Nottingham University Business School Malaysia Campus

Research Paper No. 2009-07

Islam and Democracy
Malaysia after 50 years

Eduard J. Bomhoff

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Abstract

This paper describes and analyzes outcomes of the first World Values Survey for Malaysia, an upper-middle income country that was not yet included in the four previous Surveys. I look at results for tolerance, interest in democracy and other survey questions, and find that the Malaysian Chinese are more satisfied with their life than the Singapore Chinese. Dissatisfaction with the political culture in Malaysia is strongest for the rural poor, both Chinese and Malay. The paper also discusses some political developments in Malaysia up to the March 2008 election.

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"Tunku Abdul Rahman has an overwhelming Parliamentary majority, the local forces and police are largely Malay, and for his own ends he will keep legal powers to detain without trial...he gives the impression of aiming at an old-fashioned Muslim dictatorship, with some democratic trappings..."[2]

Cable to Sir Anthony Eden from Britain's last supremo in South-East Asia, Sir Robert Scott, a few weeks before Malaya's independence.

"These moguls transmuted to be merely British Advisers wrote privately to each other: 'They'll never be able to cope. Within a month or two, it will all be back in our hands.' But it wasn't. The Malay menteris *[state and national ministers] were quite determined about that".[3]*

J.M. Gullick, the foremost chronicler of colonial Malaya, looking back in 2007 with a smile at the sentiments among his fellow-Britons just prior to independence in 1957.

1. Introduction[4]

Malaysia, as a nation, has turned out to be somewhat of a surprise to its British colonizers, but also to those in the West who are skeptical about balanced development in the Islamic world and to social scientists concerned about a clash of civilizations and irreconcilable values. Malaysia seems to be a happy anomaly. A "flawed democracy", in the words of the Economist Intelligence Unit (see section 4), but no "Muslim dictatorship"; a country where the colonial administration had forgotten to provide Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first chief minister (after independence in 1957, the country's first prime minister), with an office when he reported for work in the run-up to independence[5].

Independent Malaya (renamed Malaysia in 1963) managed to survive continuous insurgent rumblings and consequent low economic growth in its first decade; overcame terrible ethnic riots and racial unrest in 1969, but then joined the second group of Asian tigers, so that in August 2007 it had much to celebrate about its fifty years of independence.

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2   Bayly and Harper, **Forgotten Wars**, pp. 532 - 533
3   Interview with Gullick in *New Sunday Times*, August 26, 2007, p. 31
4   With many thanks to Mary Man-Li Gu for data management and research assistance; Eng Chooi Ling for assistance with the calculations in section 4 and Lisa Ho for useful discussions and editorial help. This paper was finished in October 2007 before the elections of March 2008 which resulted in opposition wins in five peninsular states.
5   Bayly and Harper, p. 534

The results from the first *World Values Survey (WVS)* for Malaysia, conducted at the end of 2006, serves as a gauge whether all Malaysians are as happy as the recent independence anniversary pageantry would suggest. Are Malaysians proud of their country? Do the Malays, who dominate politics through their political party UMNO (United Malays National Organization), assess democracy in Malaysia more positively than their fellow-citizens of Chinese and Indian descent, or are all Malaysians comfortable?[6] Section 2 has the answers.

Commentaries from the international media on Malaysia's 50th anniversary celebrations were both sweet and sour. The *International Herald Tribune*, the *Financial Times* and *The Economist* all combined praise for economic progress and social peace with serious criticism. In the *International Herald Tribune*, Philip Bowring admitted that Malaysia can be "deemed an example to the wider Muslim world", but at the same time pointed to "arrogant assumptions about the primacy of Islam", as well as to pervasive corruption flowing from the continuous stay in power of one political coalition.[7] In the *Financial Times*, Singapore correspondent, John Burton wrote about the "growing influence of Islamic religious authorities" and the risk of "racial and religious polarization."[8] The anonymous leader-writer in *The Economist* had a different emphasis. She mentioned religion only in passing ("worries about creeping 'Islamization' among the Malay Muslim majority") but attacked Malaysia for its social and economic preference policies: 'state racism'. In addition, she criticized the economic chasm among the **Bumiputera** (sons of the soil): between the rich and politically connected Malays who benefit from government largesse, and the greater majority who do not. [9]

One view of Malaysian democracy is that of the *New York Times* and the *Financial Times*: so far, so good but with the twin risks of increasing tension between the religious communities and intolerant, Islamist politics. The alternative view is that of *The Economist*: a prosperous country that could have been even more prosperous and admirable if race-based politics had been abolished earlier.

Again, the *WVS* results can assist in examining the issue related to tolerance for which there have been many survey questions. Whether Malaysians – Muslim and non-Muslim – show tolerance in their answers, and how that compares to answers from other countries is the topic of section 3.

I shall argue against the view that Islamism is a risk to democracy in Malaysia (sections 4-6). One institutional reason is that Malaysia's religious authority is decentralized. Religious figures are appointed by state governments; there is no national religious leader, and different *mufti*s compete for national attention. The country's electoral dynamics make dangerous Islamism highly unlikely. Moreover, the evidence is there: a conservative Islamic party, PAS, (Pan Malaysian Islamic Party) has governed one state

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[6]   From hereon, when the context refers to Malaysia, "Chinese" refers to "Malaysians of Chinese descent" and "Indians" refers to "Malaysians of Indian descent".

[7]   *International Herald Tribune (New York Times)*, August 29, 2007, p 7.

[8]   *Financial Times*, August 31st, 2007, p.6.

[9]   *The Economist*, August 30th, 2007, Leaders section.

(Kelantan) almost continuously, and has shown pragmatism in its policies – when the voters were not keen on separation of the sexes in the check-out lines at the supermarkets, the idea was quickly given up. PAS, in this state, has to defend a small majority, and continues to harbour national ambitions: two strong reasons for being cautious and pragmatic.

On the standard indices of democracy, Malaysia lies near the worldwide average; a good score for an Asian country and an excellent score for a majority-Muslim nation. However, such a ranking fails to account for the principal reason why Malaysian elites defend a form of democracy that is flawed on standard measures: the determination to avoid the communal violence that blighted Malaysia in 1969. It is this same communal violence that continues to haunt Sri Lanka today and remains a risk in Gujarat and other states in India. Of course, the newspapers in Mumbai make for a better read than the Kuala Lumpur *New Straits Times* (although *The NST* is not as tepid as its Singapore twin, *The Straits Times*), but its readers run a greater risk of getting killed in religious violence. The British-University-in-Malaysia, where I work, has a large number of students from Nigeria who are sent to this country by their oil-rich provincial governments, because Nigeria remains mired in chaos. A subjective description of some features of Malaysian politics in Section 4 tries to connect some of these points. Section 5 has a brief international comparison.

The coupling of the words, "Democracy" and "Islam", is itself significant. In the early post-war period, the British colonizers combated "terrorists" in Malaya – not only Chinese but also Malays who fought against them for independence – and the worry then was "Democracy and Communist insurrection". When Japan, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan exhibited economic growth that had never before been experienced in the history of the world, the West became concerned about the culture of consensus and about Asian, non-Western values: "Democracy and Asian values" became the issue of the day. After 9/11, the focus is on "Democracy and Islam", even though this may not be the most insightful way at looking into Malaysian politics.

Worries about Islam and politics in the US and in other Western countries tend to be focused on the Middle East, Pakistan, Afghanistan and North Africa regions (except for the terrorist horrors in Bali which affect Australia). Thus, most commentary by non-Muslims about political Islam often neglects Islam in South-East Asia, even though almost as many Muslims live in Indonesia, Malaysia and elsewhere in South-East Asia as in Turkey, Iran and the Arab Middle East combined. Malaysia is an imperfect but peaceful Muslim-majority country, and provides an interesting, but quite different, model from better-known Turkey. Section 6 tries to offer some general comments about Islam and democracy.

2. The first World Values Survey for Malaysia

The Survey was conducted in late 2006 and forms part of the fifth "wave" in a series that was started in the 1980's by Ronald Inglehart, a political scientist at the University of Michigan. At the time of writing, other country surveys are not yet available. Therefore, all international comparisons in this paper will be based on the previous survey, conducted in 1999/2000. After a trial with some 200 undergraduate students, the Malaysian survey was conducted by a professional marketing firm, using home interviews with 1200 Malaysians. The sample was stratified according to State (province), urban-rural residence and gender of the respondents. The distributions over age, ethnic groups and religions correspond to national figures.

> *V 209: How proud are you to be Malaysian*
> *1. Very proud*
> *2. Quite proud*
> *3. Not very proud*
> *4. Not at all proud*

It would be nice if people could be proud of their nationality in a peaceful manner. However, a look at the answers to the same question in other countries shows that some economically successful countries cannot boast of many proud citizens. As an example, only 17 percent of Germans have a sense of being "very proud" of their nationality. That shows a healthy distance from the excessive nationalism that has blighted German history. In Malaysia, by contrast 69 percent answered "very proud", thus showing that Malaysians are more attached to their country than the worldwide average of 56 percent. In the same South-East Asia region, 44 percent of Singaporeans and 48 percent of Indonesians state that they are "very proud" to be citizens of their countries, but in the Philippines, with a score of 87 percent, almost everyone is "very proud" to be a citizen.

Due to the large differences between national averages, looking in detail at a single country is more useful. In Malaysia, the Malays and the Indians are comparatively more proud of their nationality than their Chinese counterparts. Only half the Chinese say they are "very proud" to be Malaysians, against three quarters of the Indians and the Malays. The Chinese, especially the poor and rural, are significantly less proud of their nationality than the national average; but adding the responses "1-very proud" and "2-quite proud", three out of four poor Chinese can still say that they are at least "quite proud" of their nationality. The different views of the Chinese could be due to certain aspects of Malaysia which they do not like so much, or it could be that the Chinese, as a race in general, are not particularly nationalistic – which, (remember Japan and Germany in the Second World War) may be a good thing.

The second explanation is supported if we look around in the region. In China as well as in Taiwan (as it happens, also in Korea and Japan), only one out of every five citizens says that he or she is "very proud" to be citizens of those countries. Thus, Chinese Malaysians have views which are in between the not-so-proud- sentiments of Chinese in

China and Taiwan and the quite proud feelings of the Malay and Indian Malaysians. By contrast, in India, 71 percent of the citizens are "very proud" of their country, underlining that Indians are more comfortable at expressing pride in the country of which they are citizens.

If we scrutinized further at Singapore, we find again that Singaporean Chinese are also not very nationalistic. 39 percent of the Chinese in Singapore are "very proud" of their nation, as against 55 percent of the Malays who live there. If we went on the assumption that people were more enthusiastic and proud of their nationality because the prime minister and other important leaders came from the same ethnic group, the Chinese should then be very proud in Singapore; likewise, the Malays in Malaysia. This is not the case: in Singapore as well as in Malaysia, the Malays are more comfortable than the Chinese in stating that they are "very proud" of their country, and the Malaysian Chinese are happier by far in being Malaysian citizens than the Singapore Chinese in being Singapore citizens.

The score for the Malays (74 percent being "very proud") matches the answers of Muslims in other Islamic societies. Worldwide, Muslims are comfortable in stating that they are "very proud" of their nationality: this is true also in poor Islamic countries, for instance Bangladesh (73 percent), Pakistan (81 percent) and Egypt (82 percent).

Malaysia is one of the few countries in the world where graduates are no less proud of their citizenship than people with less education. World-wide, all seven Islamic countries in North Africa or West Asia which participated in the *WVS* showed that highly educated people are less proud of their country – that is a significant pattern. On average, people with higher education score 11 percentage points lower on the question "Are you very proud of being a citizen of your country?" than people with lower education; no difference by education shows up in the Malaysian answers.

> *V 164 How much respect is there nowadays for individual human rights? Do you feel there is*
> *1. A great deal of respect*
> *2. Fairly much respect*
> *3. Not much respect*
> *4. No respect at all*

Differences between the ethnic groups also appear in this related question. 69 percent of all Malaysians feel that human rights receive "fairly much" or even "a great deal" of respect in their country, but again the Chinese are somewhat less positive with 61 percent agreeing (Malaysian Buddhists, almost all of which are Chinese, also score 61 percent). As with the previous question, the Malaysian Indians give answers that are more in line with the Malays and are less critical than the Chinese. The differences become significant when we look at the less affluent Chinese: they are distinctly less happy about human rights in Malaysia. Christians and non-Muslims generally do not deviate from the national average, which means that Malaysians are considerably more positive in their judgment than the world average. This question was not asked in 2000 in Singapore;

answers for other Islamic societies have enormous variations with Iran and Egypt at above 70 percent, Algeria and Turkey at the bottom of the world ranking with 36 and 26 percent respectively. Answers to this question in some of these countries differ a lot from assessments by outsiders who perhaps are freer to speak.

With the Chinese and the Malays, the degree of satisfaction with human rights depends on income. Richer people are happier with the degree to which human rights are respected; poorer people are less convinced. Income levels make a large difference; education levels do not. This makes the results for Malaysia somewhat different from those in other countries: in Western countries the satisfaction with human rights increases with income and education; by contrast in many Islamic countries (for example Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Pakistan and Turkey), highly educated people are more displeased with the human rights situation. In all seven participating Islamic nations in the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa), people with higher education are less likely to agree that human rights get at least a fair amount of respect in their country – that is a significant pattern. By contrast, well-educated Malaysians are not necessarily more critical about human rights.

Women are a little less positive in their answers, but this is true in most countries. Overall, the answers on this question about respect for human rights are a little better than the world average, and place Malaysia in the same category as Great Britain (66 percent) and with many other European countries. The Scandinavian countries, the US and Canada, however, have a higher score than Malaysia on respect for individual human rights.

V131-146 Confidence in institutions

Since the practice and assertion of human rights are upheld by the government, the courts, parliament, the police and the press, the Chinese Malaysians exhibit skepticism for these guarantors of human rights. Their answers show that they hold similar views about parliament and the press as with other Malaysians, but that they are a little more critical of the government and the courts, and a lot more critical of the police. A further analysis shows that it is the Chinese on below-average incomes who have little trust in the police. With Malays and Indians, both rich and poor hold similar views of the police, but in the Chinese community, it is the poor who have very little trust in the police force. Many Chinese from the lower-income bracket work in small businesses that may be troubled by extortionists for protection money or by the local authorities through harassment over licenses, opening hours, permits and the like. It is also possible that Chinese with lower disposable income have concluded from bad experience that the police are not impartial when dealing with the different ethnic groups. Such issues could have a greater impact on lower-income households than on Chinese citizens who have higher disposable incomes. In any event, policies that make the Chinese Malaysians more trusting of the police would likely help also to increase their comfort with the degree to which human rights are protected in Malaysia.

V163 How democratically is your country being governed today?
1. Not at all democratic
...
10. Completely democratic

All ethnic groups agree quite strongly that Malaysia is a democracy, but on a scale of 1 to 10, the Chinese give a slightly lower mark than the Malays or the Indians. The poor Chinese are significantly less happy about this question, whereas the poor Malays or Christians do not deviate from the national average.

Finally, we consider the answer to some questions about relations between men and women. This tends to be an area with differences between Muslim countries and the rest of the world. In Muslim-dominated countries, the position of women is often more focused on the family and less on the outside world of work and career. One question relating to this in the *WVS* asks:

V44 If jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job then women
1. Agree
2. Neither
3. Disagree

Muslims worldwide continue to agree that men, rather than women, should be given preference for jobs when there is scarcity. In Malaysia, 54 percent of the Malays (the Indians also polled at the same percentage) feel that men should have first preference, but only 41 percent of the Chinese feel that way. The stance of the Malays is very similar to the response in Indonesia (with 52 percent agreeing that men should have first right to a job), and is less sexist than in all other Islamic countries in the survey where we see large majorities, ranging from 90 percent in Egypt to 60 percent in Turkey. Only in Islamic Bosnia and Albania do less than 50 percent of men say "yes" to this question. In these two European countries and in Malaysia, Muslim men have a view that parallels the opinions of men in rich countries.

The national answer in Malaysia, 49 percent agreeing with the proposition, obviously is also better than almost all Muslim nations, and has come out on the right side of the forecast of 55 percent in Inglehart and Welzel (2005, Internet Appendix, table A-5)[10] In all western countries, including countries that exhibit male chauvinist attitudes like those of Italy, Spain or Mexico, public opinion today is much more favorable to equal rights to a job for men and women, even though a generation ago, opinions would have been more similar to today's Islamic countries. We do not know, of course, how much these expressed views are influenced by the fear of giving an answer that is not considered politically correct.

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[10] Inglehart and Welzel's other forecast, for the percentage of Malaysians declaring that "religion is very important in their lives" comes out less well, with an actual outcome of 80 percent as against their forecast of 71 percent. Malaysia may be another country, together with the US, where "modernization" does not mean the loss of religiosity.

Women worldwide are less convinced that men should have priority in the jobs market. This holds true also for Malaysia where 64 percent of Malay men and only 44 percent of Malay women are comfortable with the idea. Malaysia is the only Islamic country outside of Europe where less than 50 percent of Muslim women agree with the idea that men should go first in the job market.

Other questions in the *WVS* related to the position of women gave mixed results. At times Malaysia fares better than the average for Islamic nations, as on V44; on some other questions, Malaysians do not seem to see the importance of defending women's rights (i.e. Should university education be as important for a girl as for a boy?).

Of course, men and women also disagree in their answers to the related statement:

> *V62 University education is more important for a boy than for a girl.*
> *1. Strongly agree*
> *2. Agree*
> *3. Disagree*
> *4. Strongly disagree*

The national average show 46 percent in agreement with the statement and 54 percent in disagreement, but the breakdown by gender shows that 56 percent of Malaysian men agree as against 36 percent of women. These percentages are at the very top of the worldwide answers: only Bangladesh has an even larger agreement. The Malays are slightly more in favor of equality between the sexes than the Chinese or the Indians, but the difference is not significant. It is possible that Malaysians see more girls than boys going on to university and indirectly express their disappointment with too many boys liking motorcycles better than cramming for exams. Another possibility is that families do have to make choices, because much of higher education is in the expensive private education sector.

59 percent of Malaysian women agree that men make better political leaders than women. Malaysian Indians as well as Malaysian Chinese agree somewhat more than Indians or Chinese in the original countries. The percentages drop for the younger generation and for the poor and rural Chinese – who are unhappy with the political leaders of Malaysia. 66 percent of men and 43 percent of women agree that men also make better business leaders. Younger Malaysians and people with a higher income or more education are equally divided over the question, and the Chinese show less than 50 percent agreement.

V60 Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay
1. Strongly agree
…
4. Strongly disagree.

In their reactions to that statement, Malaysians dip slightly below the world average from the results of the 2000 *WVS*. 59 percent agree or even agree strongly, comparable to 61

percent in the UK and 62 percent in France. "Strong agreement" with this proposition is voiced by 19 percent of all, but by 36 percent of rural respondents. Note that 81 percent of Finns and 80 percent of Americans agree – answers to this question do not relate to GDP, religion or post modernism. In Malaysia, as elsewhere, women themselves have more doubts than men: 63 percent of men are sure of the joys of being a housewife, but only 55 percent of Malaysian women agree that being a housewife is as fulfilling as having a paid job. Younger people also have more doubts about being a housewife.

3. Proud of being multi-cultural

V221 Your view on ethnic diversity
1. Ethnic diversity erodes a country's unity
…
10. Ethnic diversity enriches life.

All ethnic groups in Malaysia on average clearly choose the positive answer: no more than four percent are negative (answers 1-4) on this question of ethnic diversity. The Malays are slightly less sure that ethnic diversity is a good thing, but the difference with the Chinese and Indians is of no significance. In many Western countries, highly educated people and people with high incomes declare a positive attitude towards ethnic diversity, because they are sensitive that it is the politically correct answer. It is good to note, therefore, that the positive attitude in Malaysia is shared equally among rich and poor as well as among university graduates and people with little education, suggesting that the positive answer to the question about the risks and benefits of a racially mixed society is also their honest view.
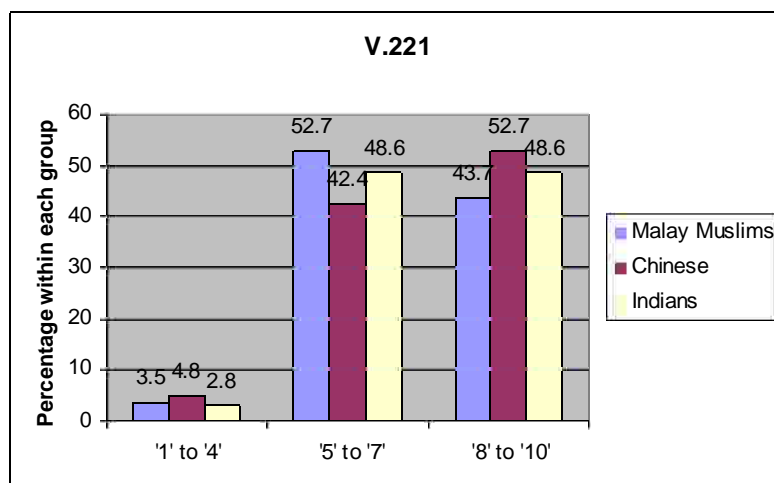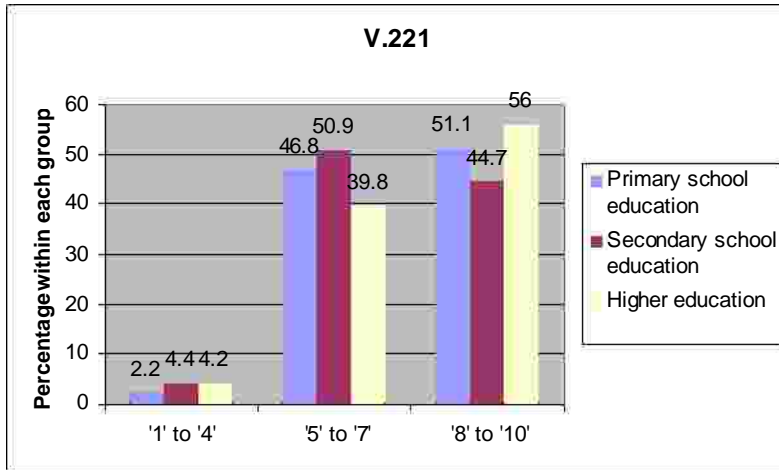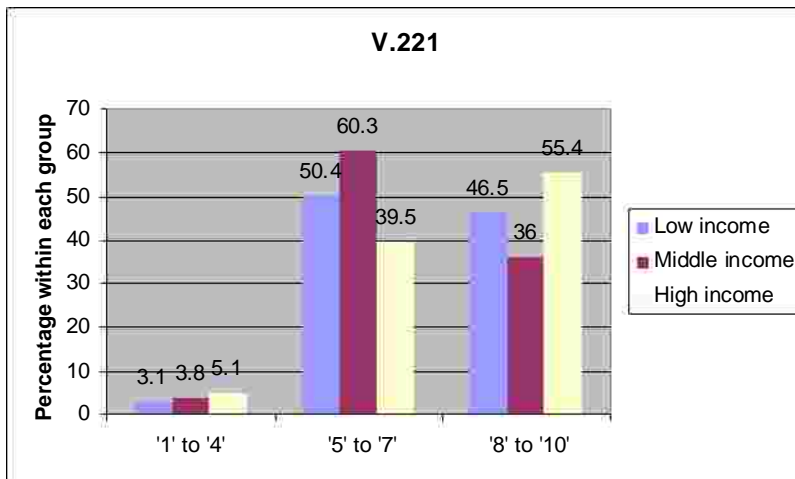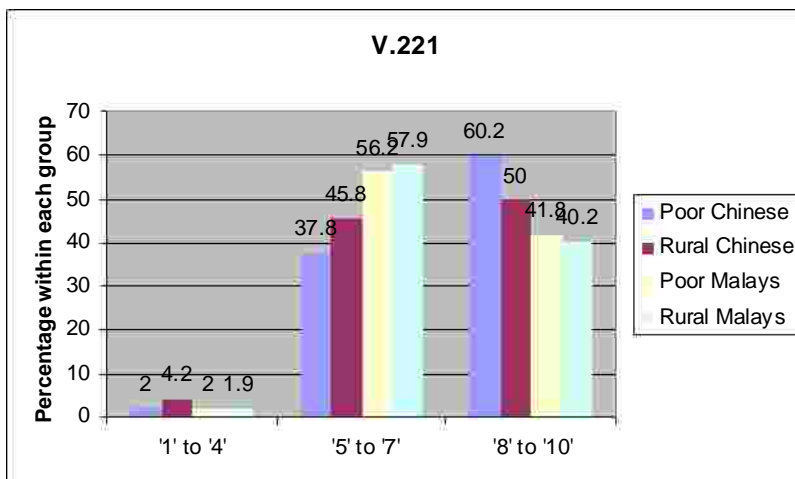
V.221

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

By contrast, here is the result of a related question in a 2007 survey in the Netherlands: "Would you say that Islam in Holland has enriched our [sic] culture, would your rather call Islam a threat to our [sic] culture, or would you not like to qualify Islam either way?"

Islam an enrichment   13 %
Neither enrichment nor threat 35%
Islam a threat to "our" culture 51%
Do not know/no answer 1%[11]

The *WVS* has four questions about the separation of church/mosque/temple and state. Figures 5-8 give the answers for all Malaysians and for the Malay Muslims who make up half the population of Malaysia.

V.194 'Politicians who do not believe in God are unfit for public office'
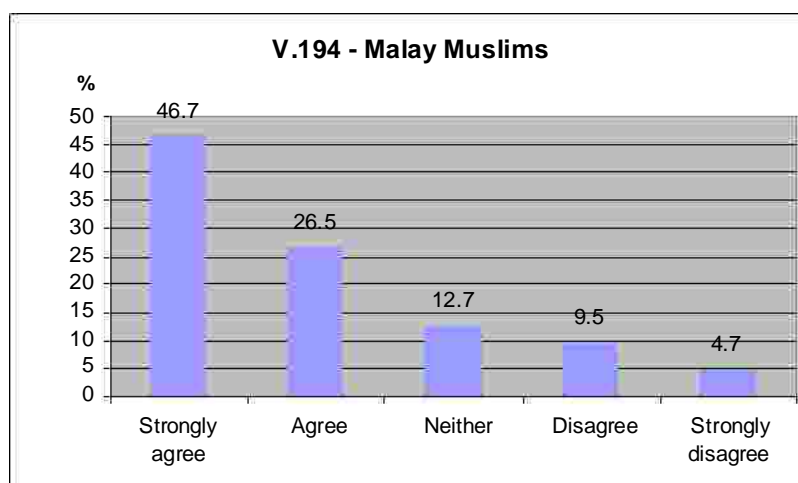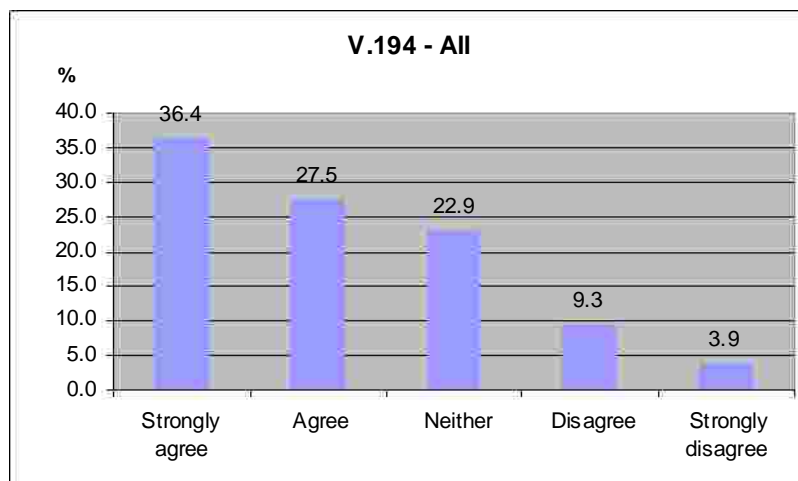
Figure 5

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[11] www.peil.nl (a national electronic survey, 2007)

V.196 'It would be better for Malaysians if more people with strong religious beliefs held public office'

V.196 - All

Response	%
Strongly agree	21.7
Agree	36.4
Neither	33.9
Disagree	6.8
Strongly disagree	1.3

V.196 - Malay Muslims

Response	%
Strongly agree	30.3
Agree	42.1
Neither	23.1
Disagree	4
Strongly disagree	0.5
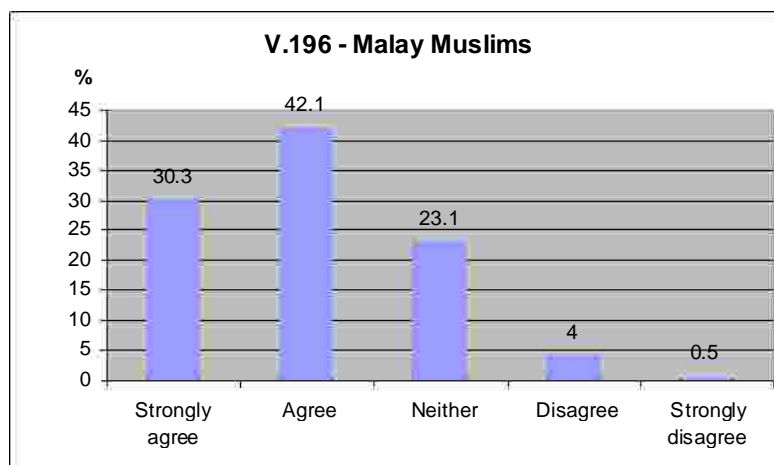
Figure 6

V.195 'Religious leaders should not influence how people vote in elections'

V.195 - All

Response	%
Strongly agree	17.1
Agree	36.4
Neither	37.2
Disagree	7.7
Strongly disagree	1.1

V.195 - Malay Muslims

Response	%
Strongly agree	20
Agree	35.9
Neither	32.8
Disagree	9.8
Strongly disagree	1.4
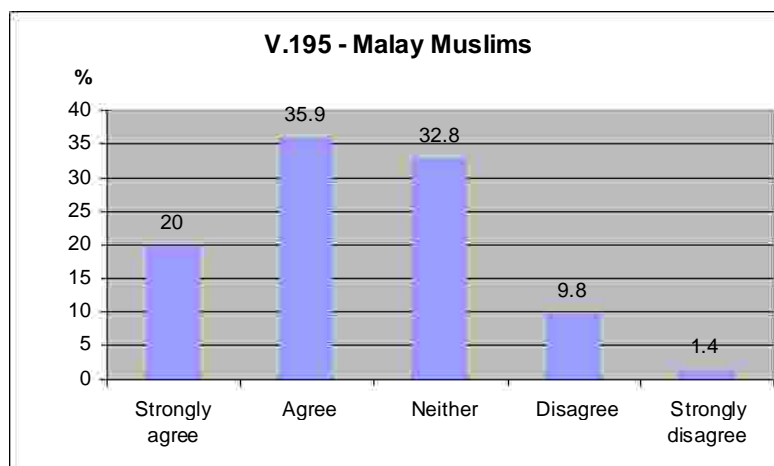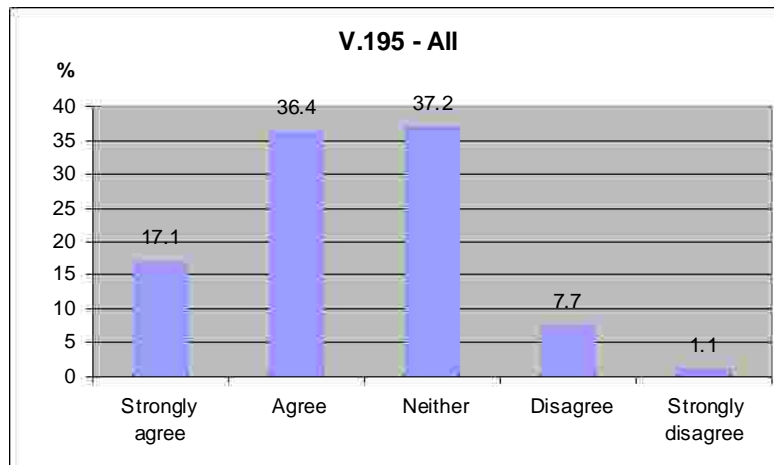
Figure 7

V.197 'Religious leaders should not influence government decisions'

V.197 - All

%

13.4	32.5	40.4	11	2.7
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree

V.197 - Malay Muslims

%

16.1	32.9	33.8	13.5	3.7
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
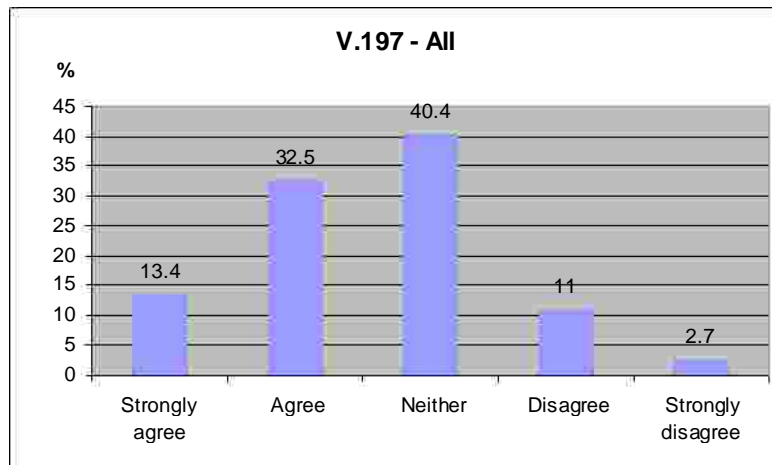
Figure 8

The national answers for Malaysia are not much different from other Islamic countries, see Table 1

Table 1

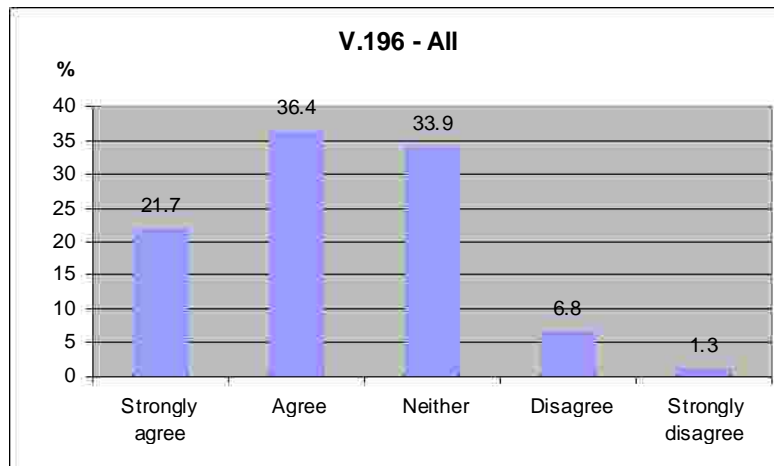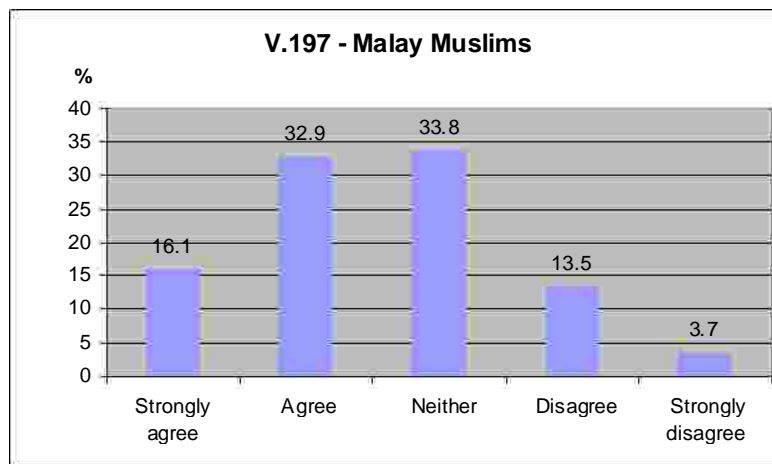|	V.194 Politicians who don't believe in God unfit for public office Disagree/ Strongly disagree (%)	V.196 More people with strong religious beliefs should hold public office Disagree/ Strongly disagree (%)	V.195 Religious leaders should not influence how people vote Agree strongly/ Agree (%)	V.197 Religious leaders should not influence government Agree strongly/ Agree (%)
Malaysia	13	8	54	46
Albania	29	32	77	76
Algeria	13	30	38	40
Bangladesh	24	54	75	71
Bosnia and Herz.	51	41	76	72
Egypt	10	4	57	na
Indonesia	9	na	86	91
Jordan	17	25	75	na
Morocco	9	24	76	65
Pakistan	1	50	74	na
Turkey	28	27	79	72
United States	36	25	64	51
France	78	68	86	82
Spain	69	56	67	69
Netherlands	94	73	66	60
Northern Ireland	68	59	76	66

Simple OLS tests for these four questions help us to learn from the answers:

1. **Should politicians be God-fearing people?** Most Malaysians hope so, but the Malay Muslims even more so than the national average. The two questions on this topic show a significant difference between Malay Muslims and the national average. On the first question, the rural Malays are even more outspoken than the average for all Malay Muslims: scoring the five answers 1 through 5, the rural Malays average 1.8. , against a national average of 2.4. Many Muslim politicians use this to their advantage. During the fasting month of Ramadan, leading Malay Muslim politicians are pictured daily breaking fast with their supporters, and often in small towns or rural areas. On the second question, Malay Muslims average a score of 2 (the national average is 2.6, and there is no difference between rural and non-rural Malays).

   Christians are a 9.1 percent minority in Malaysia; they agree with the Malay Muslims in their views about whether politicians should be religious, but for the question about "people with strong religious views", their answers are significantly more negative than the national average. Likewise for the Buddhists: many do not take a position on these two questions, but of those who do, three to four times as many Buddhists agree rather than disagree with the two statements about politicians' religious convictions.

   This possibly shows some amount of political stability in the country. France and Spain have a bloody record of strife between church and state – today large majorities feel disinclined to value strong religious convictions in their politicians. In Malaysia, Christians and Buddhists are neutral to agreeable on the two propositions, even though they must realize that in the local context "strong religious views" usually must mean "strong Islamic convictions".

2. **Should religious leaders be active in politics?** On the two questions for that topic, Malay Muslims do not differ in their answers from the national average. Christians do not disagree with the national average on the third question, but they like religious influence on the government significantly less than average. Buddhists do not at all deviate from the national averages.

   Again, that may be read as a positive sign about the stability of the political climate. If religious leaders were very influential during election campaigns or were suspected of putting pressure on the government, the non-Muslims would have shown their fears.

   The answer on question V197 is very similar to the answer in the US where no more than 51 percent agree, or in Sweden (52 percent). The worldwide answers to these questions show that full democracies can produce startlingly different answers depending on the countries' history. Some countries have settled on a clear "No". In France it is an article of faith that the Church should not be a factor

in politics – the *laicité* is a defining element in French political culture. Other countries agree to differ. In Holland, both Catholic and Protestant priests used to give precise voting instructions, and not so long ago (1954) the Catholic Church ordered excommunication for Catholics who voted for any leftist party . All this time, Holland is a full democracy. There are also democracies where the issue remains divisive. The Catholic Church in Spain publicly approved and supported the dictator Franco, so that today's attempts by both left- and right-wing politicians to revisit the terrible Spanish civil war risks poisoning Spanish politics.

The 2006 *WVS* has a number of questions requiring moral judgments. Here I look at the six questions on personal morality in family and sexual matters that were asked also in the 2000-1 surveys. The table compares the answers for all Malaysians, Malay Muslims and Malay Chinese to the average from all Islamic nations, the US, Ireland and Spain (the three most "conservative", high income countries on Inglehart's cultural map of the world); see table 2.

Table 2

	Homosexuality	Prostitution	Abortion	Divorce	Euthanasia	Suicide
	Never justifiable (%)					
Malaysia						
National average	43	45	43	31	38	44
Malay Muslims	47	49	48	37	43	47
Chinese	30	30	30	20	26	30
Albania	81	80	26	18	47	68
Algeria	93	93	79	26	86	94
Azerbaijan	89	85	30	27	47	73
Bangladesh	99	95	90	82	97	99
Bosnia and Herz.	72	76	35	15	43	80
Egypt	100	93	57	16	78	95
Indonesia	95	94	88	54	84	97
Jordan	98	98	85	42	90	97
Morocco	na	na	84	44	93	98
Pakistan	96	96	60	67	100	97
Turkey	85	na	64	42	65	90
United States	32	47	30	8	24	57
Ireland	37	58	51	26	49	69
Spain	17	30	28	12	24	52

On homosexuality, the Malay Muslims are stricter than the other ethnic groups, but in line with the national average in the previous wave of the *WVS* for many upper-middle-income countries. In 2000, Japan and Israel were the only two Asian countries that were more tolerant of homosexuality. However in 1990, Japan still polled at 61 percent "never acceptable" on this questions, and Korea at 91 percent (Ten years later, Korea polled at

53 percent). A more tolerant view may also come to the Muslim world, but it would be surprising if the enormous differences between the Malay Muslims and the averages for all other Islamic nations in 2000 had disappeared.

In Singapore –wealthier than Malaysia - 87 percent of Singapore Malays held to this stern view of homosexuality while the Singapore Chinese averaged at 49 percent in 2000. It looks as if the Singapore government's tough official stance on homosexuality is compatible with the sentiments of its citizens (as senior minister Lee Kwan Yu does not tire of claiming), but the official government view probably also influences the citizens' opinions, given that on homosexuality, the Singaporeans stand out from other rich countries and are even a lot more conservative than the Chinese in Malaysia.

Buddhist Thailand does not yet participate in the *WVS*; figures for that country could show whether a middle-income country in Asia with a largely Buddhist population can be similar to rich Korea and Japan. Chinese town dwellers are stricter than Chinese in the countryside; by contrast rural Malays abhor homosexuality more than urban Malay Muslims.

The pattern of the answers on "prostitution" and "abortion" is very similar: Malay Muslims stricter than the Chinese, but much less so than Muslims in 2000 from other Islamic countries. Poor and rural Chinese hesitate significantly more in their condemnation of prostitution or abortion compared to the national average.

Divorce is, of course, regrettable but permissible under Islam, and we see a much larger variation in the answers from other Islamic nations in the *WVS*, ranging from 82 percent saying "never" in Bangladesh to 16 percent in Egypt. The Chinese in Malaysia are a lot more tolerant of divorce than in Taiwan or China. In Singapore only 28 percent of the Singapore Chinese acknowledge divorce as being "never acceptable" in the previous *WVS*.

Younger Malaysians consider euthanasia less frequently than Malaysians over 30, but all age groups say "never" less frequently than the worldwide average in 2000. Combining answers 1-3, 60 percent of Malaysians say that euthanasia should never or rarely be acceptable.

On the issue of suicide, 47 percent of the Malay Muslims found it "never justifiable" - in all other Islamic nations the percentage is 90 or higher. Quite possibly, answers to this question have changed in these other countries over the past few years in reaction to terrorist suicide attacks in the name of Islam. On this, as well as on all other questions about morals, it seems as if younger Malaysians express more conservative moral views than older adults. The differences are not large, but they go against the patterns worldwide.

"Beating your wife" was not an issue in the previous *WVS*, so we only have results for Malaysia. The Chinese are significantly more lax on the issue than the national average. For the whole country, fortunately, seven times as many Malaysians are on the good side

of the neutral middle (answers 1 through 4 "never") rather than on the wrong side (answers 7 through 10 "always").

4. Democracy in Islamic countries

We know from many surveys that a lack of interest in democracy is not a valid explanation for the poor scores of many Islamic nations on measures of democratic rule. On the contrary, Inglehart and others have shown that Muslims in the MENA region are keener on democracy than the global average.[12] That also holds true for Malaysia:

> *V16 "How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically?"*
> *1. Not at all important*
> *…*
> *10. Absolutely important*

Two out of three Malaysians put themselves at 8-10, with younger, richer and more educated citizens a little above the national average. The Malay Muslims are at exactly the national average. At the same time, Malaysians appear more relaxed than people in most other countries when asked about non-democratic alternatives:

> *V148 "Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections?"*
> *1. very good*
> *2. fairly good*
> *3. fairly bad*
> *4. very bad*

Asked whether that would be "very good" or "fairly good", Malaysia (78 percent) and Turkey (71 percent) are right at the top of the world ranking after Vietnam (99 percent agree). No difference in Malaysia between Muslims and non-Muslims.

V149 "Having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country?" [13]
90 percent of Malaysians feel positive; again, second place in the world ranking after Vietnam – no difference between Muslims and non-Muslims.

V150 "Having the army rule"
70 percent call that "very good" or "fairly good", with the Muslim Malays even more tolerant of the idea. Once more Malaysia scores near the top of the world. Older Malaysians recall how the army was, on balance, a force for good in controlling the 1969 violence. Since the policy changes of the early 1970s, army and police work with strong pro-Bumiputera personnel and promotion policies; a major worry has to be that the police at all levels is not at all representative of the nation. The great tolerance of most Malaysians for army rule, strong man rule or technocratic rule poses a puzzle for historians and sociologists

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12   Inglehart (ed), *Islam, Gender, Culture & Democracy*, p. 67
13   See question V148 for the four possible answers also to this and the next two questions.

V151 "Having a democratic political system".
At this point in the survey respondents can give their opinion about the democratic alternative, and 92 percent like it – no difference between the national average and the Muslim Malays. That number is at the world average.

Before moving from the demand for democracy to its supply, I mention one more question in the *WVS* which is important for those who believe that a free and democratic nation requires a free and open economy:

V119 "Competition is good?"
On this question, 57 percent of Malaysians score 1-4 on a 1-10 scale which is below the world average, but quite comparable to Catholic countries in Europe (Slovakia 68 percent, Poland 59 percent, and Italy 57 percent, down to France at 46 percent). Malay Muslims, Christians, rural folks all do not differ from the national average. Poor Malaysians also agree, whereas in Western Europe, the US and the old Commonwealth, poor persons are significantly less keen on the blessings of competition.

To get some perspective on the level of democratic practice in Malaysia, one could compare the country to the South-East and East Asian region, to other upper middle-income countries worldwide or to other Islamic countries. [14] In this section I offer an initial exploration of the Islamic context. Malaysia currently holds the chair of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC); to the member countries I have added all other countries with at least close to 20 percent Muslim population for which data were available. Only very small states with fewer than 600,000 inhabitants were omitted. That leaves a set of 60 countries (see Table 3).

Demand for democracy is not the problem with the members of the OIC for which we have survey data; the supply side is disappointing. Poor institutions and disillusioned voters probably explain the low turnout at elections in some countries - the Swedish "International Institute for Democracy and Electoral assistance" has a (somewhat outdated) ranking of countries according to the percentage of voting-age citizens who actually vote and the bottom 7 countries are all members of the OIC. Many members of the OIC are not even in the list, because they do not have an elected parliament.[15]

For the exploratory statistical description of democracy in this section I use the most recent Survey of Democracy by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU).[16] The survey gives an overall score for each country which is the average of scores for five sub-indices:

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[14] "Islamic" used without implying that the country uses Sharia law as the basis of its legal system. Malaysia can be called an Islamic nation because many Muslims live there and Islam is the official religion; it is not an Islamic nation in the sense that its legal system is derived from or controlled by Islamic texts or Muslim religious leaders.

[15] After dividing the results for Kuwait and Bahrain by 2 because women are not allowed to vote.

[16] See L. Kekic, "The Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy", in *The World in 2007,* London, *The Economist*, 2006

1. Electoral process and pluralism
2. Functioning of government
3. Political participation
4. Political culture
5. Civil liberties

From Sweden to North Korea, 167 countries are ranked according to the overall index and informally classified into four groups.[17] "Full democracies" is the top group of 27 countries; not a single one of the 60 countries in Table 3 is represented.[18] Japan is the only Asian country. Malaysia shows up right at the bottom of the second group of "Flawed democracies"; hardly different from neighboring Singapore which is put at the top of the next group called "Hybrid regimes".

Table 3

No.	Islamic Countries	Percentage of Muslim Population	GDP Per Capita	Overall Score	Years of Ethnic Warfare
1	Bahrain	100.00%	23604	3.53	0
2	Kuwait	100.00%	19909	3.09	0
3	Mauritania	100.00%	2553	3.12	0
4	Saudi Arabia	100.00%	16744	1.92	0
5	Yemen	99.90%	759	2.98	0
6	Turkey	99.80%	9107	5.70	16
7	Afghanistan	99.00%	1490	3.06	13
8	Algeria	99.00%	7827	3.17	1
9	Iran	99.00%	8624	2.93	10
10	Morocco	99.00%	4956	3.90	15
11	Oman	99.00%	18841	2.77	0
12	Comoros	98.00%	2039	3.90	0
13	Tunisia	98.00%	8898	3.06	0
14	Iraq	97.00%	2900	4.01	30
15	Libya	97.00%	12204	1.84	0
16	Niger	97.00%	951	3.54	0

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[17] Brunei-Darussalam is not covered by the EIU; Palestine has no good measurement of GDP per capita – these two OIC member countries were dropped from the statistical analysis.

[18] Two prosperous countries excluded from the table because Muslims are no more than 15-16 percent of the population are Mauritius and Singapore. Mauritius is a "full democracy". In the run-up to the island's independence the Islamic community played an important, constructive role. Singapore, a "hybrid regime" according to the EIU, has 15 percent Muslim population and is at the GDP level of the richest Gulf countries.

17	Pakistan	97.00%	2722	3.92	24
18	United Arab Emirates	96.00%	29142	2.42	0
19	Gambia	95.00%	2136	4.39	0
20	Qatar	95.00%	33049	2.78	0
21	Djibouti	94.00%	2515	2.37	4
22	Egypt	94.00%	4836	3.90	0
23	Jordan	94.00%	5542	3.92	0
24	Senegal	94.00%	2007	5.37	6
25	Azerbaijan	93.40%	6171	3.31	10
26	Mali	90.00%	1300	5.99	5
27	Syria	90.00%	4117	2.36	0
28	Tajikistan	90.00%	1501	2.45	0
29	Turkmenistan	89.00%	8548	1.83	0
30	Bangladesh	88.30%	2287	6.11	14
31	Indonesia	88.00%	4323	6.41	29
32	Uzbekistan	88.00%	2283	1.85	0
33	Guinea	85.00%	2474	2.02	0
34	Kyrgyzstan	75.00%	2150	4.08	0
35	Sudan	73.00%	2729	2.90	41
36	Albania	70.00%	5702	5.91	0
37	Côte d'Ivoire	60.00%	1699	3.38	2
38	Sierra Leone	60.00%	888	3.57	0
39	Lebanon	59.70%	5457	5.82	17
40	Malaysia	59.00%	11858	5.98	8
41	Burkina Faso	50.00%	1396	3.72	0
42	Chad	50.00%	1770	1.65	29
43	Ethiopia*	50.00%	1044	4.72	32
44	Nigeria	50.00%	1213	3.52	4
45	Tanzania*	50.00%	801	5.18	0
46	Kazakhstan	47.00%	9294	3.62	0
47	Guinea-Bissau	45.00%	774	2.00	0
48	Ghana*	30.00%	2771	5.35	0
49	Togo	25.00%	1589	1.75	0
50	Kenya*	24.00%	1341	5.08	5
51	Cameroon	22.00%	2199	3.27	0
52	Benin	20.00%	1408	6.16	0
53	Malawi*	20.00%	706	4.97	0
54	Mozambique	20.00%	1500	5.28	0
55	Suriname	19.60%	6276	6.52	0
56	Russia*	19.00%	12096	5.02	7
57	Israel*	18.91%	30464	7.28	16
58	Uganda	16.00%	1626	5.14	25
59	Guyana	13.00%	4851	6.15	0

| 60 | Gabon | 12.00% | 7403 | 2.72 | 0 |

Note: * = not a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)

In the EIU survey, Mauritius (25/167) and India (35/167) are the two best-scoring countries with a substantial percentage of Muslims in their population; soon, France, the Netherlands and a few other European countries could be mentioned. Looking at the 60 countries in Table 3, the best score is for Israel at place 47/167, close to Bulgaria, Jamaica and Poland.[19] Indonesia, firmly in place at 65/167, is the first OIC member to appear on the EIU list. Bangladesh is placed at 75 and Palestine and Mali appear together with Malaysia at the bottom of the "Flawed democracies" group.

Results from the 1999/2000 *WVS*, if available, have been used by the EIU to compute the answers to some ten questions in the survey; I have substituted the actual results for Malaysia from the guesstimates in the table, leading to some changes in the sub-indices, but with no significant change in the overall score. Looking at the five component indices, Malaysia does well on "political culture", which measures the popularity of democratic ideals, but it does not do well on "civil liberties" (Palestine, Israel, and Malaysia are at the bottom three of the 54 "flawed democracies" on that measure). Malaysia also scores very poorly on "Electoral process and pluralism", but closer to the average of its group for the other two sub-indices.

Figure 9 shows the position of the 60 countries on the two dimensions of GDP per capita and the overall score of the EIU index for democracy. At top left, we note the six rich members of the Gulf Cooperation Council; the desirable top right corner is almost empty. Of the OIC member countries, both Malaysia and Turkey occupy the best places near the desirable combination of prosperity and political freedom.

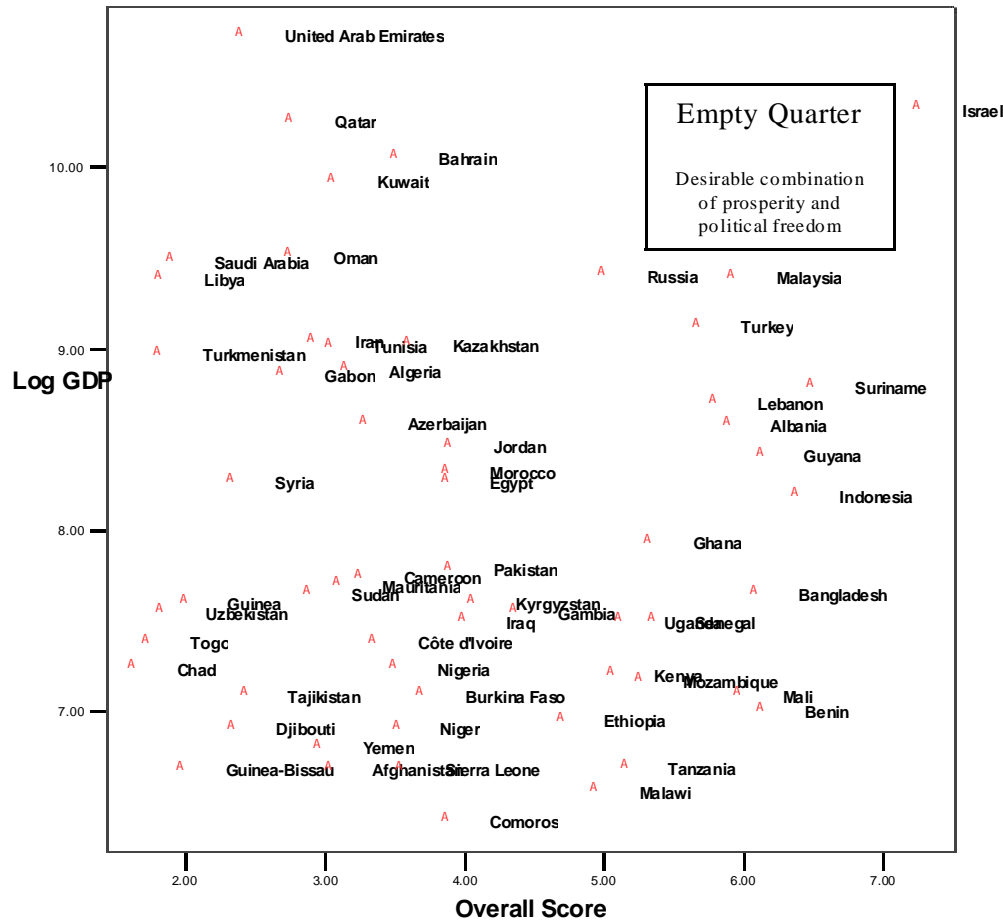[19] Muslims are in many ways second-class citizens in Israel.

Figure 9

Most discussion of the "empty quarter" in Figure 9 is focused on the Arab Middle East. For that region, Michael Mandelbaum has a list of reasons for why democracy has been so deficient:

1. Oil wealth seems a curse in many of these countries. Mandelbaum does not elaborate much on the mechanisms; however economists have pointed to a distorted local labour market where citizens think they don't have to train for work; to a small private sector that does not offer much employment; and to an overvalued exchange rate that encourages too many imports and too few local productions.
2. Governments rich with oil and gas revenues need very little consent from their citizens – money from the government can buy their acquiescence. The government does not need to make any effort to retain support from taxpayers, because tax revenues are augmented by easy oil and gas money.

3. Sharp divisions along tribal, ethnic or religious lines are yet another cause – there seems to be no culture of compromise between majority and minority groups.
4. The notion that democracy would be an import item from the hated West: "for much of their history, Arab Muslims saw themselves as engaged in an epic battle for global supremacy against the Christian West."[20]

Both the current Prime Minister and the better-known previous Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, of Malaysia often remind their fellow-Muslims that the Islamic world has a lot of catching-up to do. They point to historical, cultural and geographical reasons, but today much rhetoric in the West regrettably goes far beyond that and involves the holy Book of the Muslims and their Prophet. European politicians (usually on the fringe, but sometimes, as in the Netherlands, members of respectable parties in government coalitions) have claimed that Islam and democracy are incompatible at doctrinal level, and that Islam is alien to European civilization.

We have seen already from the *WVS* that it is not that Muslims do not appreciate democracy at the level of individuals; I now use national data for some further tests. By contrast to the well-known literature on economic development and institutions worldwide, I limit the data set to the OIC members and all other countries with some 20 percent Muslim population or more. It then becomes possible to use "percentage Muslims in the population" as well as its square (for non-linear effects) in simple OLS regressions. Table 4 shows regressions for GDP per capita. Correcting for oil and gas production, neither the percentage Muslim population nor its square is of relevance[21].

There could be an effect of percentage Muslim population on the two democracy indicators, and indirectly to GDP per capita, but the population share remains insignificant when we omit the variables from the EIU survey. The sub-index for "functioning of government" correlates better with GDP than the overall index

Malaysia, a significant oil producer since 1973, has the GDP that could be expected given its mineral wealth and the quality of its democratic institutions; Israel is the clear outlier in these regressions and much richer than expected on the basis of its "flawed democracy" and lack of mineral wealth. [22]

Table 4

	In GDP per capita			
Overall Score	0.19 (2.71)	0.14 (2.00)	-	-
EIU : II Functioning of Government	-	-	0.14 (2.83)	0.11 (2.31)
Percentage of Muslim Population	0.26 (0.77)	0.39 (1.29)	0.17 (0.52)	0.34 (1.17)
In Oil	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.03

[20] M. Mandelbaum, "Democracy Without America", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86 Nr. 5, Sept. 2007, pp.119-131
[21] The square function taken as (x-50) squared, with x the percentage Muslims in the population
[22] Note the position of Israel in figure 9.

	(1.25)	(1.51)	(0.88)	(1.26)
In Natural Gas	0.17 (3.81)	0.17 (4.07)	0.18 (3.88)	0.17 (4.14)
Dummy Variable for Malaysia	-	-0.07 (-0.11)	-	-0.03 (-0.04)
Dummy Variable for Israel	-	2.60 (3.91)		2.62 (4.03)
R^2	0.58	0.68	0.59	0.69

The next table (Table 5) shows some simple OLS regressions for the indices for democracy. The oil variable has the expected sign and is sometimes significant, providing some support for the "curse" hypothesis. The percentage of Muslims in the population has a negative sign and borders on significance. The quadratic variable is never significant. I have also tried the same specification without the oil and gas variables, in which case the population share and its square show up with some significance in two of the five specifications. Note that the fit of all these equations is much lower than in the equations for GDP per capita. [23]

Table 5
Indices for democracy in 60 countries

		Economic Intelligence Unit				
	Overall Score	I Electoral Process Pluralism	II Functioning of Government	III Political Participation	IV Political Culture	V Civil Liberties
In GDP per capita	0.63 (2.71)	0.92 (2.04)	0.92 (2.83)	0.37 (1.43)	0.30 (1.45)	0.65 (2.10)
Percentage of Muslim Population	-1.46 (-2.53)	-1.84 (-1.65)	-1.32 (-1.64)	-1.81 (-2.81)	-0.57 (-1.11)	-1.75 (-2.30)
In Oil	-0.11	-0.23	-0.07	-0.12	-0.07	-0.08

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[23] Notes:
1. EIU indices all on a 1-10 scale with "overall score" the mean of the five sub-indices.
2. Alternative specification without energy variables:

II Functioning of Government
= 2.18 + 0.27 InGDP – 2.96 Percentage of Muslim Population + 0.06 Percentage of Muslim^2
  (1.12) (1.12)   (-2.82)   (1.61)
$R^2 = 0.15$

III Political Participation
= 3.98 + 0.08 InGDP – 1.77 Percentage of Muslim Population - 0.02 Percentage of Muslim^2
  (2.48) (0.42)   (-2.04)   (-0.52)
R2 = 0.17

	(-2.08)	(-2.18)	(-0.91)	(-2.04)	(-1.33)	(-1.12)
In Natural Gas	-0.08 (-0.85)	-0.19 (-1.08)	-0.13 (-1.02)	0.03 (0.24)	0.04 (0.49)	-0.13 (-1.09)
R^2	0.34	0.34	0.19	0.26	0.08	0.25

Table 5 above includes one more column for the sixty countries that are either members of the OIC or have a large Muslim population: the number of years of ethnic warfare. The chance of ethnic warfare in this group of countries was 40 percent. Malaysia is shown with 8 years; this refers to the period before independence when the British together with most Malays were fighting a Chinese-dominated insurgency (although some left-leaning Malays joined the insurgency, especially in its early years).

The table ranks the countries according to the percentage Muslims in the population. Splitting the 60 nations in three equal-size groups results in this pattern for the average number of years of ethnic warfare:

100-94 percent Muslim citizens	5 years
94-59 percent Muslim citizens	7 years
50-19 percent Muslim citizens	6 years

Many economists have followed Alberto Alesina in looking at ethnic or ethnic-linguistic fragmentation as a cause of poor economic development. Copying the microeconomic Herfensdahl index used in measuring industrial concentration, they have worked with a calculation that makes fragmentation worse if there are many fragments. An alternative view would suggest that political compromise is most fragile in situations approaching a 50-50 split in the population.

Malaysia's politics since independence have been permeated by an official rhetoric of beautiful and necessary multiculturalism. Quite strong restrictions on free speech and expensive and pervasive ethnic preference policies (more in section 5) have always been defended as necessary to maintain that social harmony. The data for ethnic warfare and more precisely, the large number of countries in the middle of the table with civil wars, suggest that Malaysia's modest score on the democracy indices can be seen at least in part as a risk-avoiding national strategy to preclude a much worse outcome. There is no ongoing civil war as in Sri Lanka; no chaos as in Nigeria; no mass religion-inspired killings as in Northern Ireland or former Yugoslavia. The preferential policies are costly, but Malaysia has been stable for long periods of time, bad economic times have always been short-lived, showing the resilience of the economy, and foreign investments by Japan, the West and, more recently, the rich gulf countries, have held up well. Malaysia and Singapore (which does not have ethnic preference policies, but imposes even stricter limits on many freedoms than Malaysia) are by far the richest and healthiest countries in South-East and South Asia.

The counter-factual – a policy of no extra help for the **Bumiputera**s, much more freedom of expression and a level political playing field for opposition parties – can only be speculated about. Such liberal alternative policies would have been a lot less expensive and would have helped Malaysia on all rankings for "freedom" and "democracy", but would only have been preferable to the actual policies if the risk of a Sri-Lankan or Nigerian outcome had remained minimal. The mere fact that we can label such outcomes with the names of other countries that were similar to Malaysia once, and are more violent, corrupt and poor at present, shows that there is a true balance of risks and that the policy choices in Malaysia have that line of defense. There just remains the moral complication that those responsible for the choices come from the same local elites (predominantly Malay) that benefited most in financial terms, and that the restrictions on freedom result in a politics that are much more restrained and guarded than in Holland or Denmark, but also a lot more corrupt – see the next section.

5. A directed democracy

Today, Malaysia is an upper middle-income economy, with GDP per capita at the level of Western Europe in the mid-1960s. Before WW II, Malaya was Britain's richest colony, but a cruel Japanese occupation brought down GDP per capita to a level hardly higher than that of war-free Sri Lanka. After the war, economic times remained difficult due to continued nationalist and socialist uprisings, particularly from the Chinese-led Malayan Communist Party that involved many left-leaning Malays as well. Only in the 1970s did strong economic growth return – for the first time after the rubber-roaring twenties.

After a sustained period of strong industrialization, investment as a percentage of GDP rose to over 40 percent in the mid 1990s. Bad marginal capital-output ratios showed that this was unsustainable – but unfortunately, more upon hindsight than at that time. It would have been more obvious if investment increases from 40 to 45 percent of GDP, but economic growth only moves up from 6 to 6.5 percent, that much of the investment consists of overbuilding in commercial real estate or white-elephant (and corruption-plagued) prestige projects. After the severe 1997-8 financial crisis, investment stabilized at a lower level, but still supported 5-5 ½ percent economic growth in a normal year. Services, currently 53 percent of GDP, are now increasing by about 1 percentage point per year. Population growth has slowed: the average number of children per female has fallen from over 6 at independence to less than 3, so that 5 ½ percent growth amounts to 4 percent growth in GDP per capita.

Taxes are low, largely because of oil and gas revenues from the Malaysian sections of the South China Sea. The country is self-sufficient in energy and exports (including smuggling because of controlled prices to Thailand. At current levels of production, estimated oil reserves may last another 22 years; natural gas reserves another 39 years. (Government of Malaysia, 2008 budget submission).

Not only are Malaysians six times as rich as at independence, they can also enjoy life a lot longer. Life expectancy is now at 73 years, up from 52 years at independence. Then, there was one doctor for every 8229 Malaysians; there is one for every 1214 Malaysian in 2007. Infant mortality is down from 57.6 per 1000 at independence to 6.6 last year.

Malaysians have achieved all of this under the leadership of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the dominant political party. In Japan, the LDP has been out of power for nine months in fifty years; UMNO has done even better: it has lost a few State elections, but has won all nine national elections. The party governs together with a varying number of smaller coalition partners, but always involving the Malayan Chinese Organization (MCA), and the smaller Malayan Indian Congress (MIC). Because of single-member constituencies, all partners need agreement over a single pro-government candidate. As a result, UMNO policies have to be somewhat acceptable to its Chinese and Indian counterparts (see section 6).

In the final pre-independence years and continuing into the first 12 years of independence, Malaysia had elected mayors, ethnic Chinese in all three principal cities, Kuala Lumpur (capital), Penang (electronics center) and Ipoh (1920's tin boom town). Since then, the government has provided rural Malays with much more assistance to relocate to the capital city than to rural Chinese or Indians who have had to make their own arrangements, but the Chinese presence is still strongly felt in KL. If mayoral and municipal elections were held today, at least two, but likely all three towns could be dominated by secular or Chinese-dominated parties. In reality, KL has an appointed (UMNO) mayor with some power over land zoning and urban renewal, and hence a large and unchecked power of rent seeking: local elections have been abolished after the severe racial riots of 1969 and there is no sign of a re-introduction.

This means that training in political skills is supposedly only available in UMNO and the other national parties, and that local politics cannot provide a platform for different views. One big difference between party politics in Japan – rated a "full democracy" - and politics in Malaysia - bordering between a "flawed democracy" and a "hybrid regime" according to the EIU – is that Tokyo has an independent "mayor". Leaders of other cities in Japan are also vocally involved in politics. This contrast with Malaysia is more important than the historical observation that Japan has had one slight 9-month hiatus in the rule of the DJP, whereas in Malaysia, the ruling coalition has not yet lost an election. Ironically, the history of the MCA, the main Chinese party in the ruling coalition, began with the municipal elections for the Kuala Lumpur City Council in 1952, but for almost forty years now, the Malay elites have not allowed for the *choc des opinions* springing from local democracy.

Malays expect a lot from their political party: UMNO is reputed to be the richest political party in the world (in part because of its ownership of major toll concessionaires on roads in Malaysia). UMNO's headquarters and its convention center in Kuala Lumpur are short of spectacular and the party enjoys a vigorous party life. Party leaders strive to be moral teachers as well as politicians, and UMNO works hard at fostering a spirit and sense of family and nationalism; sometimes to misplaced excess when a youthful party leader raised a *keris* (an ancient Malay weapon) to invoke the "Malay warrior spirit" with disregard to sensitivities, much to the chagrin and dismay of other political and ethnic groups. (In 1969, at the height of the racial riots, an UMNO Youth leader brandished the *keris* and promised to bathe it in Chinese blood.) Senior party leaders realize that they govern a multicultural society and collaborate with partners on projects and work – however, they combine strong ethnic preferential policies for the Malays and other **Bumiputera** groups with a rhetoric that emphasizes the beauties of multiculturalism. In a recent TV-advertisement for multicultural Malaysia, the Prime Minister extends his invitation to tourists to visit Malaysia and participate in the various religious and cultural festivals of the country. He mentions Christmas, then Deepavali, the Hindu Festival of Lights, the Lunar New Year Festival for the Chinese, Buddhist Wesak, concluding with Hari Raya (Eidl Fitr). That courteous attitude is common.

By contrast, the Malaysian Chinese prefer a different political culture. They were unhappy for nearly two years when a few of their newspapers, which were independently

owned, were acquired in 2001 by the MCA, the largest Chinese partner in the government coalition, for the main purpose of political propaganda. Chinese Malaysians seem to like separate channels of expression for communal concerns: social and trade groups as well as Chinese schools and colleges and newspapers should be strong, because they maintain some independence from the political pillar.

An Islamic opposition party won one seat in the first national elections in 1955. Today, its successor PAS, although not terribly influential in the national parliament, has governed the state of Kelantan continuously since 1990. State elections (coinciding with national elections) have been fair (rumours of phantom votes being included have never been proven), albeit that the national government is in an incomparably better position to make expensive promises of roads, bridges or universities to the voters, because the state tax base is very limited.

There have been a few declarations of a state of emergency in the country's history: for almost two years after the ethnic violence in Kuala Lumpur in 1969, for a brief period in the northern state of Kelantan in the course of a power struggle between BN and the Islamic party PAS., and sometimes in the two states on Northern Borneo where there are some 30 different ethnic groups living in difficult terrain, and the national coalition has had difficulties in administration. When a largely Christian party won an election on Sabah in 1990, UMNO was reputedly associated with a shadowy scheme to import Muslims from Southern Philippines in order to change the results of the election. [24] Malaysian politics are restrained in parliament, but vigorous in matters of maintaining the grip of the ruling coalition. The resulting continuity and stability have strong positive aspects, as argued in section 4 also help explain why the armed forces have always upheld the constitution. Recall that Malaysians declare in the *WVS* that government by the army is not necessarily bad, even though the possibility has been entirely hypothetical.

Much of the current political practice in Malaysia is the result of actions taken during the emergency after the May 1969 ethnic riots. Clashes between Chinese celebrating national election gains and angry Malays who insisted on *ketuanan Melayu* (Malay supremacy), led to the death of 196 citizens according to official government statistics, but possibly many times more.

The Malaysian government abolished all local government elections and suspended Parliament, and restricted freedom including the freedom to discuss ethnic and religious issues in parliament and in the media. It also embarked on very expensive ethnic preference policies for the Malays and other **Bumiputera** groups. With the discovery of oil in the South China Sea from 1973 onwards, energy proceeds became available to finance these policies which are still active and allow for preferential affirmative actions

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[24]   "Shadowy": the financing and the organization of this mass political immigration has never become clear, in part because of possible links to the insurrection and the continuing terrorist networks in the Southern Philippines.

to all ***Bumiputera***s in the areas of education, housing, government employment and business formation.

Freedom of assembly was limited also – political meetings required a police permit and students were not allowed to participate in any political activities. Freedom in this area is considerably wider, though, than in Singapore. Trade unions were allowed, but the law contravenes ILO rules by prohibiting broad-based national unions.

Many Malaysians criticize the fetish of freedom in the West and are accepting of the idea that hate speech should be outlawed. Part of the price for this imposed restriction, though, is that the culture of restraint applies as well to discussions of corruption and to the debate on the continued insistence of preference policies for the Malays and other ***Bumiputera***s.

According to Transparency International, Malaysia ranks 43 out of 163 countries on the 2007 Corruption Perception index, about par for the level of GDP per capita. The ranking is discussed freely in the media by the local chairman of Transparency, but the naming of individual politicians and their party organizations is restricted to critical websites only. In part because of Malaysia's ambitions in design and IT, there is a general policy of non-interference with websites, and some well-known sites carry colorful criticisms of prominent politicians. Some UMNO ministers have called for an extension of the media legislation to include the internet.

Turning to the relevant aspects of religious life, a major stabilizing factor is that each state in Malaysia has its own *mufti*s who make pronouncements on Islamic religious issues. As an aside: in Islamic Banking, the government wisely promoted a single Syariah Board of Scholars connected to Bank Negara (the National Bank) to accept or reject Islamic finance products. Such centralization is more convenient than current practices in the Arab region and has helped to promote Malaysia as a hub for Islamic Finance.

Other Islamic matters, however, are the prerogative of the state governments, with the national government playing an advisory role only: there is no national "super-*mufti*". This results in more freedom and variety in the religious debate. At the time of this writing, the most visible *mufti* is also the country's youngest. Dr. Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin (35), the religious leader of the state of Perlis is often in the news. He provokes Muslims into serious thinking in some instances:

- Malaysia has a religious police that occasionally snoops on the private behavior of Muslims and sometimes on non-Muslims too. Can the kissing Muslim couple on the park bench show proof of being married or should they be charged with indecent behaviour and close proximity under the Islamic definition of *khalwat*? Are Muslims having too much of a good time in a disco dancing? During Ramadan, do the good Muslims wait until the sun has officially set to start their evening meal in the food court? In the larger cities the religious police have almost disappeared, because too often they have harassed children of political strongmen and have made gross errors in their misplaced enthusiasm for nabbing

couples in close proximity. In some rural areas and backwater states, the religious police are still active, but Dr. Asri opposes the underlying *khalwat* legislation, claiming that some of the tactics used by the religious police are in contravention of individual rights.

- In 2005 and 2006, the Hari Raya (Eidl Fitr) festival at the end of Ramadan coincided with the Hindu festival of Deepavali. Many companies placed advertisements in the newspaper wishing their patrons a happy "Deepa-raya" (a felicitous greeting combining the words "**Deepa**vali" and "Hari **Raya**"). Some conservative Muslims objected; the *mufti* argues for tolerance.

- Many Malay Muslims feel that Arabic greeting "Assalamu Alaikum" is improper for non-Muslims to use. This is because they regards Arabic as the revered language of their religious book, the Quran, and have mistakenly perceived the intertwining of the Arabic language and Islam to mean one and the same thing. Therefore, they wrongly believe that non-Muslims may not be permitted to use the Arabic *salam* in the greeting to Muslims. The *mufti* says: "Islam teaches us that an honorable greeting must be replied appropriately, and that non-Muslims who greet us with the *salam* truly wish us peace."

Such examples illustrate how much of the possible tension between mosque and state can spring from issues with a high symbolic content. Mechanisms to defuse these tensions are hard to find in Europe – there are lessons in Malaysia here (and also in Indonesia) which the West could learn.

Often democracy is discussed together with human rights. The EIU study does include "civil liberties" as one of its five components. In that area, Malaysia falls short – as do many other countries, including a large number of rich, developed countries. In terms of numbers of vulnerable people directly affected, shortcomings not related to civil liberties are more important – again in common with many other countries, including rich Western nations. The country is often harsh in its treatment of legal and illegal immigrants, in family law and in Islamic religious law. Many legal immigrants from Bangladesh and other poor countries pay thousands of dollars to an agent in their home country in order to obtain a job in Malaysia and are then cheated upon arrival. The crucial crimes are committed overseas, but legal redress in Malaysia often seems very difficult or near impossible. Malaysia also comes under criticism in the area of human trafficking (see, for instance, the website of the US State Department and websites of human rights organizations). Medical care for low-paid workers and compensation for work-related injuries could be significantly improved, given that Malaysia is an upper-middle income country and should be able to afford these things. Most of these serious issues are debated in the media, and criticism from a human rights perspective is commonly allowed.

Even though bad things happen to large numbers of legal and illegal immigrants, individual hard cases that involve Islamic religious law and related family law get much more attention in the international media; no doubt from the fascination the West has with Islam and Syariah law. In contrast to Indonesia, the freedom-of-religion clause in

the constitution (Article 11) applies only to non-Muslims; in Malaysia all Malays are Muslims by law without an option to choose another faith or to have no religious beliefs. Thus, according to Article 121 of the Constitution (an addition from the Mahathir period), all Malays are subject to Syariah courts for issues involving their religion, Islam.

As a consequence, there are painful court cases when ex-Muslims try to be recognized as Christians. A representative recent case was that of Lina Joy, an ex-Muslim who after some eight years as a practicing Catholic applied to have her religion stated as "Christian" on her identity card; necessary also for a legal marriage to a Christian. She lost on appeal by a majority vote of two Muslim judges against one non-Muslim. The lawyer, Sulaiman Abdullah, who represented the Islamic religious authorities, spoke for the winning side. He made an interesting sociological argument in a subsequent interview, claiming that Malaysia needed to guard against the deterioration in its political culture: the first generation of Malaysian politicians after independence had benefited from a UK education in the spirit of public service. The Mahathir generation (named after the prime minister (1981-2003) who supervised the industrialization of Malaysia) became more selfish; the patrician sense of responsibility was lost. Now there will be a reaction:

> "As governments develop, then constraints have to be developed as well...From what I can see, the non-Muslim community is not reverting back to religion for any particular perception of how the state should be run. ...perhaps many of our Muslim leaders are not leaders in the true Islamic sense of taking responsibility. You shouldn't construe your constitution as such that you permit a moral vacuum. Read your constitution with the Islamic background, and then make your criticisms[25]."

Fears and criticisms of the West resonate in this lawyer's abhorrence of a "moral vacuum" and that is a position to be taken seriously (see section 6), but it is regrettable that this and similar judicial judgments are seen as necessary from that perspective.

Other tragic instances occur over the proper burial rites for people whose religion is disputed. Non-Muslim claimants tend to lose, because the civil courts send such cases back to the Syariah courts. Of course, apostasy has to be condemned to some extent by the Syariah courts, but apostates receive no protection from the civil courts either.

The Malay politicians see no way of repairing the inconsistencies in the law. When all non-Muslim ministers sent a joint memorandum to the Prime Minister in 2005 asking for a review of the legal provisions on religious freedom, widespread protests by conservative Muslims forced the Prime Minister to request from his colleagues a withdrawal of what was no more than a request for discussion. The means by which the new Family Law was passed in December 2005 (although subsequently not implemented) also reflect the impasse; 16 female BN senators opposed to the law were forced to vote for it against their will. [26] In 2007, a planned visit by the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury was canceled, because of pressure from Muslim politicians.

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[25] Interview in *Off the Edge*, Nr. 31, July 2007, pp. 38-43).
[26]   See the article on Malaysia on the website www.freedomhouse.org

When the Prime Minister's wife passed away in late 2005, there was a joint prayer service for Christians, Buddhists and Hindus, but the Muslims declined to participate. Muslim politicians feared interfaith religious dialogues, as they perceive that these dialogues would demote and signal that Islam is merely one of the major religions in the country, and not the supreme one.

Interfaith activities cannot involve Muslims, and the media is very cautious in discussing issues related to religion. Media and public intellectuals exercise self-censorship and sometimes the government comes down hard on newspapers that cross over the line. There is no judicial review possible when the government closes down a publication or forces a printer out of business. All this is in opposition to those countries in Europe where freedom is seen wrongly as an absolute value. The next section of the chapter tries to comment some more on that contrast.

6. Islam and democracy

I return to two of Mandelbaum's reasons for why democracy has been so deficient in the Arab Middle East, the birthplace and heartland of Islam:

(3) Sharp divisions along tribal, ethnic or religious lines – no culture of compromise between majority and minorities;
(4) The notion that democracy would be an import from the hated West: "for much of their history, Arab Muslims saw themselves as engaged in an epic battle for global supremacy against the Christian West."

Heavily relying on existing analysis by political philosophers and historians of religion, I offer some relevant quotations and connecting remarks on (3) and (4), focusing not on the Arab Middle East but on the Islamic world in general and on the Muslim minorities in Europe. It helps, then, with (3) to distinguish between:

> 3a: citizens who identify with their ethnic or religious groups and do not have "multiple identities";

> 3b: politics that is divisive over issues that are highly symbolic - headscarves in Turkey, religious jewelry in the UK, abortion in the US, Muslim cemeteries and mosques in Denmark, etc.

In (4) one wants to separate:

> 4a: freedom as a fetish, as if freedom were an absolute value;

> 4b: resistance to typical western models about religion and state: the US way of separating church and state, or the French outcome of a long battle between the Catholic Church and the state over education.

3a: Single or multiple identities

In his treatise *A History of Islamic Societies*, Ira Lapidus writes:

> "Islam used to be one element of the multilayered sense of self held by most Muslims. Islam was joined to family, village, patronage network, clan, tribe, language-group, religious sect and political identity. Complex cross-cutting identities were a moderating factor in political behavior. However, the destruction of historical forms of small communities and the reduction of peoples to an undifferentiated mass mobilized for political struggle, the decline of *ulama* and *sufi* authority and the emergence of a new radical religious intelligentsia, and the global forces of media and migration have for many people reduced the choice of

identity to one between Islam and the secular world of nation states. This polarization has had devastating worldwide consequences." [27]

Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen has devoted his monograph *Identity and Violence* to a related issue: the risk that people are classified and judged according to one attribute only. Sen pleads for recognition of multiple identities and points to the risks of a society where people are seen only as "Muslims" or "Hindus". He thinks about his native India, but also about Muslims in Europe who often are seen as representatives of their faith only. European policymakers who look for "representative leaders of the Muslim community" in their countries should heed Sen's warning of the danger that European Muslims are stereotypically forced into this one-dimensional perspective of being recognized for their religious beliefs only.

The great novelist Joseph Conrad makes the same point about the dangers of a single identity in his "Author's note" for *Under Western Eyes* where he describes the mentality of his main character who is tempted by anarchism in pre-revolutionary Russia:

> "If he is slightly abnormal it is only in his sensitiveness to his position. Being nobody's child he feels rather more keenly than another would that he is a Russian – or he is nothing".

European politicians who claim that Islam is alien to the continent's heritage not only make a historical error, but also encourage voters to see themselves as non-Muslims and the other as Muslim. Tragic examples of what can happen at the end of that road come from all over the world. Protestants and Catholics were slaughtering each other until a few years ago in Northern Ireland, and former Yugoslavia has witnessed the mass murder of 7000 Bosnian Muslims in 1994. Under the Ottoman Empire and even under dictator Tito (1945-1980), Christians and Muslims lived in the same streets, worked together and intermarried. A few years of religious polarization by bad politicians were enough to incite religious hatred that caused the largest massacre in Europe since WW II.

3b: symbolized, non-negotiable political polarization

Symbolic politics could be re-interpreting the Spanish Civil war, re-visiting the 1389 battle between Serbs and Turks on Kosovo field in the Balkans, objecting to a Greek Orthodox cross on a woman's necklace in London just last year, 2006, defacing a Jewish sign on a war memorial in a heavily populated Muslim area in Amsterdam, disputing the exact allowed height of a minaret in Rotterdam, or fighting the headscarf battles in France and Germany.

European politicians continue to succumb to the temptation to engage in religious polarization. In 2007, a prominent Dutch opposition politician published an open letter in a national newspaper calling for a nationwide ban of the Quran. 19 percent of the public agreed; 68 percent approved of the paper's decision to prominently publish the letter. The

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[27] Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, p.835

Dutch government quickly distanced itself from the call to ban the Quran, but 31 percent of those polled disapproved of the rapid reaction. 13 percent of those polled reckon that Islam contributes to Dutch culture; 51 percent see Islam as a threat.

We saw in section 3 above how a majority of the Dutch population sees Islam as a "threat to our culture". What is even worse: when asked which political parties possess "the proper ideas on how to deal with Islam in the Netherlands" (more than one positive answer allowed), the only two parties out of ten represented in parliament that scored more than 20 percent approval are one opposition party that has a prohibition of the Quran as its main issue, and another opposition party that is opposed to the idea that Islam has any place in Western civilization.17 percent of the Dutch are optimistic about the integration of Islam and Muslims in the country; 65 percent are pessimistic.[28] Even though there are one million Dutch citizens who profess Islam, only 37 percent of the Dutch agree with a social-democrat minister who suggested that in the far future one could speak of a mixed culture with Jewish, Christian and Islamic elements. 55 percent disagree with such a vision, which the minister was careful to express as nothing but a very long-term forecast.

The history of Spain provides other such warnings. After the glorious experience of Al-Andalus, there was no religious freedom in Spain between 1492 – when the most catholic monarchs expelled the remaining Muslims - and 1978 when Spain had a GDP per capita quite similar to that of Malaysia today. In 1953 when Spain was at the similar level of development with Malaysia in the early 1970s, a concordat between Franco's Spain and the Vatican confirmed the Catholic nature of the country and "gave the Church a strong voice in education and social morality".[25] After an impressive period of democratization and modernization under the alternating right-left administrations of Suarez, Gonzales, and Aznar, Spanish politics now seem at risk of becoming polarized again in an unhealthy way. Seventy years after the Spanish civil war, when horrendous acts were committed on both sides, left-wing politicians want to recall crimes committed by Franco's army and condoned by the Church, whilst right-wing spokesman recount massacres of nuns and priests and other Republican horrors.

One more vignette out of too many that 20th century history provides is Nigeria. In table 9 above which ranks OIC members according to the percentage Muslims in the population, the county is almost next to Malaysia. The recent history and the outcomes for economic development, however, are very different as well. Africa's most populous nation has grown by some 50 percent in terms of GDP per capita since independence - Malaysia has done ten times as well, growing by over 500 percent. Nigeria suffered nine military coups since independence in 1960 and its politics continue to be poisoned by religious divisions. Nobel Prize winner for Literature, Wole Solyinka, jailed for 28 months - much of it in solitary confinement - described his country as a society where

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"power and control remain the playthings of imbeciles, psychopaths and predators."[29]

4a: freedom as an absolute value

Anyone who needs a stark reminder that freedom is not an absolute value, might recall some of the history of the US. This country has a stronger tradition of libertarianism than Europe; but look at the irrelevance of these advocates of freedom – where freedom is defined as the right to do and speak one's own thing – during the greatest advance for true freedom in recent times - the civil-rights movement in the 1960s:

> "To the extent that libertarians are remembered at all for their role, it is not for marching on Selma but rather for their enthusiastic support of states' rights and the freedom of white racists to associate with one another.[30]"

In Holland, which was once tolerant, society is now experimenting temporarily with the notion that freedom is an absolute value. This notion has not worked well: it has generated more hate speech than in surrounding countries and established a culture of fear. Ironically, while the freedom to insult religious beliefs has almost no limits, other, more practical freedoms are becoming limited. Newspapers reported of a jeweler in a poor, Moroccan neighborhood in Amsterdam who suffered over forty robberies before giving up; the mayor and the minister branded this "unacceptable", but the word meant nothing more than "somewhat regrettable". The implicit meaning of this is an actual lack of freedom to ply this particular trade in a particularly difficult part of the city. While every Dutch citizen has the freedom to abuse Islam, the prophet Muhammad and all Muslims in the most extreme of terms, ironically, the freedom to run a legitimate business in a difficult neighborhood is not guaranteed or protected by the state.

Holland has a long tradition and history of working out political disagreements; therefore one can be optimistic that the current unhealthy polarization around Islam will only be a temporary blemish on Dutch society. However, in countries with less well developed institutions, extreme freedom of speech leads to fear, revulsion and violence. Malaysian politicians – Muslim and non-Muslim alike – try to protect society from such a culture. The American political scientist Jacob Levy argues that policies towards religious or ethnic minorities should primarily avoid a culture of fear.[31] This is a useful guideline to design and implement parameters for the limits on the freedom of hate speech.

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[29] from his "You must set forth at dawn", 2007, London, Methuen, quoted in The Times Literary supplement, 17-8-2007, p. 9

[30] Hymowitz, Kate "Freedom Fetishists", *Commentary*, Vol. 124 No. 2, Sept 2007, p. 52

[31] Levy, *The Multiculturalism of Fear*, pp. 33-38

In considering the freedom-of-speech issue in an Islamic society, it also helps to remember that:

"For traditional Muslims, the converse of tyranny was not liberty but justice. Justice in this context meant essentially two things: that the ruler was there by right and not by usurpation, and that he governed according to God's law, or at least to recognizable moral and legal principles." [32]

4b: democracy on the American or French model

Western writers often perceive wrongly that "modernization" means becoming more Western. For fifty years, beginning with Daniel Lerner's "The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East", American specialists have assumed: "What the West is, the Middle East seeks to become"[33]

In his new book *The Stillborn God* Mark Lilla makes the same point:

> "Time and again we must remind ourselves that we [in the West]... are the exceptions. We have little reason to expect other civilizations to follow our unusual path, which was opened up by a unique, theological-political crisis within Christendom." [34]

The European thinkers of the 18th century will not be the guides to modernization at all times and in all places:

> "In so far as one uses classical secularization theory to characterize Islam as undeveloped with respect to internalization, privatization, pluralism and democracy, one is using precisely the criteria which derive from Western developments and the Gestalt initiated by the Reformation and the Enlightenment. One is also ignoring the huge varieties of possibilities within contemporary Islam.[35]   And: "Perhaps [secularization] could be criticized as an ideological and philosophical imposition *on* history rather than an inference *from* history."[36]

The rise of science and what Lilla calls "the Great Separation" between political authority and religious institutions occurred in Europe in the same period – and that has tempted many to assert that secularization is as inevitable and irreversible as the development of a scientific worldview. But the one is universal and an export from Europe to the rest of the world; the other more a coincidence particular to time and place.

It is likely that Islamic nations will find more than one way to combine democratic politics with the need for an ethical foundation for society. The history of Islam illustrates

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[32] Lewis, What went wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response, Oxford, OUP, 2002, p.54
[33] [quoted in Bulliet, The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization, p. 122].
[34] Review of Mark Lilla's book in the *International Herald Tribune*, Sept. 15, 2007
[35] Martin, Secularization, p. 64
[36] Martin, p. 19.

different models, since in its initial expansion, Islam merged state and religious communal organizations, but later Islamic societies developed separate state and religious institutions.[37] The image of a theocracy remains alive because of Iran, but is an exception in the history of Islam. Nearly always, state and religious organizations are separate, but there is a long history of "Muslim religious organizations organizing the populace"[38]

Nevertheless, "Islam's view of the place of religion in society is maximal, whereas in Christianity the latent impact of the difference between inner and outer, and between god and Caesar, leads, under the pressure of Protestantism, Enlightenment and secularization, to a limited view of the place of religion."[39]

Malaysia's Prime Minister keeps stressing the same point: "For the Muslims, the teachings of Islam serve as their guide for doing all things, whether conducting their affairs in the public domain or practicing the religion in the privacy of their homes. For the Muslim faithful, irrespective of whether he or she is first and foremost a Muslim. When dealing with Muslim, one cannot separate them from their religion because that is their way of life." [40]Therefore it is a mistake to hope that Muslim politicians will try to keep religion out of politics. Historically:

> "Islam has been the organizing principle of individual behavior and of small-scale community life, but only indirectly an influence upon the state. Yet Muslims yearn for an ideal world in which the state, as well as the small community and the individual is built around Islamic principles – a yearning for an integral Islamic universe." [41]

Philosopher John Rawls has described what is and is not acceptable by way of foundations for a liberal society in his article on "Public Reason". Rawls explains how judges and parliamentarians should never try to impose arguments derived from personal religious views which carry no conviction with non-believers. He calls a discourse that is acceptable to all reasonable persons "public reason". Rawls cautions that all societies need an agreement about public reason and that it is a mistake to think that American or European liberal societies are self-sustaining:

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[37] Lapidus, pp. 182-187

[38] Lapidus, p. 187

[39] Martin, p.197

[40] Official Speech of the Prime Minster of Malaysia, Dato' Seri Abdullah Badawi, to the President and Chairman of Meiji University entitled "Bridging the Gap Between Cultures and Civilizations", 22 May 2007

[41] Lapidus, p. 828

"A third general objection is that the idea of public reason is unnecessary and serves no purpose in a well established constitutional democracy. Its limits and constraints are useful primarily when a society is sharply divided and contains many hostile religious associations and secular groups, each striving to become the controlling political force. In the political societies of the European democracies and the United States these worries, so the objection goes, are idle.

However, this objection is incorrect and sociologically faulty. For without citizens' allegiance to public reason and their honoring the duty of civility, divisions and hostilities between doctrines are bound in time to assert themselves, should they not already exist. Harmony and concord among doctrines and a people's affirming public reason are unhappily not a permanent condition of social life. Rather, harmony and concord depend on the vitality of the public political culture and on citizens' being devoted to and realizing the ideal of public reason. Citizens could easily fall into bitterness and resentment, once they no longer see the point of affirming an ideal of public reason and come to ignore it."[42]

He then makes the crucial distinction between tolerant and intolerant worldviews, using the term "comprehensive" for a worldview which may be religious: "…even though our comprehensive doctrines are irreconcilable and cannot be compromised, nevertheless citizens who affirm reasonable doctrines may share reasons of another kind, namely, public reasons given in terms of political conceptions of justice. …Reasonable comprehensive doctrines do not reject the essentials of a constitutional democratic polity….Of course, fundamentalist religious doctrines and autocratic and dictatorial rulers will reject the ideas of public reason and deliberative democracy. They will say that democracy leads to a culture contrary to their religion, or denies the values that only autocratic or dictatorial rule can secure. They assert that the religiously true, or the philosophically true, overrides the politically reasonable. We simply say that such a doctrine is politically unreasonable. Within political liberalism nothing more need be said." [43]

Christianity and Islam have been both tolerant and intolerant in different times and places. The debate about Islam and democracy currently often uses the label "Islamism" to indicate different tensions between religious convictions and democratic government. At least three different risks get mention in that debate:

- **Symbolic politics**. All politicians have to manipulate symbols; but religious symbols can paralyze politics with disagreements over issues which are non-negotiable because people are busy waging God's battle. One can compromise just about any item in the government budget and about the jail terms for different

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[42] Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited", *The University of Chicago Law Review*, Vol.64 No3, Summer 1997, pp. 802-3

[43] Rawls, pp. 805-6

offenses. One cannot easily find a middle way over holy places, whether in Jerusalem or in India. When Indian Hindus destroyed the dilapidated Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, claiming the mosque was built on a Hindu holy site – marking the birth of Rama, killings and counter-killings continued ten years later when over 1000 Muslims and Hindus died in Gujarat.

- **The specter of Syariah law:** the fear of intolerant imposition of strict Muslim rules on non-Muslims as well as unacceptable treatment of women. I must limit the issue to two quotations from Lapidus on the latter issue:

  "Despite the emphasis on the security and status of women, the Quran did not establish equality of rights for men and women. While the spirit of its teaching encouraged mutuality between husband and wife, and a greater sensitivity to the personal and moral worth of individuals, the prerogatives of males were left fundamentally intact. The Quranic ideal and Muhammad's example were probably much more favorable to women than was later Arabic and Muslim practice" [44]

  "In many countries men found themselves economically and socially oppressed, often humiliated by political helplessness, and wanted to be compensated by control over women." [45]

- "**one man, one vote, one time**" : the fear that an Islamist political party achieves power and refuses to play by the rules of democracy. In his "Ruling, Not Governing", Steven Cook explains how in Morocco and Egypt Islamic political parties have had to struggle in a system dominated by the military: sometimes conservative Muslims seem useful to the generals, at other times conservative Muslims are jailed or worse by the military. Quite possibly these countries as well as Algeria provide cases that are special; Malaysia and Indonesia have a very different experience as has Muslim Turkey.

As Rawls emphasizes, a religious doctrine has leading religious moral values which are not those of Kant or Mill, but it may endorse a constitutional democratic society and recognize its public reason.[46] A market economy requires middle-class norms, but not necessarily through a protestant heritage. Self-discipline, tolerance and compassion can spring from different sources, and it would be bizarre to claim that Islam could not provide that foundation. Prominent Catholic Theologian Hans Kung is convinced:

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[44] Lapidus, p. 26

[45] Lapidus, p. 863

[46] Rawls, p. 803

> "The Quran, like the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament, can give such a global ethic a solid basis and spell it out in a convincing way…. However, a humanistic ethic, with no religious foundation, can also play this social role"[47]

Tolerance will be a key value for a society where people with different religious views have to agree on "public reason". It is a mistake to assume that such tolerance and agreement on "public reason" should result into a watered-down version of Christian, Jewish or Muslim doctrines. Many in Europe (and some elites in America) assume that religious tolerance means looking for the common denominator in the great religions and finding it in some intersection of the most "liberal" and "modern" versions of each faith. Unavoidably, persons of a more conservative religious orientation are then seen as intolerant and unwilling to engage in a dialogue.

The alternative would be to stop telling Muslims (or Jews, or Christians) that they have to locate the liberal extreme of each individual faith, and to accept that non-Muslims have no standing to tell Muslims how to be pious, just as non-Jews will have no authority over Jews in such matters, or non-Christians over Christians. Perhaps it is easier for orthodox Muslims to recognize their many similarities with orthodox Jews and traditional Christians, than to find common ground though dilution. The notion that weak Islam can meet weak Christianity is mainly popular with people who are neither Muslims nor Christians, and easily manage to insult both with their advice that Muslims (or Christians) can only survive in our modern times by jettisoning their religious heritage.

Typical for this European attitude is also a very strict imposition of politically correct views on important moral issues. Europeans do not only tell the Muslims (and Jews or Christians) that they better water down their faith in order to fit into modern society, but also impose only one correct view on issues such as sexual orientation, pre-marital sex or divorce. An alternative could be that Islamic (Jewish or Christian) schools continue to teach traditional notions, possibly including that homosexuality is frowned upon by God and that pre-marital sex is not moral behavior, as long as they also teach tolerance for other views and compete with other schools that base their foundations on different ethics, including a humanistic ethic. Such schools exist in many peaceful East Asian countries, and the governments (or overseas exam boards) set common exams that steer clear from moral issues.[48]

If tolerance of different acceptable comprehensive worldviews were the leading value in society, there would be less need to enforce politically fashionable views on sensitive moral issues. As mentioned, Singapore and Malaysia have electorates that hold strong views about issues such as homosexuality and pre-marital sex, and a sensible public

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[47] Küng, Islam: Past, Present & Future, p. 651

[48] The university I work at has a few compulsory classes in Malay history and culture but only for Malay (Muslim) students and results to not influence the degree.

policy could consist in de-criminalization and promoting tolerance, rather than trying to impose top-down today's politically correct view from the West.

Does Malaysia have a culture of compromise? The political system has built-in stabilizers that will not work for all times, but have at least been effective over the first fifty years of independence (with only one tragic exception in 1969). According to Fui K. Soong, director of the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) think-tank, the different groups in the governing coalition need to hold hands, since:

- if Malays make up more than 75 percent of the voters in a constituency, UMNO risks losing to PAS, the conservative Islamic party;

- if Chinese make up more than 70 percent of the voters, the governing partner MCA loses to the Chinese opposition party DAP (this happened in 9/10 cases in the last election);

- both the Malay UMNO party and its Chinese partner MCA therefore need seats where Malays and Chinese are roughly balanced;

- In Sabah, Malays make up a small minority of the voters, so the government needs support from other ethnic groups;[49]

Maintaining a tolerant society is an ongoing effort, and some Malaysians feel that their country has lost some of its multicultural touch. Critical author Rehman Rashid eloquently recalls the beauty and the potential of Malaysia, but uses the past tense to indicate some fear of deterioration:

> "There was in Malaysia, as nowhere else, a balance ...The Indigene had not been hounded to the brink of cultural extinction by the Immigrant, as ...in Australia or America. Nor had the Immigrant been bludgeoned into capitulation by the Indigene, as in Indonesia, or swallowed whole, digested and absorbed, as in the Philippines and Thailand.
>
> No: in Malaysia, Indigene and Immigrant were more evenly matched than anywhere else in the world – it was when the British went home in 1957, literally a 50:50 split."[50]

Malaysia's prime minister advocates the concept of Islam Hadhari, which is not a new sect, but simply a serious attempt to extract general ethical principles from Islamic teachings that should be acceptable to non-Muslim fellow citizens – quite similar to what Rawls describes as the rules of "public reason".[51] The *WVS* results for Malaysia are reassuring in this respect – see section 3, and the country stands out among comparable nations (section 4). I believe that the actual history of the past 50 years is supportive as

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[49] Fui K. Soong, "Doing the Multiracial Arithmetic", *The New Straits Times,* 23 September 2007
[50] Rehman Rashid, *A Malaysian Journey,* p. 14.
[51] (see http://www.islamonline.net/english/Contemporary/2005/03/Article01.shtml for a definition and a summary).

well of a culture of tolerance and diversity that should be maintained as the country continues to develop.

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