

## GEOPOLITICS OF RELIGIOUS SOFT POWER POLICY BRIEF #8

# THE POLITICS OF SAVE UYGHUR: CHINA'S "ISLAMIC DIPLOMACY" AND ISLAMIC ACTIVISM IN MALAYSIA

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

China's alleged persecution of the Uyghur Muslim minority in Xinjiang has gained attention among Muslims in Malaysia. The Chinese embassy in Malaysia takes a proactive role in conducting influence operations to counter negative views of China. Speaking out against injustice towards Muslims at home and abroad may increase the popularity of Muslim politicians and activists among segments of Malaysian Muslims. Nonetheless, these leaders are cognizant of not jeopardizing Malaysia's economic development in an environment of U.S.-China geopolitical competition, so they choose a balanced position. Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's administration is likely to maintain this approach.



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*The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and not of the Berkley Center, Georgetown University, or the United States Institute of Peace.*

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- While the Chinese government justifies the establishment of Uyghur camps in the name of “fighting radicalism/separatism,” many Muslims in Malaysia see it as a form of discrimination against the Muslim minority, and some of them run campaigns to “save Uyghur.”
- Through various influence operations—media and social campaigns, engagement with various Muslim leaders, and organization of events and trips—the Chinese embassy in Malaysia labeled the accusation of Uyghur oppression as “Western propaganda.”
- Compared to the plight of the Palestinians and Rohingya, top government leaders in Malaysia have remained silent on the Uyghur issue, primarily to maintain good business relations with China. However, the government gives space for various Muslim NGOs to show their support for the Uyghurs.
- Overall, the Malaysian government takes a cautious stand when handling Uyghur issues—it does not justify China's Xinjiang policies, yet it also avoids speaking up against China directly. Such a position reflects Malaysia's stand to remain neutral amidst U.S.-China competition and balance the need to maintain good business relations with China while appeasing its Muslim population, which sympathizes with the Uyghurs.



## INTRODUCTION

On December 21, 2019, the Chinese embassy in Malaysia hosted a cultural show “Beautiful Xinjiang,” performed by the Xinjiang Song and Dance Ensemble of Art Theatre, at a convention centre in Bangi, a Muslim-majority suburban near Kuala Lumpur. Before the event, the embassy sent invitations to various Muslim politicians, preachers, and activists as part of China’s influence operations to shape Muslim opinions on the issues of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang. However, some Muslim groups and individuals responded to the show with a protest. Amongst the protestors were members of the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM, a moderate Muslim organization), the Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS, an Islamist party), and a Chinese Salafi-leaning preacher, Firdaus Wong Wai Hung. According to the then ABIM vice president Ahmad Fahmi Mohd Samsudin, the protest was to oppose the cultural show, which he described as an attempt by the Chinese government to promote a “false narrative.”<sup>1</sup>

China has been charged with extensive persecution of the Uyghur Muslim minority in its Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, which has caught the attention of Muslims in Malaysia and elsewhere. Human Rights Watch, an organization which investigates and reports on abuses worldwide and advocates on behalf of people at risk, has criticized China’s Xinjiang policy as “serious human rights violations,”<sup>2</sup> yet most Southeast Asian and Muslim-majority countries remain silent,<sup>3</sup> primarily because of China’s heavy investments in the region. While the Chinese government justifies the establishment of Uyghur re-education centers in the name of “fighting radicalism and separatism,” some Muslims in Malaysia see them as a form of discrimination against the

Muslim minority and therefore have started running campaigns to “Save Uyghur.”

Based on conversations with pro-Uyghur activists and social media postings, this brief focuses on the prospects and challenges of China’s “Islamic diplomacy,” Beijing’s campaign to engage local Muslims, and how Muslims of different backgrounds have reacted to such diplomacy. I examine the politics of Save Uyghur from two intersecting perspectives: China’s Islamic diplomacy and geopolitical competition between the United States and China; and local politics of “defending Islam,” which includes both Islamist ideological commitment and competition to court Muslim votes. China’s Islamic diplomacy has received mixed responses, reflecting different reactions to China in the Muslim context—be it welcoming cooperation, critical engagement, or total rejection.

While China’s Islamic diplomacy has been fruitful in many Muslim-majority countries, including Indonesia and Saudi Arabia,<sup>4</sup> it has been less successful in Malaysia. In 2022, Malaysia was among 11 nations that abstained from the UN vote on the debate about China’s treatment of Uyghur Muslims,<sup>5</sup> while many other Muslim-majority countries, including Indonesia and Saudi Arabia, voted against the debate. Compared to the plight of the Palestinians and Rohingya, top government leaders in Malaysia have remained silent on the Uyghur issue, primarily to maintain good business relations with China. However, the government gives space for various Muslim NGOs to show their support for the Uyghurs. ABIM, a moderate Islamic NGO closely linked to current Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, has been very vocal in campaigning on this issue. Some of these campaigns juxtapose the plight of Uyghurs and Palestinians, while others use slogans such as “Me Too Uyghur” and “Uyghur Lives



Matters.”<sup>6</sup> In 2023, ABIM and the International Union of East Turkistan Organizations (IUETO) set up the Uyghur – Malaysia Relations Organization (UMRO) to raise awareness of the dire situation of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

## CHINA'S PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGNS

In the past, in Malaysia, China's influence operation focused on ethnic Chinese. Over the years, it has also been increasingly expanding towards Malaysian Muslims. I attended an academic conference on “Islam and BRI” in Beijing in 2016, co-organized by the Chinese Association of Middle Eastern Studies and the Chinese Association of Religious Studies. During the conference, some participants debated both the opportunities and the risks of such Islamic diplomacy—some suggest the Chinese government capitalize on its Muslim minorities and take an Islam-friendly position to engage with Muslim countries; others suggest the Chinese government should be cautious because emphasizing Islamic elements might empower terrorist and separatist movements in China.

There are few examples of China's Islamic diplomacy: promoting Zheng He, a Chinese admiral during the Ming Dynasty, as a symbol of China's “peaceful rise”; establishing a halal business network; and cultivating relationships with Muslim organizations and leaders. China's Islamic diplomacy, however, faces serious challenges, especially after the international media has increasingly highlighted the plight of Uyghurs since 2018. The plight of Uyghurs has been increasingly channeled through “Islamic” lenses, as “Muslim solidarity” is one of the ways for Uyghurs to gain international support, especially among Muslim-majority countries.

Starting in 2019, various pro-Uyghur lobby groups have visited Malaysia. They briefed Muslim politicians and activists on the situation in Xinjiang. For example, in early 2019, Omer Kanat, the then chairman of the World Uyghur Congress, and Ilshat Hassan, the then president of the Uyghur American Association, met many politicians in Malaysia, including then Deputy Prime Minister Wan Azizah and Minister of Religious Affairs Mujahid Yusof Rawa. Some Uyghur religious leaders have also visited Malaysia. At the same time, some Hui migrants in Malaysia have been quietly but actively raising concerns about the plight of Uyghur and Hui Muslims.

Such events gained the attention of the Chinese embassy in Malaysia, prompting it to take a more proactive role in conducting influence operations to counter negative views of China. These influence operations have three main components, starting with media and social media campaigns. In early 2019, the Chinese embassy in Malaysia established a new bureau: the Media and Public Relations Office. Since then, the Chinese embassy has issued media statements and run advertisements in various news outlets,<sup>7</sup> highlighting the anti-terrorism campaign, socioeconomic developments in Xinjiang, and what Beijing has been doing to “fight against radical separatism and not Islam.” Further, it labeled the accusation of Uyghur oppression as “Western propaganda.” Beijing has also approached social media influencers such as Husna Liang<sup>8</sup> and Satria Zhang,<sup>9</sup> both Chinese nationals who speak fluent Malay, to produce content presenting a positive image of China.

Another component of influence operations is lobbying Muslim activists, politicians, and influencers. Officials from the Chinese embassy have approached Muslim leaders

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in various Muslim-majority political parties (including PAS and National Trust Party, Amanah), Islamic organizations (such as ABIM and Malaysian IKRAM Association, IKRAM), and religious institutions (for instance, the Malaysian Department of Islamic Development, JAKIM, and the Federal Territory Department of Religion Affairs, JAWI). Between January and June 2019, the Chinese embassy sponsored three delegations of Muslim leaders in Malaysia to visit Xinjiang, with a stopover in Beijing. The first trip involved leaders from the People Justice Party (PKR), such as Syed Ibrahim Syed Noh and Lee Chean Chung. The second trip invited leaders from various Muslim institutions and organizations such as IKRAM, JAWI, the Malaysian Chinese Muslim Association (MACMA), the Islamic Information & Services Foundation (IIS), and the Malaysian Foundation of Islamic Dakwah (YADIM), as well as journalists from Astro Awani, a Malaysian pay television news channel. The third trip was joined by the then minister of religious affairs, Mujahid Yusuf Rawa, and the then head of JAKIM, Mohammad Nordin Ibrahim. A similar trip has also been organized for Indonesian Muslim leaders.

In Xinjiang, such trips include visitations to various places in Urumqi and Kashgar like mosques to show that China respects Muslims' religious rights, re-education centers to show China's well-intended effort at providing Uyghurs with job training, and an exhibition on "major incidents of violence and terror in Xinjiang" to justify China's "anti-terrorism" and "anti-separatism" acts. Such visitations received mixed responses. The ABIM refused the invitation, describing it as "political propaganda." Malaysian Muslim Solidarity (ISMA), a right-wing Islamist organization, has also declined to engage the Chinese embassy.

After the trip, Astro Awani featured a talk show with two of the trip participants—Taufiq Yap Yun Hin, president of MACMA; and Shahrin Awaludin, CEO of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth—which was shared by the Facebook page of the Chinese embassy in Malaysia. However, not all participants were convinced of the initiative. According to Shahrul Aman, an IKRAM leader, the visits were "tightly controlled" and "nicely packaged." As he observed, the performance by the "trainees" at the education center was "well-orchestrated." He later discovered that similar shows have been performed for the Indonesian delegation team.<sup>10</sup> He also noticed that Muslim women in Xinjiang are not allowed to wear headscarves. Upon his return to Malaysia, another trip participant, Zuhri Yunyi, the secretary of IIS, initiated "Malaysia4Uyghur" (M4U)—a coalition of NGOs drawing attention to the Uyghurs' plight.<sup>11</sup> Instead of successfully persuading Muslim leaders, such trips generated unintended or negative consequences.

The most high-ranking leader invited to visit Beijing and Xinjiang was then Minister of Religious Affairs Mujahid Yusuf Rawa. After the visit, Mujahid posted on his Facebook about China's efforts in combating radicalism and in giving Uyghurs vocational training.<sup>12</sup> An online news portal also quoted Mujahid as saying that there is "false news" about Muslims being oppressed in China that "could trigger a wave of sympathy for the oppressed and affect relationships,"<sup>13</sup> a report which Mujahid criticized as "confusing, incorrect and did not portray the whole speech."<sup>14</sup> He has come under sharp criticism from many Malaysian Muslims, including the supporters of his party (Mujahid is one of the vice presidents of Amanah, a moderate Islamist party). Amnesty International Malaysia



expressed disappointment over the minister's description of the camp. Ahmad Farouk Musa, founder of the Islamic Renaissance Front (IRF), a progressive Muslim organization, called Mujahid a "victim of Communist China propaganda."<sup>15</sup> Unsurprisingly, PAS, the rival Islamist party of Amanah, accused Mujahid of not being able to "safeguard Muslim interests in Malaysia and abroad." However, Mujahid fended off accusations that he was pandering to Chinese propaganda. Instead of directly criticizing China, he preferred a more constructive interaction with China, in which a cordial relationship could help him persuade the Chinese government to treat its minorities fairly.<sup>16</sup> The then head of JAKIM, Mohammad Nordin Ibrahim, who accompanied Mujahid to Xinjiang, wrote an article, "The Light of Islam in the Land of Xinjiang,"<sup>17</sup> published in *Sinar Harian*, a Malay daily newspaper, which also received heavy criticism from netizens.

A third component of these influence operations is running events. The Chinese embassy is both directly and indirectly involved in organizing various seminars and events to promote a positive image of China among Malaysian Muslims. In June 2019, the Chinese embassy hosted an Aidilfitri Open House for the first time as a "Muslim-friendly" gesture. Hosted by Ambassador Bai Tian, the guests included Minister of Religious Affairs Mujahid Yusof Rawa, officials from religious departments, NGO leaders, and media representatives. In July 2019, MACMA organized the Malaysian Global Chinese Muslim Conference under the theme of "Empowering Chinese Muslims towards peace and harmony in Kuala Lumpur." Invited speakers at the conference included representatives from the China Islamic Association, as well as Chinese Muslim leaders from Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong

Kong, and Taiwan. However, some Hui Muslims living in Malaysia chose to keep a distance from such an event, seeing it as part of China's propaganda to cover up its discrimination against Muslim minorities.

During the pandemic, in March 2021, a virtual event titled "Xinjiang Is a Wonderful Land" was jointly hosted by the Chinese embassy in Malaysia and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region government. In August 2021, a webinar on "China's Cooperation with the Muslim World"—supported by the embassy featuring Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, former foreign minister, and Ouyang Yujing, China's ambassador to Malaysia—was canceled at the last minute after protests by Malaysia4Uyghur (M4U). As Zuhri Yuhyi, president of M4U, put it, that event "[wa]s nothing more than a propaganda blitz aimed to cover up the well-publicized genocide against the Uyghurs."<sup>18</sup> In 2023, together with ABIM, a local think tank organized the Islam-Confucianism Leadership Dialogue,<sup>19</sup> attended by Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and China's ambassador to Malaysia. In 2024, the China Islamic Association and MACMA co-hosted the Chinese Islamic Culture Exhibition in Kuala Lumpur in conjunction with the fiftieth anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Malaysia.

### **"SAVE UYGHUR" CAMPAIGNS**

Islam is playing an increasingly important role in Malaysian politics, in which various actors—including Muslim politicians, activists, and preachers—are cooperating, and sometimes also competing, in shaping Muslim opinions and advocating Islamic causes.<sup>20</sup> While these players might contest each other in Malaysian politics, they sometimes work together directly or indirectly in



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campaigning for vulnerable groups such as Palestinians, the Rohingya, and Uyghur. ABIM, IKRAM, and ISMA are three politically active Muslim organizations. They are all Islamists but differ in their political affiliations and social approaches in Malaysia. Overall, ABIM and IKRAM are perceived by many Malaysians as moderate and friendly to Pakatan Harapan (PH, a multiethnic political alliance), while right-wing ISMA tends to support Perikatan Nasional (PN, a Malay-dominant alliance).

The efforts taken by the Chinese embassy to engage with Muslim leaders and activists might have promoted a better image of China among them but have fallen short of convincing them that there is no discrimination against Muslim minorities in China. Despite China's influence operations, the Uyghur issue has united several Muslim NGOs in condemning the repression of Uyghur Muslims. On July 5, 2019, 34 Muslim NGOs—including ABIM, IKRAM, and ISMA—endorsed a memorandum submitted to the Chinese embassy, urging China to release all detainees in its Xinjiang camps.<sup>21</sup>

On December 27, 2019, ABIM staged another protest in front of the Chinese embassy. The then ABIM president Muhammad Faisal Abdul Aziz urged the Chinese government to respect freedom of religion and open up the so-called re-education camps to independent observers.<sup>22</sup> ABIM has also repeatedly turned down the invitations from the Chinese embassy to visit Xinjiang. Such attitude has led a Chinese embassy official to see ABIM as being “radical,” even though ABIM is generally perceived as a moderate Muslim NGO in the context of Malaysia. Faisal emphasized that ABIM's stand should not be seen as a political agenda or interpreted as being “anti-China” or “pro-West.” He mentioned that ABIM had also protested in front of

the U.S. embassy in Kuala Lumpur over the Palestinian issue.<sup>23</sup> He stressed that ABIM is open to having a frank dialogue and positive engagements with the Chinese government if the issues of Xinjiang are to be addressed transparently and in good faith.<sup>24</sup>

In 2020, ABIM organized an online interfaith dialogue featuring the fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, which also drew the attention of the Chinese embassy. More recently, together with UMRO and the Center for Uyghur Studies, ABIM ran a series of forums during the month of Ramadan in 2023 to raise awareness of the Uyghur issue. In one of these events, the director of the center, Abdulhakim Idris, met Anwar Ibrahim. While Ibrahim expressed sympathy for Uyghurs, he also said it was “the internal matter of the Chinese government.”<sup>25</sup>

IKRAM, another moderate Islamic NGO, has expressed solidarity with the Uyghur people but refrained from a confrontational approach with the Chinese embassy. It endorsed the memorandum on Uyghur rights but did not join the protest in front of the embassy. Then Vice President Shahrul Aman, who joined the Xinjiang trip, stated in 2021, “We do not want to confront China, but we also do not want to be seen as a mouthpiece of China.” He added, “By engaging with the Chinese embassy, we can channel our concerns and try to solve the Uyghur issue constructively.” Another IKRAM activist, Hafidzi Noor, has stated, “Discrimination against Uighur Muslims is real. We should reject Western propaganda, but this does not mean we have to accept Chinese propaganda.”<sup>26</sup> In May 2019, IKRAM held a “fact-finding” visit to Turkey. By talking to the Uyghurs living in Turkey and conversing with “like-minded” activists (referring to Islamists in Turkey), IKRAM aimed to verify various claims by the Western media and the Chinese embassy.



ISMA, a right-wing Islamic organization, has taken a strong stand, not only criticizing the Chinese government but also justifying its xenophobic attitudes towards ethnic Chinese in Malaysia. It uses the language of “human rights” when dealing with Western audiences. The International Women’s Alliance for Family Institution and Quality Education (WAFIQ), led by an ISMA female activist, has also run online forums to advocate the Uyghur plight. Collaborating with the Uyghur Human Rights Project, on September 5, 2020, WAFIQ ran a webinar on “The Uyghur Crisis in China: The Untold Stories from our Uyghur Sisters,” inviting four Uyghur women to share their experiences. Yet, ISMA leaders took a racialized tone when speaking to local Malay audiences, claiming that Malay Muslims in Malaysia might end up like the Uyghur if they are not united. In an article called “China-zation of Malaysia: Don’t end up like Palestine, Xinjiang,” the then vice president Zainur Rashid Zainudin expressed his concern about a perceived influx of new Chinese migrants and the increase of Chinese investment projects in Malaysia—worrying that with the help of local Chinese, China might take over political and economic power in Malaysia.<sup>27</sup>

In a similar tone, in May 2019, a PAS leader, Mokhtar Senik, cautioned Muslims in Malaysia that they might face a fate similar to the Uyghur Muslim minority in China if non-Muslims are left to run the country.<sup>28</sup> At that time, PAS was an opposition party that claimed that Islam in Malaysia was under threat due to the perceived dominating power of DAP (Democratic Action Party), a Chinese-majority party.

The support towards Uyghur causes cut across political divides. For example, Nik Nazmi, a member of Parliament of the multiethnic People Justice Party (PKR), Anwar

Ibrahim’s party, is one of the vocal MPs advocating for Uyghur causes. In 2019, he raised the Uyghur’s plight in the Malaysian parliament.<sup>29</sup> In 2023, another PKR state assemblyman said the Malaysian parliament should debate a motion on Uyghur abuses in Xinjiang.<sup>30</sup> Some Muslim preachers have also expressed their concerns. In 2019, popular and outspoken Salafi-oriented preacher Mohd Asri has urged Muslims to boycott Chinese products.<sup>31</sup>

Just like Palestinian issues, the Uyghur issue in Malaysia has also been played into the politics of “defending Islam.” Speaking out against injustice towards Muslims at home and abroad may increase the popularity and credibility of Muslim politicians and activists among Malaysian Muslims. However, while the Malaysian government has been vocal about the plight of the Palestinians and the Rohingya, it remains silent on the situation of the Uyghurs. It does not defend China but refrains from condemning China publicly. Malaysia did not sign a statement supporting China’s policies in Xinjiang, which has been endorsed by more than a dozen member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), including Saudi Arabia. In October 2018, former prime minister Mahathir Mohamed’s administration did not extradite Uyghurs seeking asylum in Malaysia, despite a request from China. This departed from the decision of the Najib Razak administration in 2013 to deport six Uyghur asylum seekers to China. The Muhyiddin Yassin administration has continued Mahathir’s policy, reiterating that the government will not deport ethnic Uyghurs to China if Beijing requests it and will allow them safe passage to a third country.

While holding firm in protecting the rights of Uyghur refugees in Malaysia, Mahathir avoided confrontation. In Sep-



tember 2019, Mahathir said Muslim countries were silent about the persecution of Uyghurs “because China is a very powerful nation.” Thus, other ways must be found to deal with Beijing so as not to suffer repercussions. He said, “You don’t just try and do something which would fail anyway, so it is better to find some other less violent ways not to antagonize China too much, because China is beneficial for us.”<sup>32</sup>

### **CHINA’S ISLAMIC DIPLOMACY, GEOPOLITICAL COMPETITIONS, AND LOCAL POLITICS**

As mentioned earlier, Beijing has always been accused of media reporting on Uyghur persecution as “Western/U.S. propaganda.” Amidst the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Beijing is somehow contrasting its approach with Washington’s in a bid to win favor from the Muslim-majority countries. During the escalated Israeli-Palestinian conflict in May 2021, Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi suggested the UN Security Council press for an immediate ceasefire and resumption of dialogue on a two-state solution.<sup>33</sup> He also urged the United States to stop obstructing the council’s role in taking action on the conflict. When the U.S. government has criticized China for its human rights abuse of the Uyghurs, visibly taking such a stand is a gesture to project a positive image of China among Muslim-majority countries as well as to expose the United States’ double standard in campaigning for human rights. In July 2024, Hamas and Fatah signed a unity deal in Beijing, a move many Muslim leaders commended.<sup>34</sup>

Many Muslim activists and leaders in Malaysia understand the background of the U.S.-China geopolitical competition. In-

stead of taking a “pro-China” or “pro-United States” stand, they take a balanced position. For example, ABIM has not only submitted memoranda to the Chinese embassy about the Uyghur issue but also staged physical protests in front of the U.S. embassy over the Palestinian issue. Quoting Mahathir’s statement, another IKRAM leader, Shah-rul Aman, has stated that IKRAM is critical of China’s policy on Uyghur and other Muslim minorities.<sup>35</sup> However, he disavows confrontation, worrying that it might jeopardize Malaysia-China relations and hurt the Malaysian economy, considering that China has been Malaysia’s largest trading partner for over a decade.

Overall, the Malaysian government takes a cautious stand when handling Uyghur issues—it does not justify China’s Xinjiang policies, yet it also avoids speaking up against China directly. Such a position reflects Malaysia’s decision to remain neutral amidst U.S.-China competition and balance the need to maintain good business relations with China while appeasing its Muslim population, which sympathizes with the Uyghurs.

Anwar Ibrahim’s administration is likely to maintain such a middle position. Given that he was ABIM president and committed to combating Islamophobia, there have been expectations that he might be more vocal. In 2023, with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Ibrahim stated that Malaysia and Turkey would work together to address Islamophobia. Indeed, Ibrahim has been vocal on issues such as the Palestinian plight, the Quran burning in Sweden, and the imprisonment of Rashid Ghannouchi in Tunisia. However, he has not raised the Uyghur issue publicly or during his official visit to China. Pro-Uyghur activists argue that Ibrahim lets NGOs, especially ABIM, be the public voice of protest.



The Malaysian government has indeed allowed various Muslim NGOs, leaders, and activists to raise awareness and express their concerns. The issue has traction among Muslims across political divides. While competing in domestic politics, key Islamic organizations have voiced criticisms of China's mistreatment of Uyghurs. Solidarity with oppressed Muslims overseas is not new. Speaking out against injustice towards Muslims at home and abroad may increase the popularity and credibility of Muslim politicians and activists among segments of Malaysian Muslims. Yet, they are also aware that their reactions should not jeopardize Malaysia's economic development.

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## ABOUT THE GEOPOLITICS OF RELIGIOUS SOFT POWER PROJECT

The Geopolitics of Religious Soft Power (GRSP) project represents a multi-year, cross-disciplinary effort to systematically study state use of religion in foreign affairs. Through a global comparison of varying motivations, strategies, and practices associated with the deployment of religious soft power, project research aims to reveal patterns, trends, and outcomes that will enhance our understanding of religion's role in contemporary geopolitics. This working paper arises from a partnership between the project and the United States Institute of Peace focused on understanding how the geopolitics of religion shapes peace and conflict dynamics in particular regional and country settings.

## ABOUT THE BERKLEY CENTER FOR RELIGION, PEACE & WORLD AFFAIRS

Through research, teaching, and outreach, the Berkley Center seeks to build understanding and promote dialogue and cooperation around issues of religion, peace, and world affairs. Two premises guide the center's work: that religion is a critically important but poorly understood force in world affairs, and that the open engagement of religious and cultural traditions with one another can promote peace.

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