



Opportunities and Challenges of Saudi Arabia's Soft Power Policies over Indonesia

Ramazan Aydın¹ and Jelang Ramadhan² 

¹ Marmara University, Istanbul 34722, Türkiye

² Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta 10430, Indonesia

ramazanaydin368@gmail.com

Abstract. Saudi Arabia is an important actor in its region and in the global arena with its material and spiritual resources. In order to protect its national interests, the Kingdom utilizes these resources in different ways to be influential both regionally and globally. The fact that Mecca and Medina, which are of vital importance for Muslims, are located within the borders of Saudi Arabia allows it to develop relations with the Muslim world. Especially after the 1979 Iranian revolution, Saudi Arabia has tried to balance Iran by spreading its own Salafi/Wahhabi ideas against Iran's Shiite expansionism and has aimed to be influential on Muslim states. At this point, Indonesia is important for Saudi Arabia as it is the country with the highest number of Muslims in the world. In addition, it is very important to gain Indonesia's support in the international arena due to its claim of leadership among Muslim states. For this reason, Saudi Arabia has been trying to influence Indonesia by spreading its own Salafi/Wahhabi ideas in Indonesia through soft power policies. This article discusses Saudi Arabia's soft power opportunities and challenges in Indonesia.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Soft Power, National Interest.

1 Introduction

Saudi Arabia is a state ruled by the Wahhabi interpretation of the Salafist interpretation of Islam, which occupies about 80% of the Arab geography, is home to Mecca and Medina, which are of vital importance for Muslims, and is the world's largest exporter of crude oil. Geographically, Saudi Arabia occupies most of the Arabian Peninsula and is surrounded by Jordan and Iraq to the north, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and the Persian Gulf to the east, Oman and Yemen to the south, and the Red Sea to the west. This strategic location makes Saudi Arabia the center of both regional and global trade routes.

Saudi Arabia has a great religious and spiritual significance as it is home to the holiest sites in the Islamic world. Mecca and Medina are the holy cities that millions of Muslims visit every year to fulfill the pilgrimage and Umrah rituals. Mecca is home to

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the Kaaba, Islam's holiest shrine, while Medina is home to the Masjid al-Nabawi, the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). These holy sites give Saudi Arabia a unique role of religious authority and spiritual leadership in the Islamic world. Capitalizing on this role, the Kingdom forges strong ties with the global Muslim community and strengthens its international relations through religious diplomacy.^[i] This religious and spiritual heritage is an important factor enabling Saudi Arabia to strengthen its position in the Islamic world and its international prestige.

The second aspect that makes Saudi Arabia stand out in the global arena is undoubtedly its rich energy resources. The country has about 17% of the world's oil reserves and is the leader in daily crude oil production and exports. This makes Saudi Arabia a critical player in the global energy market. As one of the most influential members of The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the Kingdom has a significant influence on oil prices and production quotas. In addition, its large natural gas reserves increase its strategic importance in terms of energy resources. This energy wealth reinforces the country's economic power and provides it with significant bargaining power in international diplomacy and politics. It plays a critical role in ensuring global energy supply security through its investments and infrastructure projects in the energy sector. Efficient management and export of energy resources also play a key role in achieving the country's sustainable development goals and increasing its economic diversification.

Saudi Arabia, which has an important position in global politics due to its religious sites and energy resources, plays a critical role in regional politics thanks to its rivalry with Iran in the Middle East. Iran's positioning of itself as the leader of Shia Islam and Saudi Arabia as the leader of Sunni Islam, and the steps taken in this framework, increase the tension between the two countries and shape the balance of power in the region.^[ii] Saudi Arabia seeks to balance Iran's influence through its leadership in regional organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Arab League. The confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iranian-backed groups in conflicts in Yemen, Syria and Lebanon is a concrete example of this rivalry. Moreover, Saudi Arabia's strong relations with the United States and its Western allies support the strategic balance against Iran. Saudi Arabia's pivotal role in ensuring regional security and stability reinforces its influence in the Middle East and increases its strategic importance *vis-à-vis* Iran.

Saudi Arabia uses a combination of hard power and soft power tools to protect its global and regional interests and to counterbalance Iran's Shiite expansionism. Developing policies in different ways depending on the perceived threat, the Kingdom engages in soft power activities by spreading its own religious ideas in different parts of the world. In this context, it carries out various religious and cultural projects to spread its Salafist/Wahhabi ideas in the Islamic world. Through educational institutions, religious centers and charitable organizations, it makes its unique Islamic teachings and cultural influence felt in a wide geography.^[iii] With this soft power strategy, it seeks to consolidate its position of religious leadership while at the same time limiting Iran's influence.^[iv] These efforts increase Saudi Arabia's influence on the global Islamic community and give it an advantage in regional competition.

Saudi Arabia has a long history of soft power policies based on the spread of its own religious ideas. Developing a foreign policy centered on an Islamic discourse against Egyptian President Nasser's idea of secular Arab nationalism, Saudi Arabia tried to balance Iran by spreading Salafist/Wahhabi ideas against Iran's Shiite expansionism after the 1979 Iranian revolution.^[v] During the Cold War period, Western states, especially the United States, who wanted to limit the influence of the Soviet Union in Muslim countries, supported Saudi officials to spread Salafist/Wahhabi ideas.^[vi] All these situations made it easier for Saudi Arabia to spread its unique religious ideas in Muslim countries and enabled it to have influence on Muslim countries.

However, in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, the Kingdom has made some changes in its soft power policies centered on religious expansion. The fact that most of the terrorists involved in the attacks were of Saudi origin put the Kingdom in a difficult situation in the international arena and led the country to reconsider its religious expansion strategies.^[vii] Especially with the accession of King Salman to the throne in 2015, the Kingdom's soft power policies underwent another shift. Under King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, economic reforms, tourism investments, cultural diplomacy and international cooperation have come to the fore. Within the framework of the Vision 2030 program, emphasis was placed on sports events, cultural festivals and large-scale projects to modernize and diversify the country's image. This new strategy aims to help Saudi Arabia create a more positive image globally and gain an edge in regional competition.^[viii]

2 Theoretical Framework

One of the most important factors to be mentioned when discussing Saudi Arabia's soft power is, of course, its religious influence. By exporting its trademark Salafist/Wahhabi ideas to different countries of the world, the kingdom tries to influence the foreign policies of these countries.^[ix] However, at this point, it is important to note that religion is not a goal of Saudi foreign policy, but a tool to achieve the stated objectives. One of these countries is Indonesia, which has a long history of religious interaction with the Arabian Peninsula.

In Indonesia, as in many other parts of the world, Saudi Arabia is naturally the first country that comes to mind when Salafist/Wahhabi ideas are mentioned. It is true that the kingdom has had a central influence on the spread of Salafist/Wahhabi ideas in Indonesia by providing support to schools, mosques, madrassas and pesantrens. However, it should not be forgotten that Salafist/Wahhabi ideas came to Indonesia not only through Saudi Arabia but also through Yemen, Jordan and even Afghanistan.^[x] In particular, Yemeni scholar Muqbil bin Hadi al-Wadi'i and Jordanian scholar Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani are among the scholars with followers in Indonesia. These scholars have at times influenced Indonesia's domestic and foreign policy through the students they have trained in their madrasas and the fatwas they have issued. The most striking example of this is the jihad waged by Ja'far Omar Talib against Christians in Maluku in 2000 with the fatwa of Yemeni scholar Muqbil bin Hadi al-Wadi'i.^[xi]

Salafist/Wahhabi ideas from Afghanistan entered the country during the war between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan. Some Indonesian Muslims who participated in this war learned jihadist ideas there and carried them back to their country. In conclusion, it would not be correct to say that Saudi Arabia supports all Salafist/Wahhabi groups in Indonesia or that Saudi Arabia is the only actor in the spread of these ideas in Indonesia.^[xii]

Saudi Arabia's presence in Indonesia dates back to the Sukarno era. From the 1950s onwards, the Kingdom adopted the spread of Pan-Islamist ideas as an important strategy in its foreign policy against Nasser's secular Arab nationalism, which it perceived as a potential threat to its existence and sought partnerships with Islamic groups in different countries that could support it. In the same period, Masjumi party leaders and activists, who were unable to express themselves in the political arena due to Sukarno's repressive policies in Indonesia, became the partners the Kingdom sought in Indonesia.^[xiii] Looking closely at this period, which lasted until 1979, it should be remembered that the aid was not intended to empower specific Salafist/Wahhabi groups, but to strengthen Islam in Indonesia.^[xiv] At that time, it was especially important to strengthen Indonesian Islam against Ahmadis and Christians.

Following the Shiite Iranian Revolution in 1979, the Saudi commitment to building a global alliance in the Muslim world and supporting Salafism/Wahhabism increased significantly. During this period, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia grew closer due to a common interest in reducing the influence of Iran's Shiites on their societies.^[xv] The rapid rise in oil prices after the 1973 oil crisis contributed to the rapid spread of Saudi influence in the Muslim world. With this economic wealth, the kingdom was able to promote and spread its beliefs.^[xvi] Aid providers include the Saudi government, religious foundations such as the Hameeyn Foundation, international organizations such as MWL, and Saudi individuals. Aid has generally been channeled through DDII (Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia), established in 1967, and LIPIA (Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Arab), established in 1980. The aid has been used in a wide variety of areas, most notably to build schools, mosques and hospitals, to provide scholarships to students studying at Saudi Arabian universities, and to provide teachers and textbooks, the Holy Quran and religious books.^[xvii]

The Riyadh government's efforts to export its unique interpretation of Islam coincided with the so-called "Islamic Awakening" in Southeast Asia. This was a period of increased awareness of Islamic principles, more precise implementation of Islamic rules, greater interest in Islam among politicians, and the spread of Islamic thought in the university environment.^[xviii] In Indonesia during the same period, Suharto was in power. Suharto's government tried to manage different languages, religions, ethnicities and cultures in a vast geography. However, the biggest threat to Suharto's New Order government came not from this diversity, but from political Islam and university-based political movements. For this reason, Suharto sought to reduce the appeal of some major Islamist parties by suppressing them and to eliminate communist-leftist academics and students by suppressing political activity in universities. As a result of this repression, political Islam and political activity on campus weakened. In this environment, Islam as a way of life became the refuge of all these groups and the common idea that mobilized them.^[xix]

As a result of Saudi Arabia's religious expansionism, a new type of Salafist/Wahhabi emerged in Indonesia in the 1980s. While trying to shape their beliefs and behaviors in line with the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), as well as the understanding and example of the *Salaf-i Salihin*, they have always emphasized *tawhid*. Since their appearance is part of their identity, it is quite easy to identify them in society. Men usually wear long beards (*lihya*) and turbans, short pants above the ankles (to avoid *isbal*) and long Arab-style dresses (*jellabiya*), while women wear the black veil (*niqab*). They generally preferred to live in their own small, elite communities, as they tended to avoid open society where they were free to commit any act. Since they do not accept any form of Islam other than the form in which it was practiced in the early period, they consider cultural and Sufi practices such as visiting the grave, intercession, mawlid, kunut prayer, and prayers for the dead as heresy and fight to eradicate them. Since they despise politics and consider it a *bid'ah*, they stay away from politics as much as possible. In this respect, they differ from recent movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-e-Islami. The implementation of Sharia is desirable, but before that, society must be prepared for it. This requires the Islamization of Muslim society through education (*tarbiya*) and purification (*tasfiya*). They organize *halqas* (study circles) and *dauras* (workshops) to achieve this goal.^[xx]

By 1997, Indonesia was on the brink of disaster with the Asian financial crisis that started in Thailand and spread rapidly across the region. The crisis triggered an economic meltdown in the country, which was compounded by rising political tensions and increasing violence between Muslims and Christians, student protests and separatist riots. Amidst this turmoil, President Suharto's 32-year New Order rule ended with his resignation in 1998. Between 1966 and 1998, Saudi influence not only persisted but also flourished under the pressure of Suharto's New Order regime.^[xxi] In the partially democratic environment that emerged after Suharto's ouster, there was an increase in the number of undemocratic, violent and intolerant movements. Some Salafist/Wahhabi groups, which had previously maintained a quiet stance, ironically took advantage of the freedoms of the democratic environment to engage in anti-democratic activities. These include Laskar Jihad and the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), the Islamic Ummah Union, and the National Coalition of Anti-Shia Movement. As a result, the rise of these groups has led to tension, conflict and violence in Indonesia.^[xxii]

The most important development that shaped Saudi Arabia's religious soft power activities in its foreign policy was undoubtedly the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001. Afterwards, Wahhabism, which was branded as responsible for 9/11, became a difficult burden for Saudi rulers to carry in the international arena. For this reason, over time, Saudi rulers have adopted a more inclusive, tolerant, peaceful, moderate interpretation of Islam instead of conservative religious soft power and tried to gain a positive image in foreign policy. An example of this new approach can be seen in King Salman's visit to Indonesia in 2017. During the visit, King Salman met with many Muslim and non-Muslim religious leaders and held interfaith meetings with political leaders and business people from different ethnic backgrounds. The King shook hands with women and did not refuse their requests to be photographed with him. He was even accompanied by a priest who speaks Arabic during his vacation in Bali. During the meetings, the King praised Indonesia's diversity and religious harmony, and spoke about how his

country is fighting terrorism, extremism and radicalism, and its commitment to promoting tolerance and dialogue between religions and cultures. King Salman's attitude, behavior and words surprised many Indonesians. In particular, his handshake with women was covered for days on Indonesian television and social media.^[xxiii] This moderation also manifests itself in diplomatic relations. For example, in recent years, some Saudi officials have held important meetings with one of Indonesia's most important institutions, Nahdat al Ulema, which allows Sufism and some cultural practices to live within its understanding of Islam.

As a result, Saudi Arabia made religious expansion an important foreign policy goal from the 60s onwards, in contrast to Nasser's secular Arab nationalism, and supported the spread of Islam in Indonesia through its partnerships. After the 1979 Iranian Revolution, it reaccelerated the spread of Salafi/Wahhabi ideas due to its belief that the revolutionary ideology posed a threat to it. Moreover, during the Cold War, Western countries, particularly the United States, asked the Saudi authorities to spread Salafist/Wahhabi ideas in order to limit the influence of the Soviet Union in Muslim countries. As a result of this general policy, Saudi Arabia accelerated the spread of Salafism/Wahhabism by building mosques and madrassas, thus trying to reduce the influence of communism, i.e. the Soviet Union, on Muslim countries.^[xxiv] It can be said that these three developments in particular were the main factors that triggered the spread of Salafist/Wahhabi ideas in Indonesia. From this point of view, it can be said that Saudi influence in Indonesia and the Salafist/Wahhabi development and rise in Indonesia are directly related to the developments in Saudi Arabia, the Middle East and on a global scale. After the 9/11 attacks, the Kingdom, which was in a difficult situation in the international arena, reduced its support for Salafist/Wahhabi expansion over time. This support came to a halt especially with the moderate Islam policy implemented under King Salman. This change in Saudi Arabia has also affected the Salafist/Wahhabi movements in Indonesia. However, Salafist/Wahhabi groups in Indonesia are now capable of standing on their own feet without Saudi support.

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 Opportunities Saudi Arabia's Soft Power in Indonesia

Relations between Saudi Arabia and Indonesia have a rich and extensive historical background. The interaction between Arabs and non-Arabs throughout history can be characterized by peace and cooperation as well as conflict and tension. While some Indonesians in the country have a deep admiration for and strong relationship with the Arabs, others have harshly criticized them for destroying Indonesia's local traditions, social diversity, stability, and religious harmony. Therefore, this situation brings both opportunities and challenges to Saudi Arabia's soft power policies. This section will first discuss the enabling factors for Saudi Arabia's use of soft power in Indonesia and then discuss the challenges.

The first factor that enables Saudi Arabia's soft power policies is the Kingdom's positive image among Indonesian Muslims. For an actor to achieve soft power in the international arena, it needs to be attractive and appealing. This attraction of the source actor

will shape the preferences of others without any coercion. This is directly related to the positive image of the source actor.^[xxv] Saudi Arabia's positive image on the Indonesian public is evident in the Lowy Institute's 2021 report "How Indonesians See the World". According to this report, Indonesians expressed the highest level of trust in their leader Joko Widodo with 74%, followed by Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman with 57%. It is noteworthy that Mohammed bin Salman ranked second with a very high score, surpassing the leaders of global actors such as the US, Russia and China, and regional actors such as Japan and Australia. In the same report, a "sentiment thermometer" was used to measure respondents' feelings about countries, which they could rate on a scale of 0 to 100. On this measure, Saudi Arabia came out on top with a score of 70, making it the country with the most favorable image among Indonesians. In contrast, Japan, with which Indonesians have closer economic, political and cultural ties than other countries, scored 64 points, while Singapore and Malaysia scored 63 points. These results clearly demonstrate Saudi Arabia's positive image and soft power in the eyes of Indonesians.^[xxvi]

There are several factors that contribute to the positive image of Saudi Arabia in Indonesia. The first of these is that it is the country of the *Qibla*, places of worship and especially the pilgrimage.^[xxvii] *Hajj*, in particular, has a very different place in the eyes of Indonesian Muslims. People save money for years to go to the holy places once in their lives and perform the pilgrimage. In addition to the Kingdom's status as the land of the holy sites, the fact that Indonesian Muslims can easily perform Hajj pilgrimage and witness the Kingdom's services in the *Haramayn* in person is the first factor that contributes to the positive image of Saudi Arabia.^[xxviii]

The second factor contributing to the positive image is the perception of Saudi Arabia as the seat of Islamic education.^[xxix] This goes back long before the establishment of the Kingdom and its effects continue to this day. Throughout history, Indonesian Muslims seeking religious education have traveled to Haramayn, especially Masjid al-Haram, to participate in the religious education circles established there. Many of those who completed their education returned to their countries and participated in dawah activities, while others stayed in Haramayn and continued their lives as muderris. Some of them even became very important scholars. The Indonesian scholar Sheikh Ahmad Khatib Minangkabawi, who became the greatest scholar of the Shafi'i sect in the Masjid al-Haram from the end of the 19th century until the beginning of the 20th century, is one such example. Hasyim Ashari, the founder of the Nahdatu'l Ulema, which would have a great impact on the religious-social life of Indonesia, and Ahmad Dahlan, the founder of the Muhammadiyah, are among other important figures who studied in Mecca.^[xxx] Although there are different alternatives for Islamic education today, Saudi Arabia continues to maintain its importance in the field of Islamic education with universities such as the Islamic University of Medina, Imam Muhammad bin Saud University, Mecca Umm al-Qura University or private madrasas. Therefore, in addition to being the country of holy places, the continuation of the pilgrimage and Islamic education in the Saudi organization can be counted among the factors that contribute to the positive image of Saudi Arabia in the eyes of Indonesian Muslims.

The second factor enabling Saudi Arabia's soft power policies is Indonesia's diverse religious structure and the fact that Indonesian Muslims are not alien to Salafist/Wahhabi ideas. The overwhelming majority of Indonesian Muslims are Shafi'i in deeds and Ash'ari in faith. In addition, it is estimated that about 7% of the Muslim population adopts the Salafist/Wahhabi interpretation.^{xxxii} The spread of Salafist/Wahhabi ideas in Indonesia is closely related to international developments in the 80s. Based on this fact, it is sometimes wrongly believed that Salafist/Wahhabi ideas entered Indonesia through Saudi Arabia. An analysis of the historical development of Salafism in Indonesia shows that many groups emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries with the aim of purifying Islam from innovations and returning it to its original purity. These include groups such as Padri, Persatuan Islam (Persis), al-Irshad and Muhammadiyah.^{xxxiii} Although these groups share the same starting point and generally agree on matters of worship, they have different views on many other issues. It can be argued that the reason why these groups were not as influential at the time of their emergence as they were in the 80s, which was closely related to international developments, is that they were not strong, widespread and organized. In conclusion, Indonesia's diverse religious structure and the fact that Indonesian Muslims are not alien to Salafist/Wahhabi ideas is the second factor that enables Saudi Arabia's soft power activities in the country.

The third factor is that some Indonesian youth find Salafi/Wahhabi ideas attractive. In today's world, young people are confronted with a wide range of information, opinions and fatwas on the internet when they seek solutions to their religious and modern issues. Therefore, they are seriously confused about who to trust or which information is religiously authentic. At this point, Salafis/Wahhabis can be seen as a more reliable option with their answers referring to the first period.^{xxxiii} In addition, Salafis/Wahhabis continue to produce religious knowledge not only in areas such as theology, ethics and fiqh, but also in many areas of life, including prayer, rituals and bodily practices that express worship and piety. At this point, the idea of tawhid is always kept alive by referring to the Qur'an, Sunnah and the practices of the Salaf-i Salihin.^{xxxiv} In addition, Salafis/Wahhabis offer a clearly defined vision of Islam. This vision is relatively easy to implement for young people from all walks of life, especially those from secular backgrounds. These young people are asked to say the Shahada, pray five times a day, fast in Ramadan, and go on a pilgrimage once in their lifetime, while avoiding what they consider to be heresy, such as visiting graves, intercession, mawlid, kunut prayers, and prayers for the dead.^{xxxv}

The fourth factor is the relatively low level of religious knowledge of Indonesian Muslims to distinguish between different interpretations of Islam. Despite the large number of Pesantren in the country and the high level of religious sensitivity, it can be said that the level of religious education of individuals is relatively low. When this sensitivity is combined with a lack of religious knowledge, the influence of a systematic, organized and self-sacrificing mass on the people becomes inevitable. This situation opens space for Salafist/Wahhabi groups. Indonesians encounter Salafist/Wahhabi ideas on the radio in the car, on television at home, on YouTube on the internet or directly in sermons in the mosque, in other words, in the natural flow of life. People with high religious sensitivity but insufficient religious knowledge to distinguish be-

tween different interpretations are influenced by Salafist/Wahhabi ideas by directly associating these ideas with Islam itself. Therefore, insufficient religious knowledge allows people to easily accept Salafist/Wahhabi teachings.^[xxxvi] In addition, the fact that Salafist/Wahhabi groups have a systematic curriculum, form regular lecture circles to implement this curriculum, and interact directly with the public can be counted among other factors that enable them to spread their teachings.

The fifth factor is Indonesia's need for Saudi oil and investments. Indonesia's oil industry is a major contributor to the country's GDP, providing employment opportunities and playing an important role in manufacturing. Indonesia relies heavily on oil imports to meet its crucial domestic energy needs. Saudi Arabia is Indonesia's largest oil supplier. Indonesia imports around USD 2 billion worth of oil from the Kingdom annually. However, this dependence on oil to meet Indonesia's domestic energy needs is worrisome for energy security and economic stability. This is because the country's high domestic oil demand clearly has significant impacts on its economy, environment and society.

The other factor is Indonesia's need for investments. As a developing country, Indonesia is in dire need of investments for its new capital. Indonesia, which has been trying to attract investors to finance this mega project, has turned to Middle Eastern and Chinese investors after Masayoshi Son, the founder of Japan's Soft Bank Group, withdrew from the project in March 2022. Eko Hartono, Indonesia's Consul General in Saudi Arabia, stated that they are seeking financial support from some countries, especially Saudi Arabia, and that they are very optimistic about attracting investment from Saudi Arabia.^[xxxvii] The need for oil and investment forces Indonesia's hand in foreign policy vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia. This situation allows Saudi officials to operate very easily in Indonesia. Knowing that Saudi Arabia's activities are not in line with Indonesia's identity interests, government officials prefer economic interests over identity interests.^[xxxviii] This enables Saudi Arabia's soft power activities in the country.

3.2 The Challenges of Saudi's Exercise of Soft Power in Indonesia

In addition to the above-mentioned opportunities, there are also a number of challenges. These challenges are related to the Arabs and Salafist/Wahhabi groups living in Indonesia and the negative image attributed to Saudi Arabia as a direct result of what is happening in the Kingdom or in the Middle East region.^[xxxix] There are many factors that feed this negative image. The first is the practice of temporary marriages between Arab men from the Gulf region and Indonesian women, especially from the Sundanese ethnic group. This marriage is referred to as "Kawin kontrak" or temporary marriage. The villas and hotels where these marriages take place are located in Puncak, a mainly mountainous area where many Arab tourists from the Gulf region spend their vacations. The main reason why this practice of temporary marriage is common among Sudanese women is that they can earn a lot of money easily. They also believe that this temporary marriage will give birth to handsome and beautiful children. Although the arrival of Arab tourists plays an important role in the development of the Puncak region, the Kawin kontrak practice negatively affects the image of Arabs in the eyes of Indonesians.^[xl]

The second is that after the fall of Suharto's government, some Salafist/Wahhabi leaders organized violent, intolerant and anti-pluralist protests and some Arabs joined them. Some Salafist/Wahhabi clerics have inculcated Islamic radicalism in their followers through madrassas and pesantren. These include Jafar Omar Talib, Abu Bakr Ba'asir, Habib Rizq Shihab, Habib Salim Salon, Habib Hussein al Habsi, Salim Mu-barak at-Tamimi and Habib Ahmad bin Zain al Kaff. Jafar Omar Talib, for example, founded Laskar Jihad, which has led to violent clashes between Muslims and Christians in Maluku. Similarly, Abu Bakr Ba'asir Ba'asir, who has been accused by the Indonesian government for his involvement in some bloody terrorist acts across the country, is one of the founders of Jemaah Islamiyah. Another is the notorious FPI (Front Pembela Islam), founded by Muhammad Rizieq Shihab and some radical Muslim leaders of Hadrami Arab origin. Since its inception, FPI activists have frequently appeared in the media for acts of violence against religious minorities such as Christians and Hindus, as well as a wide range of sects such as Shias and Ahmadis, across the country. Since these individuals and groups base their actions on Islamic rules and principles in order to restore public order and morality, they do the most harm to the faith they represent, and Saudi Arabia is no exception.^[xli]

The third is the violent reaction and exclusionary style of the Salafis/Wahhabis living in the country, or some clerics graduated from Saudi institutions, against local or cultural elements that they claim have been added to the religion outside the form in which it was practiced in the early period of Islam.^[xlii] In Indonesia, some local beliefs and practices continue to live within Islam, especially in rural areas. However, Sufism is quite widespread and accepted in the country. Salafis/Wahhabis criticize Indonesian Muslims harshly for their opposition to the incorporation of local and cultural practices within Islam and the acceptance of Sufism as an Islamic way of life. This criticism, often directed online and through mosque conversations, has led to tensions and even fights between citizens. Thus, in some areas, mosques planned to be built with Saudi financing are strongly protested by residents.^[xliii] Uncomfortable with such harsh criticism of their own religious understanding and life, Indonesian Muslims sometimes label Salafists/Wahhabis as fanatics and militants. For this reason, many Indonesians avoid associating and identifying with them.

Fourth, there have been media protests and publicized reports of mistreatment and rights violations of Indonesian workers by Arab employers in Saudi Arabia. Many Indonesian workers face long working hours, inadequate wages, poor living conditions and a range of basic rights challenges. The long-standing lack of effective labor laws and inadequate enforcement mechanisms further exposes these workers to exploitation. Indonesian workers who struggle to find solutions to their problems with the Saudi authorities face serious difficulties due to the lack of solid legal guarantees. In addition, low salaries, long working hours, unsanitary accommodation and inadequate access to health care services add to the unrest and unhappiness of Indonesian workers.^[xliv] Although the Indonesian government has taken initiatives to resolve these negative situations, bilateral relations continued in some form until the execution of Tuti Tursilawati in 2018. This execution caused a major diplomatic crisis between the two countries. The Indonesian government strongly protested against the Kingdom for carrying out this execution without informing them.^[xlv] These negative situations experienced by

Indonesian workers damage Saudi Arabia's image and are among the factors that hinder soft power activities in the country.

As a result, the positive image of Saudi Arabia as the home of places of worship and the qibla of Islamic education, Indonesia's diverse religious structure, the appeal of Salafist/Wahhabi ideas to some Indonesian youth, the lack of religious knowledge among Indonesian Muslims to distinguish between different interpretations within Islam, and Indonesia's dependence on oil and investments are among the factors that enable the Kingdom's soft power activities in the country; In contrast, the temporary marriage between Arabs and Sudanese women, the organization of violent protests by some Salafist/Wahhabi leaders and the participation of some Arabs in the country, the violent reactions of Salafist/Wahhabi groups to the country's local and cultural practices within Islam, and the mistreatment and rights violations faced by Indonesian workers were considered as elements that forced Saudi Arabia to engage in soft power activities.

4 Conclusion

As an important actor in the regional and global arena, Saudi Arabia utilizes soft power policies to achieve its national goals. In this context, Indonesia has an important place among the countries where Saudi Arabia has implemented soft power policies. Saudi Arabia has various opportunities and challenges in implementing its soft power policies in Indonesia. Saudi Arabia uses various tools such as education, cultural exchange programs, and humanitarian aid activities to strengthen its religious and cultural ties and increase its influence. However, challenges and obstacles in this process cannot be ignored. In Indonesia, different religious groups and local dynamics may limit the effectiveness of Saudi Arabia's soft power policies. Moreover, how the local community perceives and reacts to these policies is also an important factor. In conclusion, Saudi Arabia's soft power policies have significant impacts both in the region and on a global scale. As seen in the case of Indonesia, the success of these policies depends on both seizing opportunities and overcoming challenges. Saudi Arabia's soft power strategies will continue to be an important research topic in international relations in the future.

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