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POPULISM STUDIES

ECPS Panel

Religious Populism, Cyberspace and Digital Authoritarianism in Asia – The Cases of India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Malaysia & Turkey

Date: February 2, 2022

Time: 11:00-13:00 (CET)

Moderator: Dr. Simon Watmough

Speakers: Dr. Ihsan Yilmaz, Dr. Raja M. Ali Saleem, Dr. Mahmoud Pargoo,
Dr. Syaza Shukri, Idznursham Ismail & Kainat Shakil

Turkey, Pakistan, India, Malaysia, and Indonesia span one of the longest continuously inhabited regions of the world. Centuries of cultural infusion have ensured these societies are highly heterogeneous. As plural polities, they are ripe for the kind of freedoms that liberal democracy can guarantee. However, despite having multi-party electoral systems, these countries have recently been negatively influenced by populist authoritarian political leaders, parties and movements. Our panelists have explored in their most recent [report](#) published by the ECPS the unique nexus between faith and populism in five Asian countries and offer an insight into how cyberspace and offline politics have become highly intertwined to create a hyper-reality in which socio-political events are taking place.

The report focuses on the role of religious populism in digital space as a catalyst for undemocratic politics in these five Asian countries they have selected as their case studies. The focus on the West Asian and South Asian cases was an opportunity to examine authoritarian religious populists *in power*, whereas the East Asian countries showcased powerful authoritarian religious populist forces *outside* parliament. The situational analysis from five countries indicates that religion's role in digital authoritarianism is quite evident, adding to the layer of nationalism. Most of the leaders in power use religious justifications for curbs on the internet. This evident "religious populism" seems to be a major driver of policy changes that are limiting civil liberties in the name of "the people." In the end, the reasons for restricting digital space are not purely religious but draw on religious themes with populist language in a mixed and hybrid fashion.

Program

(11:00-11:05) Welcome speech on the behalf of ECPS by Simon Watmough

(11:05-11:15) Introduction of the report by Ihsan Yilmaz

(11:15-11:25) Cyberspace, authoritarianism, and religious populism by Mahmoud Pargoo

(11:25-11:35) Indian Case by Raja M. Ali Saleem

(11:35-11:45) Indonesian Case by Idznursham Ismail

(11:45-11:55) Pakistani Case by Kainat Shakil

(11:55-12:05) Malaysian Case by Syaza Shukri

(12:05-12:15) Turkish Case by Ihsan Yilmaz

(12:15-13:00) *Q&A Session*



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Short Bios

Ihsan Yilmaz is Research Professor and Chair at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation (ADI), Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. He is also a Visiting Research Associate of the Oxford Centre for Religion and Culture, Regent's Park College, The University of Oxford, and a Non-Resident Senior Research Fellow at the ECPS. Yilmaz has conducted research on religion and politics; authoritarianism; digital authoritarianism; populism in Turkey, Pakistan, and Indonesia and beside of other research subjects.

Raja M. Ali Saleem is an Associate Professor (Public Policy) at the Centre for Public Policy and Governance at Forman Christian College in Lahore, Pakistan. He is a former civil servant and has more than 20 years of diverse experience in government and academia. His research focuses on religious nationalism, the relationship between church and state, the politics of Muslim-majority countries, especially Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, local governments, public financial management, the role of the military in politics, and democratic consolidation. His first book, *State, Nationalism, and Islamization: Historical Analysis of Turkey and Pakistan*, was published by Palgrave-Macmillan in 2017.

Mahmoud Pargoo is a research fellow at Deakin University (Melbourne) and a visiting fellow at the AI-enabled Processes (AIP) Research Centre, Macquarie University in Sydney. Mahmood is the author of *Secularization of Islam in Post-Revolutionary Iran* (Routledge, 2021) and lead-author of *Presidential Elections in Iran: Islamic Idealism since the Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

Syaza Shukri is an assistant professor at the Department of Political Science, Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. Her area of specialization is in comparative politics, specifically in democratization and politics in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Her current research interests include populism, identity politics, inter-ethnic relations, political Islam, geopolitics, and gender studies, specifically in Muslim-majority contexts. Among her recent works is "Populism and Muslim Democracies," published in *Asian Politics & Policy*.

Idznursham Ismail, the founder of stratsea.com, possesses a master's degree in Strategic Studies and a First-Class Honours in Biological Sciences from the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) Nanyang Technological University (NTU), respectively. After his stint as a Research Analyst at the Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR, RSIS), he resided in Indonesia for numerous years, gaining experience in organizations such as The Jakarta Post, the Wahid Foundation, and PAKAR. He specializes in security-related issues, particularly terrorism and unconventional weapons. His current research includes non-traditional security themes such as public health.

Kainat Shakil is a non-resident Research Associate at the ECPS. Her research explores populism from the perspectives of religion, emotions, and gender. The regional focus of her work is mainly Pakistan and demographically Muslim-majority countries. Previously, she was a researcher at The Shahid Javed Burki Institute of Public Policy at NetSol (BIPP)— a Pakistan-based think-tank— where her work focused on reviewing public policies from a people-centric perspective. Before working as a full-time researcher, she was an Erasmus research scholar at Middlesex University London and the recipient of the US State Department's cultural scholarship, Global UGRAD.