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The Role of Democracy in Reinforcing Sustainable Development and SDGs Achievements: Evidence from 3 Muslim Countries in Southeast Asia

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Abstract.

Climate change is considered to be the most serious challenge to global development, with its widespread, unanticipated consequences disproportionately affecting the poorest and most vulnerable. Immediate action to curb climate change and deal with its repercussions is crucial in achieving all the SDGs. Southeast Asia is one region that is particularly sensitive to the effects of climate change. Policymakers began to take an action, as the consequences of environmental issues and climate change became more severe. Key environmental regulations, such as framework laws, safeguard measures, and air and water quality standards, have been implemented throughout the region. Muslim democratic countries differ systematically both in the degree of Islamic political party concentration in the parliament and in the party discipline. Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, and Malaysia have very different political systems, ranging from absolute monarchy, in which the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam rules almost every aspect of society's life, to democratic deficit in Indonesia, in which the government's methods or operations fall short for satisfying democratic norms. Although the three Muslim countries share divergences in democracy state, but the countries' sustainable development policies and overall SDGs score of realization remain similar during the period of 2001-2021.

Keywords: Islam, Democracy, Sustainable Development, SDGs, Southeast Asia.

1. Introduction

Climate change seems to be the most significant threat to global development, and its pervasive, unprecedented effects disproportionately affect the poorest and most vulnerable. Immediate action to halt climate change and cope with its consequences is critical to attaining all of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (1). Climate change and sustainable development debates are getting increasingly contentious and while some people are opposed to the campaign to wean the world economy off of fossil fuels, others are concerned about the enormous costs of transitioning to a sustainable economy and if such efforts would have the desired effect (2). There is a longstanding assumption in the environmental politics literature that democracies are better at environmental quality provision than non-democracies. Some theories argue that democracy contributes to environmental damage. Others claim that democracy may not prevent or rather worsen environmental damage (1). So far, empirical data has been scant and contradictory. Numerous studies investigate the implications of democracy for climate mitigation, usually by analysing fluctuations in national carbon emissions. More recently, a growing consensus has emerged that meeting an ambitious temperature target set in the 2015 Paris Agreement requires more rigorous and immediate action to shift from conventional fuels to low-carbon energy technologies, prompting an increasing number of scholars to investigate the impact of democracy on national energy portfolios.

Comprised of eleven countries that are religiously, culturally, and historically diverse: Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, Southeast Asia is also one of the world's most economically dynamic regions, which helps to explain its growing worldwide relevance. Southeast Asia is regularly mentioned as one of the most threatened and sensitive regions to climate change. Climate change was identified as one of Southeast Asia's top three security issues in the annual State of Southeast Asia survey performed by the ASEAN Studies Centre at the ISEAS - Yusof Ishak institute in 2019 and 2020(3). The region will be one of the world's most vulnerable to climate change unless countries reduce greenhouse gas emissions dramatically. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a 1.5-degree Celsius increase in global warming will result in rising oceans, severe flooding, and shifting rain patterns, leading to violent typhoons and drought. Global warming threatens food security, slows economic growth, causes political instability, and accelerates pandemics. Southeast Asian countries have all signed the Paris Climate Agreement, but most have few plans in place to mitigate

the most severe climate dangers. Energy consumption is increasing, and coal alone accounts for roughly 40% of the region's increased energy needs. Coal use is increasing, thanks in part to its relative abundance and inexpensive cost compared to oil, gas, and renewables. Countries struggle to trap greenhouse gases before they enter the atmosphere and warm the earth as a result of deforestation. Deforestation contributes for about half of the country's rising emissions in Indonesia, which has some of the world's largest forests(4).

Southeast Asia, also known as the "Muslim archipelago," where Islam is the most commonly practiced religion serves as home to more than 240 million Muslims, accounting for 42 percent of Southeast Asians and 25 percent of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims, with majorities in Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia, as well as sections of Southern Thailand and Mindanao in the Philippines. Muslim democratic countries differ systematically both in the degree of Islamic political party concentration in the parliament and in the party discipline (5). Table 1 below depicts major economic indicators with special highlight on the top three muslim countries in the region.

Table 1: Southeast Asia Countries (minus Timor Leste) in Brief.

Country	Population (million)	GDP (USD billion)	GDP Growth (%)	Percapita (USD billion)	Poverty (%population)	Unemployment rate (%)	FDI (% GDP)
Brunei Darussalam	0.459	13.5	4	31087	0.49	9.2	2.8
Cambodia	16.5	27.1	7	1643	16.5	1.1	13.5
Indonesia	270.6	1119.2	5	12302	10	4.3	2.2
Lao PDR	7.2	18.2	5	2535	18	0.6	3.1
Malaysia	31.9	3.4	4	11415	6	3.4	2.1
Myanmar	54	76.1	3	1408	24.8	1.6	3
Philippines	108.1	376.8	6	376.8	17	2.5	2
Singapore	5.7	372.1	1	372.1	-	3.8	28.3
Thailand	69.9	543.6	2	1338.8	10	0.7	1.1
Vietnam	96.5	261.9	7	807.8	7	1.9	6.2

Source: (ASEAN, 2021) (3)

As can be observed, Indonesia has the highest population density in Southeast Asia (270 M), followed by the Philippines with a population of 108.1 M. Brunei has the lowest population among all the Southeast Asian nations, but Malaysia has fewer people, with a total population of little under 32 million. The GDP shows that Indonesia has the largest GDP and the best GDP growth (5%) compared to Brunei and Malaysia, whose GDP growth was just 4%. Brunei, however, had the biggest GDP per capita (31097 billion USD), while Malaysia and Indonesia had comparable result. Based on the population

to poverty ration, Malaysia is on the median level with 6% while Indonesia has higher poverty ratio, 10% of its total population. Brunei, although having the the lowest poverty ratio with less than 0.5%, has the highest unemployment rate in the Southeast Asia (9.2%) whereas Indonesia and Malaysia also have a relatively high unemployment rate with 4,3% and 3,4% respectively. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the three countries (Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei) stood at a similar level ranging from 2,1%, 2,2% and 2,8% respectively.

Climate change driven by increased energy usage decreases people's well-being. Nonetheless, one of the most important responsibilities of democracy in society is to increase people's well-being through democratic accountability. One of the current energy concerns confronting nations today is the need to address environmental degradation induced by increased energy usage in an effort to boost economic growth (6) . The recent global pandemic (COVID-19) triggered a global shock wave that impacted all industries. This crisis underlined both the critical significance of energy systems in development and the vulnerability of today's energy markets. Policymakers are now faced with the issue of developing economic recovery strategies to build economic and energy infrastructure for a sustainable future. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to achieve both long-term economic and climatic goals(7). Empirical research on the effects of democratic political regimes for energy transition is fairly different. While a number of research reveal the expected favorable effect(8), others(9) contend that democracy can occasionally stymie decarbonization.(10)

Indeed, contradictory empirical findings have led some authors to conclude that a nation's level of trade openness,(11) fossil fuel endowment (12), political corruption (12), ideological orientation of political parties (13), and economic development (12) may all have a moderating effect on democracy's effect on transitions. Thus, this article seeks to contribute to this literature by addressing a critical question: how do the democratic attributes Islamic regimes influence national transitions from fossil fuel energy to low carbon electricity generation and the realization of SDGs in the most muslim-populated countries in Southeast Asia? In doing so, by using descriptive qualitative approach, our core objectives are to depict the effects of democracy for the sutainable development with focusing the highight on: (i) the role of Islam in the countries' democracy (ii) divergences in democracy effects on the countries' sustainable development policies and SDGs realisation.

2. Literature Review

The United Nations established the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, in 2015 as a universal call action to eradicate poverty, safeguard the environment, and ensure that by 2030, all people live in peace and prosperity. The 17 SGDS are interconnected, recognizing that actions in one area will have an impact on outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic, and environmental sustainability. Countries have agreed to emphasize improvement for those who are the most disadvantaged. The SDGs aim to eliminate poverty, hunger, AIDS, and gender discrimination against women and girls.(14) The link between sustainable development and political regime quality should result in a high level of public engagement and discourse. Since 1992, the United Nations has emphasized that an ideal degree of development can be reached through active citizen participation at various levels of political decision-making. Citizens' participation in decision-making is a critical prerequisite for accountability, social and economic stability, and environmental protection. In terms of public participation, the civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) sector play a critical role in implementing public policies in the field of sustainable development. Social responsibility and the constructive role that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play in the social domain legitimize their public interventions in establishing models for good governance and sustainable development.(15,16)

Democracy is a system in which the entire society can participate in and control the decision-making process at all levels. The full observance of human rights, as defined by both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Vienna Pacts and Declaration of 1993, serves as its cornerstone. The promotion of fundamental rights, as well as the respect for differences and the freedom of expression and thinking, are necessary preconditions for democracy. There can be no democracy without an independent judicial system and institutions that ensure free expression and the presence of a free media. Legislative power must be exerted by people's representatives who have been chosen by the people. Laws must be enforced by legally responsible personnel, and the administrative apparatus must be accountable to elected officials(17).

While the findings in the academic literature is inconsistent and inconclusive, there is no doubt that democracy and development are mutually reinforcing over time. In a process of mutual interaction and reinforcement, advances in one may result in advances in the other. The term "good governance" is frequently employed as a shorthand for the broader concept of democracy's contribution to and role in development. Participants,

on the other hand, contended that democracy, not just 'good governance' (or even more limited expressions such as 'good enough governance'), is indeed necessary for development, encompassing not only key institutions and processes but also the concepts of citizens' voice, participation, inclusion, and nurturing a democratic culture (18). Pro-democracy movements around the world have defied repression, and worldwide social movements for combating climate change and racial injustices have formed. Despite the restrictions, protests occurred in more than three-quarters of the countries during the pandemic.

3. Research Questions

How do the democratic attributes of Islamic regimes in Southeast Asia's most Muslim-populated countries influence national transitions from fossil fuel energy to low carbon electricity generation, and how do they impact the realization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly considering the role of Islam in the countries' democracies and the divergences in democracy effects on their sustainable development policies and SDGs realization?

4. Method

This study will employ a qualitative research approach to explore the democratic attributes of Islamic regimes in Southeast Asia's most Muslim-populated countries and their influence on national transitions from fossil fuel energy to low carbon electricity generation, as well as the realization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A thorough review of policy documents, national and regional energy plans, and other official publications will be conducted to understand the context of sustainable development and energy transitions in the target countries. Document analysis can provide valuable insights into the policy direction, goals, and measures adopted by the countries to mitigate climate change (19). In-depth case studies will be carried out to examine the democratic attributes of Islamic regimes in the most Muslim-populated countries in Southeast Asia, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei. The case studies will provide detailed information on the role of Islam in each country's democracy, the divergences in democracy effects on their sustainable development policies, and the realization of SDGs (20). The combination of these qualitative methods will provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between democratic attributes of Islamic

regimes, energy transitions, and the realization of SDGs in the target countries in Southeast Asia.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Islam & Democracy in the 3 countries

Asia is home of 65 percent of the world's Muslims, and Indonesia, in Southeast, is the world's most populous Muslim country. Indonesia has grown as a regional leader during the previous two decades, whose democracy, prosperity, and long-term stability are vital to the Indo-Pacific region. Inclusive democratic governance and human rights are essential for economic, social, and political opportunity, which includes economic opportunity, enhanced environmental protection, education, and health, and participation in all sectors of society. Although progress has been made, government institutions have encountered problems in combating endemic corruption, enhancing public service administration, defending civil liberties, and tackling the causes of intolerance and extremism.

TABLE 2: Democracy Index of Brunei, Indonesia & Malaysia.

Rank	Country	Total Value	Rank
	Brunei	n/a	n/a
77	Indonesia	0,587	Deficient Democracy
95	Malaysia	0,536	Hybrid Regime

Source: www.democracymatrix.com (21)

Based on the table above, it can be seen that in the democracy index, Indonesia is ranked 77th with a total value index of 0.587 and is classified as a deficient democracy. A democratic deficit occurs when ostensibly democratic organizations or institutions (particularly governments) fall short of fulfilling the principles of democracy in their practices or operation where representative and linked parliamentary integrity becomes widely discussed. (22) Furthermore, Malaysia is placed 95th with a total value index of 0.536 and is categorized as a hybrid regime. (23) Meanwhile, Brunei is an absolute monarchy ruled by the Sultan. At the national level, there are no elected representatives. Press and assembly freedoms are severely limited. Authorities restrict online speech, yet it remains lively.

5.2. SDGs Achievement in the 3 countries

Table 3 below shows the comparison of SDGs realisation in the three muslim countries.

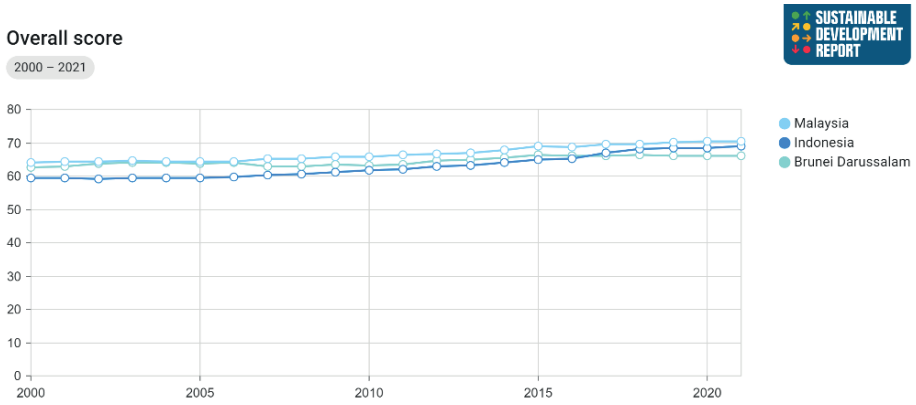
Most Recent Value SDGS Goals	Malaysia	Indonesia	Brunei	Mini Chart
1. No Poverty (Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty lines) **(2019)**	8,4	9,4	-	
2. Zero Hunger (Prevalence of undernourishment (% of population) **(2020)**	3	7	6	
3. Good Health and Well-Being (Mortality rate, under-5 (per 1,000 live births) **(2020)**	9	23	12	
4. Quality Education (School enrollment, primary and secondary (gross), gender parity index (GPI) **(2018)**	1,05	0,99	1,02	
5. Gender Equality (Women Business and the Law Index Score) **(2021)**	50	64,4	53,1	
6. Clean Water and Sanitation (People using at least basic drinking water services) **(2020)**	97	92	100	
7. Affordable and Clean Energy (Renewable energy consumption) (% of total final energy consumption) **(2019)**	5,11	19,09	0,01	
8. Decent Work and Economic Growth (GDP growth) (annual %) **(2021)**	3,1	3,7	-1,6	
9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (CO2 emissions) (metric tons per capita) **(2019)**	7,9	2,3	16,1	
10. Reduced Inequalities (Average transaction cost of sending remittances to a specific country) (%) **(2020)**	4,8	6,57	-	
11. Sustainable Cities and Communities (Urban population growth) (annual %) **(2021)**	2	2,2	1,3	
12. Responsible Consumption and Production (Total natural resources rents) (% of GDP) **(2020)**	5,2	2,8	17	
13. Climate Action (Total greenhouse gas emissions) (kt of CO2 equivalent) **(2019)**	313020	1002370	9300	
Life Below Water (Total fisheries production) (metric tons) **(2020)**	1.794.271	21.837.117	16.591	
14. Life on Land (Forest area (% of land area) **(2020)**	58,2	49,1	72,1	
15. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (Primary government expenditures as a proportion of original approved budget (%) **(2019)**	102,38	93,87	-	
16. Partnerships For the Goals (Foreign direct investment, net inflows (% of GDP) **(2020)**	1,2	1,8	4,7	

Source: UNDP, 2022 (24)

Figure 1: SDGs Achievement of Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia & Malaysia.

The presented table delineates each SDG Goals represented in Malaysia, Indonesia to Malaysia with 9,4% and 8,4 whilst Brunei has succeeded in managing poverty. In 2020, the Prevalence of undernourishment for Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei stood at 3%,7% and 6% respectively. Based on the mortality rate in 2020, Indonesia had the largest proportion with 23% of its total population comparing to its peers, Malaysia (9%) and

Brunei (12%). In common, these three countries shared similar Gender Parity Index (GPI) approximately lied in the 1% level. In 2021, looking from Gender Equality perspective, in all three countries, had managed to scored more than 50% in the Women Business and the Law Index Score. For Clean Water and Sanitation, Approximately, all Malaysian (97%), Indonesian (92%) and Bruneian (100%) has access to clean water and sanitation in 2020. Indonesia's renewable energy consumption in 2019, had the largest contribution with almost 20% energy are generated through clean energy where Brunei and Malaysia are less than 6%. According to the GDP growth (%), Malaysia and Indonesia practically had similar share, around 3% meanwhile Brunei experienced a negative growth with -1.6%. Moreover, Brunei emitted more than 15 metric tons CO2 in 2019. Indonesia's average transaction cost of sending remittances to a specific country was 6,57% in 2020 where Malaysia had a little fewer than that (4.8%). In 2021, Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei urban population growth stood at 2%, 2,2% and 1,3% accordingly. For Natural Recources Rents, Brunei had fairly higher point with 17%. Additionally, Indonesia contributed to the largest gas house emissions in 2019, far higher than Malaysia and Brunei. Similar pattern also shown in fisheries production, Indonesia held the largest share with 21,837,117 metric tons where Malaysia and Brunei had relatively low fish production. Malaysia and Brunei Forest to Land were above 50% while Indonesia was a little less than that (around 49%). In the Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions Brunei and Malaysia managed to score a relatively high point although Brunei's level is undisclosed. Lastly, from FDI variable, Malaysia and Indonesia stood below the 2% point meanwhile Brunei almost reach 5%.



Sachs, 2022 (25)

Figure 2: Overall SDGs Score of Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia & Malaysia.

Looking from an overall perspective, from 2000-2021, Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei shared similar progression during the period although Malaysia's overall SDG score has reached 70,33 in 2021 when Indonesia and Brunei had 68,9 and 66,16 respectively.

COVID-19 has far-reaching consequences for the Southeast Asia region. a total of USD318.2 billion (approximately 10.1% of its 2019 GDP) in stimulus packages has been provided to help deal with the effects of the epidemic, with Thailand and Indonesia injecting the highest amounts. These packages are largely intended to safeguard jobs and keep firms viable, and they do not emphasize green initiatives (26). In terms of energy consequences, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand reported declines in national electricity demand as a result of the lockdown. Because of the COVID-19 epidemic, some Southeast Asia countries have had to defer or postpone aggressive energy efficiency development. Despite the epidemic, global demand for renewables increased, while numerous renewable energy projects in the region face significant delays due to shifts in energy markets and disruptions in clean energy supply chains. Other COVID-19 consequences include effects on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, air quality, and society. People began using teleworking and online conferencing; online sales soared; and logistics activities increased, including last-mile delivery. Even if economies return to pre-crisis levels, lifestyle changes are projected to have a long-term influence on GHG mitigation efforts. The pristine air enjoyed in cities during the lockdowns has also fueled cities' efforts to decarbonize.

Southeast Asia is one region that is particularly sensitive to the effects of climate change. According to the Global Climate Risk Index (CRI) 202018, Myanmar, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand were among the top ten countries most affected by extreme climate events from 1999 to 2018 (27), with Myanmar ranking first by CRI score (10.3), followed by the Philippines (CRI 17.67), Vietnam (29.83), and Thailand (29.83). (31.00). As the consequences of environmental issues and climate change became more severe, policymakers took action. Key environmental regulations, such as framework laws, safeguard measures, and air and water quality standards, have been implemented throughout the region.

Brunei Darussalam is an oil-rich country that relies heavily on oil and gas as a key source of energy. The country's road transport sector consumed the most gasoline and diesel oil, accounting for 38% of total final energy consumption in 2015. Furthermore, natural gas accounted for 99% of all power generation in Brunei in 2015. Brunei Darussalam has established a hydrogen demonstration facility in western Brunei Darussalam with Japan's assistance. It means that Brunei Darussalam will be a hydrogen-producing country, with some of the hydrogen produced domestically used for internal purposes such as road transport and power generation. If the country could transition from oil and gas to hydrogen as a fuel for transportation and electricity generation, it would dramatically reduce oil and gas use as well as CO2 emissions. As a result, hydrogen

could be a sustainable energy source or technology for Brunei Darussalam. However, one great concern is the high cost of hydrogen supply.(28)

Indonesia plays a critical role in the global energy transition. It has the greatest energy consumption among ASEAN Member States, and its energy consumption is expected to increase dramatically in the future decades as its economy and population grow. To help meet expanding demand, Indonesia has established short-term targets to increase renewable energy. As the government has also committed to an ambitious climate goal of reaching net zero emissions by 2060 or sooner, a longer-term perspective is required these days. With plentiful geothermal and hydropower potential, as well as enormous renewable resources such as solar, wind, ocean, and bioenergy, Indonesia is uniquely positioned to develop a renewable energy system that can support socioeconomic development, address climate change, and achieve energy security, universalisation, and affordability goals.(29)

6. Conclusion

Climate change is often regarded as the most serious threat to global development, with its widespread, unexpected impacts disproportionately hurting the poorest and most vulnerable. Immediate action to combat climate change and its consequences is critical to achieve all of the SDGs. Southeast Asia is particularly vulnerable to the consequences of climate change. Policymakers acted as the repercussions of environmental issues and climate change became more serious. Throughout the region, key environmental legislation such as framework laws, protection measures, and air and water quality requirements have been enacted. Muslim democratic countries differ systematically in terms of the concentration of Islamic political parties in parliament as well as party discipline. Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia and Malaysia have very much difference interms of politics regime ranging from absolute monarchy where the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam rules almost every aspect of society's life to democratic deficit in Indonesia in which governments methods or operations fall short of satisfying democraticnor

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