

## **The Role of Government Political Approaches in The Growth and Decline of Hardline Islamic Movements in Indonesia**

**Peter Suwarno**

*Arizona State University, Tempe, United States*

Email: [peter.suwarno@asu.edu](mailto:peter.suwarno@asu.edu)

### **Abstract**

One of the most arduous challenges in the development of Indonesian democracy has been the political contestation between the hardline Islamists vs. secular nationalists. This paper describes how the Indonesian governments dealt with this conflict due to the growing Islamic conservatism and the midst of democratization. For this purpose, this paper examines the controversial government policies during the administration of Soekarno, Soeharto, Soesilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), and Joko Widodo, who governed Indonesia for at least two terms. The analysis of the data collected from various media and research publications describes and compares the political approaches of these presidents in dealing with hardline Islamic movements. Soekarno had to end his primary reliance on democratic debates that resulted in no agreement by issuing an authoritarian decree allowing him to ban the most powerful Islamist party – Masyumi. Soeharto, who implemented iron-fist policies against the Islamists, created stability for badly needed development, but to maintain his power, he had to meet some of the Islamic demands. Due to the reform era, SBY attempted to be more democratic toward the hardline Islamic appeals, leading to his indecisiveness that enhanced the growth of Islamic hardliners. Jokowi uses legal and discursive strategies to uphold secular nationalism. Still, to deal with Islamic radicalism, he used semi-authoritarian approaches such as banning hardline Islamic organizations. This paper concludes that the Indonesian liberal democratic political approaches could enhance Islamic politics and the growth of hardline Islamism. In contrast, authoritarian or semi-authoritarian approaches to secular nationalism created more stability for the growth of moderate Islam in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** *Islamists, nationalists, government, authoritarianism*

### **Abstrak**

Salah satu tantangan terberat dalam perkembangan demokrasi Indonesia adalah kontestasi politik antara Islamis garis keras vs nasionalis sekuler. Tulisan ini menjelaskan bagaimana pemerintah Indonesia menangani konflik ini akibat tumbuhnya konservatisme Islam dan di tengah demokratisasi. Untuk itu, tulisan ini mengkaji kebijakan pemerintah yang kontroversial pada masa pemerintahan Soekarno, Soeharto, Soesilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), dan Joko Widodo, yang memerintah Indonesia setidaknya selama dua periode. Analisis data yang dikumpulkan dari berbagai media dan publikasi penelitian menggambarkan dan membandingkan pendekatan politik para presiden tersebut dalam menghadapi gerakan Islam garis keras. Soekarno harus mengakhiri ketergantungan utamanya pada debat demokratis yang tidak menghasilkan kesepakatan dengan mengeluarkan keputusan otoriter yang memungkinkan dia untuk melarang partai Islam yang paling kuat–Masyumi. Soeharto, yang menerapkan kebijakan tangan besi melawan kaum Islamis, menciptakan stabilitas untuk

pembangunan yang sangat dibutuhkan, tetapi untuk mempertahankan kekuasaannya, ia harus memenuhi beberapa tuntutan Islam. Karena era reformasi, SBY berusaha untuk lebih demokratis terhadap seruan Islam garis keras, yang mengarah pada keragu-raguannya yang meningkatkan pertumbuhan Islam garis keras. Jokowi menggunakan strategi hukum dan diskursif untuk menegakkan nasionalisme sekuler. Namun untuk menghadapi radikalisme Islam, ia menggunakan pendekatan semi-otoriter seperti melarang organisasi Islam garis keras. Makalah ini menyimpulkan bahwa pendekatan politik demokrasi liberal Indonesia dapat meningkatkan politik Islam dan pertumbuhan Islamisme garis keras. Sebaliknya, pendekatan otoriter atau semi-otoriter terhadap nasionalisme sekuler menciptakan stabilitas lebih bagi pertumbuhan Islam moderat di Indonesia.

**Kata Kunci:** *Islamis, Nasionalis, Pemerintah, Otoritarianisme*

\*\*\*

## A. Introduction

Uniting a complicated, diverse nation such as Indonesia is challenging, especially when the government has to rely on democratic approaches allowing freedom of expression. One such challenge involves decades-long conflicts and tension between Islamists and secular nationalists. Although there have been ferocious discourses and violent actions throughout the history of Indonesia, the disagreements have been mostly manifested in civil political contestations. These debates and conflicts among Indonesian religious and nationalist leaders began prior to Indonesian Independence in 1945 and developed into more prominent conflicts in the 1950s, shaping the Indonesian socio-political power and influence contention to this day.

One of the most challenging issues in Indonesian political history is the conflict between the religiously neutral nationalists and the Islamists. Sanctioning democracy and freedom of expression during early Soekarno's regime, the reform era, and SBY administration, Indonesia had never successfully curbed Islamist movements that fought for the dominant role of Islam in the constitution. On the other hand, Soeharto's dictatorship not only successfully suppressed Islamic politics but also enhanced the growth of moderate and liberal Islam. As a majority Muslim nation, Indonesia needs a unique democracy, different from a Western liberal one, because with Pancasila's first

principle is believing in God, it is problematic to create a clear separation between religion and state.

This paper describes how the Indonesian governments dealt with this conflict due to the growing Islamic conservatism while there are efforts for democratization. For this purpose, this paper examines the rules and policies as well as the consequential debates, tensions, and conflicts on controversial political strategies of Indonesian presidents throughout the history of Indonesia. This paper will focus mostly on the government of Soekarno, Soeharto, Soesilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), and Joko Widodo, who ruled Indonesia for at least two terms or ten years.

## **B. Method**

The data collected for this study comes mostly from various news media and research publications that will be analyzed to explain and compare these governments' political and discursive policies in dealing with the rise of conservative and hardline Islamists in Indonesia. Some administrations employed a more authoritarian approach, while others used a more democratic or egalitarian approach with semi-authoritarian schemes. The discussion will hopefully show a pattern of policies suggesting the best approach in dealing with the rise of conservative Islamism as well as in creating stability for democratic political development in Indonesia.

## **C. Result and Discussion**

### **1. Soekarno's strategies in dealing with the Islamists**

In the 1920s and 1930s, nationalist leaders from Islamic as well as non-religious organizations worked hard to come up with the most effective groundwork for the unity of these diverse societies to have an agreeable nationalist movement. Then, intense disagreements emerged around the question of whether Islam or secular nationalism should become the uniting foundation for an independent Indonesia that is inclusive of all secular as well as religious groups, having equal rights and participation in a democracy. Prior to his presidency in 1945, Soekarno, a secular

nationalist, engaged in discursive contestations with Mohammad Natsir, a prominent Islamist since the 1920s. One of the well-known debates between the two was represented in Soekarno's article entitled "Nationalism, Islam and Marxism," (Sedjarah Indonesia 2008) where he underlined Nationalism as the best foundation for uniting diverse Indonesian political groups against Mohammad Natsir's various writings that emphasized Islam as the best groundwork for Independent Indonesia. This issue became the impetus for continuing debates between the two factions (Kahin 2012), which, despite anger and accusations, remained mostly democratic and civil. However, based on the idea that Islamic movements were partisan and beneficial only for Muslims, Soekarno successfully created a major nationalist movement (Kahin 2014).

These tension and conflicts were most prominently displayed during the debates in the Constitution Preparatory Committee (BPUPKI) meetings when the participating leaders discussed the formation of the five principles of Pancasila. The Islamists insisted that the first principle of "Believing in One God" include seven words containing sharia law for the Muslims. The participating moderate Muslim leaders agreed with the exclusive and partisan nature of the conservative Islamists' demands and understood the concerns of Christians from Eastern Indonesia. In the end, the participants agreed with the secular nationalists' proposition to have a modern, inclusive, and comprehensive constitution (Maarif 2006).

This discursive contestation between the secular nationalist Soekarno vs. Islamist Natsir in writings, as well as during BPUPKI assemblies, showed that Indonesian leaders managed to successfully engage in democratic and civil debates (Suhelmi 2012). However, when the first Indonesian democratic 1955 election resulted in the nationalists as the winner and Islamist *Masyumi* only gained second place, the debates became more intense. The Islamists and Nationalists failed to agree on power-sharing and the most suitable foundation for a modern constitution for Indonesia. Islamist leaders led by Natsir relentlessly fought for a prominent role of Islam in the

Indonesian constitution, leading to endless debates that ended up in a deadlock. Ideally, more democratic discussions and debates could continue to find a compromise by both sides which means Islam could have a more important role in the nationalist constitution. However, Soekarno was not patient enough to deal with these conscientious democratic debates and decided to issue a presidential decree in 1959. This decree directed the return to the original 1945 nationalist constitution, marking the beginning of Soekarno's authoritarian government. He concentrated the power not in the people's representatives but in his own hands, ending the Indonesian liberal democracy era, precluding civil debates involving the Islamists vis-à-vis secular nationalists (Maarif, 2006).

The more secular nationalist constitution under a more authoritarian regime gave rise to secular and moderate Islamic communities such as NU which split from the hardline *Masyumi* in 1952. The Islamists were excluded from political participation and the militant or radical groups went undergrounds, some staging rebellions. Furthermore, the democratic political inspiration from the Islamists practically vanished after President Soekarno passed a law permitting him to dissolve any political party that promote principles contradictory to Pancasila state ideology. With this, Soekarno banned *Masyumi* in 1962, followed by sending its leaders to jail, including Muhammad Natsir. Soekarno's suppressive policies might be beneficial in saving Indonesia from the Islamists' sharia law, partisan rules, and endless religious conflicts; but unfortunately, the government had to use an authoritarian approach to achieve this goal. This created a major setback for Islamic movements in Indonesia, setting a precedent that an effective way to deal with the Islamists is using a dictatorial political scheme. To Soekarno, dealing with religious and faith-based arguments using liberal democracy is disruptive and ineffective, while embracing the traditional consensus is the most suitable method of resolving challenging disputes for unity. Nonetheless, Soekarno's authoritarian determination to merge the three conflicting

political ideologies of NASAKOM (nationalism, religion, and communism) (NASAKOM) failed miserably and led to his fall in 1967, overthrown by an authoritarian military force led by Soeharto (Borgias 2012).

## **2. Soeharto's Authoritarian Approach against Islam: From 1967 to the 1980s**

Following the fall of Soekarno after a tragic coup in 1965, Major General Soeharto came to power, giving Islamic movements more political opportunities, including the Islamists who helped crush the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) as the common enemy. However, ruling under "Pancasila" democracy, Soeharto military regime called the "New Order," Soeharto continued Soekarno's authoritative policies, using the terms "ekstim kanan" (extreme right, referring to the hardline Muslims) and "extreme kiri" (extreme left, referring to the Indonesian Communists) as the common enemies. After the new order regime banned the Communist Party and jailed, exiled, or killed most of its members, the remaining challenges to Soeharto's power were the Islamists and Islamic movements.

From 1967 to the mid-1980s, Soeharto's regime applied suppressive policies against different Islamic groups by firmly rejecting their appeals (Crouch 1981). These policies include marginalization, exclusion, detention, and prosecutions of Islamic political advocates and leaders (Liddle 1996, 1999). Soeharto's government rejected Muslim demands for policies that could support Islamic missions, programs, values, and interests, such as banning the wearing of hijabs in schools. This way, Soeharto effectively demoralized any aspiration of any Islamic political party and its parliamentary representatives. Soeharto's regime also successfully forced all Islamic parties to be fused into one party called United Development Party (PPP) in 1977. However, the government still viewed it as a threat because it used Kaaba (Islamic holy site) as the party's symbol. It accused PPP of having a connection with radical Islamists. In addition, there was religious tension that led to the Tanjung Priok (North Jakarta) tragedy, with a few Muslim protesters killed on September 12, 1984. Finally, in 1985, the Orde Baru regime forced all mass organizations and political parties to embrace

Pancasila as the only foundation while giving the military significant political power with its “*Dwifungsi*” (dual functions as the armed forces and political representation) (dual functions as the armed forces and political representation) (Okbah 2003).

These policies de-politized Islamists, putting them under many constraints so that the only type of Islam able to grow as a moderate and liberal one, leading to the reduction of Islamic movements to become a mere spiritual, intellectual, and cultural undertaking. This was shown in the famous liberal Islamic scholars, such as Nurcholis Madjid, who promoted the principle of “Islam Yes, Islamic Party No,” suggesting that Muslims should accept the separation between religion and state or Islam and politics (Barton 2014). This proves that authoritarian approaches worked well not only in obstructing the growth of conservative and radical Islam but also in enhancing the growth of moderate and liberal de-politicized Islam and renowned Indonesian majority Muslims with smiling faces (Assyaukanie 2013).

### **3. Soeharto’s Re-Politization of Islam and the Reform Era**

Significant changes took place during the second part of Soeharto’s presidency in the 1990s; doubting the commitment of his military support, he began tolerating Islamic rhetoric and fulfilling some of their requests. These include allowing Muslim school students to wear veils, creating Islamic courts, establishing Islamic family law and Islamic banks, in addition to showing his devotion to the Islamic faith by going on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Then in 1990, Soeharto took a significant step in re-politicizing Islam for his own political benefit by establishing ICMI 1990 to strengthen his control over the armed forces. Liddle (1996) described this as the “Islamic turn,” because it constitutes a significant political shift from de-politicization to re-politicization of Islam, marking the beginning of conservative Islamic movements in Indonesia. This slowly damaged the images of moderate non-political and smiling Islam leading to the dominance of Islamic discourses that emphasize devout Islamic practices as well as Islamic political aspiration. ICMI constituted an Islamic renewal that intensified the Islamization of the *abangan* (nominal Muslims) (Nasir and Jinan 2018; Sutley and

Hefner 2001). This new freedom of Islamic expressions and practices augmented the growth of conservative Islamic political power and movements, which ironically became one of the main causes of Soeharto's fall in 1998 (Radityo 2018).

Although Soeharto's fall and the consequential euphoric desire for a democratic Indonesia created a critical transitional period, fortunately, B.J. Habibie, Soeharto's vice president and successor had the conviction to end the dictatorial system. This move received strong support from leaders of the military, nationalists as well as Islamic organizations to prepare for a democratic election. Despite the powerful Islamic discourses during the campaigns, in the 1999 legislative election, the secular nationalists won about 56% of the votes; the moderate Islamic parties gained modest votes of about 31%, while the conservative Islamist parties gained only 2% or less. The dominance of Islamic discourses during this reform era had not changed the voter's moderate views of Islam, in addition to the fact that these Islamic parties, except PPP, are new or had not participated in any election in decades.

Interestingly, supported by the Islamic discourses of rejecting the idea of having a woman president, the Islamic parties united to form a "poros tengah" (Central Axis) to elect a Muslim cleric, Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), instead of the leader of the winning party, Megawati Soekarno Putri (daughter of Soekarno) (Richburg 1999). As a cherished pluralist leader of the moderate Islamic group Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Gus Dur's election received strong support from various political groups, but his liberal-democratic approach disappointed conservative Muslims and alienated military supporters. This led to unrelenting demonstrations, chaotic political negotiations, and even violent conflicts, such as the Christian vs. Muslim conflicts in Maluku, which helped create hardline Islamists and Islamic militancy (Richburg 1999).

Gus Dur's challenge described above confirms that egalitarian approaches with freedom of expression may not be effective in dealing with the complexity of Indonesian political and religious conflicts. He tried hard to consolidate nationalist-

Islamist tension by emphasizing the adaption of democracy based on Pancasila, coalescing the Islamic teachings with modern secular principles, which recognize the separation of state and religion. This is against the Islamists' demand for a more prominent role in Islam. Active participation in this democratic political era enabled Islamic leaders to vocally voice their Islamic demands, and Gus Dur's egalitarian processes failed to persuade conservative Islamic leaders to embrace secular democratic universal values such as justice, tolerance, freedom, and equality. Gus Dur realized that liberal democratic approaches could not deal with faith-based Islamic demands for the important role of Islam in politics. Therefore, following Soekarno's example, Gus Dur issued a decree suspending the parliaments prior to his fall, but it was disregarded, leading to his overthrow (Nugroho 2017).

#### **4. SBY Era of Enhancing Islamic Conservatism**

The first directly elected Indonesian president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), realized the increasing political power and influence of the conservative Islamic movements during the reform era and wanted to create more stability by obtaining their support. Repressed during the Suharto regime, conservative Islamic movements such as Salafists and Wahabis now sensed more freedom and opportunities to convert Indonesian Muslims to become more fundamentalist and intolerant, leading to expressions of radicalism as well as terrorist attacks (Putten 2019). This reform era of Islamic conservatism was enhanced by SBY's lack of firm action against Radical Islamist movements and the increasing number of fundamentalist preachers from the Middle East, as well as the return of the exiled Radical Islamist leader, Abu Bakar Bashir. Bashir renewed his call for the caliphate and sharia law by establishing a boarding school while recruiting militant students, some of whom were later involved in terrorist acts. These include bombings in Bali in 2002 and 2004, the Australian Embassy in 2004, and the JW Marriot Hotel Jakarta in 2009.

Fulfilling the demands for democracy, freedom, and openness, SBY also tolerated more Islamist discourses in Indonesian politics and the public sphere,

including vocal and intolerant Islamic groups such as Islamic Defender Front (FPI), Hizbut Tahir Indonesia (HTI) as well as the increasingly conservative MUI. Supported by some political and military leaders, FPI was a thuggish hardline Islamic organization established after the fall of Soeharto in 1998 by Habib Rizieq Shihab. FPI is known for its entertainment spots, hotels, and bars during the Islamic fasting month, in addition to its member attacks on minority groups such as Christians and Ahmadiyya. The political effect of the rise of hardline Islam in Indonesia showed in the popularity Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), which gained 7,3% of votes in the 2004 election, a jump from 1,36% in the previous election in 1999.

Taking advantage of the freedom of expression during the SBY era, HTI expanded its proselytizing activities in mosques, offices, organizations, university campuses, and neighborhoods. After the SBY government officially recognized it as a legal civil organization, HTI was free to develop its strategies of preaching caliphate messages among the civil servants, including the police, the military, and other government bureaucracy, through seminars and religious gatherings. Its success was marked by the 2007 mass meeting in Jakarta, where tens of thousands of members and sympathizers expressed their support for a caliphate (Iseas 2017). Martin van Bruinessen's (2013) describes this as the 'Conservative Turn' that uncovers a very significant change in the significant growth of conservative communities with an increasing number and power of hardline Islamists. Ricklefs (2012) was pessimistic about the possibility of curbing this Islamism upsurge that has been successfully infiltrating the state and civil society organizations. Surveys confirm the increasing support for sharia law and caliphate messages among civil servants, students, and educators. Alvara Research Center and Mata Air Foundation surprised many moderate Muslim group leaders and observers in finding that about a quarter of Indonesia's college students and almost 30% of professionals support fighting for the implementation of an Islamic caliphate system (Praying For Indonesia 3017; Tiba 2017).

In addition to allowing the intolerant speeches and actions of HTI and FPI, SBY expanded MUI's authority which he announced during MUI National Congress in 2005. Enjoying this support, MUI issued controversial and intolerant edicts or *fatwa* (Islamic legal opinion) that are against principles of an egalitarian society, such as secularism, pluralism, and liberalism (Sirry 2013). In addition, MUI issued edicts expanding Islamic exclusivism in Indonesia, including the 2006 regulation on restricting houses of worships and anti-Ahmadiyya sect decree. Unfortunately, the Indonesian majority Muslims tend to follow these edicts even if they marginalize minority groups, enhancing Islamic purification and exclusivism discourses, as well as shaping Indonesian intolerant political and socio-cultural landscape (Menchik 2016; Tempo 2011).

SBY's era of freedom of fundamentalist Islamic expression encouraged local municipalities in different parts of Indonesia to institute Islamic codes or sharia laws. From 1999 to 2009, at least 63 heads of municipalities enacted sharia local codes, but interestingly, only one of them is a member of an Islamic party. The secular parties voted for the establishment of local sharia laws because of the strong pressure from local conservative Islamic leaders who have great influence over the politicians' constituencies. SBY era is a continuation of a reform era where there is more freedom of expression enjoyed by Islamic hardliners, similar to Soekarno's era Islamists when they demanded the implementation of sharia law and the establishment of Islamic State. These discourses, as well as the marginalization and intimidation of minority religious groups, thrived, dampening the discourse of Pancasila that promotes tolerance and unity in diversity. Democracy and freedom enhanced conservative Islamic groups in expressing their power and influence in the form of partisan Islamic discourses that dominated the public political sphere, enhancing by the "conservative turn" (Assyaukanie 2013) have helped to destroy the well-known images of smiling faces of Indonesian Muslims (Ricklefs 2012).

## 5. Jokowi's Era of Pancasila Democracy

Jokowi's election in 2014 created some changes in government policies by bringing back Pancasila discourse, as shown by his statement: "saya Indonesia, saya Pancasila" (I am Indonesia, I am Pancasila). This marked the beginning of his less-democratic policies to constrain the growing Islamic conservative and partisan discourses and a shift from a reform era of freedom for conservative Islamic discourse to a more secular and nationalist one. During the reform era and SBY's presidency, Pancasila's discourse was subdued partly for having a negative association with Soeharto's authoritarianism. However, Jokowi asserts his conviction to go back to the discourses of nationalist Pancasila to resist the increasing dominance of Islamic discourses of sharia law and caliphate. Relying on Pancasila and the constitution, Jokowi promotes a non-religious state, emphasizing nationalism and unity as the foundation for clamping down on Islamic movements that promote the caliphate and sharia law.

This is challenging because these movements have penetrated the Indonesian bureaucratic, academic, and social structure, threatening the core principles of Pancasila itself. SBY's era of allowing the Islamic hardliners to build a communicative network had strengthened hardline Islamic movements, outpacing those of the moderates, i.e., NU and Muhammadiyah. The Islamic hardliner's discourses spread successfully using various print, electronic, as well as social media. This posed a great challenge for Jokowi because the success of fundamentalists, e.g., HTI, in recruiting educated middle class, such as government workers and university students, made it difficult to promote the secular nationalist and pluralist principles of Pancasila. At this point, a liberal democracy emphasizing freedom of expression would not be able to compete with the socio-political and discursive power of these Islamists.

Jokowi's conviction in pluralist and secular nationalist principles of Pancasila was obvious when he stated that the MUI could not influence government policies. His

pluralist credential was evidenced when he chose Basuki Tjahja Permana, who has a double minority identity (Chinese and Christian), as his vice governor. The peak of Jokowi's challenge against the hardline Islamic movements took center stage in the governor election debates between the incumbent Ahok and a Muslim scholar, Anies Baswedan. Ahok argued that the devious use of a Quranic verse could prevent him from becoming a governor. However, the viral edited version of the video showed Ahok stating that the Quranic verse is devious, leading to a blasphemous accusation, widespread rejection of non-Muslims becoming a leader of the Muslim majority community, and massive Muslim's protests from 2016 to 2017. The peak of the massive demonstration that occurred on November 4, 2016, created a populist movement called 212, divulging a significant socio-political power and influence of the Islamists led by FPI, FUI, and HTI (Marshall 2018). The massive protests constitute a setback to Jokowi's secular nationalist campaigns for democratically promoting tolerance and pluralism. This significant Islamic political force led to the blasphemy prosecution of Ahok, who was convicted and jailed for two years.

In response, Jokowi took more militant democratic steps by curbing the freedom of anti-government speeches, especially of Islamic hardliners, including the FPI chairman, Rizieq Shihab, a self-proclaimed Indonesian Muslims' grand Imam, and main leader of the mass protests against Ahok. On July 10, 2017, Jokowi signed an amendment to the 2013 regulation, making it illegal to insult the principles of Pancasila. With the approval of the parliament and the Constitutional court, HTI was legally banned on July 18, 2017. Although following legal procedures, this move was considered against democratic freedom and human rights principles, encouraging Islamist supporters to go against Jokowi and his undemocratic measures.

Realizing the mounting pressure from Islamist supporters, Jokowi politically strategized his bid for the second presidential term by choosing Ma'ruf Amin, a conservative prominent Muslim cleric and head of MUI as his vice president. Jokowi's

supporters of mostly secular nationalists were concerned about his succumbing to the conservative Islamic political power pressure. However, in the middle of influential hardline Islamic discourses, when his opponent, Prabowo Subianto, was supported by Islamists sympathizers, Jokowi's move gave him a better chance of being re-elected (Ariffin 2018).

After winning the second term in 2019, Jokowi felt freer to restrict the hardline Islamic movements, to exert his Pancasila discourse, and to support the moderate Islamic organizations. He disregarded criticism of his anti-democratic measures against Islamists, including his campaigns to systematically repressed academicians, public workers and educators deemed to be active Islamist groups members, leading to blacklisting, firings and even arrests. The critics consider this anti-Islamist measure undermining principles of democracy and human rights (Fealy 2020), although moderate Muslims consider these privilege-minded and hatred-ridden hardline Muslims create conflicts that tarnish the peaceful and tolerant image of Islam in Indonesia.

The government was especially bold in cracking down FPI and its leader Rizieq Shihab. Jokowi's attempts to prosecute Rizieq Shihab for minor crime of messaging pornographic images led Shihab to flee to Saudi Arabia. To culminate long relentless tensions, the government finally disbanded FPI, following Rizieq Shihab's return from Saudi Arabia. This ban means that FPI has no legal organizational standing to conduct any activities (Wirajuda 2020).

After some gatherings following Shihab's return from self-exile in Saudi Arabia, the police issued three arrest warrants for his violation of COVID - 19 protocols. When the Police attempted to follow, monitor, and arrest Shihab, there was a clash between the Police and members of FPI guards in charge of escorting Rizieq Shihab, leading to the death of six FPI guard members. The Public Prosecutor considered this bloody event, called "the Km 50 tragedy," unlawful killing, the investigation not transparent;

and a gross violation of human rights. Rezieg Shihab was finally arrested and sentenced to four years in prison for spreading false information of his COVID-19 test result, in addition to earlier an eight-month jail verdict for conducting several illegal mass gatherings (Al Jazeera 2021).

Observers had viewed Jokowi's hardline measures against Islamists such as these undemocratic, calling these as "the authoritarian turn" (Power 2018) that restrict civil freedom (Tempo.co 2020). However, moderate Islamic groups, nationalists, and the majority of Indonesians supported Jokowi's measure as an effort of implementing the Pancasila democracy (Fealy and White 2021; Wartaekonomi 2021). Although these moves reduce tensions and create more stability, they curb Islamists' influence in the socio-political system, limiting their right to civil discourse in the public sphere.

Observers also saw Jokowi's semi authoritarianism approach to prevent any potential socio-political disturbances resulting from uncontrollable social media by consolidating the implementation of the hate speech, blasphemy, and defamation law in the Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE). The authoritarian nature of the government policies was evidenced when the criminal law also applies to all types of electronic communications, including interpersonal messaging. This became worse, when in 2016, the law was modified to allow the government to block access to any electronic messages deemed containing "defamation" (Nolan 2022). The sweeping implementation of the anti-defamation law also restrain religious speeches from contradicting the constitutions and Pancasila as well as the government policies. This law has long been strictly enforced to prosecute those who insult Islam, but now also to prosecute those who defame Pancasila or the president himself (Andriyanto 2017). There were criticisms that civil liberty and freedom of speech would continue to deteriorate in Indonesia's democracy, as shown in the declining Indonesia's Democracy Index in 2020 (VOI 2021).

## 6. The need for some government authoritarian approaches

The discussion of the Indonesian government's policies above begs the question of whether Indonesia can embrace liberal democracy or if Indonesia should employ a more authoritarian approach when it comes to dealing with outspoken influential Islamic hardliners. Early Soekarno's era of liberal democracy created unending debates from the 1955 election until the presidential decree in 1959, creating much lost time for socio-political consolidation and economic development. This early Soekarno era was similar to the reform era and SBY's era, where the new freedom of expression generated competing for efforts to change the country's direction in a partisan way. Soekarno's authoritarian-guided democracy created relatively short-lived stability due to the political turmoil of a new nation. The Islamists mostly went undergrounds and staged rebellions.

Despite massive human rights violations, Soeharto's dictatorship successfully created relative stability, useful for badly needed economic development. This authoritarian New Order regime reinforced the Pancasila principle of unity, tolerance, and pluralism so that Indonesian Muslims were mostly tolerant toward religious minorities, including followers of local beliefs. In addition, the moderate Muslims could expand their influence, creating well-known liberal Islamic principles proposed by scholars such as Nurcholis Madjid.

Unlike SBY, Jokowi is consistent and firm in fighting against the Islamist agenda, which successfully dampens the campaigns for sharia law and caliphate. Although criticized for being semi-authoritarian, this measure gain supports not only from religiously neutral nationalists but also from moderate Muslims. Like Soeharto, Jokowi brought Pancasila's prominence in the public sphere, but unlike Soeharto, Jokowi went through legitimate legislative and judicial procedures to achieve his goals.

While in most western nations, HTI's non-violent promotions of sharia law and caliphate are guaranteed freedom of expression, in Indonesia, the semi-authoritarian

measures were useful, especially when dealing with partisan arguments based on failsafe and uncriticizable religious principles. This is true because many Indonesian Muslims easily succumb to persuasive arguments that God's laws are above and superior to all human-made laws (Visi Muslim News 2014). In response to the Islamists' reliance on divine-truth arguments, Jokowi relied on Pancasila as the national foundation which the Indonesian founding fathers have agreed upon, represented in a current popular motto of "Pancasila" and "NKRI harga mati" (non-negotiable Unitary Republic of Indonesia). The success of the semi-authoritarian measure to ban HTI and FPI is due to Jokowi's emphasis on this principle of unity in diversity, tolerance, and pluralism, which is now commonly used even among the majority of Indonesian Muslims (Sari 2019).

Islamists perceived this defamation and hate speech law targeted Islamic preachers and clerics (ulama), although thuggish FPI has been known for their hate speeches intimidating the democratic civil discourse. While some minority leaders, such as Ahok, were prosecuted for defamation, this semi-authoritarian law enhanced the civil discourse of Indonesians from diverse backgrounds, including the usually marginalized non-Muslims. Thus, while seemingly undemocratic, this law dampened hardline faith-based, infallible religious discourse in the public sphere that can enhance more rational participative civil discourse (Crowley 2006).

#### **D. Conclusion**

It is often tricky to argue against the prominent role of Islam in Indonesia. The Indonesian majority Muslim population has long embraced Islamic divine-truth arguments and can easily criticize the human-made Indonesian constitution and laws. At the same time, their faith refrained them from any form of criticism against Islam. This creates an uneven playing field for liberal democracy, such as evidenced during the reform era and SBY's administration. Despite restrictions during Soekarno's and Soeharto's regimes, hardline Islamic movements were never gone. They went

underground and/or staged rebellions but resurfaced again when opportunities arose, especially beginning in the reform era.

The “Islamic turn,” as well as the “conservative turn,” has posed challenges for Jokowi’s administration to implement secular principles of tolerance and “unity in diversity” contained in Pancasila. Jokowi’s authoritarian measures, such as banning HTI and FPI and consolidating the implementation of blasphemy and anti-defamation laws to protect Pancasila and the government, create a more level playing field. After Jokowi’s crackdown on Islamists, including the arrest of Rizieq Shihab, there is relative political calm in Indonesia. This suggests that in dealing with the struggle for dominance between religious or faith-based ideologies and secular principles, the government needs to exert some form of semi-authoritarian measures that could enhance equality in participative civil arguments leading to more political stability. Hence, this paper concludes that the Indonesian liberal democratic political approaches could enhance Islamic politics and the growth of hardline Islamism. In contrast, authoritarian or semi-authoritarian approaches to secular nationalism created more stability for the growth of moderate Islam in Indonesia.

\*\*\*

### References

- Andriyanto, Heru. 2017. “Rizieq Shihab Named Suspect in Pancasila Insult Case.” Retrieved November 28, 2022 (<https://jakartaglobe.id/news/rizieq-shihab-named-suspect-in-pancasila-insult-case/>).
- Ariffin, Eijas. 2018. “Why Did Jokowi Pick Cleric Ma’ruf Amin?” Retrieved November 28, 2022 (<https://theaseanpost.com/article/why-did-jokowi-pick-cleric-maruf-amin>).
- Assyaukanie, Luthfi. 2013. “Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the ‘Conservative Turn.’” *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 49(3):394–95. doi: 10.1080/00074918.2013.850644.
- Barton, Greg. 2014. “Indonesia’s Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid as Intellectual ‘Ulamā’: The Meeting of Islamic Traditionalism and Modernism in Neo-Modernist Thought.” *Studia Islamika* 4(1). doi: 10.15408/sdi.v4i1.786.

- Borgias, Fransiskus. 2012. "Nasakom: Soekarno's Failed Political Move." *Indonesian Journal of Inter-Religious Studies* 1(2):125-48.
- Crowley, Sharon. 2006. *Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism (Composition, Literacy, and Culture)*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Fealy, Greg. 2020. "Jokowi's Repressive Pluralism | East Asia Forum." Retrieved November 28, 2022 (<https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2020/09/27/jokowis-repressive-pluralism/>).
- Fealy, Greg, and Shally White. 2021. "The Politics of Banning FPI." *Www.Newmandala.Org*. Retrieved November 28, 2022 (<https://www.newmandala.org/the-politics-of-banning-fpi/>).
- Iseas. 2017. "'The Disbandment of Hizbut-Tahrir Indonesia: Curbing Islamist Hardliners?', A Commentary by Deasy Simandjuntak - ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute." Retrieved November 28, 2022 (<https://www.iseas.edu.sg/media/commentaries/the-disbandment-of-hizbuttahrir-indonesia-curbing-islamist-hardliners-a-commentary-by-deasy-simandjuntak/>).
- Al Jazeera. 2021. "Indonesia: Rizieq Shihab Jailed for Concealing COVID Test Result." Retrieved November 28, 2022 (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/24/indonesia-rizieq-shihab-jailed-for-concealing-covid-test-result>).
- Kahin, Audrey. 2014. "Islam, Nationalism and Democracy: A Political Biography of Mohammad Natsir." *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 29(1):204. doi: 10.1355/sj29-1j.
- Kahin, Audrey. 2012. "Natsir & Sukarno: Their Clash over Nationalism, Religion and Democracy, 1928-1958." Pp. 191-217 in *Encountering Islam: The Politics of Religious Identities in Southeast Asia*. ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Liddle, R. William. 1996. "The Islamic Turn in Indonesia: A Political Explanation." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55(3):613-34. doi: 10.2307/2646448.
- Liddle, R. William. 1999. "The Islamic Turn in Indonesia: A Political Explanation." Pp. 112-38 in *Religion, Globalization and Political Culture in the Third World*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Maarif, Ahmad Syafii. 2006. *Islam Dan Pancasila Sebagai Dasar Negara: Studi Tentang Perdebatan Dalam Konstituante*. Jakarta: LP3ES.
- Marshall, Paul. 2018. "Conflicts in Indonesian Islam." *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 23:122-38.
- Menchik, Jeremy. 2016. *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia*. Cambridge University Press.

- Nasir, Haedar, and Mutohharun Jinan. 2018. "Re-Islamisation: The Conversion of Subculture from Abangan Into Santri in Surakarta." *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 8(1):1. doi: 10.18326/ijims.v8i1.1-28.
- Nolan, Jim. 2022. "Are Indonesia's 'Rubber' Laws Limiting Freedom of Speech?" Retrieved November 28, 2022 (<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/are-indonesia-s-rubber-laws-limiting-freedom-speech>).
- Nugroho, Johannes. 2017. "Was Gus Dur a Failure as President?" Retrieved November 28, 2022 (<https://jakartaglobe.id/opinion/johannes-nugroho-gus-dur-failure-president/>).
- Okbah, Farid Achmad. 2003. "Peranan Orde Baru Dalam Depolitisasi Umat Islam Sejak 1966--1980 M." Retrieved November 28, 2022 (<https://www.alislamu.com/7/peranan-orde-baru-dalam-depolitisasi-umat-islam-sejak-1966-1980-m/>).
- Power, Thomas P. 2018. "Jokowi's Authoritarian Turn and Indonesia's Democratic Decline." *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 54(3). doi: 10.1080/00074918.2018.1549918.
- Praying For Indonesia. 2017. "Survey Reveals an Increase in Intolerance Among Indonesian Students - Praying for Indonesia." Retrieved November 28, 2022 (<https://www.prayingforindonesia.com/recent-posts/survey-reveals-increase-tolerance-among-indonesian-students/>).
- Putten, Linda van. 2019. "How Radical Islam Gained a Foothold in Indonesia." *Universiteit Leiden*. Retrieved November 28, 2022 (<https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/news/2019/09/how-radical-islam-gained-a-foothold-in-indonesia>).
- Radityo, Muhammad. 2018. "Amien Rais Cerita Saat Dia Tumbang Soeharto 20 Tahun Lalu." *Merdeka.Com*.
- Richburg, Keith B. 1999. "The Race Was Megawati's to Lose, And Against All Odds, She Lost It." Retrieved November 28, 2022 (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/WPcap/1999-10/21/049r-102199-idx.html>).
- Ricklefs, M. C. 2012. *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present*.
- Sari, Haryanti Puspa. 2019. "Menteri Agama: FPI Berkomitmen Setia NKRI Dan Pancasila Halaman All - Kompas.Com." Retrieved November 28, 2022 (<https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2019/11/29/07435231/menteri-agama-fpi-berkomitmen-setia-nkri-dan-pancasila?page=all>).
- Sedjarah Indonesia. 2008. "Tulisan Soekarno 1926: Nationalism, Islam and Marxism."

Retrieved November 28, 2022  
(<https://kolomsejarah.wordpress.com/2008/06/22/tulisan-soekarno-1926-nationalism-islam-and-marxism/>).

Sirry, Mun'Im. 2013. "Fatwas and Their Controversy: The Case of the Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI)." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 44(1):100-117. doi: 10.1017/S0022463412000641.

Suhelmi, Ahmad. 2012. *Polemik Negara Islam: Soekarno vs Natsir*. Jakarta: UI Press.

Sutley, Stewart, and Robert W. Hefner. 2001. "Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia." *Pacific Affairs* 74(3):459. doi: 10.2307/3557788.

Tempo.co. 2020. "FPI Ban Erodes Civil Freedom, Amnesty Indonesia Says." Retrieved November 28, 2022 (<https://en.tempo.co/read/1418889/fpi-ban-erodes-civil-freedom-amnesty-indonesia-says>).

Tempo. 2011. "Syariah Sampai Ujung - Laporan Utama - Majalah.Tempo.Co." Retrieved November 28, 2022 (<https://majalah.tempo.co/read/laporan-utama/137615/syariah-sampai-ujung>).

Tiba, Zahara. 2017. "Concept of Islamic Caliphate Grows More Popular Among Indonesian Students: Survey." Retrieved November 28, 2022 (<https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/indonesian/indonesia-militants-10312017181359.html>).

Visi Muslim News. 2014. "Ust. Felix Siauw : 'Yang Merasa Hukum Konstitusi Lebih Tinggi Dari Hukum Allah Sejatinya Merasa Lebih Hebat Dari Allah.'" Retrieved November 28, 2022 (<https://news.visimuslim.org/2014/10/ust-felix-siauw-yang-merasa-hukum.html>).

VOI. 2021. "In The Era Of President Jokowi, Democratic Resilience Weakened." Retrieved November 28, 2022 (<https://voi.id/en/bernas/34885/in-the-era-of-president-jokowi-democratic-resilience-weakened>).

Wartaekonomi. 2021. "Survei: Mayoritas Publik Setuju Pembubaran FPI." Retrieved November 28, 2022 (<https://wartaekonomi.co.id/read335638/survei-mayoritas-publik-setuju-pembubaran-fpi>).

Wirajuda, Tunggul. 2020. "Indonesia Officially Disbands the FPI." Retrieved November 28, 2022 (<https://go.kompas.com/read/2020/12/30/213926674/indonesia-officially-disbands-the-fpi>).