

RELIGION TURNED ‘POLITICS’: SAUDI-IRAN RELIGIOUS OUTREACH

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Abstract The Saudi Arabia-Iran rivalry or the Middle East Cold War, exceeds the region when it touches religious regards, which is the religious outreach that the two peripheral regional powers conduct to the Muslim world. This paper aims to explain the religious outreach of Saudi Arabia and Iran, with Indonesia as the main case study. The research also aims to discuss the recent changes in policies and attitudes of Saudi Arabia regarding its religious ideology and the obstacles that Iran is facing in its Islamic revolution. This research found that Saudi Arabia’s religious outreach is decentralized, rapid, and large, while Iran as centralized, quick, and light. Wahhabism-Salafism as an ideology is not limited only in the religious domain, it touches on various domains which is taken as precaution for the moderates, as it leads to uncontrolled and undesirable interpretation which can affect the Saudi’s image. Saudi’s Vision 2030 is a series of rapid efforts the kingdom pursue that includes transforming Saudi’s religious ideology. Whereas Iranian’s centralized religious outreach contributed to the effectiveness and acceptance by the Muslim world, which is predominantly Sunni-Muslim. Although Iran is successful in carrying it out, it is less likely to touch various aspects that are desired.

Keywords: Religious outreach, Sunni-Shia, foreign policy analysis, Saudi-Iran rivalry, international relations.

INTRODUCTION

Questions raised regarding aspects that are foundational to the conflicts in the Middle East region. One aspect that seeds difficulties to reach positive peace is the ‘religion turned politics’ that bring about sectarianism (Tzemprin et al., 2015) particularly between Sunnis and Shias directed by Saudi Arabia and Iran. The religious sectarianism is a part of power politics, which is directly or indirectly used to achieve the desired outcome. Narrations of Sunni-Shia feuds widened since the 1979 Islamic Revolution (Tzemprin et al., 2015) for aspirations of conflict and war, being the benchmark of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and become an element that is widely put forward at the of Arab Spring and post-Arab Spring in Bahrain, Yemen, Lebanon, and Syria showed how Sunni-Shia rivalry significantly accumulated the turmoil between Shia community and Sunni community (Ekşi, 2017; Tzemprin et al., 2015).

Saudi Arabia and Iran are the regional peripheral powers of the Middle East, engaging in a crucial rivalry touching various aspects for hegemony in the Middle East and the Muslim world (Lynch, 2021). The divide between the two is clear by seeing their regional and international alliances. Differing alliance and cause contributes to the division, coupled with the differences in ‘Islamic spirit’ they represent. Certainly, the divide between the two is clear by seeing their regional and international alliances. The impact of Saudi-Iran rivalry within the region has been widely discussed by previous researches on the aspect of proxy wars during the Arab Spring (Ekşi, 2017; Tzemprin et al., 2015). There is a limited study which ascertain the rivalry beyond the context of hard power concept. Papers touched the spread of Saudi’s Wahhabism are often discussed by Indonesians and Western scholars but not in the case of Iran’s Islamic Revolution. This indicates a lack of research both in the application of soft power concept in Saudi-Iran rivalry and comparative study touching both Saudi and Iran’s spread of religious perspective. Interestingly, Mandaville and Hamid (2018) introduced the study of Saudi-Iran using the concept of religious soft power in the context of ‘statecraft’ or diplomacy. However, the study is still broad.

This paper aims to further develop the idea by ascertaining Saudi Arabia and Iran’s religious outreach in Indonesia. The research also aims

to discuss the recent changes in policies and attitudes of Saudi Arabia regarding its religious doctrine as well as the challenges that Iran faced in its continuing Islamic revolution. Using library research to collect qualitative data, the comparative study of both state's religious outreach allows readers to understand how both states apply religious outreach differently due to several considerations.

This paper consists of three main sections. The first section encapsulates literature review and theoretical framework of the study. This section reviews recent studies related to the religious outreach of both Saudi and Iran. In this section, the authors elaborate the theoretical framework that is used in understanding the research and why it is used. The second section covers the methodology section. The third section fills with results and discussions of the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hasan (2018), Kovacs (2014), and Mandaville and Hamid (2018) stress that ideological hegemony to be a crucial instrument for power. Mandaville and Hamid (2018) came out with article discussing religion as 'statecraft'. Febriansyah and El-Alami (2021), Hamdi (2020), Hasan (2018), and Kovacs (2014) conducted research on the influence and impact of Saudi religious outreach to Wahhabism-Salafism ideas in Indonesia, providing bigger picture of the reasons that motivates Saudi Arabia. In the 1960s under Gamal Abd Nasser, Egypt promoted Arab socialism which was opposed by Saudi Arabia. Egypt's reforms made Islamic Al-Azhar University a hub for Islamic heritage studies for Muslims around the world. Saudi Arabia responded by establishing the Islamic University of Medina, and later the Imam Muhammad bin Saud University as a response to ensure the upper hand for central role in the Muslim world. These institutions then developed into the largest Wahhabism-Salafism educational institution in the country that attracts students from other states (Kovacs, 2014). Whereas Hasan (2018) pointed the relationship between the rising price of crude oil in 1970s due to the embargo among Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and Saudi Arabia's religious outreach global expansion.

The existence of several educational institution and the establishment of a Wahhabism-Salafism communities in Indonesia are the results of the religious outreach of Saudi Arabia, which, like other regional powers in the Muslim world, sees Indonesia as an important state to influence the entire Southeast Asian region, as mentioned in previous studies (Hasan, 2018; Kovacs, 2014; Mandaville & Hamid, 2018). However, studies from Hamdi (2020) and Hasan (2018) believe that the spread of Wahhabism-Salafism caused the existence of violent act or ethno-religious conflicts. Hamdi (2020) and Hasan (2018) argued that not all eventually led to conflict as perceived, but conflict does occur between Wahhabism-Salafism adherents and local traditional Muslim communities, which Hamdi (2020) described as deculturalization. According to Hamdi (2020) and Nye (1990), such circumstances are something Saudi Arabia cannot control and in certain scenarios turned into something that Saudi Arabia did not desire such as the formation of extremist groups.

Unlike the case of Saudi Arabia, literatures of Iran's religious outreach argued that it was a response of West isolation since the post-1979 Islamic revolution (Sadeghi & Hajimineh, 2019; Togoo, 2022). Sadeghi and Hajimineh (2019) stated that the 1979 Islamic revolution caused the so-called 'soft war' by the West through Iranophobia. Iran responded the soft war through public diplomacy and soft power approach that include political value of 'religious democracy' as among Iran's soft power tools to confront Iranophobia (Sadeghi & Hajimineh, 2019). 'Religious democracy' according to Togoo (2022) using Indonesia as a case study is the perspective based on the principle of the Islamic revolution but still can be accepted among moderate Muslims. The positive response from the recipient Muslim majority states shows that Iran's soft power instruments can confront Iranophobia.

Iran carries out its religious outreach along with major state interference from Islamic Cultural Center (ICC) which is held at the Iranian Embassy in Jakarta (Togoo, 2022) and Islamic Culture and Relations Organizations (ICRO) under the guidance of Imam Khomeini (Sadeghi & Hajimineh, 2019). The approach taken has resulted to Iran's ability to influence nations beyond its border. The examples of its achievements in the case of Indonesia as stated by Mandaville and Hamid (2018) and Togoo (2022) such as through education and research, as well as media and culture.

The literatures reviewed argues that both Saudi Arabia and Iran use their political values and religious perspectives to influence the recipient Muslim majority states. With differed religious perspective, both conduct their religious outreach differently. Ever since the Islamic revolution, Saudi Arabia has a new rival. What lacks in the previous studies is the comparative analysis of the two regional powers' religious outreach. Hence, this paper aims to fill the gap of study by focusing on Saudi-Iran religious outreach in Indonesia.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

What is religious outreach in international relations? To what extend the role of religion is significant? The study used the concept of power and foreign policy in placing the term into the discipline of international relations.

a. Concept of Power

Classical realists claim that international arena is where states compete to survive. To ensure one dominates the other, pursuing for power is required. In the earlier stage, power was only known as hard power which purely measure material capabilities like military capability and neglect the other roles.

The concept of 'power' developed, defined into two definitions: (1) traditional (hard) power and (2) non-traditional (soft) power since Post-Cold War period (Nye, 2004; Roselle et al., 2014) widely understood form has become a straitjacket for those trying to understand power and communication in international affairs. Analyses of soft power overwhelmingly focus on soft power 'assets' or capabilities and how to wield them, not how influence does or does not take place. It has become a catch-all term that has lost explanatory power, just as hard power once did. The authors argue that the concept of strategic narrative gives us intellectual purchase on the complexities of international politics today, especially in regard to how influence works in a new media environment. They believe that the study of media and war would benefit from more attention being paid to strategic narratives. © The Author(s). The constructivist scholars define soft power as 'ideas' as another role that can interpret and reinterpret the traditional material forces. In other words, material is no longer the

only dimension that is measured. The authors apply Ipek (2015) theoretical approach who used Goldstein and Keohane (1993) who defined ‘ideas’ as ‘belief held by individuals’. In the Muslim world, ‘ideas’ can be referred to ‘religious perspective’. The Muslim world is separated into two main religious perspectives, in which one religious perspective is the Sunni under the reign of Saudi Arabia whereas its rival is Shia which is an Islamic bloc led by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

b. Concept of Foreign Policy

Each state often has different foreign policy instrument. The instrument that the state uses to approach another state significantly depends on both domestic and international factors. Traditionally, domestic factor can be referred limited to the state capability known as ‘material forces or hard power but that does not apply in this paper. How does soft power matters in foreign policy? The authors apply theoretical approach that ‘ideas’ and ‘material interests’ are independent variables whereas foreign policy as dependent variable (Ipek, 2015). Whereas the structural factor mainly refers to the polarity of the international system. Although there are debates that either domestic or structural matters the most in determining a state’s foreign policy, it cannot be denied that both levels are relevant to be interlinked (Bojang, 2018).

This paper mainly studies the domestic factor that covers only the ideas which is religion perspective and material interests of each religion perspective. Figure 1 explains how the Muslim-majority state’s foreign policies are influenced by the domestic factors.

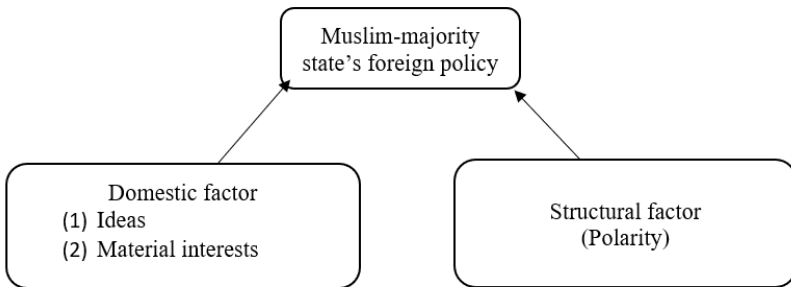


Figure 1 Foreign policy analysis of Islamic world

'Idea' refers to state's ideology, in this case refers to state's religious perspective. Material interests is not material forces as how realist scholars describe. Material interests in social constructivism theory refers to state's national interests. In religious outreach, Saudi Arabia and Iran conducted interrelationship differently, with considerations on recipient state's domestic factors, such as local tradition, branch of Islam, as well as the differences in the material interests that each Muslim-majority states has.

METHODOLOGY

This research aims to further develop the existing ideas. The research was conducted with qualitative and descriptive approach. Qualitative data commonly taken in study of humanities that include states behaviour. The research used library research as a method to collect the qualitative data through secondary sources. The use of library research in this paper indicated that the researchers have no difficulty in searching the subject to be used as the data. The authors combined recent papers which discuss the Saudi and Iran's religious outreach separately. The authors applied case study model in library research mode by focusing on a particular area of study, which in this case refers to state of Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study is a comparative research of religious outreach between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Islamic Republic of Iran to Indonesia. It is also to discuss the recent change in policies and attitudes of Saudi Arabia regarding its religious doctrine of Wahhabism-Salafism, as well as the challenges that Iran has in its continuing Islamic revolution. The first two sub-sections examine the religious outreach of both states, while the last two sub-sections ascertained the second purpose.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Wahhabism Export

Wahhabism is encouraged by followers of ibn Wahhab, a religious and spiritual reformer from the 18th century. Ibn Wahhab affirms and calls for Islam he asserts as pure and un-spoilt. It eventually finds its way to be the religious ideology of Saudi Arabia. Within Sunni-Muslim there are differences, and when there are differences of opinion, there are disagreements that leads to conflict. The notion that Wahhabism is pure and un-spoilt is opposed by other Sunni-Muslim entities. Similar case within Shia-Muslim who is not represented by one entity. Within Sunnis, each has its dominant Islamic perspective. Viewing on the state level, Saudi Arabia with Wahhabism, Turkey with 'neo-Ottoman' spirit, Morocco, Jordan, and Egypt with '*Islam Wasathiyah*' or moderate Islam, similar dimension with Indonesia with moderate Islam locally known as *Islam Nusantara*, which co-exist local values and Islam without violating Islamic values. Muslim majority states promote their label and trademark of Islam. Religion as soft power is factual, and its function remains crucial.

Saudi Arabia's Wahhabism exports has the capacity to become an instrument that can influence local communities within states. Thus, the kingdom's custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, at time leave an impression to communities that the kingdom holds central religious role, representing 'true Islam' which Wahhabism-Salafism states as 'pure', possess the advantage in this regard to promote their Islamic brand.

Among Saudi Arabia's strategy in religious outreach is through fundings to various institutions such as religious education institutions, and mosque building that comes with the acceptance of Saudi-approved imams, and specific texts in religious schools such as from the well-known Islamic theologian Ibn Taymiyah (Mandaville & Hamid, 2018). Recipient states and private agencies are willing to cooperate, in the state level, acceptance of these cooperation goes together with the hope to maintain bilateral relations and cooperations in different areas with the kingdom (Hasan, 2018). With such cooperations and deals going on, Mandaville and Hamid (2018) believe that local leaders burnish their religious credentials to seek Saudi support.

The kingdom did not hold central role in guiding the direction of the Wahhabism-Salafism ideology, which opened possibilities for undesirable interpretations and perceptions. “*It has been like a sorcerer’s apprentice that has come back to bedevil its original creator*” (Nye, 1990). Having no attention to introduce extremism to the recipient states, but the kingdom is often directly linked as it endorses the teachings in religious space. Which present a situation where the moderates would have to fiercely confront the fundamentalist view of Wahhabism-Salafism. Divisions to exist in different levels such as among communities, mosques, and Islamic educational institutions, which often only received public attention after it led to violent act, where sometimes it does in one community but does not in other community (Hasan, 2018). As a movement, Wahhabism-Salafism is known to be closed only among its followers which eventually led to suspicion in the communities it exists.

According to Hasan (2018), Saudi’s global campaign for Wahhabism-Salafism is to dominate the Muslim world as a consequence of Arab-Israeli War in 1967. While Kovacs (2014) stated that the main reason is the kingdom’s opposition towards Arab socialist pushed by Egypt. As the largest Muslim majority state, Indonesia is significant for major powers in the Muslim world. The 1998 reformation toppled central repressive elements that eventually opened the state further to non-traditional values such as Wahhabism-Salafism (Hasan, 2018). At the early stage, it created greater division among Muslim communities and has resulted in acts of violence. Hasan (2018) stated that the Muslim-Christian conflict in Ambon, Maluku in 1999 were influenced by extremist ideas of Salafi, which is closely linked with *Laskar Jihad* (Febriansyah & El-Alami, 2021; Schulze, 2002). The particular Islamic movement which is created by alumni of *Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Arab (LIPIA)* Jafar Umar Thalib, is considered as radical well-trained jihadists used to against Soviet Union in Afghanistan (Febriansyah & El-Alami, 2021).

According to Febriansyah and El-Alami (2021) and Kovacs (2014), the spread of Saudi’s Wahhabism in Indonesia began as early as 1980’s through the establishment of LIPIA in 1980 as its first trademark of religious outreach in Indonesia. LIPIA is the branch of Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud

University in Riyadh which also has another several branches in United Arab Emirates, Djibouti, Japan, and the United States (Febriansyah & El-Alami, 2021). Today, it has become so impactful as its narratives became a political carrier. In the 2019 presidential election, growing fundamentalist group drove a presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto, using religious narratives at their campaigns. Islamic organization called *Front Pembela Islam (FPI)* known for being fundamentalist in its campaigns and social activities, is functional in mobilizing support for Prabowo. Aiming for re-election, President Joko Widodo, supported by most of the moderates, getting full support from the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, *Nahdlatul Ulama*, choose Ma'ruf Amin, former Chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council until 2020 and former Supreme Leader of *Nahdlatul Ulama* until 2018 as his vice president. Widodo won the election with a 55,50 percent vote, a 16,9 percent difference from Prabowo having won 44,50 percent (Farisa, 2019). The 2019 post-election tensions could divide the nation to conflicts if it was poorly managed. The concern of the majority of Indonesian is if the upcoming 2024 presidential election will have similar or higher tensions in which religious notions are used as one the main driver, having it used as a tool to win votes in campaigns which will result to religious sectarianism. Wahhabism-Salafism ideas, though never mentioned explicitly, has had quite an impact to influence the political sphere, determine voting behaviour and creating identity politics.

Wahhabism became an ideology that the Saudi Arabia cannot control, as it manifests undesirable acts, from extremism and terrorism, as well as participation of religious fundamentalism in the realm of state politics. This eventually influence the Muslim world and the Western world's perception of the kingdom, questioning the religious ideology endorsed by the kingdom, something the kingdom is looking to restore. The absence of centrality of the Saudi's outreach means undesirable results that have little to do with programs or plans carried out by Saudi Arabia will eventually be linked to the kingdom or perceived as sharing the same spirit. Therefore, if it led to negative collision such as creating significant divides among the Muslim community, or worst, ends with extremist measures, it will eventually harm the image of the kingdom.

The Islamic Revolution of Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran described its 1979 revolution as Islamic. However, that didn't eventually convince the Muslim world but rather raised different perception whether to support it, being neutral, or perceived it as a threat, as Iran is committed to export its revisionist ideas. The Arab Gulf monitor the progress of post-revolution Iran, and later perceived it as aiming to pierce its power at the expense of the predominantly Sunni Arab Gulf. Directed by the Sunni-Shia feud, Sunni Arab states perceived the revolution as 'Shia-based' to carry on anti-thesis of Sunnis which threatens the power politics of Sunni-Muslim states. The opposing paradigms regarding the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the motives that Iran set to achieve has made other Sunni-Muslim states, especially in the Middle East, to question whether Iran is a real threat or a perceived one. This division driven by religion and politics in the history of the Islamic caliphates and dynasties has long been in force, the spirit of religious sectarianism (the present-time term) is one aspect that is put forward in the process. In this respect, Sunni-Shia sectarianism existed in the period of the Rashidun Caliphate and continues to evolve being both politically and religiously driven.

Iran competes for hegemony in the Middle East and Muslim world against Saudi Arabia and became the active force to oppose the world hegemony of the United States since post-Islamic Revolution, which is known as 'Axis of Resistance' (Keynoush & Wastnidge, 2022). In such context, how will Iran carry out religious outreach to the Muslim world that are predominantly Sunni-Muslim majority? Fundamentalist Sunni-Muslim beliefs either affiliated with Wahhabism-Salafism or not, has tendency to consider Shia-Muslim to be outside of Islam. Moderate leaders and scholars responded to anticipate this fundamentalist view, 'Amman Message' hosted by Jordan, raised three points of questions that must be answered for the benefit of all; (1) Who is a Muslim? (2) is it permissible to declare someone an apostate (*takfir*)? (3) who has the right to undertake issuing fatwas (legal rulings)? (Ghazi, 2007). Amman Message aims to make no more arbitrary statement that states fellow believers as apostate.

Unlike Saudi Arabia where the recipient states are also Sunni-based states, and given the perception that Iran received at both religious and political level, Iran's religious outreach toward other Sunni-Muslim states takes extraordinary calculations so that the outreach are perceived positively. Iran's religious soft-power outreach is described by Mandaville and Hamid (2018) as 'quick and light in movement and action', while Saudi Arabia's outreach to be the opposite. Iran sees the need to keep calculating their measures, to not be seen as an 'anti-thesis' agendas. Putting these into consideration, Mandaville and Hamid (2018) pointed out that "*Iran possessed sophisticated awareness of its audience for religious soft power outreach*".

Religion is not the only theme that Iran export, with states in Central Asia namely Tajikistan and Afghanistan, Iran puts forward the historical Persianate affiliate involving ethnic, linguistic, and historical factors. Centralized through Iran's Islamic Culture and Relations Organizations (ICRO), to carryout religious and cultural outreach. To increase its credibility and support of the Muslim world, Iran has widely propagated its revisionist ideas based on the Islamic Revolution of Iran on an academic basis (Togoo, 2022). There are two different dynamicity in perceiving the Iranian outreach, (1) societies in general tends to focus on the religious factors, namely the teachings of Shia amid the Sunni-majority, while (2) states focus towards the 'political impact' the spread of the 'revisionist' idea can result to society (Togoo, 2022).

For religious outreach towards Sunni majority states, Iran imports elements of Sufism and mysticism of Islam from the works of major prominent Persian Islamic scholars (Mandaville & Hamid, 2018) or known as 'religious democracy' (Sadeghi & Hajimineh, 2019; Togoo, 2022). Both Sunni and Shia, raised elements of Sufism and mysticism, although there are differing views to it from within Sunnis and Shias entities respectively. For example, elements of Sufism and mysticism is not widely accepted by Saudi Arabia and its Muslim communities but are practiced by Muslim communities in Indonesia and Malaysia. With the quick and light approach, Iran hopes that understandings and cooperations with shared beliefs to be carried out with the Muslim world, which is predominantly Sunnis.

In Indonesia, ICC of the Iranian Embassy in Jakarta cooperates with higher educational institutions managed to open 'Iranian Corner' in Universitas Indonesia (UI), Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Jakarta & Yogyakarta, Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM), Universitas Hassanudin, Muhamamadiyah universities across Jakarta, Malang, Yogyakarta (Togoo, 2022). From this case, the quick and light approach stated by Mandaville and Hamid (2018) worked practically by understanding its recipient, conducting outreach to increase their credibility in Islamic education without the motive to spread an understanding that is contrary to the understanding of the majority, such as Shia in the midst of Indonesian Sunni society. It instead attempts to find a common ground that both parties mutually accept, such as from literacy of Islam Sufism and mysticism that is widely practiced in Indonesia or extending the collaborations by organizing events as described on the UIN website as 'Muslim Student Friendship Week' (Mandaville & Hamid, 2018; Togoo, 2022).

Nevertheless, the authors finds that the spread of Shia did happen in Indonesia and among its spread is through educational institutions, but at a different level of outreach than Saudi Arabia. Hasim (2012) divide the spread of Shia in Indonesia into four phases; (1) the entry of Shia since the early arrival of Islam to the archipelago through Persian Muslims, (2) after the 1979 Islamic revolution, (3) Indonesian people studying Shia *fiqh* (theory or philosophy of Islamic law), and (4) forming ties such as the formation of the Association of Indonesian Ahlul Bait Congregation (*IJABI*). Out of these four phases, the Islamic revolution phase opened the curiosity of Muslim youth, not only in Indonesia, to seek the revisionist thoughts and struggles that were instilled through an Islamic republic formed by Shia majority Muslims, which resulted to phase three, which then strengthened and organized through phase four.

Among what Iran offered in its outreach is the widely translated revisionist thoughts from the Islamic revolution (Togoo, 2022), ideas that can have great impact if it enters the state level, but for Indonesia remained in the realm of academics. Thus, idea of the Islamic revolution is not significantly put forward in the Indonesian Muslim community. From the research that has been carried out, the authors believe that the Iranian

outreach is inadequate to establish large divisions in religious thoughts or have the capacities to pierce other domains. Establishing cooperations through religious outreach in a careful manner, with primary focus to establish cooperations with fellow Muslim world in the midst of isolation, and secondary focus to achieve social and political sympathy which has an active effect. However, the case in Indonesia certainly differs from other states, especially states that confronted Iran at regional and international levels. Iran's outreach to Indonesia is to build good relations, as well as to respond to the outreach of their rival Saudi Arabia which Iran perceived in certain case would damage Indonesia's perception of the Islamic republic. For instance, in 2009, delegation of Iranian journalists led by Mehdi Sarrami as manager of digital media affairs at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance was sent by the Iranian government to Indonesia to help the Iran countered misinformation given by the West media. The delegate invited numerous Indonesian journalists to Iran and visited several Iranian media outlets in order to obtain first-hand information (Togoo, 2022).

The religious outreach of Iran has no intention to disseminate understandings or ideas that did not reflect the recipient's states, like spreading Shia teachings amid Sunni-Muslim communities. Although such event occurs to varying degrees and, in some cases, cause public concern, neither the ICRO nor the Iranian government claim to have any involvement or centrality in the occurrence. Iran has the focus and centralization in ensuring that its instrument can be accepted. Therefore, the state focuses on the paradigm of Islamic Sufism and mysticism in an educational institution such as the ones that took place in Indonesia. In addition, Iran also promotes their 'resistance culture' without using a narrative that puts much empathy towards the notion of Shia, which has a strong resistance dogma in Islamic history.

Muhammad bin Salman's 'Vision 2030'

Within Sunnis, contention between the moderates and the fundamentalist is inevitable. Two possibilities as to why moderate Muslim states are hesitant to issue direct criticism towards the idea of Wahhabism-Salafism. Firstly, an act of 'direct intervention' of state will be negative for Muslim

communities within and have high potential to create greater divisions. Secondly, it risked the relations with Saudi Arabia, bringing the contention from the Muslim scholars and community level to the state level.

In spreading their ideology, the Wahhabis, like minority Shia, preferred to move underground, strengthening their influence by consider those who do are not in line with the practice of the *Salaf* (early companions of the Prophet) to be outside of Islam (Wiktorowicz, 2000), ideas that made Wahhabism-Salafism referred as 'puritanical Islam', in favour of direct 'fundamentalist' reinterpretation, nevertheless, Salafi sought to reconcile Islam with modernism (Brown, 2009). In response to ideas that led to de-culturalization, moderate Muslim states like Indonesia believe that many of its local values and tradition are in line with Islam and therefore must be preserved, emphasizes the need to provide distinction between Arabization and Islamization.

Saudi Arabia is undergoing transformation that will change the course of its history. Under the leadership of crown prince Muhammad bin Salman (MbS), the kingdom is pushing towards moderate aspects of Islam which will likely transformed the religious traditions of Saudis. Vision 2030 touched on multiple aspects looking to answer future challenges, touching on society, economy, and energy, to maintain relevancy and regional dominance.

On religious level, moving towards moderate Islam, MbS state that the kingdom would return to moderate Islam which is the true root of the Saudi society (Sheline, 2017). The push towards moderate Saudi Arabia is influenced by the international political, economic, and social considerations, for greater openness and competitiveness, as well as to maintain relevance and regional dominance. An unorthodox step where the kingdom no longer endorses Wahhabism-Salafism ideology, and only time will tell how the progress will in this vision that transform multiple area.

Moderate Sunnis and the West responded positively remember how relations in the religious sphere and in other fields can work with the kingdom. In addition, it is a monumental step to the improvement of Saudi-Iran relations. Thus, considering the examples of states that have undertaken multi-area transformation, it takes longer time that the one ‘visioned’ to really transform (Gause, 2021), especially transforming at the socio-religious level. To witness a significant transition towards moderate Islam is very unlikely to take effect in no time.

Iran’s challenges in defending the value of the Islamic Revolution and its effect on the outreach

The regime in Iran faced mass protests that demands social rights and women’s rights, transforms into protests pushing to overthrow the ruling government. With the experience in 2009 and 2017, will the late 2022 protest end with the same fate, or will push forward? Upholding the Islamic element in its constitution, together with the spirit of the successful Islamic revolution the state promotes internally and externally, to what extent will the contemporary dynamics affect the religious outreach?

Iran’s centrality in religious outreach played a role in ensuring that it would not be perceived in undesirable way. In the case of Indonesia, the protest did not lead to cooperation suspension between educational and religious institutions and Iranian outreach body ICRO, the authors did not find such activity and believe that it did not apply to other states where Iranian outreach is also in place. Relations with ICRO has been going on for decades running ‘passively’ rather than ‘actively’, with activities that does not deviate from what was agreed. Regardless with the fact that adherents of Shia-Muslim or revisionist ideas increased in followers or supporters, considering state’s minimum involvement to society decision making in the era of rapid information dissemination.

The lack of centrality in mobilizing the protest is one of the many reasons that makes it failed to produce anything significant, either because the masses cannot be mobilized in this way, or because the central government can prevent the emergence (Abbs, 2018). Social and women’s

right in is openly criticized by the West that are hoping for the so-called 'Persian Spring' to happen, but the Muslim world is more passive in action towards how Iran is enforcing its laws. Protests that prevail today and in the last decade certainly has become a worrying event for the rulers in Iran. A step to change the principles and essence of the revolution seems to not fade away.

CONCLUSION

This paper aims to further develop the idea by ascertaining Saudi Arabia and Iran's religious outreach in Indonesia. The research also aims to discuss the recent changes in policies and attitudes of Saudi Arabia regarding its religious doctrine as well as the challenges that Iran faced in its continuing Islamic revolution. The study found that Saudi Arabia's Wahhabism-Salafism outreach gave credibility to the kingdom under the expense of the recipient states due to division. Despite the Sunni-Shia feud and international sanctions, Iran is no less important in conducting religious outreach, such as Türkiye, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. The Iran's religious outreach often centralized with careful calculations through Iran's Islamic Culture and Relations Organizations (ICRO) and ICC of the Iranian Embassy in Jakarta guided from likelihood that can tarnished its reputation and relations. The example of its success is the decades long relation with several institutions in Indonesia.

The research concludes that Saudi's religious outreach to be more influential than Iran, larger budget, and arena of outreach to fellow Sunni-Muslim majority, but less centralized than Iran. However, the Saudi's religious outreach leads to acts that are not desired by the Saudis, such as extremism and terrorism, making the international community to turn back towards the Saudis for endorsing ideas that influenced such act. Thus, Wahhabism-Salafism creates religious 'turned' social divisions. It influenced voting behaviour and created identity politics in the 2019 Indonesia presidential election. Whereas Shia majority Iran, minority in the Muslim world, played a light religious outreach with central control, means it will not be as influential in areas such as politics.

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 is looking to transform the kingdom to moderate sense of Islam. Saudi illustrates these efforts to maintain regional and international role, politically, socially, and economically. MbS considered Wahhabism ideology as not part of the roots of his nation, sees it as obstacle to the socio-economic changes ahead, seeing moderate Islam as the true root of the nation. Iran's centralized religious outreach and not conducted underground plays a significant role in dampening reluctance and misperceptions from the Muslim world. Thus, despite facing protests the theocratic rule and the Islamic revolution, it did not affect significantly to the outreach through ICRO.

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