

## Impact Objectives

- Explore how Salafism moved from its origins in the Middle East to South East Asia
- Understand how Salafism develops into social movement in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines
- Study the education sector to analyse how Salafi ideas influence the curricula development of religious schools

# Salafism - from idea to institution

*Political scientist Professor Takeshi Kohno has been investigating the processes in which foreign-born fundamentalism, such as Salafism, is institutionalised in South East Asia*



**Can you briefly explain the importance of understanding more about Salafism and the value from identifying and defining this process?**

We have little understanding of the way in which Salafism moved from its origins in the Middle East to South East Asia. It is difficult to measure the transmission and the settlement of the idea, so we have been tracing key individuals – mostly Islamic preachers - who are instrumental in promoting these ideas. We focus on the concept of institutionalisation to examine how ideas become laws and regulations. We have chosen to study the education sector to analyse how Salafi education curricula are drafted and subsequently implemented in schools.

It is important to understand the gap between movement and institution. Many movements die out and have been forgotten in history while others become the social norm and transform society. That is what it means to become institutionalised. I borrow heavily from social movement literature that describes the institutionalisation of a movement as making the end of a movement.

**You are focusing on the education sector to provide an example of how Salafism is institutionalised. What approaches or methods are you using for this analysis?**

The education sector is a concrete measure of the depth of institutionalisation. I hope to examine the level of institutionalisation through indicators, including: how Salafi ideas are embedded into regulations and rules; how Salafi ideas are inserted into the school curriculum; and how budget is allocated to implement this. I will also consider the establishment of Salafi-leaning schools or institutes, the hiring and firing of instructors in accordance with the educational curriculum and the levels of student enrolment in these schools. If we are able to scrutinise these numbers in a time-series analysis, this should uncover the degree to which institutionalisation has occurred. We will not be able to gain nationwide data on these due to limited time and funding. Therefore, we will identify specific localities as case studies for comparison.

**Part of this research involves understanding how Salafism develops into social movement in these three countries. What are you hoping to learn through this part of the project?**

At the level of intellectual curiosity, I aim to discover which of the variables make an idea – in this case Salafism – gain popular

attraction and help social movements grow. Intuitively, external political and economic factors such as popular anger toward corrupt elites and economic difficulties may contribute to this growth, but we may find that charismatic leadership also plays a role. My goal is to provide natural experiment analysis of this phenomenon. Our findings (and theoretical framework) will be applicable to other similar cases globally.

**You have previously worked in key roles at Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the United Nations Development Program. Can you talk about some of the key learnings you took from this work and how this has benefited your research now?**

My detour to foreign service at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and international civil service at the United Nations Development Programme enabled me to see social issues as policy issues. Moreover, my academic life allows me to see social issues in a theoretical light, using methodology for analysing very complex political phenomena. Both my foreign and international civil service lives equipped me to consider public responses to social issues. In the foreign service, I needed to adjust to entirely new jargon and phrases, but I learned the processes by which policy actions were crafted. I see my hybrid life as an asset in my current research. ▶

A group of women wearing hijabs and traditional attire are walking through a modern, brightly lit interior space, possibly a public building or a transit station. The background shows architectural elements like columns and a staircase.

# Institutionalising fundamentalism

*Considering how an idea can move continents and become an important part of the lives of people far from its origin is the subject of a multinational collaborative project led by political scientists based at Toyo Eiwa University in Japan*

Professor Takeshi Kohno, from Toyo Eiwa University in Japan, has spent his career understanding transnational political and security issues. He has a particular interest in the Salafi movement which stems from the Sunni branch of Islam and was developed in response to Western European imperialism in the 18th century. Kohno explains that Salafism developed in Egypt and seeks a return to a pure form of Islam as practiced by the salaf, the first three generations of Muslims, said to include the Islamic prophet Muhammed. 'Relying on the teachings of the salafs as well as the Quran and the Sunnah, Salafists reject more modern interpretations and teachings,' he highlights.

Kohno is leading a project that seeks to analyse how Salafism turns into social movement and how this social movement evolves into institutions. By identifying transformational agents such as the state and its bureaucrats as well as religious teachers, Kohno and his colleagues hope to gain insight into this religious school of thought and how it has become established in the South East Asian countries of Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Existing research shows a range of ideas in relation to the impact of institutionalisation. 'For example, social movement literature assumes that institutionalism is a product of compromise over conflicting interests, such as in the passing of new laws relating to gender discrimination,' outlines Kohno. 'Similarly, political science,

considers institutionalisation as the mostly unequal resolution of intense power struggles. Economic sciences propose that institutionalisation is the end product of societies that weigh up opportunity and transaction costs before settling on an economically-rational equilibrium. On the other hand, behavioural economics seeks to provide socially-responsible solutions in institutional designs by incentivising individuals to avoid harmful behaviours.' The difficulty in tracing and therefore attempting to measure the institutionalisation of a concept has led Kohno and his colleagues to choose the education sector as their study subject. Education generally plays a key role in the evolution of an idea, that turns into social movement and then becomes institutionalised.

Working in collaboration with international colleagues from the three countries he is particularly interested in, Kohno seeks to develop understanding on the flow of Salafism from the Middle East to countries in South East Asia. Professor Jamhari Makruf, from Indonesian International Islamic University, Professor Kamarulnizam Abdullah, from the Universiti Utara Malaysia, and Professor Julkipli Wadi, from the University of the Philippines-Diliman, are all vital contributors to the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS)-supported project, bringing vital local knowledge and insight to the investigation.

## OBJECTIVELY MEASURING IDEAS

The critical role of the state in the process of institutionalisation and Kohno's choice of using the education sector as the focus for this study demonstrates the importance placed by governments on this area. As a means to shaping future generations and as a valuable tool for nation building, education is a high priority for many governments. However, the approach taken by different nations varies greatly. 'Malaysia, for example, gave Islam explicit priority stating in its constitution that it is a religion of the Federation. Islamic institutionalisation in the education sector is primarily led by the state,' confirms Kohno. 'Indonesia does not explicitly give Islam constitutional status, and Islamic institutionalisation in the education sector is primarily a task of the Religious Ministry. The Philippines, as a constitutionally secular state in which Muslims are a minority group, lacks a promotional role in the Islamic education of this group.' These three very different approaches offer the team great scope for analysing how these interactions, or lack of, impact on institutionalisation.

This project seeks to conduct its analysis on three levels in each of the three countries: the identification and definition of Salafism; the discovery of how Salafism develops into a social movement; and how Salafism becomes institutionalised. Close attention has been paid to the role of social organisations as well as key individuals who influence the process of institutionalisation. Furthermore, the three levels of Salafism





activity – Dakwa, Haraqi and Jihad – have been further broken down in order to better understand how, when and why they manifest in the process of forming education institutions.

Six key indicators were assessed as a means of measuring the impact of institutionalisation on education establishments in order to objectively quantify the process. These include: Salafi ideas being codified as laws, local ordinances or regulations; inclusion of Salafi ideas into educational curricula; allocation

#### EVOLUTION OF IDEAS

Having lived in Indonesia for almost five years, both as a researcher and a foreign service officer, Kohno felt uncomfortable with commonly held assumptions that fundamentalist ideas such as Salafism are uniform throughout the world. His observations of how Islamic teachings and interpretations were applied to daily life as well as the way in which particular countries in South East Asia influenced the protocols of Islamic life based on Salafi ideals caused him to contact his collaborators to start this project. 'I feel that social science researchers

*This ambitious study seeks to extend the knowledge base on the evolution of institutionalisation and the methodology and theory that underpin this work which straddles a number of different academic fields*

of budgets for Salafi activities, including producing textbooks and other instruction materials; establishment of new Salafi educational facilities; hiring or firing of instructors in accordance with curriculum and instruction; and student enrolment.

#### FACING EXTERNAL CHALLENGES

'This ambitious study seeks to extend the knowledge base on the evolution of institutionalisation, and critically, the methodology and theory that underpin this work which straddles a number of different academic fields, which will give our results a solid basis' enthuses Kohno. The team place considerable importance on the value of collecting raw materials and data locally, and, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, their work has been paused as travel and information gathering contact has been banned. The team hope to restart their work as soon as possible, once restrictions on travel have been lifted. Currently in their second year of the study, they have been able to refine their definitions of Salafism, as well as of movement and institutionalisation, and they hope to present the results they have gathered thus far to several major international conferences soon.

are obliged to show that factual evidence they've gathered through direct observation, in order to reveal complexity and nuances found in social life,' Kohno explains. He seeks to offer factual research that can help policy makers in their understanding of social phenomena based on objective evidence as opposed to selective evidence that lends credence to policy legitimacy. 'We also hope to contribute to the theoretical understanding of social transmission of ideas, for movements as well as how this leads to institutionalisation,' Kohno adds.

Looking ahead, Kohno and his colleagues hope to publish a book on their findings in 2022, the fourth year of the project. In furthering their research into the process of how Salafism has become established in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, they seek to gain further insight into how ideas and movements can evolve and become institutionalised. These valuable learnings can help us better understand not only the process in which ideas become assimilated into daily lives, but how this may differ across different sectors of society. ●

## Project Insights

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