articles 161 C and D, which protected the special interests and right to freedom of religion of the indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak.

Today, Islamic institutions, Islamic councils and departments, and the Shariah courts have been established in Sabah and Sarawak as a result of decades of state-assisted Islamization efforts. Most alarming, however, are state-sponsored Islamization programs, including population engineering and proselytization activities by *dawa* (missionary) organizations in indigenous areas, which have significantly contributed to changing the demographics of the east Malaysian states.⁷⁶ The lack of due process in granting citizenship to Muslim migrants has generated particular concern. A profile on Sabah compiled by Minority Rights Group International states: “By permitting an influx of perhaps more than a million Muslims from the southern Philippines and Indonesia in the last two decades to settle and acquire voting rights (even if their presence is not always admitted in official figures), the current government under the UMNO (United Malays National Organization) party has ensured its political domination over Sabah since it derives most of its support from Muslim groups. The indigenous non-Muslim groups such as the Kadazan-Dusun, Muruts and Chinese are declining into demographic and political insignificance, while Muslim groups have become dominant both in demographic and political terms.”⁷⁷ The Royal Commission of Inquiry report on Sabah details the specific issue of vote-buying in the state. Formed in 2012, the Commission conducted hearings in 2013, and issued a report at the end of 2015. Although the report is not detailed, the records from the Commission shed light on official efforts

to grant citizenship to Muslim migrants in the region: in the proceedings, government officials admitted they issued citizenship to Muslim immigrants from the Southern Philippines, Bangladesh, and Indonesia.⁷⁸

Historically, UMNO has used the state apparatus to affect large-scale “false” conversions, particularly in parts of Sabah and Sarawak with poor and illiterate populations.⁷⁹ Under the pretext of distributing welfare funds, state officials under the influence of Barisan National induced mostly illiterate communities to sign documents that changed their designated religion on their IDs to Islam, though many were Christian or followers of animistic traditions.

The state continues to use its own resources in an attempt to convert the indigenous Christian *bumiputeras* (“sons of the soil”) of Sabah and Sarawak. For example, the Borneo Post reports that “*Bumiputera* Christians in Sabah continue to be “converted to Islam” and restated as Muslims by the National Registration Department (NRD) simply because they have “*bin*” and “*binti*” (son of or daughter of) in their names.” The NRD has informed NGOs protesting such practices that it would continue to list *Bumiputera* Christians in Sabah as Muslims as long as they are known by *bin* or *binti*. It would also not rectify past entry errors by way of changing the religion listing back to Christianity in the identity cards (*MyKad*) of those affected until and unless a Shariah court order for the renunciation or release from Islam is obtained.⁸⁰ There are some cases where the Shariah court has granted apostasy or the apostasy certificate,

but these cases are rare and cannot be relied on as binding legal precedent.

One other major “battleground” for the conversion of *Bumiputera* Christians is in schools where teachers and staff have actively pressured Christian children to convert. There have also been reports of conversions in kindergartens where Christian children are taught to recite Islamic prayers. Sister Rita Chew, the head of the Catholic Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu’s education commission, reported to UCA News that “Conversions are taking place in schools but they (the government) are denying it.”⁸¹ Indigenous communities in these states face difficulties and discrimination when it comes to marrying Muslims. While marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims are no longer officially permitted, the practice continues as long as each family consents and exchanges gifts.⁸² However, as the national government does not recognize such marriages, it is often difficult for the children of these marriages to obtain birth certificates. The status of a child in Malaysia is typically categorized according to the status of the mother, but if only the father is Muslim, that tradition may not be respected. If a non-Muslim mother insists on the religion, her wish may be granted, but the father’s name will be left off the birth certificate, leading to a generation of legally fatherless children.

Religious Intolerance against Christians

Four recent incidents exemplify the broader problem of intolerance toward Christians in Malaysia. The first incident occurred in May 2017, when a public

university lecturer lodged a police report against the Selangor state speaker at the time, Hannah Yeoh, over the inclusion of Bible verses in her biography. According to the lecturer, references to Christianity in the publicly available biography amounted to proselytization of Muslims, which is prohibited under Selangor law.⁸³

Secondly, a large Christian revival gathering called the “Jerusalem Jubilee,” was banned by the Home Minister in June 2017 after several complaints were lodged against the gathering. The gathering was to be hosted by a Chinese Calvary Church in the state of Malacca and was merely intended as a prayer gathering of Christians from Malaysia and the Asia Pacific region. The Home Minister, who is also Deputy Prime Minister, argued that such an event would hurt the sensitivities of Muslims, and, “When the sentiments of Muslims are affected and their feelings offended... I as Home Minister order the police to ban the meeting.”⁸⁴ PAS had also accused the event of “promoting ‘Zionist Christianity’ and ‘Jewish Culture.’”⁸⁵

Thirdly, two weeks after the ban against the Jerusalem Jubilee gathering in Malacca, the CEO of the Centre for Human Rights Research and Advocacy (Centhra), Azril Mohd Amin, argued that the government should ban Christian evangelicalism as the movement “threatens religious harmony in Malaysia.”⁸⁶ According to Azril, the banning of the Jubilee event was “in line with Article 11 of the Federal Constitution, towards preserving the peace among religions.”⁸⁷

Finally, on 7 January 2018, demonstrators threw objects

resembling water filter components at the Kota Bharu Methodist Church, resulting in smashed and cracked windows. According to the pastor of the church, Goo Siew Lai, the culprits intended to start a fire at the premises. Moreover, a similar incident reportedly took place at the Arulmigu Siva Subramaniyar Temple the day before.⁸⁸

Commercial Discrimination: The Case of the Muslim-only Launderette

Several Muslim-only launderettes have sprung up recently in some parts of Malaysia. One such establishment was found in Muar in Johor Bahru in the southern tip of the Malaysian Peninsula, across from Singapore. The Muslim business owner of the Muslim-only laundromat in Muar said it was part of their “duty” as Muslims and that it was intended to safeguard the purity (*kesucian*) of their clients’ clothes.⁸⁹ In defense of the business practice, Johor Islamic Council Adviser Nooh Gadut said Muslims should not mix their laundry to avoid “*najis mughallazah*” or pigs’ and dogs’ feces.⁹⁰

As expected, when the news circulated, it immediately received condemnation from both the public and religious authorities not only for its absurdity, but also for its potential socio-political and ethno-religious ramifications. R.S. Mohan Shan, deputy president of the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Taoism, said, “I cannot see why a simple thing like a launderette can become a religious matter. It is not good for racial harmony, and it won’t take us anywhere.”⁹¹

Such discriminatory practices also provoked censure from Muslim authorities. The *Sultan* of the southern state of Johor, Ibrahim Ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar, who by law is the “Head of Religion” in his State, criticized the establishment: “This is not a Taliban state and as the Head of Islam in Johor, I find this action to be totally unacceptable as this is extremist in nature...[T]his is not the Johor we want,” he said.⁹² The *Sultan* went on to say, “From now on, I am directing the state executive council and all the councils to insist that any business owners who carry out such blatant discriminatory practices should have their licenses revoked ... Don’t mess around with your narrow-minded religious prejudices.”⁹³ Following the rebuke by the *Sultan*, the business owner apologized and brought down the signage that offended the sensibility of many Malaysians.⁹⁴

Such criticism, however, has not stopped others from committing the same discriminatory practices. Only a few days after the furor in Muar, the same kind of practice was found in the state of Perlis. This time, the launderette had a huge signboard, which read: “Islamic laundry concept.” When called for confirmation, the business owner explained that he opened the laundry to serve “only Muslims,” and that it was for his clients’ “comfort,” while urging non-Muslims to use other launderettes.⁹⁵ Although some Muslims have protested against these practices, the concern is that such discriminatory business practices are indicative of an “us versus them” mentality that could potentially become the new norm in Malaysian society. More cases of totalizing racial and religious segregation in the form of Muslim-only taxis, restaurants, and

apartment blocks, among other forms of discrimination, would likely ensue.

Intimidation of Muslim Progressive Thinkers

Yet another challenge to religious freedom involves tensions within the Malaysian Muslim community, and related targeting of Muslim minority sects.

The raging debate on the Kuala Lumpur-based Islamic Renaissance Front (IRF) typifies these tensions. IRF is an organization of Muslim progressive thinkers launched by Tariq Ramadan in late 2009.⁹⁶ It defines itself as “an intellectual movement and think tank focused on youth empowerment and the promotion of Muslim intellectual discourse.”⁹⁷ According to its website, “IRF echoes the voice of reason and compassion, and is committed to liberating the Muslim mind from rigid orthodoxy and conservatism” by engaging in discussions “to promote democracy, liberty and social justice.”⁹⁸ IRF also claims that it is committed “to the revival and reform of Islamic thought and appreciation in order to enable the *ummah* (Muslim community) to confront their present challenges more meaningfully toward the progress and happiness of all.”⁹⁹

IRF became the center of controversy when two Muslim intellectuals, Mustafa Akyol and Mun'im Sirry, were invited to its reading sessions and regular public discussions. Akyol is a journalist and was a Muslim lecturer of political science at Faith University in Istanbul, Turkey, but is currently a Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute’s Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity in the U.S. Akyol

regularly writes columns in a number of international and Turkish national media outlets such as *International New York Times*, *Al-Monitor*, *Hurriyet, Star* and *Referans* daily news.¹⁰⁰

Akyol was invited in mid-2017 by IRF to share his thoughts on Islam, reason, and freedom. However, before he finished his lecture series, the Malaysian religious authorities came to the venue to intimidate him, “advising” him not to proceed with his lectures, especially those regarding inter-faith understanding. After discussing his situation with the IRF hosts, Akyol then decided to cancel his last lecture, which was supposed to examine in-depth his most recent book on “the Islamic Jesus” and return to the U.S.¹⁰¹ Upon trying to leave Malaysia, Akyol was held up at immigration and subsequently moved to and interrogated at a police station, jailed, and put on trial in a Shariah court by JAWI (Jabatan Agama Wilayah Persekutuan/Federal Territories Islamic Affairs Department) officials. The Islamic authorities evidently regarded his talks as “preaching” without the appropriate license. The religious officers at the Shariah court claimed the detention was necessary “to protect religion.”¹⁰²

Meanwhile, Mun'im Sirry is an Assistant Professor in the Theology Department of the University of Notre Dame in Indiana (U.S.).¹⁰³ In August 2017, IRF invited Sirry to present his “revisionist” perspective on the Quran in one of their “Reading Sessions.” In his talk, Sirry elaborated on the various dimensions of the Quran’s polemical verses and their *tafsir* (exegeses), which he found to be obstructing “peaceable interreligious relations” in past and contemporary times. Sirry

maintained that a more vigorous and rich understanding of the verses would allow for less confrontational attitudes toward other religions.

Following his talk, Sirry was lambasted by the Islamic authorities. Sirry was accused by JAKIM (Malaysian Islamic Development Agency) Director Othman Mustapha of spreading “deviant liberal ideas.”¹⁰⁴ Due to the controversy, a backlash occurred, with some urging Sirry to be barred from entering Malaysia.¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately, these cases are part of a trend of “liberal-minded” Muslim intellectuals from Indonesia encountering trouble in Malaysia.¹⁰⁶ In addition to Akyol, Sirry, and Abdalla, many others have also come under fire from the Malaysian Islamic authorities, under the guise of internal security. The most prominent cases involved the banning of books by world renowned authors and scholars of religion such as Karen Armstrong (*Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Harper Collins, 2000) and John L. Esposito (*What everyone Needs to Know About Islam*, Oxford University Press, 2002).¹⁰⁷

JAKIM has promoted a very specific strand of Islam to the detriment of others, as seen in the cases involving Akyol, Sirry, and a whole host of other liberal-leaning Muslim thinkers such as Kassim Ahmad, Wan Sulaiman, the well-known female lawyer Siti Kassim, and prolific Muslim preacher Ustaz Wan Ji Wan Hussien. Sisters in Islam (SIS), an organization that promotes the rights of women in the context of Islam, was also declared to be deviating from Islam by a gazetted *fatwa* in Senglar. SIS appealed this *fatwa*, and its appeal will be heard in the High Court.¹⁰⁸



STRENGTHS OPPORTUNITIES & NEEDS

Malaysia is a Muslim-majority state, but there is some ambiguity surrounding the status of Islam. On the one hand, the country is widely regarded by its Muslim population as an officially Islamic state. On the other hand, the Constitution merely grants Islam the status of favored religion. This ambiguity has led to many of the challenges discussed in detail in this report.

The first challenge pertains to the state regulating Islam within the country. Under the UMNO-led government, the state often prescribed a specific form of Islam and Islamic jurisprudence, which could prove hostile to pluralism. The central need, then, is for a greater buffer between the state and Islamic affairs. Proponents of varied strains of Islamic thought, public intellectuals, and human

rights defenders are often castigated as trouble makers by ill-informed Malaysians and discriminated against in Malaysian society. Some defenders of Shia Islam are threatened or persecuted. Over time, this has led to unfair treatment of other religious groups, discrimination against minorities, and inequality.

The state has often been seen by large portions of society as imposing its will through interfering with or prescribing religious ideas, rules, and norms on all religious communities. However, the establishment of a new government and administration offers an opportunity to create greater distance between the state and Islamic affairs. It remains to be seen whether the new government will disentangle itself from these matters and take steps toward policies and practices

that foster religious freedom while maintaining a “respectful distance” from religious affairs.

The second challenge relates to the freedom for all religious groups to practice their own religion according to their faith tenets. No religious group—whether majority or minority—should impose its religious beliefs and practices upon others, to include those that amount to discrimination and result in religious inequality. Minority groups should receive more respectful treatment.

The recent incident in the Malay-Muslim town of Manjoi in the state of Perak is instructive. In this incident, a group of young Muslims belonging to an NGO called Jabat Isytihar boasted of having successfully thwarted the sale of liquor in their vicinity when they forced a convenience store to empty its liquor cabinet.¹⁰⁹ One resident’s complaint

provides some insight into the Muslim sensitivities motivating the group, “[A]s long as there are alcoholic drinks in the shop, then we can’t buy something else, can we?”¹¹⁰

This case is an excellent example of how a majority religious group in a country may begin to impose its beliefs and practices upon minorities in a discriminatory manner that disregards their rights. The fear amongst religious minorities in Malaysia is that the small restrictions today may lead to larger and more comprehensive restrictions in the future.

Although religious freedom in Malaysia needs many additional protections, several opportunities also exist in this regard. In particular, Malaysia boasts an active civil society, with several groups working to defend religious freedom.

ACTION ITEMS

Based on this survey of Malaysian law, public policy, and culture, the following action items should be given due consideration by relevant authorities in Malaysia government and society.

- 1. Take concrete steps to implement Malaysia's international commitment to promote and protect the rights of all people to worship in peace and security without discrimination or restriction.**
 - 1.1** Based on this survey of Malaysian law, public policy, and culture, the following action items should be given due consideration by relevant authorities in Malaysia government and society.
- 2. Revise Malaysia's legislative framework to be consistent with international covenants and treaties relating to freedom of religion.**
 - 2.1** The new government should take positive steps to ensure all laws that relate to or impinge on religion should be consistent with the provisions under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966, namely:
 - Article 18 – the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
 - Article 26 – equality before the law without discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion.

- Article 27 – persons belonging to ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities shall not be denied the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.

2.2 The new government should take positive steps to put into effect the obligations under the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief 1981, namely:

- The positive duties imposed on states pursuant to Articles 2-6 against intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief and against all acts that has the effect of nullifying and impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis.

2.3 The new government should take positive steps to put into effect the obligations under the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities 1992, namely:

- Under Article 4, States shall take measures to ensure that persons belonging to minorities may exercise fully and effectively all their human rights and fundamental freedoms without any discrimination and equality before the law; and
- Under Article 4(2), States shall take measures to create *favourable* conditions to enable persons belonging to minorities to express their characteristics and to develop their culture, language, religion, traditions and customs.

3. Increase the protections and guarantees for religious and ethnic minorities with respect to the exercise of freedom of religion or belief.

- 3.1** Make provisions to resolve the conflict of jurisdiction between civil and Shariah court systems and their respective area of application.
- 3.2** Make provisions under the law and/or Shariah enactments to state clearly that Shariah courts shall have jurisdiction only with respect to personal law matters solely with Muslims and not when either party are non-Muslims.
- 3.3** Make provisions under the law and/or Shariah enactments to state clearly that civil courts shall have the exclusive jurisdiction of judicial review with respect to the application of Shariah enactments in conversion and family law matters when one party is not a Muslim and other matters impinging on the rights of non-Muslims.

- 4. Take measures to ensure that all persons, including Muslims, can freely exercise their right to freedom of religion and belief, without interference by the state—including the right to change one’s religion:**
 - 4.1** Promote public discussions to create awareness on these issues.
 - 4.2** Facilitate the amendments to the current Shariah enactments or make policy provisions for an administrative procedure for persons who are no longer Muslims to leave Islam freely without undue obstacles.
 - 4.3** Facilitate the amendments to the current Shariah enactments to revoke apostasy and blasphemy as offenses.
 - 4.4** Amend the National Registration Act or make policy provisions to allow for those who have left Islam to change their religious status and/or change their names on their ID.
 - 4.5** Amend the National Registration Act or make policy provisions to allow for those who have been wrongly categorized as Muslims to change their names and religious status on their ID.
- 5. Continue interfaith dialogue efforts and ensure the involvement of religious bureaucrats, state Islamic leaders, and religious minorities on a common and equal platform:**
 - 5.1** Under the new government manifesto, the new government seeks to establish a Council for People’s Harmony. Among the roles of this council is reviewing and recommending policies and programs aimed at enhancing unity and integration of different races. The council should investigate root causes of religious conflicts and set up community mediation centers for dispute and conflict resolution.
- 6. Continue efforts to promote inter-religious dialogue and mutual respect for the different schools of Islamic thought and other religions by renouncing and nullifying all actions and steps taken against “thought-policing” of religious ideas, including bans on publications, printings and materials contrary to official interpretation of religious dogmas.**

MAJOR RELIGIOUS ACTORS: MAYALSIA

ISLAM

→ *The Sultans & the Agong*

→ *Federal-Level Islamic Institutions*

- *Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM)*
- National Fatwa Council
- National Council for Islamic Affairs

→ *State-Level Islamic Institutions*

- *Majlis Agama* (State Islamic Council)
- *Jabatan Agama Islam* (State Islamic Department)
- State Fatwa Committee
- State Shariah Courts
- United Malays Nationalist Organization (UMNO)
- *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS) - After the moderate faction of PAS was purged from the party in 2015, the ousted members formed a new aggressive Islamic political party, AMANAH.

→ *Malay-Muslim Organizations¹¹¹*

- *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (ABIM)
- *Dakwah* (Islamic Revivalism)
- *Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia* (ISMA)
- Pro-Malay Rights Groups, Anti-Liberal & Anti-Secular

CHRISTIANITY

→ *Christian Federation of Malaysia*

→ *Catholic Bishop's Conference*

→ *Council of Churches Malaysia*

→ *National Evangelical Christian Fellowship*

→ *East Malaysian Bodies (Sabah Council of Churches & Association of Churches Sarawak)*

→ *Churches Active in Addressing Religious Freedom Issues*

- *Catholic Church in Malaysia* (Archbishop Julian Leow, Bishops Bernard Paul & Paul Tan)
- *SIB Church in Kuala Lumpur, SIB Church (East Malaysia)*

BUDDHISM

→ *Young Buddhists Association Malaysia (YBAM)*

→ *Malaysian Buddhists Association (MBA)*

HINDUISM¹¹²

→ *Malaysian Hindu Sangam*

→ *Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF)*

MALAYSIA

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis is a structured planning method that evaluates a given organization, program, or a project in each of these areas. What follows is a SWOT analysis for religious freedom for Malaysia.

STRENGTHS

What does the country do well with regard to religious freedom?

What areas are vibrant, positive, and healthy when it comes to religious freedom in the country?

- ◆ Among Malaysians there is still a strong commitment to a narrative that views Malaysia as an experiment in pluralism, and whose achievement in harmony has been made possible by remarkable economic development over the course of the country's history.
- ◆ Rising persecution against the Christian minority has caused many Christians to become more politically aware. Christians are now more likely to speak out against actions that compromise religious freedom as opposed to going through back door channels. (Example: CFM's vocal call to vote against the Hudud Bill)¹³
- ◆ Christians are still the largest religious group in the state of Sarawak, and there is still a sizeable Christian minority in Sabah. The attempted conversion of *bumiputera* Christians and the manipulation of Sabah's population significantly diminishes their political clout and, therefore, their capacity to practice and defend their religious freedom as well as other fundamental rights, both as indigenous peoples and as Christians.
- ◆ The unique political and cultural background of East Malaysia offers an opportunity to counter the government's narrative of *ketuanan Melayu* and *ketuanan Islam*. Documents leading up to the forming of the Federal Constitution and the Malaysia Agreement of 1963 provide evidence that Malaysia was envisaged as a secular state. The state government of Sarawak has recently announced a research trip to the U.K. in order to recover documents detailing the discussion of the Malaysia Agreement of 1963.

MALAYSIA

SWOT ANALYSIS

WEAKNESSES

What does the country do less well when it comes to religious freedom?

What areas of weakness does the country encounter with religious freedom?

- ◆ The Islamization of Malaysian society is now well-established in government institutions and is backed by the idea of Malay-Islamic supremacy. UMNO and PAS have also successfully encouraged the development of a “siege mentality” among Malay-Muslims. (Muslim groups use Christians and Chinese as scapegoats to frighten the Muslim community by suggesting that there exists a Chinese-Christian agenda to overthrow Islam).¹¹⁴
- ◆ Use of the name “Allah” and calls to ban Hannah Yeoh’s biography signal an evolving understanding of Article 11(4) in which the absence of *intent* to proselytize is no longer considered integral to determining whether this provision has been violated. Rather, religious minorities now face the risk of being accused of proselytization if their activities are deemed unacceptable by a Muslim.
- ◆ The UMNO government controlled by PM Najib Razak was defiant in the face of the 1MDB corruption scandal. It is unlikely that the Malaysian government will respond to international calls to address its religious freedom situation unless meaningful pressure is applied. The government also passed a national security law in July 2016, which gave the Prime Minister broad powers to create “security areas” where government forces can legally act with impunity.¹¹⁵
- ◆ The purging of the PAS party’s moderate faction has weakened the coalition and its chances of an electoral victory in future elections. (Another ideological battle may be on the horizon as the party’s Deputy President Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man is seen to be anti-UMNO, whereas current President Abdul Hadi Awang seeks closer ties with UMNO in order to “protect” the Malays).
- ◆ It has become nearly impossible for non-Muslims to speak out against Islamization or Islamic matters without being branded as interventionist.
- ◆ The government continues to erroneously blame Christian evangelicals and ethnic Chinese for a variety of problems in Malaysia in order to reinforce the siege mentality of the Malay-Muslim majority.

MALAYSIA

SWOT ANALYSIS

OPPORTUNITIES

*What are the needs of the people in the country who wish to exercise their right to faith?
What trends can the country take advantage of to promote religious freedom?
What is changing in the country's communities that can be harnessed to promote religious freedom?*

- ◆ The historical formation of Malaysia as outlined in the documents surrounding the Reid Commission, the Federal Constitution, and Malaysia Agreement of 1963 supports the idea of a secular nation rather than an Islamic one.
- ◆ Efforts to increase international awareness of the ongoing Islamization efforts in East Malaysia have the potential to provide Malaysian Christian communities with aid and resources to combat Islamization.
- ◆ Malaysia's worsening religious freedom issues and the 1MDB corruption scandal have brought increased international attention to Malaysia. Multiple governments (including the U.S. Department of Justice) are currently investigating the 1MDB scandal.
- ◆ Organizations like the Islamic Renaissance Front and Sisters in Islam provide religious freedom advocates with the opportunity to engage with Malaysian Islamic scholars.
- ◆ Reforms in Saudi Arabia under prince Mohammed bin Salman, especially moves toward a more open and tolerant Islam, could bode well for positive religious freedom developments in Malaysia and elsewhere.

MALAYSIA

SWOT ANALYSIS

THREATS

*Are there any threats or regulations with regard to religious freedom in the country?
What is challenging in the country that will impact religious freedom?*

- ◆ In order to further consolidate his power in the face of increasing opposition, the government may continue to push aggressively for the Islamization of Malaysian society. This will only serve to worsen inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions.
- ◆ Former Prime Minister Najib pursued closer ties with Saudi Arabia. The government has approved 16 hectares of land in Putrajaya to fund a new “centre for peace” funded by Saudi Arabia and the Muslim World League (MWL).¹¹⁶ The MWL has been linked to the promotion of violent Islamist extremism.¹¹⁷
- ◆ Ties and influence from groups like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, with whom PAS has a strong history of linkages.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER REPORT

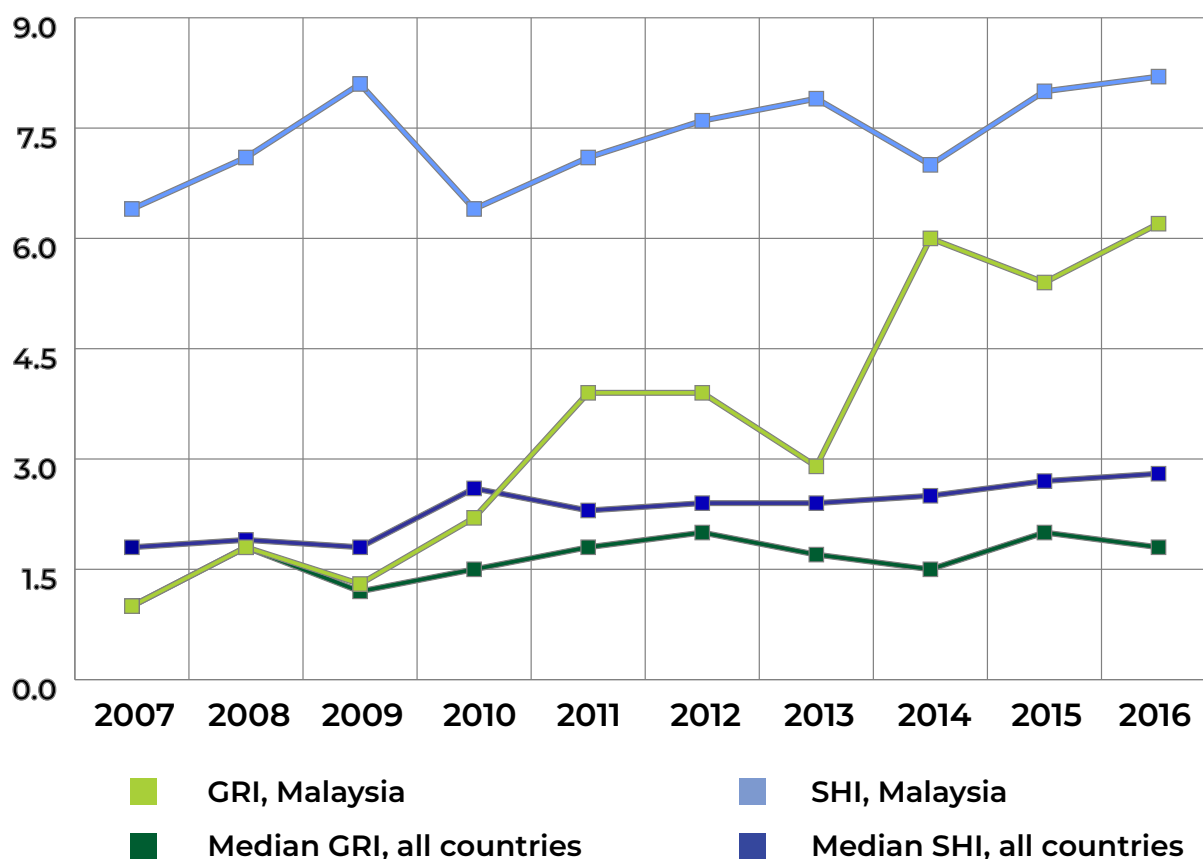
RESTRICTIONS ON RELIGION AMONG 198 COUNTRIES, 2007-2016

Since 2009, the Pew Research Center has released an annual report¹¹⁸ on restrictions of religious freedom around the world. The Pew report uses a 10-point index to rate 198 countries and self-governing territories based on Government Restrictions Index (GRI) and Social Hostilities Index (SHI).

The GRI measures government restrictions on religious actors ranging from favoring one religion over another to outright bans on a particular religion. According to the Pew Center's 2018 report on global restrictions on religion, Malaysia scored "very high" on the GRI in 2016, ranking 4th worst among the 198 countries surveyed.¹¹⁹

The SHI measures hostilities towards religion by non-state actors ranging from harassment to attacks in the name of religion. In 2016, Malaysia's SHI ranked "high" with the 23rd highest (and worst) SHI rating among the 198 countries.¹²⁰

Figure 1: Restrictions on Religion in Malaysia (GRI & SHI) 2007-2016





ENDNOTES

1 Timothy Samuel Shah et al., *Religious Freedom: Why Now? Defending an Embattled Human Right* (Princeton, New Jersey: Witherspoon Institute, 2012), pp. 13-16. See also Timothy Samuel Shah and Jack Friedman, eds., *Homo Religiosus?: Exploring the Roots of Religion and Religious Freedom in Human Experience* (New York & Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

2 Country population figures are 2020 projections according to UNdata. Derived from “Total population, both sexes combined,” *World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision*, United Nations Population Division, accessed June 17, 2020, <https://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=population&d=PopDiv&f=variableID%3a12>.

3 Pew Research Center, *The Future of the Global Muslim Population*, January 2011, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110209094904/http://www.pewforum.org/The-Future-of-the-Global-Muslim-Population.aspx>; Pew Research Center, *The Global Religious Landscape*, December 2012, <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-hindu/>.

4 Religious affiliation proportions are 2020 projections derived from the country profiles of *Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project*, Pew Research Center, accessed June 17, 2020, <http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/countries>. The proportions were applied to the UNdata population projections to obtain the figures for total population by religious affiliation.

5 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights begins with a reference to the “inherent dignity” of all human beings as the implicit foundation of human equality and human rights; the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany makes its cornerstone proposition that “[h]uman dignity shall be inviolable” the basis of the immediately following acknowledgment that all human beings possess “inviolable and inalienable human rights” (Articles 1.1-1.2); and the Declaration on Religious Liberty of the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church declares that “the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself” (sec. 2).

6 United Nations, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, December 10, 1948, <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.

7 That figure was 75 percent of the global population, more than 5 billion people, in 2010: Pew Research Center, *Rising Tide of Restrictions on Religion*, September 20, 2012, <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/09/20/rising-tide-of-restrictions-on-religion-findings/>. Subsequent annual reports confirmed that this number is only increasing: Pew Research Center, *A Closer Look at How Religious Restrictions Have Risen Around the World*, July 15, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/07/15/a-closer-look-at-how-religious-restrictions-have-risen-around-the-world/>.

8 Nathan Brown, “Facing the Cruel Palindrome: Moving beyond Sauve Qui Peut,” *Evolving Methodologies in the Study of Islamism*, POMEPS Studies 17 (March 7, 2016): 10, https://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/POMEPS_Studies_17_Methods_Web.pdf. The author defines Islamism as “a set of movements and approaches dedicated to increasing the role of Islam in general and the Islamic sharia specifically in public life.”

9 Vincent Bevins, “Christian preachers’ disappearance in Malaysia stokes fears of crackdown on religious minorities,” *The Guardian*, June 7, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/07/christian-preachers-disappearance-in-malaysia-stokes-fears-of-crackdown-on-religious-minorities>.

10 U.S. State Department, 2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Malaysia, June 21, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/malaysia/>.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report: Malaysia, 2017, <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Malaysia.2017.pdf>.

14 Pew Research Center, Global Uptick in Government Restrictions on Religion in 2016. June 2018, <https://www.pewforum.org/2018/06/21/global-uptick-in-government-restrictions-on-religion-in-2016/>.

15 See Hassan Mutalib, *Islam and Ethnicity in Malay Politics* (Singapore: OUP, 2000), 143.

16 Zeenth Kausar, “Political Development in Islam: Meaning, Goals and Phases,” in *Political Development: An Islamic Perspective*. Zeenth Kausar, ed. (Petaling Jaya: The Other Press, 2000), 65. See also Mutalib.

17 Joseph Chinyong Liow and Afif Pasuni, “Islam the State and Politics in Malaysia,” in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Malaysia*, ed. Meredith L. Weiss (New York: Routledge, 2014), 50–59.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Government of Malaysia, Federal Constitution, November 1, 2010, [http://www.agc.gov.my/agcportal/uploads/files/Publications/FC/Federal%20Consti%20\(BI%20text\).pdf](http://www.agc.gov.my/agcportal/uploads/files/Publications/FC/Federal%20Consti%20(BI%20text).pdf).

22 See The Reid Commission Report: Report of the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Commission 1957, (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1957). and Joseph Fernando, “The Position of Islam in the Constitution of Malaysia,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 37, no. 2 (2006): 249–66.

23 Articles 3(1) and 11(4) have been reinterpreted by political parties and the courts as evidence that the Constitution supports the narratives of ketuanan Islam and ketuanan Melayu.

24 For example, the state of Negeri Sembilan.

25 See the decision at the High Court of the case of Lina Joy.

26 A UN Copy of the 1963 Malaysia Agreement can be found here: <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20750/v750.pdf>.

27 Dewan Rakyat, Report 12 July 1976; Dewan Negara, Report 9 August 1976.

28 This anomaly has somewhat been resolved and cleared in the Federal Court decision of Indira Gandhi Mutho v. Pengarah Jabatan Agama Islam Perak & Ors And Other Appeals (2018) 3 CLJ 145.

29 See Zan Azlee, "Push for hudud law raises tensions in Malaysia," CNN, May 31, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/05/31/asia/malaysia-hudud-bill/index.html>.

30 Photo originally from The Sunday Star newspaper but obtained from the blog 'Voice of Reason' by Roger Tan, <http://www.rogertan.com/2014/01/>.

31 While the Conference of Rulers has made no official stand on the current hudud controversy, the Sultan of Kelantan has openly supported the implementation of Shariah law in his state. See "With Sultan's backing, Kelantan says confident of pushing through hudud plans," The Malay Mail, March 16, 2015, <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/with-sultans-backing-kelantan-says-confident-of-pushing-through-hudud-plans>.

32 R. Devaraj, "Understanding fatwa in the Malaysian context," Aliran Monthly 25 no. 2 (2005), <https://aliran.com/archives/monthly/2005a/2h.html>.

33 Islamic affairs were intended to be a state matter under the supervision of the Sultans. JAKIM does not answer to the Council of Rulers but to the PM's office.

34 For further information, see SUARAM's annual human rights report, SUARAM, Annual Human Rights Report, 2017, http://www.suaram.net/?page_id=7234.

35 Anonymous Interviewees, interviewed by Josiah Ponnudurai.

36 Kairos Research Center, Freedom of Religion after the Catholic Herald, <http://www.krisispraxis.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Freedom-of-Religion-after-the-Catholic-Herald.pdf>

37 Ibid

38 "CFM: Allah ruling only for The Herald not the Bible," The Star Online, October 14, 2013, <http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2013/10/14/allah-sabah-sarawak-christians/>.

39 Malaysian Prime Minister's Office, Ten Point Solution to address the Bahasa Malaysia/ Indonesia Bible and other related issues, 2011, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BxVQsfeXM8pbcU4zY3d4MTR4MkE/view>.

40 Other churches and societies have been impacted by the ban and related court cases. See Thomas Fuller, “The Right to Say ‘God’ Divides a Diverse Nation,” The New York Times, November 3, 2014.

41 Ida Lim, “Indira Gandhi Case: A summary of the majority judgement,” The Malay Mail, January 5, 2016, <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/indira-gandhi-case-a-summary-of-the-majority-judgment>.

42 Kate Mayberry, “Islamic conversion and custody conundrum in Malaysia,” Al-Jazeera, May 30, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/05/islamic-conversion-custody-conundrum-malaysia-160530053731097.html>.

43 Rahmah Ghazali, “Indira Gandhi: Grateful for Decision, but Where Is My Daughter?,” The Star Online, January 29, 2018, www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/01/29/indira-gandhi-grateful-for-decision-but-where-is-my-daughter/.

44 Sarawak Ministers’ Fellowship, Executive Summary: Defining Moment of Religious Conversion for Sarawak.

45 US State Department, 2018 International Religious Freedom Report: Malaysia.

46 Loulla-Mae Eleftheriou-Smith, “Malaysian atheist group under investigation over alleged Muslim apostate members,” The Independent, August 8, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/malaysia-atheist-group-muslim-apostate-members-lapsed-faith-south-east-asia-a7881301.html>.

47 Amy Chew, “Malaysia’s atheists fearful following calls by a minister to ‘track them down,’” Channel News Asia, August 11, 2017, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/malaysia-s-atheists-fearful-following-calls-by-a-minister-to-9116338>.

48 Ibid

49 U.S. State Department, 2017 International Religious Freedom Report: Malaysia, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2017-report-on-international-religious-freedom/malaysia/>.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 Shawn Crispin, “No Safe Place for SEAsia’s Shia Muslims,” Asia Times, February 3, 2018, <https://cms.ati.ms/2018/02/no-safe-place-seasias-shia-muslims/>.

55 Rodger Shanhan, Middle East Institute, Malaysia and its Shia “Problem,” July 25, 2014, <http://www.mei.edu/content/map/malaysia-and-its-shi%E2%80%98%E2%80%9Cproblem%E2%80%9D>.

56 Ibid.

- 57 Aedi Asri, "Jais arrests 50 Pakistani Shia Muslims," FMT News, October 12, 2016, <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2016/10/12/jais-arrests-50-pakistani-shia-muslims/>. Another example of anti-Shia polemic can be found here: <http://mindakini.com/kenali-tokoh-tokoh-syiah-malaysia/>.
- 58 SUARAM, Annual Human Rights Report, 2016, <https://www.suaram.net/suaramreports/>.
- 59 Pew Research Center, "Boundaries of Religious Identity," in The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity, August 9, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/08/09/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-5-religious-identity/>.
- 60 Note the Annam Declaration.
- 61 U.S. State Department, 2018.
- 62 Pradeep Nambiar, "Ahmadis in Penang Live a Peaceful Life," FMT News, October 10, 2017, <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2017/10/10/ahmadis-in-penang-live-a-peaceful-life/>.
- 63 U.S. State Department, 2018; Zia Shah, "Malaysia: Ahmadi Muslims arrested for performing Friday (Jumma) prayers," The Muslim Times, April 12 2014, <https://themuslimtimes.info/2014/04/12/malaysia-ahmadi-muslims-arrested-for-performing-friday-jumma-prayers/>.
- 64 U.S. State Department, 2018.
- 65 M. H. Ting, "The Politics of Hudud Law Implementation in Malaysia," ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute Working Paper Series, 2016, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEASWorkingPaper4.pdf>.
- 66 Tessa Wong, "A Missing Pastor and the Disappearances Chilling Malaysia," BBC, April 12, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-39252139>.
- 67 Sharanpal Singh Randhawa, "Spirited Away – Like Pastor Koh," The Star Online, March 28, 2017, <http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2017/03/28/spirited-away-like-pastor-koh-perlis-hope-cofounder-missing-since-nov-24/>.
- 68 Bevins.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 CSW, Malaysian Human Rights Commission Identifies Police Responsible for Enforced Disappearances of Raymond Koh and Amri Che Mat, April 3, 2019.
- 71 Wong.
- 72 Bevins.
- 73 "Now, CAGED questions missing men task force lineup," FMT News, June 26, 2019, <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2019/06/26/now-caged-questions-missing-men-task-force-lineup/>.
- 74 Ibid.

75 Kairos Research Center, Freedom of Religion under the Malaysia Agreement and the Federal Constitution, 2014, <http://www.krisispraxis.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Freedom-of-Religion-under-the-Malaysia-Agreement-and-the-Federal-Constitution1.pdf>.

76 This has already been achieved in Sabah as the percentage population of Muslims is now double the Christian minority. Christianity remains the majority religion in Sarawak.

77 Minority Rights Group International, Malaysia – Indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities in Sabah, <http://minorityrights.org/minorities/indigenous-peoples-and-ethnic-minorities-in-sabah/>.

78 Melissa Chi and Julia Chan, “‘Corrupt Officials’ Blamed for Sabah Problems, but RCI Says Hands Tied,” Malay Mail, December 3, 2014, <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2014/12/03/corrupt-officials-blamed-for-sabah-problems-but-rci-says-hands-tied/795491>.

79 Regina Lim, Federal-state Relations in Sabah, Malaysia: The Berjaya Administration, 1976-85 (Singapore: ISEAS, 2008).

80 “Sabah’s Bumiputera Christians’ MyKad Predicament,” The Borneo Post, November 5, 2012, <http://www.theborneopost.com/2012/11/05/sabahs-bumiputera-christians-mykad-predicament/>.

81 “Islamic Influence Creeping into Malaysia’s Mission Schools,” UCA News, February 11, 2016, <http://www.ucanews.com/news/islamic-influence-creeping-into-malaysias-mission-schools/75176>. Note that there have also been reports that indigenous Christians face economic pressures to convert – for example, a Muslim village might receive water and electricity but a Christian village has a lower chance of receiving such amenities. Again, a proper study needs to be done to document the proselytization efforts against East Malaysian Christians.

82 The Library of Congress, Prohibitions on Interfaith Marriage, accessed 25 June 2019, <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/marriage/interfaith-prohibition.php#malaysia>.

83 Low Han Shaun, “Lecturer lodges police report against Hannah Yeoh ‘for proselytizing to Muslims,’” The Malaysian Insight, May 17, 2017, <https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/s/3243/>.

84 Low Han Shaun and Noel Achariam, “Jerusalem Jubilee Banned,” The Malaysian Insight, June 5, 2017, <https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/s/4396/>.

85 “No Zionist agenda, say organisers of Jerusalem Jubilee,” FMT News, June 6, 2017, <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2017/06/06/no-zionist-agenda-say-organisers-of-jerusalem-jubilee/>.

86 Moh A. Amin, “Wujudkan undang- undang anti-evangelicalisme,” Utusan Online, June 15, 2017, <http://www.utusan.com.my/rencana/utama/wujudkan-undang-undang-anti-evangelicalisme-1.493392#ixzz4k3Q2txli>.

87 Ibid.

88 Oleh Mustafa, "Gereja Cina Methodist Kota Bharu Dibaling Bom Petrol" (Chinese Methodist Church Thrown Petrol Bomb), *Bharian*, January 7, 2018, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/kes/2018/01/372198/gereja-dibaling-penapis-air-batu>; "PSM: Attacks on places of worship are 'strange' for Kelantan," *Malaysia Kini*, January 7, 2018, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/407912>.

89 "Muslim-only Laundromat puts Malaysia in a spin," *Today Online*, September 26, 2017, <https://www.todayonline.com/world/asia/muslim-only-laundromat-puts-malaysia-spin>.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid.

92 "Johor not a Taliban state, Sultan tells Muslim-only laundry," *The Malay Mail*, September 27, 2017, <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/johor-not-a-taliban-state-sultan-tells-muslim-only-laundry>.

93 Ibid.

94 Pradeep Nambiar, "Owner of Muslim-only launderette apologizes after rebuke from Johor Sultan," *FMT News*, September 27, 2017, <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2017/09/27/owner-of-muslim-only-laundrette-apologises-after-rebuke-from-johor-sultan/>.

95 "Another Muslim-only launderette found in Perlis," *The Straits Times*, September 29, 2017, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/another-muslim-only-laundrette-found-in-perlis>.

96 At the time of writing this report, Ramadan was in police custody in Paris for alleged rape.

97 See IRF's website, "Introduction" and "Actors with a focus on Religious Freedom," *Islamic Renaissance Front*, accessed January 8, 2018, <https://irfront.net/about-irf/introduction/>.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 Akyol is currently a Visiting Fellow at the Freedom Project in Wellesley College, Massachusetts.

101 See Akyol's book, Mustafa Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus: How the King of the Jews Became a Prophet of the Muslims* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017).

102 For a complete account by Akyol, see Mustafa Akyol, "A proposal for Islam," *The New York Times*, September 28, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/28/opinion/mustafa-akyol-detention-malaysia.html>.

103 Two of his most recent self-published books in Bahasa Indonesia focus primarily on revisionist approaches to understanding Islam and the Quran. See: Mun'im Sirry, *Islam Revisionis: Kontestasi Agama Zaman Radikal* (2018) (Revisionist Islam: Religious Contestation in the Radical Era), and Mun'im Sirry, *Kemunculan Islam dalam Kesarjanaan Revisionis* (2017), (The Rise of Islam According to Revisionist Scholars).

104 Oleh Faris Fuad, "Dr. Mun'im Sirry cuba sebar idea liberal sesat" (Dr. Mun'im Sirry tries to spread liberal and deviant ideas), *Bharian*, August 25, 2017, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2017/08/317593/dr-munim-sirry-cuba-sebar-idea-liberal-sesat>.

105 "Tokoh Islam Liberal Indonesia Mun'im Sirry wajib dihalang masuk Malaysia" (Indonesian Muslim Intellectual Mun'im Sirry should be barred from entering Malaysia), *Ismaweb*, August 28, 2017, <https://www.ismaweb.net/2017/08/28/tokoh-islam-liberal-indonesia-munim-sirry-wajib-dihalang-masuk-malaysia/>.

106 Previously, Ulil Abshor Abdallah, former Coordinator of Jaringan Islam Liberal (Liberal Islam Network), was denied a visa to enter Malaysia in 2015 for his supposedly dangerous and deviant ideas.

107 John Pipes, "John Esposito and Karen Armstrong – Banned in Malaysia," February 18, 2018, <http://www.danielpipes.org/blog/2006/06/john-esposito-and-karen-armstrong-banned-in>.

108 As of May 2019, this case is still in flux. See A.R. Zurairi, "High Court to hear Sisters in Islam's challenge against 'deviant' fatwa again," *The Malay Mail*, May 2, 2019, <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2019/05/02/high-court-to-hear-sisters-in-islams-challenge-against-deviant-fatwa-again/1748895>.

109 "NGO paksa kedai kosongkan peti arak, kemudian lapor polis," *FMT News*, May 26, 2018, <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/videos/2018/05/26/ngo-paksa-kedai-kosongkan-peti-arak-kemudian-lapor-polis-2/>.

110 "Stop 'Islamist thuggery' Siti Kassim urges Muslim MPs, Ministers," *FMT News*, May 27, 2018, <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2018/05/27/stop-islamist-thuggery-siti-kassim-urges-muslim-mps/>.

111 For more information on Islamic civil society in Malaysia, see: Mohamed Osman and S. Saleem, *Nanyang Technological University—RSIS, The Impact of Islamic Civil Society Organizations on Malaysian Islam and Politics*, April 21, 2016, https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Malaysia-Update-April-2016_Copy_Finalised.pdf.

112 For more information Hindu activism in Malaysia, see: Andrew Wilford, *Tamils and the Haunting of Justice*, (Singapore: NUS Press, 2014).

113 "Rejecting hudud a constitutional right, Christian group says," *The Malay Mail*, July 2, 2016, <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2016/07/02/rejecting-hudud-a-constitutional-right-christian-group-says/1153945>.

114 Anith Adilah, “‘Be careful’ of DAP ‘evangelists’, Ku Nan warns Muslim civil servants,” The Malay Mail, April 14, 2018, <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2018/04/14/be-careful-of-dap-evangelists-ku-nan-warns-muslim-civil-servants/1620018>; A.R. Zuariri, “Claiming ‘Christian’ DAP in control of Dr M, Umno man plans Parliament protest,” The Malay Mail, July 12, 2018, <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2018/07/12/claiming-christian-dap-in-control-of-dr-m-umno-man-plans-parliament-protest/1651529>.

115 Leslie Shaffer, “Malaysia’s new national security law gives Najib, army, police new powers, amid 1MDB probe,” CNBC, July 31, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/07/31/malaysias-new-national-security-law-gives-najib-army-police-new-powers-amid-1mdb-probe.html>.

116 Abdar Rahman Koya, “It’s a joke, U.S. terror expert baffled by Saudi-led Putrajaya Centre,” FMT News, July 14, 2017, <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2017/07/14/its-a-joke-us-terror-expert-baffled-by-saudi-led-putrajaya-centre/>.

117 Lizzie Dearden, “Saudi Arabia and Gulf states ‘support Islamic extremism in Germany,’ intelligence report finds,” The Independent, December 14, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/saudi-arabia-gulf-states-fund-islamic-extremism-germany-salafism-wahhabism-qatar-kuwait-islamists-a7473551.html>.

118 Pew Research Center, Global Uptick in Government Restrictions on Religion in 2016. June 2018, <https://www.pewforum.org/2018/06/21/global-uptick-in-government-restrictions-on-religion-in-2016/>.

119 Pew Research, “Appendix A” in Global Uptick in Government Restrictions on Religion in 2016, 2018, <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2018/06/19152148/APPENDIX-A.pdf>.

120 Pew Research, “Appendix B” in Global Uptick in Government Restrictions on Religion in 2016, 2018, <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2018/07/19102430/Restrictions2018appendixB.pdf>.



Religious Freedom Institute

The Religious Freedom Institute is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization committed to achieving broad acceptance of religious liberty as a fundamental human right, the cornerstone of a successful society, and a source of national and international security.



Templeton Religion Trust

Providing the funding that made this report possible, Templeton Religion Trust (TRT) is a global charitable trust chartered by Sir John Templeton in 1984 with headquarters in Nassau, The Bahamas, where Sir John lived until his death in 2008. TRT has been active since 2012, and supports projects and the dissemination of results from projects seeking to enrich the conversation about religion.



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

The Foreign & Commonwealth Office

The Foreign & Commonwealth Office promotes the United Kingdom's interests overseas, supporting its citizens and businesses around the globe.

Layout and Design

Element Media
www.element.ps

Photography Credits

Cover Photo: Hafizussalam bin Sulaiman / Shutterstock
Table of Contents: Nokuro / Shutterstock
Page 3: ESB Professional / Shutterstock
Page 5 (Top): Matt Hahnewald / Shutterstock
Page 5 (Middle): Matt Hahnewald / Shutterstock
Page 5 (Bottom): Ellinnur Bakarudin / Shutterstock
Page 6 (Top): Matt Hahnewald / Shutterstock
Page 6 (Middle): Izlan Somai / Shutterstock
Page 6 (Bottom): Matt Hahnewald / Shutterstock
Page 12: anek.soowannaphoom / Shutterstock
Page 13: Vaflya / Shutterstock
Page 15-16: Nokuro / Shutterstock
Page 23-24: Sylvia SooyoN / Shutterstock
Page 27: JKL / Pexels
Page 44: Yogendra Singh / Pexels



316 Pennsylvania Ave. SE, Suite 501
Washington, DC 20003
Tel: 202-838-7734
rfi@religiousfreedominstitute.org
www.religiousfreedominstitute.org

