

## **Foreword**

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Women's empowerment dominates this eighth edition of Muslim Politics Review [Vol. 4, No. 2, December 2025]. The edition's first three articles discuss the challenges that women face in both culture and the political systems they live in, such as in India, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Bangladesh. Discussing these challenges is important: women are increasingly assuming important roles in Muslim societies, particularly thanks to better access to education and work opportunities. At the same time, the dual pressures of women's professional roles and traditional care roles such as being a mother present unique challenge. So, as more women shape social and political affairs in Global South countries, their roles deserve scrutiny in this edition of Muslim Politics Review.

The first article, titled 'Governing Religion: Colonial Legality, State, and the Case of Hijab in India', explains how Muslim female students in predominantly-Hindu India face difficulties in expressing their religious beliefs following a high court ruling banning them from wearing hijab at schools. By doing so, the Court wished to emphasize the norms of secularity that serve as the bedrock of India's social and political systems stemming from British colonial rule that separates between public and private life. The article criticizes the state, arguing that the state is not supposed to suppress the interpretation of Muslim religious authority that obliges women to wear the hijab. By extending the practice, the article argues that the Muslim women's lives – in this case, demonstrated through wearing the hijab – are "regulated, controlled, and disciplined,

and the boundaries of religion are managed through secular-Hindu constituents of power”.

The second article, ‘Post-Conflict Political Dynamics in Aceh and Bangsamoro: Religious Symbols and Patrimonialism in Practice’, also deals with state interventions in women’s affairs. It argues that women – alongside other vulnerable groups in their society – are often the victims of neo-patrimonialism perpetrated by the elites in the post-conflict areas of Aceh, Indonesia, and Bangsamoro, the Philippines. The male political elites in these regions, who claim to represent Islam, often abuse religious meanings and symbols to establish and exert their power at the expense of women and others. These elites use jargon such as ‘*abang-abang syar’i*’ (‘sharia brothers’), projecting religious masculinity as both a moral authority and a basis of political dominance.

The third article, titled ‘Faith and Empowerment among Bangladeshi Muslim Women’, discusses women’s empowerment and faith in Bangladesh. The article explores how the interpretation of Islam is not a homogenous one, but depends on various factors, such as class, culture, and norms, which serve as the structures that shape women’s empowerment. The Bangladesh case shows how women have the agency to produce change, thanks to the advancement of the technology such as social media that can help advance the voice of women against disempowering Islamic religious dogma.

This edition’s other three articles discuss various contemporary topics in Indonesia: contested piety, conservatism and scientism, and the rise of China’s soft power. The fourth article discusses how the *hijrah* movement in Islam as “part of the cultural and spiritual trends” in Indonesia is being constructed as threat by the state and Muslim mass organizations. The article, titled ‘When Piety is Framed as Threatening: The Hijrah Movement within the Politics of Religious Moderation’, argues that this securitization logic “risks narrowing Indonesia’s religious pluralism by stigmatizing identity-based piety” and undermines the state’s and mass organizations’ religious moderation goals of tolerance and harmony. The

fifth article, 'When Religious Conservatism Intertwines with Anti-Scientism: Friday Prayers in the Time of Corona in Semarang', discusses the effect of religious conservatism and anti-scientism on religious leaders' attitudes toward the spread of COVID-19 in early 2020. Rising religious conservatism and anti-scientism, as reflected in preachers' sermons during congregational Friday prayers, contributed to their opposition to health protocols which aimed to reduce the spread. The religious leaders continued to open their mosques for Friday prayers, contributing to the spread of COVID-19 in Semarang. This edition's sixth article examines a contemporary issue significant magnitude: the rise of China's soft power and how it reduces anti-communism propaganda against China. This final article, titled 'China's Soft Power in Indonesia: Eliminating the Remnants of Suharto's US-Backed Anti-Communist Propaganda', provides evidence of how China's vigorous economic, education, and cultural efforts have strengthened China's first and second track diplomacy toward Indonesia, ultimately resulting in reduced anti-communist propaganda and Indonesian belief in such messages.