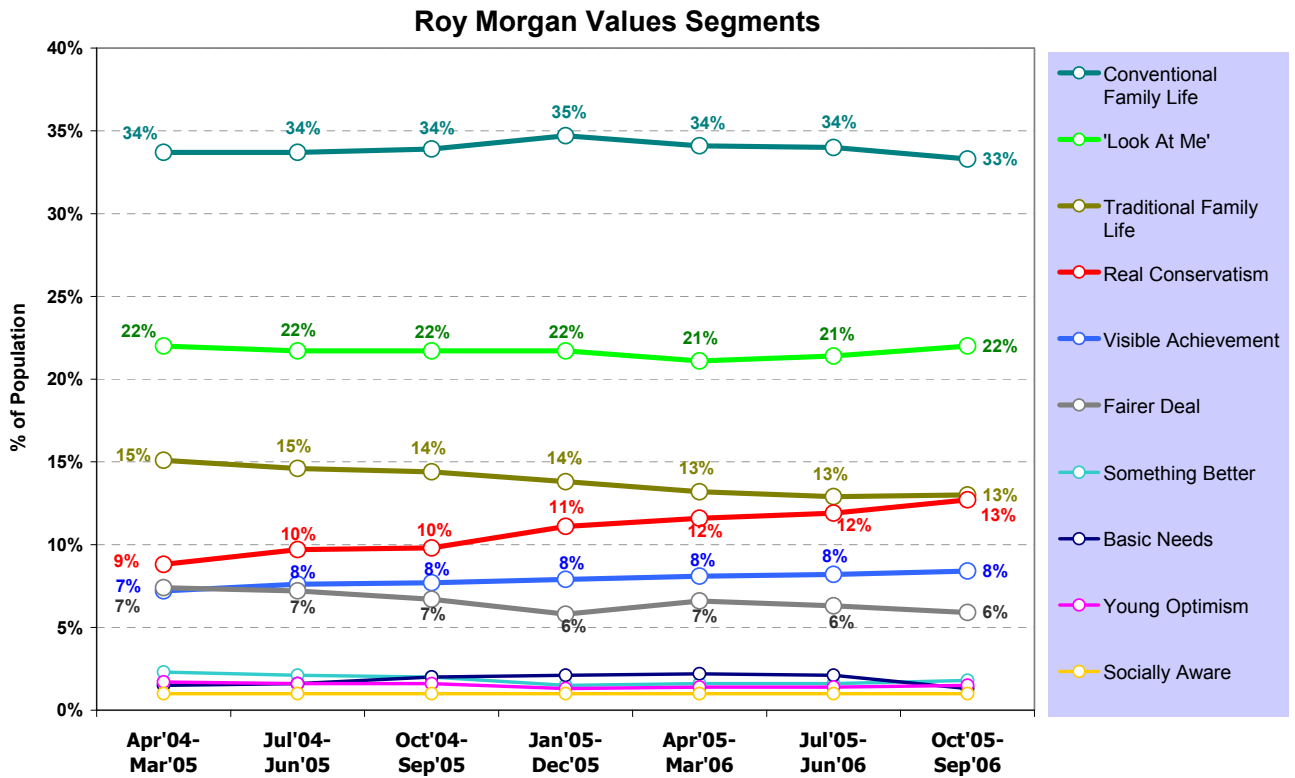


What's changing the texture of Indonesian society, slowly but visibly?

How time flies. Indonesia will soon be celebrating a decade of democracy. Three out of four people from around the country continue to believe that “democracy is working”. With democracy came freedom of expression, individual, media and political. The common assumption is that such freedoms must be leading to a more liberal society. The trends in fact indicate otherwise. Conservative values aren't making way for more liberal views, quite the opposite. These observations are based on Roy Morgan Single Source, Indonesia's largest syndicated survey now expanding to include over 27,000 respondents annually, projected to reflect 90% of the population over the age of 14.

Roy Morgan Values Segments, produced in conjunction with Colin Benjamin of The Horizons Network, is a socio-economic ‘map’ of society at large. It also tracks attitudinal changes, the psychological progress of Indonesia so to speak. Of interest not only to marketers, it is able to quantify attitudinal changes over time. Deeper analysis would reveal the differences of opinion between say men and women, young and old, urban and rural or a combination of such facets. Allowing for the marginal shifts which are characteristic of random sampling of respondents around the country, the numbers representing each of the Values Segments are understandably stable across the board. With the noticeable exception of two important segments.



Conventional Family, at 33 per cent of society is a segment that comprises young parents of young children. In a young country like Indonesia, this is the single largest grouping of people above the age of 14. The self-focussed “Look At Me” segment comprising the large teenage population comes next, at 22 per cent. There are no noticeable changes in attitudes among these two major groups, in the last three years. But the changes in the next two segments are indeed noteworthy.

As the name denotes, “Real Conservatism” represents a group of people who share conservative values, influenced in large measure by their upbringing as well as their spiritual beliefs. This group is growing steadily, from 9 per cent of society three years ago to 13 per cent today. The growth rate is higher in both urban and rural, but even higher in rural Indonesia. As genders, the percentage of men in this segment has dipped slightly, but women are more than compensating. In terms of percentage younger women 14-49 remain steady, growing in numbers as the population grows and regardless of the joys of greater individual freedom that democracy offers. Why are men and women heading in different directions, attitudinally? Could it be that those new freedoms abused by the male are impacting on the females of Indonesian society?

I think so. If I may move away from facts and figures into the realm of opinion, I fear it is simply a case of ‘men behaving badly’. On the street and in the *kampung*, in the buses and the trains, in the *pasars* and the shopping malls, are women today being treated with as much deference and respect as they were in yesteryear? I don’t think so. The jilbab or head-dress is a visible ornament of faith, capable of creating both distance and respect, especially from the opposite sex.

From a completely different angle, add the everyday pictures of misery in Iraq and Palestine, the heartland of Islam. The individual inability to actively soothe the pain of fellow-followers of the same faith can be compensated in part by a simple expression of solidarity, a silent but visible sign of protest. One or both these very different stimuli are giving growing numbers of women the ability to find some comfort in their faith. I can think of no better explanation for Real Conservatism growing as visibly and as quickly as it is. The increasing popularity of the jilbab on the street is proof of that view.

The fact that older women in this segment are also growing in both percentage and numbers is the obvious explanation for that next sizeable segment, Traditional Family Life, declining to the point where a crossover is imminent. Comprising older parents and empty nesters, steady growth in conservative values will further diminish this segment.

The “Visible Achievement” segment is next in size, comprising those 8 per cent of the most financially-comfortable in Indonesia. They are among the most successful in business or in their professions, but they too are conservative in comparison to their financial equals but liberal thinking counterparts, “Socially Aware”. The latter forms barely 1 per cent at the top-end of Indonesian society. This is not a segment that’s growing.

At the opposite end are the sizeable group of young people struggling to make a living, make ends meet, looking for a “Fairer Deal” than they are getting out of life today. They represent the under-privileged of Indonesia. Their aged counterparts are the small group “Basic Needs”, living out their twilight years alone. This is a small group in a culture where very few aged people live alone, in contrast with neighbouring Australia. Collectively, their ability to influence thinking and progress of society-at-large does not amount to much.

As the Middle Class continues to grow, the small group “Something Better” (2%) comprising professionals in their late-30s and 40s looking for their next promotion will hopefully become a more influential voice in the future. Of similar promise is “Young Optimism” (2%), young graduates and first-jobbers looking at life through rose-tinted glasses.

Unashamedly a liberal, I celebrate the signs in Indonesian society that are actively promoting exchange of opinion today, of debate intended to stimulate real social change in these post-Soeharto years. Sadly though, I often see those opposing views expressed, then harden not soften, leading to even more rigid and polarised positions than before. Some such exchanges have led to violence against individuals and groups. The inability to live and let live cannot be good for Indonesia, strengthening the status quo, dampening the desire for change. But that really isn’t any of my business. For the marketing fraternity and business at large, watching the fabric of Indonesia change will always be an essential key for continued success in the marketplace. Acting quickly on those nuances will produce desired results.

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