

Refereed article

Islam and Nation-Building in Indonesia and Malaysia

Patrick Ziegenhain

Abstract

The increasing tensions between Islamists and the political leadership in Indonesia and Malaysia reveal that the relationship between religion and state has not yet been definitively settled in either state. The ongoing sociopolitical struggles over the relationship between Islam and national identity in both countries are also a result of their very different nation-building processes. To understand the current dynamics, it is necessary to analyze the specific ways in which Islam was incorporated in the constitutions of both countries after independence and how nation-building was directed by their respective political elites. Whereas Malaysia tried to build a nation based on the coexistence of different ethnic/religious groups, Indonesia meanwhile adopted an assimilationist approach — in which members of every ethnic/religious group were to be absorbed into one overarching nation. Due, not least, to these historical reasons, we can now observe a growing tendency toward dissatisfaction with the results of the nation-building processes among the Muslim communities in both of these countries.

Keywords: Indonesia, Malaysia, Nation-building, Islam, Religion and State, History

Patrick Ziegenhain: PD Dr Patrick Ziegenhain is currently Visiting Professor at the Asia-Europe Institute of University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur/Malaysia. Previously, he had been a Visiting Professor at the Department of Business Administration at Atma Jaya University in Jakarta/ Indonesia, an Interim Professor at the Department of Southeast Asian Studies at Goethe-University Frankfurt/ Germany (2015), a Visiting Professor at De la Salle University Manila/ Philippines in 2014 and Assistant Professor (Akademischer Rat) at the Department of Political Science, University of Trier/ Germany (2007-2014).