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Assessing Human Rights Backsliding in Prabowo Subianto's Indonesia and Anwar Ibrahim's Malaysia

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ABSTRACT
This article assesses whether restrictions on human rights under President Prabowo Subianto in Indonesia and Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in Malaysia represent new deterioration or the continuation of earlier practices. It compares two administrations whose leaders made public commitments to rights protection but govern under different political institutions and coalitions. Using a purposive, document-based comparison of published scholarship, human-rights organization reports, and contemporary news accounts available through August 2026, the analysis examines official responses to expression, peaceful assembly, and religious and sexual minorities. It distinguishes new measures and reported intensification from the continued application of pre-existing laws, and compares legal instruments, administrative enforcement, and accountability. In Indonesia, reports of forceful responses to the 2025 protests and the 2025 defense-policy designation concerning LGBTQ culture indicate new or intensified restrictions, while local resistance to a church is insufficient by itself to establish a national policy shift. In Malaysia, sedition investigations and protest-related policing largely demonstrate continuity of established instruments despite reform pledges; minority-rights controversies also involve earlier administrative decisions. The cases therefore show overlapping rights-protection concerns but not an identical or uniformly established degree of backsliding. The oligarchy thesis provides a plausible interpretation of political constraints, yet the available documents do not establish that elite or conservative pressure caused each enforcement decision. The contribution is a differentiated comparison of rights-related administrative action rather than a comprehensive measurement of national human-rights trends.

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Anwar Ibrahim; Human Rights; Indonesia; Malaysia; Prabowo Subianto.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations (UN), respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is an essential element of democracy. Human rights and fundamental freedoms include "freedom of opinion and expression, and freedom of association" (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], n.d.). However, the UN also reveals that "after a period of increased democratization around the world, many democracies

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appear to be backsliding" (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], n.d.). To ensure their long-term rule, some governments appear to be deliberately weakening checks and balances on their powers and restricting freedom of speech (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], n.d.). Such human rights backsliding also happened in Indonesia and Malaysia some time after the end of authoritarian or one-party rule in both countries.

In this article, "backsliding" is used as an assessable claim, not as a synonym for any rights violation. The immediate pre-incumbency baseline is the Joko Widodo a.k.a. Jokowi presidency (2014–2024) for Indonesia and the governments preceding Anwar Ibrahim (2018–2022) for Malaysia. A case is treated as evidence of a new restriction when a dated official measure expands constraints relative to that baseline; it is treated as intensification when available reporting documents a more restrictive pattern of enforcement. Where the same law or practice persists without an identifiable change, it is classified as continuity, even if it remains inconsistent with rights-protection commitments. The assessment concerns the three rights domains examined below and does not purport to measure a national trend in every human right. The period of incumbent-government observation is October 2024–August 2026 for Indonesia and November 2022–August 2026 for Malaysia. Human Rights Committee decisions on freedom of expression and assembly provide useful comparative legal precedent on issues of legality and proportionality. Decisions of the Human Rights Committee are relevant comparative legal precedent but do not establish that the countries have the same treaty obligations (Human Rights Committee, 2011, 2020). In Indonesia, greater political freedom and multiparty democracy after the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998 provided more freedom of expression. Laws enacted in 2008, including the Electronic Information and Transaction Law, were used to restrict expression. Hamid (2019) argues that pressures intensified under Indonesian President Jokowi after 2014. It is important to consider developments in Indonesia since 2014 because other leaders have restricted expression. In Malaysia, the first change in federal government since independence came in 2018, when opposition leader and former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad and members of the Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition came to power, ending 61 years of Barisan Nasional (BN) rule (Pakiam, 2019, pp. 195-196). Other civil liberties restrictions remained after the change in government. While the new PH government made public statements and other commitments in support of press freedom and other reforms to the Sedition Act 1948 and Communications and Multimedia Act 1998, critics faced continued enforcement of these laws (Amnesty International, n.d.). Anwar Ibrahim's actions and other policies should be understood in the context of existing policies.

In addition, religious and other minority groups encounter legal and other obstacles in both countries. This article examines recent legal and other obstacles faced by religious and other minority groups and advocates of free speech and assembly under President Prabowo Subianto in Indonesia, who assumed office in 2024, and Prime

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Minister Anwar Ibrahim in Malaysia, who assumed office in 2022. Both have publicly committed to protecting human rights, although there are important differences in their backgrounds. Prabowo has been accused of human rights abuses during his military career, and Anwar has been convicted in politicized trials and was a key figure in Malaysia's Reformasi movement. Comparisons between the two countries can help address structural differences between Indonesia's presidential system and Malaysia's coalition parliamentary system. Questions asked about both countries include: Which institutions have taken what actions to restrict free speech and assembly? How are recent actions to restrict these rights different from past restrictions? What evidence is there of elite or conservative support for restrictions on these rights? Differences in the length of time in office of leaders in the two countries and other legal institutions present challenges to this comparison but should not be dismissed.

Some scholarly works haves documented past restrictions on rights in both countries but not compared them. Halimatusa'diyah & Saat (2026) examine restrictions on free speech in both countries. Wiratraman (2025, p. 302) documents media restrictions and use of government-sponsored online "buzzers" in Indonesia under Prabowo, and Mietzner (2020) documents other illiberal actions by government officials in Indonesia at other times. Other works on Malaysia, including Lee (2025) on restrictions on online contents and critical voices by the government, Hunter (2023) on unfulfilled promises to review security and media laws, and Weiss (2025) on a 2024 proposal to strengthen licensing requirements for online media, documents recent restrictions on rights in Malaysia but does not compare restrictions on rights in the two countries.

Existing studies have examined some aspects of these questions, but there has been minimal systematic research on new restrictions and other forms of restriction in the three areas of rights under both incumbents. The purpose of this study is to conduct a systematic comparison of new and existing restrictions on the three areas of rights under both incumbents and test the elite-capture hypothesis. This study makes contributions to the public administration literature by demonstrating that protections of rights during an administration are influenced not only by campaign promises but also by the actions of public administrators interpreting and applying the law. Maheswara et al. (2022), for instance, assess rights-based public-service implementation and accountability in an Indonesian immigration office; the present article extends that administrative concern to rights-affecting policing, regulatory classification and treatment of minorities.

This study uses the oligarchy thesis of Hadiz and Robison (2013) as a provisional explanation of elite persistence after regime change, rather than as a complete causal model of rights violations. The proposed route is from elite accommodation or conservative electoral incentives to government priorities, regulations and enforcement discretion. Evidence of such a mechanism would require a documented link between actors' interests and an identifiable administrative decision, not merely their coexistence.

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Alternative explanations include institutional inertia and the inherited legal framework (Mietzner, 2020).

In the interpretations of Hadiz (2021) and Weiss (2020), the destruction of organized leftist politics during the Cold War contributed to the weakness of liberal or social-democratic alternatives. Indonesia's Communist Party was suppressed under Suharto after 1965–1966, and anti-communism subsequently stigmatized parts of the left (Fogg, 2021; Hadiz, 2021). This is one important historical explanation, not an exhaustive account of civil society development.

In British Malaya, the Emergency of 1948–1960 weakened the Malayan Communist Party and reinforced the political marginalization of the left. Weiss (2020, p. 511) connects this legacy to the consolidation of a communal and capitalist state. The link between the two countries is their limited left political party representation, not the suggestion that historical factors fully explain current policy. Left political parties in both countries have had limited success since the Cold War. Left parties in Indonesia, such as the People's Democratic Union (PRD), Just and Prosperous People's Party (PRIMA), and Labour Party, have been small. The Socialist Party of Malaysia has had limited success nationally in Malaysia. The Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI), a progressive party established in 2014, did not win seats in the national parliament in 2019 (Savirani et al., 2021, p. 117). The PSI later selected Kaesang Pangarep, President Jokowi's Jokowi's son, as its leader, indicating possible connections to patronage networks ("Indonesian Solidarity Party [PSI]", n.d.). This information adds to but does not prove the oligarchy explanation of limits to rights.

Other recent Malaysian parties, such as the Malaysian United Democratic Alliance (MUDA) and Malaysian United Party (BERSAMA), have struggled to compete with established coalitions. Historical information presented here helps test the oligarchy hypothesis but does not directly show that elite influence led to limits on rights. The objectives of this study include comparing new and old limits to three types of rights in both countries and testing two hypotheses about elite and conservative influences. Methods and results for both countries are presented in the following sections.

METHOD

This study is a qualitative, document-based comparative case study, not an event count or literature review. Factors influencing the selection of case studies include actions taken by Prabowo and Anwar prior to their assumption of office to safeguard the rights of some groups and differences between their governments' coalition and other institutional features. Units of analysis are documented state measures or official responses concerning three areas (freedom of expression and assembly, and minority protections related to religion and sexual orientation) during their terms of office. This article includes findings from November 2022 under Anwar's government and October 2024 under Prabowo's government, as well as additional updates through August 2026.

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Historical information about laws and other events and research is provided as background information about conditions in these countries prior to the assumption of office by current leaders but not counted as current leaders' actions.

The source corpus comprises the scholarly analyses, news accounts and human-rights organization reports cited in the reference list. It was assembled purposively for relevance to a specified incident, law, official policy, or institutional context; the underlying original search log and a complete list of excluded items were not documented, and this study does not claim exhaustive coverage. For the revised comparison, a source is considered pertinent when it can identify at least the authority or public institution, the reported action, an approximate date and its relation to one of the three domains. Contextual works are retained to explain institutions and historical continuity. Reports that do not identify an identifiable government measure are used as contextual evidence, not proof of a new administrative restriction.

Evidence is assessed in two passes. First, each reported action is identified by country, date, authority or instrument, type of right affected, source and immediate pre-incumbency comparator, then categorized as a new measure, reported intensification, continuity, or insufficient evidence of change. Second, the same categories are compared across countries and summarized in Table 1. Peer-reviewed research is used chiefly for institutional context and prior trends; rights-organization reports for documented allegations and patterns; and news reports for the chronology, official responses and competing accounts. Where sources differ, reported events, attributed claims and proven official actions are kept separate. Independent corroboration is limited: source convergence is noted where it exists, while single-source examples cannot independently establish motive, state responsibility or a national trend. No systematic inter-coder reliability test was performed. Unequal observation periods and differing source coverage further preclude numerical country rankings or a definitive causal test of the oligarchy thesis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The section first describes historical and coalition contexts, then examines the evidence by shared rights domain, and finally compares the country-level administrative routes. Background material identifies possible political constraints; , assessment of new restrictions rests on dated official actions and the distinction between continuity and change.

The Background of Prabowo Subianto

Prabowo was a military officer who served under Suharto and headed the Army Strategic Reserve Command. He was also Suharto's former son-in-law and belongs to a business family that includes his brother Hashim Djojohadikusumo (Tehusijarana, 2018;

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Siregar, 2024). These links are relevant to elite continuity, but the later administrative evidence must be examined separately.

Prabowo's military record includes allegations concerning the abduction of pro-democracy activists in 1997–1998, some of whom remain missing (Hamid, 2014). A contemporary report described findings by the Military Officers' Honour Council that contributed to his dismissal after the fall of Suharto ("Fresh doubt", 2014). These disciplinary findings and allegations must be distinguished from a criminal judgment: the report identifies no subsequent judicial conviction of Prabowo for those events. The historical episode establishes a contested rights-related background, not evidence of an action under his current administration.

After leaving the army, Prabowo spent time in Jordan and subsequently entered business and party politics (Mao, 2024). He founded the Great Indonesia Movement (Gerindra) Party in 2008 and unsuccessfully contested national executive elections before joining Jokowi's cabinet as defence minister following the 2019 election (Siregar, 2024; Connelly & Laksmana, 2019). This move is relevant to the argument because it illustrates elite accommodation across an earlier rivalry; it does not by itself establish the administrative causes of rights restrictions after October 2024.

Prabowo won the 2024 presidency with Gibran Rakabuming Raka, the son of outgoing president Jokowi, as his running mate (Mietzner, 2024). Nuraniyah (2024, p. 105) argues that state institutions and resources were mobilized to favor their candidacy. This interpretation concerns the coalition that brought Prabowo to power; it is not by itself proof of particular later rights restrictions.

The Background of Anwar Ibrahim

Anwar's experience differs from Prabowo's. He was a student and Islamist activist at Universiti Malaya before entering electoral politics. He was detained under the Internal Security Act after student protests against rural poverty in Baling in 1974 and released in 1976 ("50 years", 2018; Khoo, 2023, p. 5; Rahim, 2022). The Internal Security Act, which provided for detention without trial, was repealed in 2012 (Ragu, 2026). This history helps explain the prominence of civil liberties in Anwar's later reformist commitments.

In 1982, Anwar joined the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), a principal party in the BN coalition, and entered Parliament. He subsequently held several ministerial posts and became deputy prime minister in 1993 ("50 years", 2018). His participation in UMNO is relevant to the coalition constraints that later accompanied his return to government.

Anwar's relationship with Mahathir fractured amid disagreements over economic management during the 1997–1998 Asian financial crisis, leading to his dismissal in September 1998 (Wain, 2009, pp. 283–284, 288). Anwar subsequently launched the multiracial Reformasi movement and was imprisoned on corruption and sodomy charges.

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He rejected the accusations as politically motivated ("50 years", 2018; "Anwar Ibrahim: From political prisoner", 2022). His reformist history makes the retention of restrictive laws under his later premiership a relevant question, without determining the answer in advance.

Anwar was released in 2004 but imprisoned again in 2015 under Najib's government; he received a royal pardon after the 2018 change of government ("Anwar Ibrahim", 2022). That change followed Mahathir's departure from BN and his alliance with the opposition PH coalition, of which Anwar was de facto leader (Abdullah, 2019).

Following the 2022 election, Anwar became prime minister and the head of a unity government formed by PH and BN even though neither coalition had secured an absolute majority. This coalition arrangement shapes the analysis of his executive discretion.

Indonesian Politics after the End of Suharto's Authoritarian Rule

After the end of Suharto's rule in 1998, Indonesia restored multiparty democracy, yet established political, business and military networks continued to exercise influence (Hadiz & Robison, 2013). Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Prabowo had historical connections to Suharto, while Jokowi also cooperated with established elites during his presidency. This history motivates an expectation of political accommodation under Prabowo; whether accommodation produced particular rights restrictions must be judged from later administrative evidence.

Conservative Islamist organizations also became politically influential in post-Suharto Indonesia and have campaigned for restrictive treatment of religious and sexual minorities (Kurlantzick, 2018). These pressures predate Prabowo's presidency and thus cannot alone distinguish a new downturn under his administration.

Jokowi's choice of conservative cleric Ma'ruf Amin as his running mate in 2019 illustrates an electoral incentive to appeal to conservative Muslim constituencies (Saat, 2019, pp. 1–4). It does not demonstrate who initiated a particular administrative decision under Prabowo.

Malaysian Politics after the End of One-Party Rule

Malaysia's 2018 change of government brought Mahathir back to power at the head of PH, but the coalition collapsed in February 2020 after defections and realignment with BN (Abdullah, 2019; Ahmad & Koya, 2020). Chin (2020) associates part of this realignment with conservative Malay Muslim discontent over the composition of the PH cabinet. This is political background, not a direct explanation of all later policing choices.

PH won the largest number of parliamentary seats in 2022 but needed BN support to form a unity government (Ng, 2022). Anwar consequently appointed UMNO president Ahmad Zahid Hamidi as deputy prime minister despite the corruption-related charges he faced (Soo, 2022). Zahid was granted a discharge not amounting to an acquittal in 2023

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(Weiss, 2024, p. 290; "Zahid's Yayasan Akalbudi case", 2026). This coalition accommodation is observable, but no cited decision record links it directly to a specific arrest or minority-rights policy.

The conservative Malay Muslim coalition Perikatan Nasional (PN) made major gains in the 2022 national and 2023 state elections and became the main parliamentary opposition. These electoral pressures are pertinent to Anwar's coalition strategy, but they do not automatically establish the administrative cause of later restrictions.

Tayeb (2023) interprets Anwar's increased spending on Islamic functionaries and support for stronger sharia court powers as an effort to appeal to conservative Muslim voters. This is evidence of an electoral policy orientation, not of influence over each of the incidents examined below.

Evidence of Change and Continuity in Rights Protection

The following incidents show administrative restrictions and controversies during the two administrations, but they differ in what they establish about temporal change. A new official classification or a documented escalation in the use of force may indicate deterioration. Continued use of inherited criminal statutes, without evidence of increased application, instead demonstrates persistence of a restriction. The legal benchmark is not whether any person was investigated or any gathering dispersed, but whether the state action was lawful, necessary and proportionate to a legitimate aim (Human Rights Committee, 2011, 2020).

Policing of Free Speech

Under Prabowo, government critics were sometimes described as "foreign agents", and Amnesty International (2026) reported online disinformation targeting them. The Alliance of Independent Journalists documented 60 reported incidents against journalists and outlets during January–August 2025, including intimidation and digital attacks, with police or military personnel named among alleged perpetrators (Aliansi Jurnalis Independen, 2025). These are serious reported restrictions, but allegations about particular actors are not equivalent to judicial findings. Since restrictions and online manipulation also predate Prabowo (Hamid, 2019; Mietzner, 2020), the figures alone cannot establish the scale of change from the previous administration.

In Malaysia, the administration continued to enforce the Sedition Act 1948 and Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 despite Anwar's pledges of reform. Activist Badrul Hisham Shaharin, known as Chegubard, was charged in April 2024 over a Facebook post about a proposed Forest City casino and political figures ("Malaysian activist Chegubard", 2024). He received a RM5,000 fine in July 2026, with consequences for his electoral eligibility ("Chegubard disqualified", 2026). These events indicate use of inherited legal powers, not an independently established increase in their frequency.

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Amnesty International (2025a) also reported the October 2025 arrest of seven social-media users under the Sedition Act, the Communications and Multimedia Act and the Penal Code. Together with the Chegubard case, the incident shows continued reliance on inherited speech restrictions. Neither example alone establishes whether enforcement has increased since 2022. The constitutional debate around the Sedition Act is analyzed by Singh (2020).

Suppression of Peaceful Assemblies

Indonesian security forces used tear gas and water cannons during the 2025 "Dark Indonesia" (#IndonesiaGelap) protests against budget cuts and the August–September protests against legislators' benefits (Sood, 2025; "Protesters extend", 2025). The former included student objections to cuts affecting education and health associated with Prabowo's free-meals budget ("Questioning budget cuts", 2025). Whether each use of force was lawful turns on necessity and proportionality, not simply on the existence of police dispersal.

Indonesia's August–September 2025 demonstrations escalated after reports that an armored police vehicle killed a motorcycle driver at a protest site. News and scholarly accounts describe tear gas, water cannons and physical force (Lane, 2026; Wijaya & Jayasuriya, 2026, pp. 149–150; Amnesty International, 2025b). Reports as of September 2, 2025 mentioned at least six deaths and 20 people missing ("Twenty missing", 2025). These incidents warrant scrutiny for necessity and proportionality, but the available sources do not attribute each casualty to an identifiable officer or provide a controlled comparison with earlier protest responses.

In Malaysia, participants in otherwise peaceful protests have faced police investigation under existing statutes. For example, police summoned participants and organizers of a March 2024 women's march for investigation under the Peaceful Assembly Act 2012 and Minor Offences Act 1955 ("4 summoned", 2024). An investigation alone does not establish a human-rights violation without scrutiny of its lawful basis and proportionality.

A July 2025 Kuala Lumpur rally calling for Anwar's resignation was largely peaceful (Latiff & Leong, 2025); two participants were subsequently arrested over the alleged flogging of his effigy ("Cops arrest 2 men", 2025). Such arrests may discourage participation, but a rights assessment requires a legal justification and proportionality analysis. The report of this incident alone does not determine the legality of the officers' conduct.

Marginalization of Religious and Sexual Minorities

Official decisions and local disputes affecting religious and sexual minorities warrant scrutiny, but their existence alone does not establish that conservative Islamist organizations caused them. Indonesia formally recognizes six major religions alongside

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traditional or indigenous beliefs, yet local resistance to minority worship facilities has continued under successive governments. In August 2026, residents opposed the construction of a church in the CitraLand area of Surabaya (Widiyana, 2026). The reported action was by local residents; in the absence of evidence of a new administrative refusal or state sanction, this example demonstrates a continuing protection problem, not a verified new national government restriction.

In regard to the interests of sexual minorities, although there is no law at the national level of Indonesia that criminalizes consensual sex between same-sex adults, in October 2025, Prabowo signed the Presidential Regulation on General Policy for National Defense which classified the spread of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) culture as a non-military threat to the country (Trikarinaputri, 2026). This can be seen as the government's compromise with conservative Islamist forces. This dated executive classification is more direct evidence of an incumbent-era policy change than the reported Surabaya protest. Its language may be compatible with conservative political framing, but no documentary evidence cited here establishes that a specific conservative group caused the presidential decision.

In Malaysia, the marginalization of religious and sexual minorities continued to happen after Anwar came to power. The most notorious violation of religious minorities' rights is the relocation of the Dewi Sri Pathrakaliamman temple, a century-old Hindu temple in the city center of Kuala Lumpur in March 2025. The temple was instructed to relocate to make way for the construction of a mosque. This had sparked controversy within the Indian Hindu community (Alhadjri, 2025).

The Dewi Sri Pathrakaliamman temple dispute concerns land allegedly occupied without a registered title. The temple committee sought designation of the property as a non-Muslim place of worship in 2012, but Kuala Lumpur's local authority sold the land in 2014, before Anwar took office. After subsequent proposals to construct a mosque, the committee agreed in 2025 to move the temple to a nearby site (Alhadjri, 2025; "Malaysia PM Anwar", 2025; "Dewi Sri Pathrakaliamman Temple", 2025). This chronology reveals difficulties in land administration and minority consultation, but does not support attributing the initial land disposition to Anwar.

Initially, Anwar used the term "kuil haram" (illegal temples) when commenting on the issue. This further angered the Indian Hindu community (Hariz Mohd, 2025). He only publicly apologized for using the term at the end of July 2026 before the state election of Negeri Sembilan (Hariz Mohd, 2026). Nevertheless, the PH still lost the state election (Ikram & Cheng, 2026).

Under Anwar, the government announced in February 2026 that it would replace "LGBT" with "budaya songsang" ("deviant culture") in official discourse ("Reckless labelling", 2026). This is a new stigmatizing official framing. By contrast, Section 377 of the Penal Code criminalizing sex between men predates his premiership and therefore

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represents continuing restriction rather than a new enactment. The cited record does not demonstrate how internal coalition bargaining affected either policy.

Table 1 applies the same baseline, state-action and attribution questions to all three domains in both countries. The entries summarize the evidence discussed above rather than adding incidents or assigning comparative scores.

Table 1. Cross-case assessment of administrative restrictions and temporal change

Rights domain	Indonesia: Prabowo	Malaysia: Anwar
Expression	2025 reported media attacks: potential intensification of earlier restrictions; a comparable pre-2024 rate is unavailable.	Sedition prosecutions and arrests under inherited law (Amnesty International, 2025a): continuity; acceleration unproven.
Assembly	2025 protests and reported use of force (Amnesty International, 2025b; Wijaya & Jayasuriya, 2026): serious episodes; pre-2024 comparison is limited.	2024 women's march questioning and 2025 rally arrests: potentially chilling enforcement of inherited powers ("4 summoned", 2024; "Cops arrest 2 men", 2025).
Minority rights	New 2025 executive designation of LGBTQ culture; 2026 Surabaya church objection was local, not a proven central state action (Trikarinaputri, 2026; Widiyana, 2026).	New 2026 stigmatizing official terminology; temple land decisions and Section 377 predate Anwar (Alhadjri, 2025).

Source: Author's comparative assessment of evidence and sources discussed in the text.

The cross-case pattern is not consistent rollback. Evidence of rollback in Indonesia includes law enforcement activities in mass protests during the incumbent era and new categorical claims by new leaders in Indonesia. Evidence of rollback in Indonesia is stronger than evidence of rollback in Malaysia, but we cannot compare the degree of rollback across cases. Evidence of rollback in Malaysia includes enforcement of laws established by previous leaders and new administrative rhetoric and land disputes. Evidence of rollback in both cases primarily includes law enforcement activities and moral and public order claims. Differences between the two cases include different evidence of rollback in Indonesia, covering new categories and law enforcement activities during protests, and different evidence of rollback in Malaysia, covering old laws and land decisions. These differences suggest that existing restrictions should not be coded as rollback.

Pressure from coalitions and the religious conservatism of elites are plausible explanations for certain events but not direct evidence of shared causes. Evidence of elite accommodation includes Prabowo's political rehabilitation and coalition negotiations with Anwar; sections of this article on political context include evidence of election-related motivations based on religious conservatism. Neither form of evidence provides direct evidence related to specific arrests and police and other temple- and regulatory-related activities discussed in this article involving these individuals. As Hadiz and Robison (2013) argue, these factors may block reform, but others, such as problems related to legal and security institutions and local administrative disputes, may also

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contribute. The public-administration implication is that policy commitments should be judged through the legality, proportionality, transparency and accountability of particular state actions, not inferred solely from leaders' political biographies.

CONCLUSION

This article describes general human rights problems affecting freedom of expression and assembly and the rights of minorities in Indonesia and Malaysia. Information about trends over time is inconsistent. Information about events in Indonesia in 2025 involving protests and statements by government officials about LGBTQ culture indicates steps taken by current government officials. Information about events in Malaysia, including pending litigation and the application of past laws, indicates steps taken by current government officials. Documents cited in this article indicate steps to limit human rights protections in both countries. They do not indicate broad reversals of human rights protections across either country. The oligarchy explanation helps explain obstacles to carrying out promised reforms. None of the documents cited in this article provides information linking particular government actions to oligarchy or other conservative interests. One benefit of the comparison is that it identifies different threats to human rights from different government agencies, including land agencies. Additional research may shed light on the motives and processes driving government action and related law enforcement practices over time. In policy terms, transparent justifications for restrictive measures, independent review of police conduct and rights-sensitive administrative procedures would strengthen accountability. Future research should combine systematic event records with official administrative files and interviews, where feasible, to test which coalition pressures and institutional practices actually shape these decisions. The existing documentary evidence does not justify a deterministic prediction about when human-rights protection will improve.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The evidence used in this document-based study consists of the publicly reported scholarship, media accounts and human-rights reports cited in the References, with the comparative assessment summarized in Table 1. No separate original interview dataset or publicly deposited coding spreadsheet is claimed; access to underlying publications depends on the respective publishers and organizations.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest in this article.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

This article was solely written by the author with no additional support.

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Ethical approval is not applicable to this manuscript.

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DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI

During revision of this manuscript, OpenAI ChatGPT was used to assist with language editing, the organization of reviewer-requested revisions, and suggested comparative synthesis. Following the use of this tool, the author carefully reviewed and validated the final version of the manuscript, and assumes full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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