

Human dignity in a fractured world

The Catholic Church marked the first anniversary of the pontificate of Pope Leo XIV on May 18. One year reveals the deeper orientation of a papacy that has now come into sharper focus with the publication of his first encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*.

The document confirms that his pontificate is not centered on a single issue, but on a comprehensive moral vision: the defense of human dignity in a world increasingly shaped by fragmentation, inequality and rapid technological transformation.

While often read as a landmark reflection on artificial intelligence, *Magnifica Humanitas* is more fundamentally a social encyclical rooted in the long tradition of Catholic social teaching. Its primary concern is not technology itself, but the conditions that allow human beings to flourish together. Artificial intelligence appears within this broader framework as a test case: Will technological progress serve the human person, or diminish humanity?

In this sense, the encyclical stands in continuity with *Rerum Novarum* and *Fratelli Tutti* while addressing the moral dilemmas of the digital age. Like those ear-

lier documents, it does not reject modern developments, but seeks to guide them ethically.

At the heart of the encyclical lies a simple but demanding claim: Every human person possesses an inalienable dignity that must never be reduced to economic value, political utility or technological function. This dignity is not granted by the state, the market or society; it is intrinsic.

Here, the pope retrieves a deeply theological vision of the human person as *imago Dei*—created in the image of God and called into relationship. This perspective resists any attempt to treat individuals as data points, consumers, or instruments of larger systems. The encyclical warns that when human beings are reduced in this way, society itself becomes fragile. Progress without respect for dignity ultimately leads not to development, but to new forms of exclusion.

One of the most significant contributions of *Magnifica Hu-*

manitas is its renewed emphasis on the common good. The encyclical insists that society cannot be understood as a mere aggregation of individual interests. The common good is something more demanding: a shared good that can only be achieved together and that benefits all.

This vision challenges both excessive individualism and narrow nationalism. It calls for a broader horizon in which personal freedom is balanced with social responsibility. In a world marked by polarization and short-term thinking, such a perspective is urgently needed.

The document also highlights the role of political authority in promoting the common good. It warns against forms of politics driven solely by immediate gain, ideological division, or economic pressure, arguing instead for long-term responsibility and social cohesion.

The encyclical extends its reflection to the global level, where

inequalities between nations continue to deepen. It criticizes a mentality of confrontation and calls for a renewed commitment to international cooperation.

In this context, Pope Leo XIV reaffirms the principle of the universal destination of goods, a cornerstone of Catholic social teaching. The resources of the earth—material, cultural and even technological—are intended for the benefit of all. Private ownership and national interests remain legitimate, but they are not absolute; they must be ordered toward the common good of humanity.

This principle has particular relevance in an age when access to technology, data and knowledge is unevenly distributed. The digital divide risks becoming a new form of global inequality, reinforcing existing hierarchies rather than overcoming them.

It is within this broader social vision that the encyclical addresses artificial intelligence. Pope Leo XIV does not reject technological innovation. Instead, he insists that it must be guided by ethical reflection and oriented toward human flourishing.

The key question is not simply what technology can do, but what

it should do—and for whom. Artificial intelligence can enhance human life, but it can also deepen inequality, concentrate power and obscure responsibility.

The encyclical cautions against systems that make decisions affecting human lives without transparency or accountability. It raises concerns about the use of technology in warfare, surveillance, and economic control. These are not merely technical issues; they are moral ones. At a deeper level, the document asks what kind of humanity is being shaped by these technologies. If efficiency becomes the highest value, other dimensions of human life—relationship, compassion and contemplation—may be marginalized.

Looking globally, these themes are highly pertinent for a nation like Indonesia. As one of the most dynamic digital economies in Southeast Asia, the country is undergoing rapid technological change. At the same time, it continues to navigate challenges related to inequality, social cohesion and democratic resilience.

The encyclical's emphasis on human dignity and the common good resonates deeply with the foundational values of Pancasila.

It offers a moral framework that supports pluralism, social justice and national unity.

In education, its insights are especially important. Schools and universities must not only prepare students for technological competence, but also form their ethical judgment. Without this, digital progress may come at the cost of social fragmentation.

Pope Leo XIV's first year has been marked not by dramatic gestures, but by steady moral clarity. In a world dominated by noise and polarization, this style of leadership is significant. It suggests that authority can still be grounded in reflection, coherence and fidelity to principle.

With *Magnifica Humanitas*, he has offered more than a document. He has articulated a framework for thinking about the future: one in which human dignity remains central, the common good is actively pursued and technology is placed at the service of humanity.

In an era defined by both fragmentation and technological acceleration, Pope Leo XIV reminds us of a fundamental truth: that no system, however advanced, can replace the value of the human person.



By Bernardus Agus Rukiyanto

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The Jakarta Post

Still bold, fiercely independent

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Oligarchic consolidation pushes 'end of Reform' in Indonesia

Verica Lai

The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

More than two decades after Indonesia's democratic transition, the Reform era is drawing to a close as the oligarchic order becomes increasingly re-centralized and concentrates political and economic power despite the presence of democratic institutions, a pair of leading researchers has warned.

The oligarchs, who were fragmented and decentralized after the fall of former president Soeharto in May 1998, are now undergoing a process of reconsolidation, according to political analysts Veda Huda and Richard Robinson.

"Economic and political power is now being re-centralized, even though we might still have the institutions of democracy," said Veda, professor of Asian Studies at the Asia Institute, University of Melbourne.

The oligarchic reconsolidation is one of the main points in Veda and Robinson's latest book, *Oligarchy and the End of Reform in Indonesia: Power Reconsolidation*, published on Thursday.

The book itself is a revised and

updated edition of their 2004 book *Reorganizing Power in Indonesia: The Politics of Oligarchy in an Age of Markets* in 2004, regarded as one of the most influential works on modern Indonesian politics. It is also one of the most widely cited political analyses of the fall of Soeharto's authoritarian New Order regime.

One of the reasons behind the recent success of oligarchy, as highlighted by the authors, is that the democratic transition after Soeharto's fall brought about major institutional reforms, but fell short of a full political and social transformation. This left entrenched elite power structures largely intact, said Robinson, an emeritus professor at Murdoch University.

"Oligarchy never went away," Robinson said. "The institutions have changed, but the oligarchy as a system of alliances and relationships was never dismantled."

At the same time, the social forces that once pushed for reform failed to build broad and lasting coalitions capable of sustaining political influence beyond the initial Reform period.

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Dangerous shortcut



A parent guides children on Friday while crossing the Meureubo River on the way to Alue Unik state elementary school from Cangrai village to Lambay village in Pasisi Ceurumen district, West Aceh. For the past four days, students have been forced to wade across the river to attend end-of-year exams, shortening an 8-kilometer journey after a suspension bridge linking the villages was damaged in flash floods in November 2023 and has yet to be repaired.

BGN halts new kitchens after graft shakeup

New leader to review spending, assess need for facilities

Ruth Dea Juwita

The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

The newly appointed National Nutrition Agency (BGN) head has pledged sweeping efficiency measures and a moratorium on new kitchens, signaling a major reset of President Prabowo Subianto's flagship free nutritious meal program following a corruption scandal.

The agency will temporarily halt approvals for new nutrition fulfillment service units (SPP-Ga), the kitchens responsible for preparing meals under the program, while reviewing spending and assessing how many facilities are needed across regions, BGN head Nanik Sadayana Deyang told a press conference on Thursday.

"The main thing we have discussed and prepared a work plan for is budget efficiency," Nanik told reporters.

Nanik, previously the agency's deputy head, replaced Dadan Hindayana after President Prabowo removed him and two deputies, Sony Saniyasa and Lodewyk Pusing, with prosecutors later detaining all three as suspects in a corruption probe tied to the program.

Investigators have alleged that the three former officials approved ineligible foundations linked to agency insiders



After the shock: National Nutrition Agency chief Nanik S. Deyang (second left) accompanied by other agency officials, speaks at Thursday during a news conference at the agency's headquarters in Jakarta. The event was to introduce the agency's two new deputy chiefs and to outline governance improvements to the 2026 free nutritious meal program, beginning with efforts to optimize budget efficiency.

through manipulated verification processes and influenced procurement plans for goods, including electric motorcycles, shoes and televisions, that allegedly did not reflect operational needs and were overpriced, resulting in state losses.

The program's rollout has faced public scrutiny over food poisoning incidents, operational shortcomings and allegations of budget misuse, adding pressure on the government to tighten

oversight and spending. Finance Minister Purbaya Yudha Sadewa reduced this year's budget allocation for the program to Rp 268 trillion (US\$14.87 billion) in late May from Rp 335 trillion earmarked in the state budget and plans further cuts.

Government data show that realized spending for the program reached Rp 88 trillion in the first five months of the year, with more than 63 million beneficiaries.

Focus shifts to remote regions

The BGN has announced a shift in resources toward underserved, frontier, outermost and least developed (3T) regions while pausing registrations for new kitchens in urban areas, where kitchen development has become heavily concentrated.

Prabowo had instructed the agency to prioritize those regions, Nanik said. More than 27,000 kitchens are already operating, but Nanik said many had become "inefficient" amid oversupply in some areas and with operators often using leased premises, driving up their costs.

"If kitchens are found to be operating inefficiently, of course we will suspend them," Nanik said. "But we need to sort our operational kitchens out first."

The agency will work with the Elementary and Secondary Education Ministry and Home Ministry to determine the ideal number of kitchens needed for each subdistrict before deciding whether to reopen registration, he added.

For 3T areas with a limited number of kitchens, the BGN plans to "maximize" use of existing facilities, such as school canteens, community kitchens and public food facilities.

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Light sentences still mar military justice system: KontraS

Vidya Pinnadurai

The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

Indonesia's military justice system still reflects a broader pattern of impunity for handing down mild sentences, especially in cases of violence committed by personnel against civilians, according to rights group the Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (KontraS).

The group analyzed 131 verdicts delivered by military courts against Indonesian Military (TNI) personnel charged with the offenses of murder, attempted murder and assault, from October 2023 to September 2025.

Within that period, military courts across the country tried 13 defendants for murder, five for attempted murder and 115 for assault.

From the analysis, KontraS found the punishments given to defendants ranged from one month and 20 days to six years in prison for assault cases. Meanwhile, personnel standing trial for murder received sentences ranging from a year behind bars to life imprisonment.

Only four defendants in attempted murder and one other murder case were sentenced to death by the military courts, according to KontraS finding.

The figures between October 2022 and September 2023 analyzed by KontraS were no better. Of 117 military personnel prosecuted within that period, the lightest sentence was one month and 15 days in prison, while the heaviest was a year

and three months. KontraS also found that most crimes committed by TNI personnel against civilians, which were unrelated to their military duties, were still tried in military courts. Group researcher Muhammad Yahya Iryantama argued that such cases should be prosecuted in a general criminal court rather than in military courts.

"If the state is truly committed to protecting and respecting the human rights of its citizens, one way to demonstrate such commitment is by improving the practice of military justice," Yahya said during a press briefing on Thursday.

One recent case of a lenient sentence for military personnel found guilty of a crime took place in Medan, North Sumatra. First Sgt. Risa Pahler was sentenced to 10 months in prison in October 2023 after the military court found him guilty of killing a 15-year-old boy during an operation to disperse a street brawl in the city.

The acid attack against KontraS activist Andhe Namsa also reflects the impunity pattern, Yahya said.

Unidentified men hurled acid at Andhe on March 28, causing severe injuries to most of his body and face. The National Military Police Headquarters (Puspom TNI) later arrested four personnel of the TNI's Strategic Intelligence Agency (BANS) for alleged involvement in the attack.

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Chinese investors scout alternatives as policy changes bite

Dylan Duan, Gayatri Saroyo and Melanie Barton

Routen/Shanghai, China/Jakarta/Melbourne, Australia Chinese companies that helped build Indonesia's nickel industry into the world's dominant producer are looking as far afield as Africa for longer-term alternatives as rising policy pressure tests the investment model that reshaped global supply.

Tsinghan Group is considering a major development in Madagascar, the country's mines ministry said, while Legend Resources, opens new tab is look-

ing at a project in Tanzania as well as restarting the Koniambo operation in New Caledonia, according to industry sources.

The Chinese companies were among those that developed the smelters and industrial parks that turned Indonesia into the center of global growth for the metal used in stainless steel and electric-vehicle batteries after Jakarta banned ore exports in 2020.

Indonesia's share of production surged to more than 60 percent of global mined nickel output in 2025, up from just over 50 percent in 2020, according to US Geological Survey data.

The low-cost Chinese-backed output pushed the nickel market into surplus, lowered prices and forced higher-cost producers elsewhere, including Glencore, BHP and Sumitomo, opens new tab to close or suspend operations or seek buyers.

But since taking office in late 2024, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto has focused on raising state revenue and spending, including a US\$20 billion free meal plan.

In late May, he outlined plans to bring exports of coal, palm oil and ferro-alloys under centralized state control. Nickel pig

iron, the main nickel product by volume for Chinese producers, was later said to be excluded, but the proposal added to investor concerns over policy stability.

Even before that plan, tighter nickel ore mining quotas, proposed tax hikes and a sharp upward revision to Indonesia's benchmark mineral price had unsettled investors and led the China Chamber of Commerce in Indonesia to write a strongly worded letter to Prabowo warning the measures could deter future investment.

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Parenting duty



A female Sumatran tiger named Dini plays with her cubs on Thursday at Taman Safari Indonesia II in Prigen, Pasuruan, East Java. The safari park has introduced the four Sumatran tiger cubs to the public after they were born on March 23 to parents Praja and Dini.

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In this sense, the encyclical stands in continuity with *Humanae Personae* and *Evangelium Vitae* while addressing the moral dilemmas of the digital age. Like those earlier documents, it does not reject modern developments, but seeks to guide them ethically.



By Bernardus Agus Rukiyanto
An associate professor at Sapta Dharma University, Yogyakarta

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Here, the pope revives a deeply theological vision of the human person as *imago Dei*—created in the image of God and called into relationship. This perspective resists any attempt to treat individuals as data points, consumers, or instruments of larger systems. The encyclical warns that when human beings are reduced in this way, society itself becomes fragile. Progress without respect for dignity ultimately leads not to development, but to new forms of exclusion.

One of the most significant contributions of *Magnifica Humanitas* is its renewed emphasis on the common good. The encyclical insists that society cannot be understood as a mere aggregation of individual interests. The common good is something more: a shared good that can only be achieved together and that benefits all.

This vision challenges both excessive individualism and narrow nationalism. It calls for a broader horizon in which personal freedom is balanced with social responsibility. In a world marked by polarization and short-term thinking, such a perspective is urgently needed.

The document also highlights the role of political authority in promoting the common good. It warns against forms of politics driven solely by immediate party interests, ideological division, or economic pressure, arguing instead for long-term responsibility and social cohesion.

The encyclical extends its reflection to the global level, where inequalities between nations continue to deepen. It criticizes a mentality of confrontation and calls for a renewed commitment to international cooperation. In this context, Pope Leo XIV reaffirms the principle of the universal destination of goods, a cornerstone of Catholic social teaching. The resources of the earth—material, cultural and even technological—are intended for the benefit of all. Private ownership and national interests remain legitimate, but they are not absolute; they must be ordered toward the common good of humanity.

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When science rewrites Global South diplomacy

By George Monteiro Prata

The Brazilian ambassador to Indonesia

Across the Global South, the concept of science in diplomacy remains vastly underrepresented. When people picture diplomacy, they often imagine diplomats in tailored suits attending formal state receptions, not scientists stepping out of laboratories to shape international relations.

Yet, science diplomacy has been defined in one form or another, bringing scientific experts and diplomats together to build multi-perspective solutions and advance national interests. It is a vital instrument of soft power, the means by which nations cultivate influence through collaborative, unifying fields rather than coercion.

Despite its value, countries in the Global South are still less likely to possess formal frameworks dedicated to integrating science and technology into statecraft.

However, the Global South possesses a unique geopolitical advantage: shared experiences. Developing nations frequently navigate similar climates, socio-economic realities and developmental hurdles. Consequently, they inherently understand one another's ground realities.

Because the scientific and policy approaches required to address these issues must be tailored to these specific contexts, cross-border knowledge sharing among developing countries is uniquely valuable. This is exactly where a robust science diplomacy framework becomes essential. By weaving scientific cooperation directly into foreign policy, the Global South can solidify alliances and streamline technology transfers to address emerging global crises.

As urgent regional challenges have evolved, global foreign policy has had to adapt alongside the technologies designed to solve them. Today, the impact of science diplomacy is most pronounced in fields like global health, artificial intelligence, integrated circuits and the energy transition. It also holds the key to confronting one of the most pressing environmental crises facing the Global South: deforestation.

Take the recent Brazil-led Tropical Forest Forum Facility (TFFF), launched at the COP28 climate change conference last year. Indonesia has emerged as a crucial partner in this South-South initiative, which aims to protect more than 1 billion hectares of tropical forests.

Matching Brazil's initial commitment, Indonesia pledged a US\$1 billion contribution. Data-driven science sits at the dead center of this initiative, relying on satellite remote sensing technology and Natural Forest Monitoring Systems (NFMS) to track forest activity and secure

conservation incentives. Working from the Science, Technology, and Innovation Sector of the Embassy of Brazil in Jakarta, I have had the privilege of connecting Brazilian and Indonesian stakeholders, witnessing firsthand the immense enthusiasm driving the TFFF.

It is remarkable to see how naturally our two nations align despite sitting on opposite sides of the globe. As custodians of two of the planet's largest tropical rainforests, Brazil and Indonesia share more than just ecological vulnerabilities; they share an acute awareness that the Global South will stand on the front lines of climate devastation if these ecosystems collapse.

This mutual understanding leaves me deeply optimistic about the future of our bilateral ties. As the Global South transitions into an active driver of global technological innovation, contemporary scientific cooperation in placing greater emphasis on international partnerships and diplomatic engagement.

On the multilateral stage, developing nations can now look to frameworks like the BRICS Action Plan for Innovation 2023-2030, an open initiative expanding the Science, Technology and Innovation Entrepreneurship Partnership (STIEP) to scale up tech transfers and start-ups. Sharing deep common interests, both Brazil and Indonesia play pivotal roles in these collaborative forums.

The data backs up the diplomacy. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), joint scientific publications between Brazil and Indonesia surged dramatically following the launch of the Brazilian Innovation Diplomacy Program (IDP), an initiative designed to internationalize Brazil's innovation ecosystem.

The post-2017 period recorded more than three times the absolute increase in collaborative publications compared with the 2011-2016 window. This offers concrete proof of how a deliberate diplomatic framework creates an enabling environment for researchers to collaborate across borders, linking them with overseas counterparts, strengthening institutional networks and unlocking public funding for shared research priorities.

By anchoring technological cooperation at the heart of foreign policy, nations of the Global South can transcend traditional competition and move toward collective progress, harnessing shared intellect to shield their societies, fortify their industries, and co-author solutions to the world's most urgent challenges.



Japan and Asia's new balance: Taiwan security matters

By C. Raja Mohan

New Delhi

A contributing editor on international affairs for *The Indian Express*, a distinguished professor at the Motilal Nehru Institute of Advanced Studies at Jindal Global University and the Republic of Korea chair at the Council for Strategic and Defense Research (CSDR)



Since World War II, Japan has deliberately defined itself as a peaceful nation. Relying on the United States for its security, Tokyo built one of the world's largest economies while renouncing nuclear weapons, avoiding the use of force and refusing to project its conventional military power. That era is now drawing to a close.

China's growing regional assertiveness and US ambivalence in Asia, especially regarding the defense of Taiwan against potential Beijing aggression, has caused much of Asia to complain about US President Donald Trump's administration and mull about its likely abandonment of the region. Tokyo, however, is not wringing its hands; it is acting to defend itself and help others secure themselves against Chinese expansionism and US volatility.

At the annual Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore last week, Japanese Defense Minister Shinzo Koizumi unveiled three broad directions of a new security policy to step up national defense spending and military modernization, increase defense cooperation with friendly nations and lift restrictions on the export of arms. The shift marks one of the major transformations in Asian geopolitics since the end of the Cold War.

For decades, Japan's defense industry was largely inward-looking. Strict policy controls limited arms exports and constrained military cooperation with foreign partners. Tokyo has now reached a very different conclusion. It is arguing that preserving peace in Asia requires active participation in shaping the regional balance of power. The result is a historic reorientation of arms exports announced in April this year.

The most visible symbol of

this change is the agreement last month to supply 11 upgraded *Mogami*-class frigates to Australia. The contract, estimated at nearly US\$7 billion, is the largest defense export in Japan's postwar history, goes beyond a simple commercial transaction. It creates a framework for Japan's long-term defense-industrial collaboration with Australia and other regional partners. It also points to the construction of regional defense networks that are not dependent on Washington.

In Singapore, Koizumi announced New Zealand is also interested in the purchase of *Mogami* class frigates from Tokyo. The emerging Japan-Australia-New Zealand security triangle is not a formal alliance but part of a new web of defense cooperation involving production, logistics, technology sharing and interoperability. Similar conversations are unfolding between Japan and the Philippines, as well as with other maritime states anxious about the changing balance of power in Asia.

In Singapore, Koizumi rejected China's high-pitched accusations about Japan's militarism and rearmament. Pointing to China's expanding nuclear arsenal and growing conventional military power, Koizumi gently suggested that "the pot is calling the kettle black". China cannot dramatically build up its own military capabilities, indulge in coercion of all kinds

and accuse others of rearmament and militarism.

What is driving Tokyo's new military doctrine is not nostalgia for great-power status in the imperial era, but anxiety about the future balance of power in Asia. The Taiwan question has sharpened these concerns. Under Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, Japan has moved closer than ever to publicly acknowledging that its own security is linked to peace in Taiwan.

Tokyo is not breaking from its One China policy. But it has increasingly signaled that a military conflict over Taiwan would have direct consequences for Japan. Chinese reactions have been predictably fierce, with Beijing accusing Tokyo of crossing red lines and interfering in China's internal affairs.

But Sakauchi's Japan is not willing to quiver under Chinese bullying. Tokyo believes preservation of peace in the Taiwan Strait is critical to regional stability. This does not mean Japan seeks confrontation. Rather, it reflects a growing belief that deterrence requires both clarity and capability.

The Taiwan issue has become a litmus test for Japan's strategic evolution. For decades, Tokyo preferred ambiguity. Today, it believes peace in Taiwan is critical for Asian security. That the US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth tip-toed around the question of Taiwan at the Shangri-La Dialogue is widely viewed as part of

Trump's effort to please China's leader Xi Jinping after the Beijing summit last month.

To be fair, Hegseth reaffirmed US commitment to the balance of power in Asia. He also argued that the US will not allow China to exercise hegemony over Asia. But the way Trump is going about it has triggered anxieties all around. Hegseth also called on the allies and partners to do more for themselves.

On its part, Japan is trying to reconcile two strategic imperatives. The first is preserving the American alliance, which has been the foundation of its security. The second is reducing excessive dependence on the US by strengthening regional security partnerships and creating Asian defense-industrial networks.

The imperatives for Delhi are similar: engage Washington on defense where beneficial but also simultaneously enhancing strategic collaboration with regional powers like Japan, South Korea, Australia and the ASEAN countries. Plans for India's bilateral and regional defense collaboration already exist in Delhi. What India needs is an urgent and purposeful transformation of plans into concrete outcomes.

Unlike China, India has long welcomed Japan to play a larger security role in Asia. What has changed is Tokyo's willingness to act upon that logic. The old Japan was an economic giant and a military minimalist. The new Japan seeks to be something different: a security partner, a defense-industrial power and an active participant in shaping the balance of Asia.

Tokyo's strategic reorientation is not merely a Japanese story. It is part of Asia's wider search for a new equilibrium in an era of Chinese power and US reorientation.